# REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY, DEVELOPMENT AND COLONIALITY

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**ABSTRACT**

This essay discusses sustainability, based on the ideas of development disseminated by the global north since the post-World War II period, in view of its inscription in the colonial matrix of power, which was formed in the sixteenth century, with the invasion, by Europeans, of territories of the global south. The objective is to reflect on the relationships between sustainability, development and coloniality. Discursively, companies present themselves as able to ensure the realization of sustainable development, responsible for reconciling the generation of profit and the maintenance of living conditions on the planet. The theoretical discussion encompasses the analysis of world-system, decolonial theory and thought of the global south, through a hypothetical-deductive methodology with literature review. It is concluded that sustainability is forged from the European modern-colonial historical mode, which considers itself global and formatted to meet the needs of a capitalism eager to stay alive.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development. Coloniality. Sustainability. Decolonial thinking.

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## INTRODUCTION

The notion of development was sovereign as a geopolitical program of the new post-World War II order (SGM) to, already in the twenty-first century, reveal itself as a convention that went from historical innovation to generalized frustration (Sachs, 2019). According to Arocena (2002), until the 1970s, there was no talk of development of industrialized nations, since they were already seen as developed. In this sense, with the end of the SGM and the need to recover the structures of the European countries, there was talk of reconstruction of the first world and development of the third, as it was understood that the SGM had only caused damage to the developed countries, temporarily interrupting their continuous flows of development, while the third world still needed to develop, following in the footsteps of the already developed nations. This understanding reinforced the idea of development as a social evolutionism, that is, as a predetermined path to be reached, which underdeveloped nations should follow (Milani, 2004; Moura et al., 2002).

Soon after the SGM, US President Harry Truman called on poor countries to follow the path of the United States of America (USA) and other rich nations, offering scientific and technological knowledge to free them from backwardness, poverty and ignorance (Truman, 1949). Thus, the notion of underdevelopment was invented, a key category to maintain the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005), throwing half of the planet's population at that time into a condition of underdevelopment (Sachs, 2019). In that context, two billion people were homogenized and labeled as underdeveloped by a dominant pole of power, giving rise to a colonial distinction (Porto-Gonçalves, 2015) in the realm of modernity/coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2020). It is important to point out that an effect of meaning of the ideas of development was produced to signify the promise of what life could be like under a supposedly beneficent US empire, covering up the latent sense of anti-communism - a strategy that is alive to this day (Esteva; Babones; Babicicky, 2013).

Globally, the environmental issue was discussed between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s and had as founding milestones the publication of the book The limits to growth and the holding of the United Nations (UN) conference on the human environment, with the objective of reconciling economic development, ecology and social justice (Nobre; Amazonas, 2002; Potter; Estrela, 2017). The pace of productivity aimed at economic growth, without considering environmental quality and human health, together with the consequences of demographic expansion, emerged as questions to the limits of growth. The incompatibility between economic growth and preservation of the biosphere

was later discursively equated with the invention of Sustainable Development (SD) in the late 1980s.

Although the environmental issue has become an increasingly intense debate, it is necessary to emphasize that there is a dominant ecological thought. It so happens that the sustainability discourse remains aligned with the dominant perspective, since the content of the development model remains "naturalized" in the perspectives of what, how and for whom it is produced. What can be seen is that neoliberal strategies are underway to deal with the ecological impasse, bypassing social inequalities. The focus remains on technological adaptation, the celebration of the market economy and collaboration/consensus, which implies maintaining the market as a fundamental mechanism for regulating the environmental issue (Acselrad, Mello & Bezerra, 2009).

The concept of development and its applicability, since its inception, have reinforced anthropocentrism and the coloniality of power, in addition to the utilitarian perspective of domination of the objectified Nature and external to the human being, reinforcing the sense of development as a consequence of the use of science and technology in favor of economic growth (Porto-Gonçalves, 2015). In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the confrontation of the environmental problem took place at a slow pace despite the rhetorical advances after Rio-92 (Pott; Estrela, 2017). Currently, two-thirds of humanity remains threatened by underdevelopment and its connotations: subordination, discrimination, and subjugation (Esteva; Babones; Babcicky, 2013).

From the overvaluation of technological and economic progress in the post-SGM period, the discussion about development has returned to the impasse between progressing or surviving. The global scenario is absent of concrete references to the existence of any sustainably developed country, in addition to the evident increase in inequalities and irreversible environmental damage, due to the deepening of the logic of the global north, from the 1980s onwards, which imposes the exploitation of Nature and leads to the unsustainability of human life (Sachs, 2019).

In this context, the objective is to reflect on the relationships between sustainability, development and coloniality. Thus, it is argued that the idea of sustainability is also a transfiguration of this concept of SD, which has become functional to competitiveness in capitalism (Simões, 2019). It is based on the assumption that there needs to be a critical analysis of such a phenomenon from thinkers from the global south, since the construction of the idea of development, conceived from the colonial matrix of power (MCP) (Mignolo,

2017), took place at the service of the process of capitalist accumulation. The pattern of world power is colonial/modern, capitalist and Eurocentric (Quijano, 2005).

The terms sustainability and SD are marked by polysemy, since their discourse is crossed by different discursive formations. It is necessary to approach the conditions of production (Pêcheux, 2016) of a discourse, whose historical moment dates back to the period immediately after the SGM. This essay exposes sustainability as a knowledge produced from the perspective of coloniality, since the main names and organizations that produced and reproduced its discourse did so by reproducing colonial relations of domination, from the global north as a reference and place of command. The north thinks and produces the knowledge destined to be accepted and assimilated by the rest of the planet.

In this context, the fundamental questions that guide this essay are: what is sustainability and how has it been appropriated by companies? How can coloniality be perceived in the construction of the ideals of sustainable development and its transfiguration into sustainability? What are the consequences of coloniality in the discourse on sustainability? In the next section, a retrospective of the ideas of development is used to demonstrate how the idea of sustainability derives from it, as a transfiguration of sustainable development. Criticisms of such an understanding of development will be presented from thinkers from the periphery of capitalism, especially decolonial authors. Finally, the final considerations will be presented.

## THE COLONIALITY OF (UN)SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The civilizing project named modernity/coloniality has been violently materialized since the colonial expansion led by Europe from the fifteenth century onwards, with the conquest of African and American territories, reproducing a relationship of imposition of Western power over the rest of the planet, having historical capitalism as one of the hierarchical axes of domination (Grosfoguel, 2020). Coloniality constitutes modernity (Mignolo, 2017) and implies a historical and structural dependence, in addition to promoting the hegemony of a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge (Quijano, 1999), and as Lugones (2008) points out, coloniality is not limited to economic domination, but also to the racialization and genderification of bodies and territories. The process of colonization by the European imperial states took place through the exploitation of labor and the expropriation of lands of native populations, disguised under the banner of Christian mission, making use

of enslavement, trade and trafficking of human beings in an environment of struggle between such states, victimizing mainly indigenous and African colonial subjects (Mignolo, 2017).

Sustainability has been forged in the context of the discursivity of capitalist development (Simões, 2019), therefore, it operates within the logic of coloniality that is its foundation, since development is one of the stages of representation of the colonial matrix of power (founding structure and administrative logic that underlies the totality of Western civilization) in the rhetoric of modernity (Mignolo, 2017), reproducing the hierarchy between 'valid' (Eurocentric) and 'subaltern' (traditional) knowledge, reinforcing the exploitation of both nature and the communities that preserve it. In this sense, sustainability is a colonial discourse that is materialized in norms, instruments and practices whose conception and management take place globally, within international organizations led by nation-states from the global north. Here, north and south are economic and political denominations, being beyond the geographical dimension.

The north is represented by the central countries in the dynamics of capitalism, historically responsible not only for environmental degradation, resulting from its processes of industrialization and economic strength, but also for inventing sustainable development, a concept functional to the maintenance of inequalities and privileges of the center over the periphery of capitalism. The north continues to determine the form of participation of the periphery in the context of its construct of sustainability, so much so that a large part of the literature on development continues to idealize the European and American models (Esteva; Babones; Babcicky, 2013). There is a myth of development (Furtado, 1974), constituted in the context of a thought of global coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2008) that has long been showing signs of being a frustrated idea (Sachs, 2019). Such an idea is more of a collective chimera than a reality of the facts and has resulted, fundamentally, in the strengthening of market relations.

The Euro-American construction of the ideals of development makes it a thought of coloniality that disseminates a conception of what is sustainable based on the premise that there is compatibility between economic and technological development and sustainability. The function of such a discourse is to avoid a possible decrease or setback in the way in which one operates to obtain economic growth and incessant and insatiable accumulation of capital. Such logic serves the perpetuation and reproduction of the modern/colonial world-system (Grosfoguel, 2020).

Some events in the international sphere have provided materiality to shape the discursivity of sustainable development. To go back to such events, a category of the theoretical-methodological device of Discourse Analysis (DA) is used: the conditions of production of a discourse. These are related to the subject, to the discursive memory and to the situation and are considered in two spheres: the first in the strict, immediate sense; the second in its broad, extensive sense (Orlandi, 2015).

The strict sense refers to the relations of production, the moment and the socio-historical-ideological load (Florêncio et al., 2016). For the discussion in this essay, the broad dimension is more appropriate, since memory is the instance that enables the constitution of meanings and, considering the path of analysis from the broad dimension of the conditions of production, we turn to exteriority: historicity and discursive memory. Thus, it is necessary to resort to memory, since it is determinant of everything that is relevant to the process of signification (Orlandi, 1998).

The intellectual subject, from the global north, occupies a prominent social place among the first spokespersons of a discursivity that echoed sayings and produced effects of meanings towards what, only in 1992, would reach the entire globe under the designation of sustainable development. In 1962, Rachel Carson published the book Silent Spring, and in 1972, The Limits to Growth was published. The latter, known as the Meadows report, was commissioned by the Club of Rome to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and put on the canvas the physical limits of economic growth. Its authors were: Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William Behrens.

International organizations, whether from civil society in defense of the environment, such as Friends of the Earth International (1969) and Greenpeace (1971), or those linked to the United Nations, contributed to the production of the discourse of sustainable development. In 1968, the UNESCO Conference dealt with the rational use of the biosphere; in 1971, the Man and the Biosphere program was created, also at UNESCO; and, in 1972, there was the creation of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the Conference on the Human Environment in Sweden. This conference introduced the debate on the environment to the global agenda and proposed a reduction in the pace of economic growth (Oliveira, 2008).

In 1975, the Daghammarskjold report, also known as the Que Faire report, pointed to unbridled development as a reason for environmental degradation and suggested that producers control the means and form of production (Moreira, 2010). The 1970s, especially

after the Stockholm Conference, marked the export of environmental degradation from the north to the global south. With severe environmental legislation at the center of capitalism, obsolete polluting industries, intensive in the use of electricity and generators of toxic products, began to migrate to countries on the periphery willing to receive them. By the end of the decade, the rich countries were "cleaner" due to their environmental legislation, causing the export of their polluting industries to the countries of the South – generating more environmental degradation and poverty in them (Capobianco, 1992).

For Guerreiro Ramos (1981), a critical thinker of high depth and recognition (Davel; Alcadipani, 2003), there is a predominant instrumental rationality in the organizations of the market-centered society, producing, consequently, a human behavior guided primarily by economic interest. It is a matter of observing that corporations, states and large multilateral organizations active in the sustainability agenda are structured based on a model that aims to meet the demands of the formal economic organization designed, based on calculation and maximizing resources – the dominant paradigm of organization for which management theories and techniques serve (Guerreiro Ramos, 1981).

The market is an episodic system of a utilitarian nature, only an enclave of the social system and not its totality, it is a social order based on parameters of economy, capable of shaping society, becoming a paradigm for the organization of associated human life (Guerreiro Ramos, 1981). It should be noted that the market has been benefiting from the discourse of sustainability since large companies foresaw its relevance and maintained representatives at Rio 92. It was precisely at this event that business actors perceived an opportunity to influence the emerging global agenda in favor of their interests (Pattberg, 2009), so that the 1990s were a milestone for the global diffusion of SD and, concomitantly, for the appropriation of the debate on the environmental issue in favor of the business sector.  emphasizing business logic (Porto-Gonçalves, 2015).

What Porto-Gonçalves (2015) says about the influence of the market has its roots in the Eco-92 conference. Since then, considering the state of human affairs in the market-centered society (Guerreiro Ramos, 1981), a discourse has been engendered that has been able to operate an inversion with regard to the responsibility of companies for the degradation of the conditions for the maintenance of life. Large transnational corporations have increasingly acted to be seen as essential, from the point of view of contributing to solving the planet's environmental problems, proclaiming the fragile narrative of a sustainable future.

In the same year that Rio-92 took place, the World Business Council Sustainable Development (WBCSD) was founded, which published the book Changing Course: a global business perspective on development and the environment, dealing with the business perspective on SD. In the very first chapter (The Business of Sustainable Development), the narrative is directed at how to see environmental threats from a business perspective, revealing the idea that SD can be achieved by following business rationality, that is, reducing costs and increasing competitiveness (Schmidheiny, 1995).

At Rio-92, Maurice Strong, a Canadian business leader, who served as Secretary General of the Summit in Rio de Janeiro, was responsible for hiring Stephan Schmidheiny, a Swiss industrialist, to coordinate the business contributions at Rio-92, making it possible for companies to figure as legitimate agents to guide the DS discourse. The strategy was so successful that, instead of the image of causing the environmental problem, at the end of Eco-92, companies began to be seen and included, more and more, as part of the solution (Pattberg, 2009).

Since then, the discourse of sustainability in companies has been consolidated through the performance of international organizations, some of which are non-profit, in which business leaders participate, with centers in several countries around the world. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a pro-sustainability movement was engendered, evoking that the solution to environmental problems would come from the market. Schmidheiny, once again, was responsible for the vision that predominated, this time at Rio+10: the market operating freely has sustainable development as its horizon (Porto-Gonçalves, 2015,).

In the 2000s, the keynote of the discursivity of development was marked by the Millennium Declaration, the main result of the UN Summit in New York. Point III deals with development, relating it to the fight against poverty, making its promises a consensus that gave rise to the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2000). Among the eight MDGs, the seventh stands out, which aimed to ensure environmental sustainability, demonstrating, at that time, how much the theme had achieved insertion in the global agenda. The World Summit on SD in 2002 consolidated the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. During Rio+20, despite the absence of the main leaders, heads of state and government of the USA, China, Russia and the European Union, the replacement of the MDGs was foreseen (Coelho; Rabbit; Godoi, 2013).

A document entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development" created the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a view to global sustainability management.  In 2015, during the United Nations Summit on SD in New York, the SDGs replaced the old MDGs (Vitale; Santos Neto, 2016), and the conception of the 2030 agenda materialized as an international consensus for development, a practical result of a governance process based on the UN. The SDGs are, in this perspective, an agenda for the future, a renewal-expansion of the inconclusive MDGs, under the semantic guise of the 2030 Agenda (Okado; Quinelli, 2016).

The ideas of development have been invaded by consensus, whose function is to extinguish the debate and submit people who do not see a better alternative (Lautier, 2010). It is up to international institutions to legitimize the consensus: initially through the UN Conferences, with emphasis on the MDGs and their successors – the SDGs. The formation of consensus specifically in relation to the concept of SD is highlighted by Nobre and Amazonas (2002), who criticize its imprecision and contradictory character.

The SDGs have functioned as a global mechanism for coordinating sustainable development. Unlike the MDGs, which were essentially elaborated within the UN Secretariat, the SDGs were agreed upon in a consultation between transnational corporations, national political powers, and international organizations, which reveals a close connection between political and economic powers (Simões, 2020). Teitelbaum (2010) points out the priority given to companies and the management of the interests of big capital. Within the UN, companies stand out for their global hegemonic position, derived from their economic and financial power, while governments and national states become increasingly reduced to the management of the dominant system.

Large corporations use the discourse of sustainability as a hygiene strategy, which demonstrates efficiency by linking positive meanings to their image. They do so by using discursive practices whose function is to displace the meanings that adhere to an image of a company that is harmful to society, to nature and to the set of its workers, directing them to the presentation of a more favorable and socially well-accepted image - the company that practices social and environmental responsibility, even if according to the rules and mechanisms created in the scope of the market.  It is, therefore, a matter of denying socio-environmental irresponsibility through the unsustainable discourse of corporate sustainability (Simões, 2024).

Companies use discursive functioning, not only to omit damages and crimes, but to mitigate the severity of their harmful impacts or even to proclaim themselves legitimate social agents in the fight against environmentalism (Simões; Cristaldo, 2022). An example of how the conception and writing style of the sustainability reports of a large transnational corporation give visibility to data that is positive to its image while mitigating its possible negative impacts can be seen in the work of Simões et al. (2025).

More than half a century after the Stockholm Environment Declaration in 1972, nature continues to be treated from a colonial rationality. Escobar (2000) emphasizes the modern-colonial conception of nature: objectification, separation between the biophysical, human and supernatural domains, and the support of the nature/culture dichotomy, which is a foundation of the colonization of knowledge. It is also important to highlight the unequal position in the distribution of both profits and waste in the modern-colonial world-system, for which nature is commodified, in a logic that imposes itself above the possibilities of the planet's existence based on the predominance of centric countries over the periphery (Porto-Gonçalves, 2015).

The human being was placed above nature through a dualistic opposition: culture/nature; society/environment, which results in processes of domination of nature, leading to pollution, climate change, reduction of biodiversity, social injustices, hierarchization of forms of life, etc. (Ferdinand, 2022). The ongoing socio-environmental disaster on the planet derives from the idea of humanity as something apart from nature (Krenak, 2019). The coloniality of nature implies its control and management. The idea of nature as something outside of humanity is contained in the Western concept of nature, partly conceived as a provider of "natural resources" for survival and profit generation (Mignolo, 2017). This coloniality that affects nature persists in Latin America, becoming a subaltern space, which continued to be expropriated and used by dominant elites to meet the needs of accumulation for more than 500 years (Alimonda, 2025).

Nature has been used by consumer humanity as a resource for the same industrial or extractive processes that contaminate it with its waste, within the scope of a model of progress based on the incessant consumption of nature and subjectivities, (Krenak, 2019), incurring in the devastation of the planet and the opening of a monumental gap between different peoples and societies. The idea of sustainability is, therefore, a myth, a personal vanity, as there is nothing sustainable in this world of goods and consumption (Krenak, 2020). A world treated as a warehouse that finds itself in an environmental crisis produced

by a colonial thought that opposes culture to nature, that standardizes diversity and blocks affective alliances between those who are different, where only the human acts, in which other forms of life are subordinated and the enchanted are silenced (Krenak, 2022).

The benefits of development continue to be appropriated by a minority, while environmental risks greatly impact impoverished people and more dispossessed ethnic groups, which continue to be neglected by both governments and large corporations (Acselrad et al., 2009). In this sense, the intersectional perspective reveals how the discursive strategies of corporations and colonial logic perpetuate inequalities and operate through imbricated systems of power that articulate race, class, gender, and coloniality. Intersectionality demonstrates that the "sanitization" of the corporate image and the commodification of sustainability are not neutral: they reinforce hierarchies that subordinate groups already vulnerable due to their social, ethnic-racial, and geopolitical position.

In a context of colonial oppression, decolonial black feminist unsubmissive epistemology is used as a critique of hegemonic narratives that ignore the voices and experiences of those who have been subalternized (Figueiredo, 2020). While companies proclaim themselves environmental agents, their practices ignore how their impacts fall disproportionately on black women, indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and peripheral communities, whose existences are crossed by multiple oppressions (Collins, Bilge. 2020). Therefore, the "environmental issue" has a differentiated impact on central and peripheral countries, and some of its expressions affect working-class people, especially those marked by a certain racial and geographic profile (Santos et al., 2022).

Since environmental destruction does not affect all people equally, it is important that sustainability be questioned from the double fracture (colonial and environmental) of modernity, giving space to address racial issues, considering the colonial and slavery constitution of modernity. Such a fracture not only distances the movements in struggle in favor of the environment and against racism and coloniality, but also serves as a barrier for racialized and black people to occupy spaces in their discursive and theoretical production. The spaces of power have been occupied mostly by white men, in the mold of the European colonizer, of his history and values, subordinating the lives and territories of current and former colonized (Ferdinand, 2022).

Domination is not reduced to physical coercion, it is sustained by the fabrication of imaginaries that transform oppressions into 'natural truths', as Collins (2019) warns. If yesterday it was the stereotypes that legitimized the exploitation of the subalternized, today

it is the sustainability reports — with jargon such as 'carbon neutrality' — that erase the colonial trail behind 'green progress'. Dismantling these narratives is an important part of resistance, as colonial-capitalist power hijacks the very meaning of what is rational or desirable, condemning non-Western worldviews to silence. Corporate sustainability, in this sense, is the direct heir of epistemicide that, for centuries, treated black and indigenous knowledge as 'primitive', and remains incapable of seeing the ecosystem as a subject, not as a resource.

Thus, the call is made to think about environmental issues, giving visibility to colonization and slavery from the conception of ecological thought, as well as paying attention to the struggles against racism and coloniality. How is it possible to consider the possibility of sustainable development while avoiding placing the racial issue at the center of the discussion and without having indigenous peoples, quilombolas and others considered traditional as a reference? Who is the use of a perspective of sustainable development, forged by colonialist Euro-Christian peoples, which continues to subordinate nature instead of, as part of it, learning from traditional peoples how to relate to it?

One possible path begins with the understanding of refusing to convert nature into a resource or commodity, contrary to the colonialist matrix of power. It is necessary to recognize, make explicit, and attack the coloniality that underlies sustainability, shifting to the center of its construction the different perspectives coming from the peoples for whom the colonial developmentalist perspective subjugates, attacks, and destroys (Dos Santos, 2023): the peoples clinging to the land, those who inhabit margins, edges, and edges, whether in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, among them, the caiçaras, indigenous peoples, quilombolas, aborigines (Krenak, 2019, 2020).

For all that has been said so far, it is important to strengthen an intellectual production capable of decolonizing thought and giving voice to the subaltern, since "[...] intellectual production is, in many ways, complicit in the international economic interests of the West" (Spivak, 2014, p. 24). It is in this sense that Grosfoguel (2008) proposes an epistemic perspective from the subaltern side of colonial difference. This essay, therefore, is structured in the direction of collaborating with the construction and transmission of knowledge that is capable of approaching SD as a product of coloniality, designed to meet the needs of a capitalism eager to stay alive, forged from the European modern-colonial historical mode that considers itself global.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This essay presented the origin of sustainability, understanding it as a transfiguration of sustainable development. Sustainability, as a product of coloniality, designed to meet the needs of capitalism, forged from the European modern-colonial historical mode, which considers itself global. It was argued that the concept of sustainable development was conceived as an alternative to the possibility of slowing down or reducing the pace of capitalist accumulation. Sustainability, then, works as a smokescreen that aims to shift society's focus of attention from the socio-environmental problems that the neoliberal company causes, placing its actions ahead within the scope of the so-called socio-environmental responsibility.

The study in question indicated that the rhetoric of sustainability has its origin in the Western ideas of capitalist development. It was also problematized that the construction of the idea of development has historically been interested in and guided by the demands of the market, always from the interests of exploitation of the center in relation to the capitalist periphery since the post-SGM period. In this sense, it was highlighted that the concepts of development and sustainability were built according to the interests of the dominant countries. Thus, a relationship of historical coloniality was perceived that submits peripheral countries to the sieve of the conception and criteria of sustainability forged according to the interests of rich countries central to capitalism.

The junction between sustainability and development, in its current form, is quite contradictory and, therefore, fallacious, since it is part of the world-system whose logic of accumulation does not, in fact, allow the social and environmental dimensions to have the same priority as the economic aspect, which is notorious, since the mode of production inherent to such a system presupposes an accelerated and destructive consumption of nature.

Thus, it was found that the central objective of the proclamation of sustainability is the non-interruption of business economic growth, because what needs to become lasting, at all costs, is capitalist accumulation, even if masked by the discourse of sustainability that makes economic growth and the preservation of Nature compatible, by means of a discursive resource.

Finally, it was identified that, in the mold of neoliberal capitalism, while Nature is reduced to the condition of a mere resource in the productive processes that sustain capitalist development, through discursive means, the neoliberal enterprise continues to

present itself as responsible for ensuring the achievement of sustainable development for the maintenance of living conditions on the planet. The concept of sustainable development is configured as a possible condition, if and only if, in the colonialist conception, they are linked to business activities and ratified by a science and discursivity of the global north.

When reflecting on the critique of sustainability, it is impossible to ignore the voices of those who have long been silenced. The analysis of coloniality reveals to us that sustainability, often sold as the panacea for current crises, is shaped by power structures that do not consider the realities of all peoples, especially those who inhabit the margins of society. As Lugones (2008) pointed out, coloniality is not limited to the economy, it penetrates bodies and territories, racializing and gendering experiences.

In this sense, it is essential that the voices of indigenous peoples, quilombolas, and other groups considered traditional are heard, as these populations have an intimate understanding of the environment, knowledge that, if listened to, can enrich practices and public policies. It is necessary that the idea of sustainability be transformed, establishing a true dialogue, in which lives, histories and knowledge are only respected, breaking with the Eurocentric hegemony that, as Mignolo (2017) and Quijano (2005) explain, shapes the worldview from a colonial logic.

Capitalism, as Simões (2019) argues, perpetuates the incessant exploitation of territories and resources, and this reality must be questioned: how is it possible to believe in sustainability without confronting the structures that operate for the benefit of a few? To answer the conclusive and provocative question of this essay, it is recommended that future writings base the concept of sustainable development on the meanings and practices of subjects considered peripheral by the colonialist discourse of the global north. That they bring to light discourses that prove the inefficiency of regulations and biased institutional reports in perpetuating the liberal domination that in the various social and economic spheres determine the ways in the relationship between man and nature throughout the world.

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