

# **Geopolitical Cartographies. The Contingency of the Future. Latin American Civilizational Project**

## **Cartografías geopolíticas. La contingencia del porvenir. Proyecto civilizatorio latinoamericano**

## **Cartografias geopolíticas. A contingência do futuro. Projeto civilizacional latino-americano**

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### **Abstract**

The civilizational question has returned to the academic and political agenda with particular intensity. In the context of the current systemic crisis, the civilizational approach allows us to interrogate contemporary political epistemology, to look to the future beyond national, socio-cultural, and ethnic differences, to consider new alliances and geopolitical reconfigurations, and to deconstruct the antinomic opposition between “us” and “them.” This essay problematizes Latin America’s place in the current civilizational competition and explores the possibility of projects that differ from the dominant liberal capitalist order, and the very possibility of civilizational projects in an increasingly unpredictable world.

**Keywords:** civilizational crisis, civilizational project, geopolitics, capitalism, academic debate, indigenous ontologies, decolonial theories.

### **Resumen**

La cuestión civilizatoria vuelve a la agenda académica y política con particular intensidad. En las condiciones de la crisis sistémica actual, el enfoque civilizatorio permite interrogar la episteme política contemporánea, mirar el futuro más allá de las diferencias nacionales, socio-culturales y étnicas, pensar en nuevas alianzas y reconfiguraciones geopolíticas, deconstruir la antinómica oposición entre “nosotros” y los “otros”. El presente ensayo, problematiza la inscripción de América Latina en la competencia civilizatoria actual, e indaga sobre la posibilidad de proyectos diferentes del orden capitalista liberal dominante, sobre la posibilidad misma de proyectos civilizatorios en un mundo cada vez más imprevisible.

**Palabras clave:** crisis civilizatoria, proyecto civilizatorio, geopolítica, capitalismo, debate académico, ontologías indígenas, teorías decoloniales.

## Resumo

A questão civilizacional regressou à agenda académica e política com particular intensidade. No contexto da actual crise sistémica, a abordagem civilizacional permite-nos questionar a epistemologia política contemporânea, olhar para o futuro para além das diferenças nacionais, socioculturais e étnicas, considerar novas alianças e reconfigurações geopolíticas e desconstruir a oposição antinómica entre “nós” e “eles”. Este ensaio problematiza o lugar da América Latina na atual competição civilizacional e explora a possibilidade de projetos que se diferenciem da ordem capitalista liberal dominante, bem como a própria possibilidade de projetos civilizacionais num mundo cada vez mais imprevisível.

**Palavras-chave:** crise civilizacional, projeto civilizacional, geopolítica, capitalismo, debate académico, ontologias indígenas, teorias decoloniais.

## Introduction: The Civilizational Question.

The civilizational question, long misplaced within the Babylonian libraries of academia and buried beneath the torrent of contemporary thematic problematics -all relevant and urgent- has returned to the academic and political agenda with particular intensity. An emerging yet already fairly solid disciplinary field is taking shape around the problematic of the civilizational perspective, its interpretive power, and its capacity to respond to the most pressing questions raised by contemporary geopolitical contingency. Civilizational projects, as the ontological emanation of civilizations -understood as the broadest movements of history (Braudel, 1995), as promise and task seeking to respond to the urgent challenges of survival faced by complex cultural formations (Toynbee, 2026)- arise from the intense need to break societal chaos, free themselves from the gravitational pull of the present, challenge history, revise rusted categorical canons, and imagine new ways of living, thinking, producing, and dying. They emerge in moments of existential crisis and profound social upheaval, as responses to questions concerning the meaning of existence and history, the “self” and the “other,” who we are, and how we inscribe ourselves within the inexorable logic of history.

The concepts of civilization and civilizational projects are problematic because of their genuine intention to channel history and establish the frameworks of a particular order. Yet, once liberated from Platonic-Hegelian monumentalism, eschatology, chronological canon, anthropocentrism, and the saga of historical necessity, these concepts are reduced to the articulation of plural perspectives, differences, events, potentials, multiplicities, fields of force, intensities, and incessant becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020). By assuming the untimely character of history, along with chaos, chance, and the unpredictability of global macro-processes, and by replacing being with becoming, the possibility emerges of exploring a new “order,” which in turn will eventually be dismantled once more by historical entropy.

To speak of the Latin American civilizational project -a term excessively grandiloquent, burdened with

promise and historical density for ordinary mortals- means asking and questioning the legitimacy of naming: What is a project? What is the West? What civitas does it evoke? What does it propel forward? Whom does it represent, and how? Who may dispute and claim authorship over it? Who are its architects and laborers? What energies does it mobilize? What opposing political forces are in dispute? What are the conditions of production for such a project? Contingency -the political space of facts, circumstances, concreteness, events, and imminent dangers, often disconnected and dispersed- must necessarily be framed within broader global macro-processes that provide meaning to it.

The civilizational approach problematizes that insoluble residue which remains after long-duration processes are stripped of their cycles and phases, highs and lows, myths, ideologemes, orders, anarchies, revolutions, lefts and rights. Projects are not commissioned into existence, nor are they the work of an academic team funded through government grants; they simply emerge within the noise of multiple voices, through the “chance of history” and through the configuration of different uncontrollable forces.

But what exactly would be the interpretive power of such a conceptual approach, more figurative than rigorous? Could it be that the Latin American “project,” under other names, dialects, and amalgams of meaning, has always remained latent within the societal subconscious -in Indigenous traditions, cultural signs and codes, oligarchic imaginaries, proletarian struggles, anti-dictatorial and anti-neoliberal resistance movements, the Latin American paideia, literature, and the arts- as a kind of “secular religion,” arché, principle, origin, and foundation of the continental drama of being? If so, wherein lies its sacrality and magnetism, capable of mobilizing collective wills? How does the ordinary individual -drinking beer in front of the television or strolling through the shopping mall with family on a Sunday- live, feel, and think this project manufactured within political bastions or academic towers? What is the color, the scent, and the aesthetic of its hope?

If the civilizational approach were stripped of the ostentatious adjective “civilizational,” would there remain anything other than the same banal analytical exercise concerning conflicts, structures, and forces already consolidated within the canon of the social sciences? Is it even appropriate to speak of projects in an unpredictable world? Might the civilizational approach merely amount to the fabrication of new myths, “groundless,” yet absolutely necessary? Does the unquantifiable nature of such a project, often indifferent to empirical evidence and seeking to rupture uncertainty, not threaten the rigor of theoretical logos by displacing the civilizational question into the territory of “political poetry” or prophetic intuition? We argue that whether one speaks of civilizational projects, socio-economic models, development strategies, geopolitical paradigms, or any other semantic figure, the essential issue lies in the condition of the forces capable of formulating, grounding, legitimizing, implementing, and consolidating them.

There are solid arguments for considering that the interpretive role of the civilizational approach opens the possibility of addressing global problems requiring global solutions, while revisiting “economistic essentialism” without simply replacing it with “cultural essentialism.” It allows for the critical

examination -without abolishing- of classical oppositions such as democracy-totalitarianism, Global North-Global South, culture-politics, class struggle-consensus, structure-agency, friend-enemy, war and peace, interstate and interethnic relations, intercultural dynamics, domination and subordination, and the orientation of geopolitical maps, all from the perspective of singular, heterogeneous, interconnected, and tension-filled civilizational blocs. By focusing on long-duration historical periods beyond states, nations, ethnicities, languages, great historical figures, movements, victories, and defeats, this approach introduces new parameters for articulating universalism and particularism, nationalism and globalism, the radiation and expansion of cultural energies, and a powerful instinct of preservation resistant to the erosion of historical time.

### **Texts and Contexts. The Current Geopolitical Map**

Although the Latin American civilizational project condenses the socio-economic structures, traditions, and political confrontations contesting the future, it is necessarily embedded within a global context that defines its contours and meaning. We are living through the most radical transformations of the world order since the Second World War. The brutal, ruleless struggle for control over markets, natural wealth, maritime routes, and advanced technologies; hybrid wars; the regrouping of economic, technological, and financial powers; the decline of traditional hegemonies; the emergence of new global blocs demanding recognition; the return of the Monroe Doctrine (Rodríguez, 2025) in Latin America and the Caribbean; contempt for multilateral free trade; militarization; and the subordination of the economy to national security are among the elements shaping the disturbing panorama of the current geopolitical chessboard.

Classical political economy was essentially a blueprint for the development of industrial capitalism. Today, however, we are witnessing a conflict between Western financial-rentier capitalism and “Chinese industrial capitalism,” which resembles, in many respects, the earlier American, British, and German protectionist models developed under the theories of classical economists such as David Ricardo (Tavilla, 2021) and John Stuart Mill (1985), who divided the economy into two spheres: the productive and the rentier. The aim of industrial economics was to align the price of wealth as closely as possible with the real cost of value production, thereby making economies more prosperous and industrial capitalism more powerful. Financial and real-estate sectors, in contrast, maintain that economic rent and unearned income do not truly exist (Glenn Diesen Español, 2026).

At present, Western economies maintain a system sustained by financial-rentier capitalism, oriented toward defending the monopolistic, rentier, and real-estate interests of economic and financial elites, thereby diverging from the industrial-capitalist objective of “freeing economies from rents.” The pro-rentier and pro-oligarchic Western civilization is controlled by the financial sector, composed of banking, real estate, the oil industry, and the nearly extinct coal industry. The United States persuaded NATO members to avoid free trade (Dunoff & Pollack, 2025), refrain from importing oil from Russia, Iran, and Venezuela, and instead purchase American energy, resulting in rising prices for oil, natural gas, and their derivatives. Meanwhile, the Netherlands disrupted technological trade by temporarily intervening in chip manufacturer Nexperia (a global leader in the production of essential

semiconductors critical to the automotive and electronics industries, headquartered in the Netherlands, originating from Philips, and acquired by China's Wingtech Technology in 2019). The European Union, within the NATO framework, decided not to tax American monopolies, becoming increasingly dependent on U.S. gas and information technologies (Glenn Diesen Español, 2026).

The confrontation is thus between American financial-rentier capitalism, based on the exploitation of infrastructure and information monopolies as a supposed replacement for former industrial profits, and Chinese industrial capitalism, grounded in a mixed economy (public and/or private) that allows infrastructural investment aimed at maintaining low production costs. It is a confrontation between the interests of bankers, rentiers, bondholders, monopolists, and landlords on one side, and the economies of China and Russia on the other, both actively pursuing industrialization processes. This conflict is manifested in the attempts by China and Russia to decouple themselves from American financial capitalism (Münchau, 2025).

Within Western discourse, one hears the apologetics of a neocolonial power and the radical confrontation with the others -the emerging, the different, the barbarians- to whom the West supposedly brought culture, history, and salvation, and who are now allegedly invading the Western Eden. The current U.S. global security doctrine places the civilizational question directly on the political agenda; it represents the historical projection of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a neoconservative think tank (Jarquín-Ramírez et al., 2024) formerly based in Washington, D.C., focused on U.S. foreign policy and dissolved in 2006.

A clear example of this can be found in the attacks against Iran and the Israeli bombings of southern Lebanon. The underlying objective is the appropriation of natural-resource wealth, given that Iran is the fifth-richest nation in the world in terms of natural resources, estimated at a value of 35 quadrillion dollars (holding the world's second-largest gas reserves, third-largest oil reserves, and vast deposits of zinc, copper, iron, and gold). Consequently, the narratives constructed by the West -and particularly by the United States- regarding women's rights, liberating the country from a theocratic regime, or ensuring free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz merely seek to manufacture a consensus legitimizing American-Israeli military intervention. In this way, by appropriating Iran's natural-resource wealth, the West would effectively be rescuing private Western banking, since such appropriation would inject massive liquidity into American and European banks while simultaneously preventing the collapse of the dollar. For this reason, some analysts describe the conflict as a war driven by the "Western banking cartel" (Glenn Diesen Español, 2026a, 3:54). What is occurring, according to this perspective, is that the West and its banking system are in crisis and have no qualms about accepting war as collateral damage in order to preserve their hegemony. Market analyst Krainer even states:

"I know for a fact that European bankers are extremely concerned about this. If they were forced to buy dollars at market prices, the euro could collapse. The result would be a massive surge in inflation -price inflation in euros- it would amount to the collapse of the euro. (Glenn Diesen Español, 2026a, 30:36-30:52).

At the same time, the systematic bombings carried out in southern Lebanon have killed more than 2,000 people and triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, including the displacement of nearly one million individuals (International Organization for Migration, 2026). The Israeli army is reportedly seeking to destroy the means of subsistence through the devastation of the agricultural sector -Israeli forces allegedly contaminating agricultural lands in southern Lebanon with glyphosate- while systematically bombing critical infrastructure, including seven strategic bridges over the Litani River. These actions have also allegedly fostered looting and violence against the Lebanese civilian population: according to Amnesty International (2026), Israeli soldiers have engaged in torture and looting targeting civilians in southern Lebanon.

These systematic Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon are presented as part of the broader effort to realize the Israeli-American "Greater Israel" project, which seeks Israeli hegemony and territorial expansion throughout the region (Sola, 2026). This project allegedly extends claims not only over Palestine, but also over Jordan, Iraq, Syria, eastern Egypt, and Lebanon. The aim would therefore be to establish Israeli geopolitical dominance from the Euphrates to the Nile, maximizing territorial control for Israel while minimizing the territorial presence of Arab populations.

According to Marandi, professor at the University of Tehran (Glenn Diesen Español, 2025), Israel's peace policy in the Middle East consists of attacking one adversary while maintaining other conflicts in a latent state. An example of this dynamic was the peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon in November 2024, reached while Israel was simultaneously attacking Syria and contributing to the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad. At present, the same pattern is allegedly repeating itself: while peace agreements in Gaza are publicly celebrated -celebrations the author characterizes as highly questionable- bombings continue in Lebanon.

Furthermore, it is widely argued that Western media outlets, particularly those of the United States, function by constructing narratives and manufacturing consent, thereby framing and legitimizing crimes against humanity under the rhetoric of combating terrorism. In this framework, the genocide in Gaza is justified through the narrative that it forms part of the war between Hamas and Israel. Trump himself publicly stated that Hamas had lost 70,000 people, omitting the fact that 20,000 were children and that the overwhelming majority of the remaining victims were civilians, including women and the elderly. According to this interpretation, the same mechanism is now being reproduced in Lebanon, where media narratives legitimize bombings against the civilian population of southern Lebanon by portraying them as attacks against Hezbollah strongholds. Within mainstream Western journalism, such actions are not framed as grave violations of international law and human rights, which the author interprets as further evidence of Western ethnosupremacism and the broader decline of the West.

Let us now briefly turn to this prevailing Western discourse toward Latin America, also typical of Trump, and its concrete manifestations:

1. President Donald Trump, in open confrontation with international law and the UN Charter, has

repeatedly expressed his intention to attack Iran and annex Greenland. On December 22, he appointed Jeff Landry as special envoy to Greenland. On December 25, 2025, the United States bombed targets associated with the Islamic State in Nigeria. On January 3, 2026, it attacked Venezuela, abducting President Nicolás Maduro and his wife. On January 29, it intensified the energy blockade against Cuba. This constitutes an anti-constitutional model of global governance, grounded in military order and rule by decree, under the cover of the U.S. National Security Doctrine (Glenn Diesen Español, 2026b). Through the “revival” of the Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. government seeks to eliminate Chinese influence, despite the fact that China is currently the principal trading partner of Latin American and Caribbean countries. The cooperation program centered on security, defense, and combating transnational threats such as drug trafficking and organized crime ultimately seeks to preserve dollar hegemony throughout the region.

However, the United States is no longer the only actor on the geoeconomic chessboard capable of effectively using economic coercion without major repercussions. Today, the following paradox can be observed: on one hand, there are far greater incentives to use economic coercion in order to obstruct the progress of emerging rivals; on the other hand, such coercion simultaneously drives countries toward alternative centers of power offering access to industries, supply chains, physical transportation corridors, and new technologies and forms of economic organization (BRICS), as well as alternatives to the dollar and the SWIFT system. In recent years, Russia has reportedly developed a conglomerate of new digital institutions capable of managing transnational settlements almost in real time, surpassing SWIFT (Glenn Diesen Español, 2026c). China, meanwhile, is creating an alternative system in which its institutions are no longer tied to the dollar for interbank payments. All indications suggest that within five to ten years, 25% of global commercial transactions may no longer be conducted in dollars.

2. Cuba now occupies a prominent place on the geopolitical chessboard. Russia announced energy agreements with Cuba and will send oil in exchange for nickel, cobalt, and specialized medical services. China, meanwhile, has opened a credit line worth billions of yuan to finance the reconstruction of Cuba’s electrical infrastructure. Mexico, for its part, has sent humanitarian aid to Cuba while defending its commercial sovereignty against foreign sanctions (Maritano, 2026). What is emerging is a new parallel economic architecture that is rendering economic diplomacy and its coercive instruments increasingly obsolete; the rules of the game are being rewritten outside the institutions created by the United States after the Second World War (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the SWIFT system, and others). Dozens of countries have already established agreements with China using yuan and local currencies without relying on the dollar. China and Russia now settle a large portion of their bilateral trade in their own currencies (Medeiros, 2025). Nevertheless, the United States will not relinquish its hegemony without a fierce global struggle; according to various political scientists, declining empires tend to become more aggressive, making global conflict increasingly likely.

Current geopolitical tensions are further compounded by the lawsuit filed in Washington: Noble Capital RSD LLC versus the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, and the National Welfare Fund, demanding recognition and payment of 225.8 billion dollars. The claim is based on sovereign bonds issued by Imperial Russia to American investors prior to 1917. If the financial relationship between the United States and Russia were to rupture as a consequence of this dispute, the United States would urgently need to secure alternative supply chains for raw materials, particularly given that Russia holds 10% of the world's copper reserves.

3. Chile, possessing 28% of global copper reserves, thus becomes a strategically reliable and politically aligned pillar for Washington, potentially serving as a catalyst for the U.S. industrial and military apparatus. This development has also generated concern in Peru and Bolivia, both producers of copper and lithium.

In December 2025, the far-right politician José Antonio Kast won the presidential elections (for the March 2026–2030 term). He will not only be responsible for administering the profits generated by copper exports due to tariff exemptions negotiated by Mario Marcet, but will also facilitate U.S. control over strategic assets at the expense of national sovereignty, relax environmental regulations to accelerate mining approvals, expand desalination infrastructure, intensify and legitimize extractivist processes, and impose a model of order and security characteristic of the far right when defending the interests of large-scale capital. Chile is thereby consolidating a financial-extractivist capitalism lacking ecological balance within the country's ecosystems, amid the resurgence of a neocolonial, rentier-based model of exploitation that makes the development of any industry beyond copper increasingly unviable, further deepening the country's deindustrialization.

4. Brazil, during the BRICS summit in July 2025, signed an agreement with China securing Chinese investment for the construction of a railway corridor from the city of Lucas do Rio Verde in Mato Grosso, crossing Bolivia and reaching the port of Chancay in Peru. This project also seeks to integrate Brazil's East-West Integration Railway system. Likewise, the transnational initiative known as the Capricorn Bioceanic Highway Corridor 2025–2035, presented by President Boric's government, aims to improve freight connectivity between Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Chile while strengthening the activity of ports in northern Chile.

Iran, Israel, and the United States in the Strait of Hormuz constitute another critical geopolitical flashpoint, particularly given the fragility of the Panama Canal and the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints in the configuration of global power. In this context, the Strait of Magellan emerges as a possible alternative route in times of geopolitical uncertainty.

### **Latin America on the Contemporary Geopolitical Chessboard.**

Latin America occupies a peripheral, dependent, and provincial position within an asymmetrical globalization marked by inequality; it represents the projection of the "two-speed Americas" policies

(Serbin, 2019). The major decisions shaping the course of history are debated within spaces such as the Club of Rome, the Bilderberg Group, Santa Fe (Baker, 2022), Davos, and in centers of power located in London, Moscow, and Beijing, with the participation of bankers, the so-called deep state, European royal families, the Vatican, major technology corporations, right-wing “libertarian” think tanks, the Cato Institute, and the Heritage Foundation... institutions with extraordinary political influence (Lander, 2019).

Latin America, fragmented and marked by incomplete regionalization processes, weak leaderships, and a lack of long-term strategic projection, could be characterized in terms of declining international relevance and a process of “Latin American emptying,” driven by the deliberate absence of collective regional action. If this trajectory is not reversed, it may lead to the region losing its status as an actor within the global system and being reduced to a merely geographical expression.

There are notable manifestations of Latin America’s relative “insignificance” within the international geopolitical arena: the deterioration of the inter-American system; the traditional dominance of the United States in the region; extractive policies (Bonilla, 2015); terrorism and drug trafficking; both external and internal factors hindering full multilateralism and limiting national autonomy; the pressures and opportunities associated with Latin America’s dual dependence on China and the United States; the alignment of certain Latin American governments with liberal models and foreign policies close to Washington; the influence of Latin American diasporas in Washington; and the systematic degradation of inter-American institutions.

The lack of coordination, effectiveness, and long-term perspective, together with internal continental tensions, becomes evident in the stagnation of MERCOSUR, the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), the Pacific Alliance (PA), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Despite the extensive institutional apparatus of these organizations and the work they have undertaken, little has changed regarding political representation, competitiveness, innovation, productive structures, or the continent’s image among liberal-Western elites. In global perceptions, Latin America continues to be viewed as a politically unstable territory associated with terrorism and drug trafficking, “fiesta and siesta,” machismo, aspiring dictators, perpetual celebration, and a pathological indolence. The relative “loss” of Latin America’s structural relevance reveals a declining trajectory extending over several decades.

The absence of credible proposals from progressive sectors, along with a fatigued and insufficiently combative left, has further aggravated the current situation (Lander, 2019). Natural wealth and human capital alone do not constitute comparative advantages, since their exploitation and administration ultimately depend on the spheres of influence of the major global powers.

### **The Academic Debate: Us and the Others.**

The civilizational question has generated an intense academic and political debate concerning the

status of Western civilization, the clash of civilizations, the competition among civilizational projects, and the possibility of either a single human civilization or a constellation of civilizations existing in tension with one another. Within the extensive bibliography produced by this debate, emerging from different sites of enunciation, four major approaches can be identified with relative clarity: Marxist and post-Marxist perspectives, globalization theories, postcolonial theories, and the theory of multiple modernities (Gallo, 2014).

Among the long list of authors who have devoted important work to the subject, Andre Gunder Frank (1967) rejects any analytical or interpretive validity in the idea of civilization and civilizational projects. He argues that distinct civilizations do not exist and never have existed as differentiated economic, political, or cultural spaces. What can in fact be asserted, according to Frank, is the existence of permanent interaction, exchange, and mutual interpenetration. To recognize civilizations as individualized entities is not only theoretically inconsistent, but also politically dangerous (Frank, 1967).

From the perspective of “the impolitical,” Roberto Esposito (2012) examines the controversial condition of the West as both splendor and decline:

freedom becomes imperialism, oppression, genocide; progress turns into exploitation, plunder, destruction. Peace becomes war, death, hunger. The West is no longer -and perhaps never truly was- a space, but rather a progressive and polemical line, an “imaginary institution,” namely European civilization. The West neither knows nor wishes to encounter the other without subordinating it to its own domination. (Esposito, 2012, p. 247)

The postcolonial current, which encompasses a broad spectrum of authors, explores the instrumental character of the civilizational approach, which has been employed not only to legitimize economic, military, and colonial domination, as well as white racial exclusivity, but also to impose stereotyped cultural codes defining the subordinate cultural condition of non-Western peoples (Dussel, 2014). Eurocentrism -or Occidentalism- which today appears in some of its darkest forms (radical nationalism, neo-fascism, populist conservatism, anti-intellectualism, authoritarian neoliberalism), has created its own species of humanity, one that “makes one ashamed of being human” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1997).

### **The Latin American Civilizational Project.**

To think through the genesis and architecture of the Latin American project -beyond the trivial opposition between civilization and barbarism- requires examining the socio-economic and political order imposed by the West upon the periphery, as well as the struggles, resistances, and modes of domination that emerged in response. It also requires attention to the scene of political and intellectual debate, not always articulated through clearly defined academic schools or coherent currents of thought. It means understanding the logic underlying the constitution of such a project, deconstructing the fragile architecture of Latin American academia, and carefully observing those revolutionary and

conformist intellectual minorities, rebellious yet simultaneously subordinate, while revealing their multiple souls, sacred beliefs, and internal conflicts... their dual uprootedness from both the Western canon through which they think and the ancestral traditions they seek to consecrate.

There is no conceptually compact or definitive Latin American civilizational project; rather, it constitutes a multiple and constantly evolving discursive body, a problematic “tangle” of polyphonic voices, nuances, conceptual verticalities, and hierarchical as well as rhizomatic structural levels. It is a hybrid and unstable formation composed of multiple aspirations locked in permanent conflict, forged through a shared history, language, and culture. It represents a corridor of lost, frustrated, real, present, or future possibilities.

The Latin American civilizational project is not a prophecy, much less a political action plan. Rather, it is the grounding of a certain type of social bond and of a desirable, legitimate, just, and virtuous political-juridical construction (*civitas* and *communitas*) that emerges from the depths of history, defines a horizon of expectations, and leaves its imprint. It arises from different locations and perspectives of enunciation, from the concern and commitment of intellectual minorities who, from explicit political positions, proclaim principles of the common good. It appears as an archipelago of competing narratives and counter-narratives, authorized and unauthorized discourses, intuitions, and ideas constituting a complex political-cultural fabric. It fuses, in an explosive crucible, Indigenous ontology, the civilizational projections of the far right, the aspirations of progressivism, and the cosmology of globalism. It is a floating block of ideas and relationships linking human beings, things, the earth, the heavens, and the gods within a fractal image of the world—relatively stable, yet containing an irreducible sacred core, a foundational narrative, a shared being tested through long historical experience.

The hybridity of Latin American identity -the historical mixture of the Western liberal canon, Catholic religiosity, communitarianism, ancestral worldviews, Afro-descendant culture, and neoliberal pragmatism- necessarily defines the contours of the Latin American civilizational project. Within the peripheral and dependent South American context, the full persistence of the Western-centric character of the dominant cultural formation can still be observed, particularly in universities, academia, and literate culture more generally. This worldview, subordinating the region to the directives of the Global North, continues to shape academic institutions, canons, references, epistemic frameworks, and public agendas (Bilmes et al., 2024).

The heterogeneous and internally contradictory bloc gathered under the name of the Latin American civilizational project is subject to the contemporary mutation of historical temporality, producing a new mode of connection between past, present, and future. A kind of “non-simultaneous simultaneity” (Koselleck, 1993), or “extended present” (Gumbrecht, 2005), corresponds to what Bauman calls *Retrotopia* (2017): the compensatory possibility of constructing utopias from an idealized past amid a depleted present and the absence of future perspectives. The Latin American project embodies precisely this aporetic relationship between multiple temporalities, overlapping rhizomatic cultures, and decentered historical rhythms in order to define the dimensions and limits of an always-

problematic collective “we.”

With some analytical risk, it is possible to distinguish three competing models within the Latin American project: one emerging from a radical critique of the modern political project through the updating of ancestral principles of coexistence and decolonization; another, conservative and nationalist, advocating a limited globalization which, in its extreme forms, could drift toward neo-fascist practices; and a third whose adherents believe that the current order can be maintained through intelligent policies of consensus, multicultural dialogue, conflict regulation, multilateralism, and a reformed international law. Each of these tendencies attempts, in its own way, to answer the questions: Who are we, and what do we seek? Are we anti-European, anti-Eurocentric, or simply Latin American?

The political ontology of the modern project rested upon faith in reason, progress, political rationality, economic efficiency, international law, science, racial exclusivity, individualism, autonomy, the social contract, and military power. Conquest and subsequent colonization demonstrated that this project was neither as emancipatory nor as rational as it claimed to be. Civilizational Westernization signified total domination, physical extermination, colonial savagery, genocides, crimes, and human tragedies. In Latin America, following several waves of indigenismo during the early decades of the twentieth century -represented by figures such as Alonso Caso, Gonzalo Aguirre, José Carlos Mariátegui, and José María Arguedas, among others, who dedicated their lives to the study, reevaluation, and defense of Indigenous communities and to the sociological and cultural analysis of their countries- alternative visions to Western economic rationality emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century, propelled by the development of progressive social movements during the 1990s. From this context emerged spaces such as the São Paulo Forum, which explicitly expressed disenchantment with the Western project. In opposition, a discourse took shape combining ethical principles from ancient Andean cultures with contributions from critical contemporary intellectual movements, which were later incorporated into the political sphere in Bolivia and Ecuador. These countries integrated their own visions of *buen vivir* (“living well”) into their constitutional texts (Vanhulst, 2015).

According to proponents of the decolonial perspective, the Western civilizational project is structured through multiple and heterogeneous hierarchies of domination: the repressive peripheral social order established through colonial administrations and the extractivist international division of labor; linguistic, spiritual, ethno-racial, and gender domination centered on Eurocentrism (Grosfoguel, 2016); aesthetic codes of beauty; worldviews; modes of living, knowing, learning, and thinking; and the Western logic of cultural assimilation (Dussel, 2014). The decolonial tendency defines itself in terms of an intercultural humanism oriented toward a post-material, post-growth, post-human, post-capitalist, or post-economic transition (Escobar, 2017, 2022), toward multiple modernities, a non-capitalist neo-humanism that is decolonial, non-liberal, and post-extractivist, and toward a way of life marked by a certain cosmopolitan disposition. Within its theoretical lexicon appear concepts such as a new civilization of solidarity, *buen vivir*, de-Westernization (Elizalde, 2012), sustainability, and a new communitarianism (Escobar, 2017), as well as transformative wisdom (Hathaway & Boff, 2014).

Within this same framework, a plural conception of the human is proposed, beyond Western humanism: a civilizational transition in which collective action reconnects with the Earth as a universal common good and with the sacred and spiritual dimensions of existence. The notion of civilizational transition refers to the movement away from the dominance of a single model of life toward the peaceful, though tension-filled, coexistence of multiple models within a “pluriverse” (Duhart, 2020; Escobar, 2022), recognizing the radical interdependence of all things and human existence within a living cosmos. This vision calls for re-communalization, the relocalization of social, economic, and cultural activities, the strengthening of local autonomies, the depatriarchalization and deracialization of social relations, and reintegration with the condemned Earth. It includes the construction of networks among transformative initiatives and alternatives, the recovery of harmony and reciprocity among peoples and with nature, and a reciprocal, solidarity-based economy of coexistence (Escobar, 2022). Such a project would become possible through the notion of relationality as an alternative to Western ontological dualism (Estermann, 2012).

There is no exhaustive definition of *buen vivir*, which is precisely what gives the concept its strength (Vanhulst, 2015; Vanhulst & Beling, 2015), while other authors regard it as a plural concept still under construction (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). It proposes living and coexisting with nature through cosmic spiritual consonance, complementarity, and relationality within the triad human/nature/community (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011), thereby becoming an alternative to Western anthropocentrism, scientism, and instrumental rationality.

This Indigenous ontology has direct political implications. The 2007 National Development Plan of the Plurinational State of Bolivia critically reconsidered the Western civilizational project by redefining the concept of development from a decolonial, anti-neoliberal, and anti-globalization ideological position. It proposed a cosmocentric vision exceeding ethnocentrism, alongside the transformation of the productive matrix through “a new pattern of integral and diversified development, consistent with the industrialization of non-renewable natural resources” (Loza, 2023, p. 123).

*Buen Vivir*, as an alternative to development, is interpreted as plural and holistic, capable of encompassing diversity in political, economic, social, and cultural terms. It breaks with a merely quantitative vision of development by taking into account not only the population’s access to material goods, but also subjective, intellectual, and spiritual fulfillment, while recognizing cultural identity as a fundamental element (Loza, 2023). Both wealth accumulation and industrialization are understood merely as means that enable harmonious coexistence among communities and between communities and nature.

Beginning in the second decade of the present century, in Bolivia, the idea of *Buen Vivir* became associated with increasing growth rates and expanding consumption in order to satisfy the population’s pressing needs. The country experienced annual growth of 3.5%, compared to 1.5% during the 1990–2005 period. Poverty indicators also show that “extreme poverty among Indigenous populations decreased by 27.7 [...] while among non-Indigenous populations it decreased by 8.6%” (Loza, 2023, p. 127). Indigenous populations were lifted out of extreme poverty through the application

of the extractivist logic of hydrocarbon and mining industries, albeit at considerable environmental cost and with industrialization largely neglected. At the same time, the state bureaucracy failed to respect prior environmental consultation processes in public-private investment decisions, while emerging economic groups ultimately reverted to the old dynamics of capitalist accumulation.

Ecuador and Bolivia have been pioneers in constitutional debates through their incorporation of cultural plurality by means of diverse social perspectives, thereby transforming the relationship between state and society in the construction of a new polycentric and horizontal institutional framework. However, due to a series of preexisting conditions, from the early 1990s through the constitutional reforms, these countries have not succeeded in overcoming their principal challenge: transitioning from a Western capitalist development model toward an economic model grounded in a communal and sustainable matrix capable of transcending the mercantilist logics permeating Indigenous community life. Despite the significant advances represented by the constitutional frameworks promoted by these governments, a growing distancing from the original concept of *Buen Vivir* can be observed, along with the perpetuation of oligarchic structures, social inequalities, clientelist and rentier dynamics, and continuing environmental degradation.

## Conclusions

The Latin American civilizational project is a socio-political-cultural construct still in formation, condensing historically established socio-political-cultural structures, struggles and resistances, the current balance of political and social forces, the empiricism of contingency, and the metaphysics of the future. It is neither a political program for collective action nor a purely utopian exercise of desire. It does not appear in institutional documents, newspaper headlines, or social media, nor is it a preferred topic of political deliberation. Rather, it emerges within the tense atmosphere of academic debates, the “politics of the street,” social movements, and counter-hegemonic struggles. It constitutes the organized essence of possible alternatives for addressing contemporary conflicts.

Diffuse and indeterminate, subject to the fluctuations of an explosive global geopolitical context, deprived of the political pragmatics of the here and now, and oscillating between proposals ranging from Indigenous ontologies to national-conservative ideas, the Latin American project outlines continental ways of living, feeling, thinking, struggling, and dying, grounded in a shared history, language, culture, and experience of domination. Its contribution to the global competition among civilizational projects lies in revealing the specific antinomies of a continental culture that is simultaneously Indigenous and Western, functioning as a space for the construction of meaning, as well as the forms of domination that generate specific modes of resistance and the persistent will to continue asking: Who are we? How did we become what we are? What do we seek? Upon what is our hope founded? These are not everyday questions; they arise only in existential moments and demand rigorous and audacious answers.

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