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Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary

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Pluriverse is a reference work that will prove useful both to scholars and concerned citizens with an interest in debates on development and the multidimensional economic, social, cultural and ecological crisis which, as a result of an increasingly global capitalist system, is casting a shadow over the future of humanity and the planet. While most dictionaries seek to codify what is known about the world as it is, *Pluriverse* understandably emphasises the failures as well as the ideological functions of traditional development processes, while also discussing the proliferating political and cultural practices and traditions aimed at reinventing a world whose main affliction may be not uneven development but universal maldevelopment. In other words, *Pluriverse* can also serve as a model for future endeavours to produce reference works which, in line with Marx's admonition, seek not just to understand the world but also to change it.

To best understand how *Pluriverse* pursues this objective, it may be useful to outline its unconventional structure. While containing more than one hundred entries from scholars and activists from around the world, these entries are not simply arrayed from A to Z but are organised in three separate sections. Consistent with its self-characterisation as 'a post-development dictionary', the first section contains critiques, by leading scholars and activists from all continents, of the mainstream practice of development.

After this first section's brief overview of the history, assumptions, ideological assumptions and failings of actually existing 'development', the book proceeds in the second section to analyse and deconstruct false and reformist alternatives to the disasters capitalist development regularly generates. The entries appearing in the 'reformist solutions' section of the dictionary include BRICS, Circular Economy, Development Aid, Ecomodernism, Ecosystem Service Trading, Efficiency, Green Economy, Lifeboat Ethics, Neo-extractivism and Sustainable Development. Although some of the criticisms of these false solutions will be familiar to the specialised scholar (something that is always true with reference works, such as *Pluriverse*), this section may be very useful to concerned citizens looking for answers to the bewildering multitude of problems and catastrophes which form the backdrop of our daily lives. Because they at least seem to acknowledge the existence of these problems, and to propose solutions – which are often vilified by the powerful economic and political elites presiding over the transformation of the planet into a living hell for billions of human and non-human living beings – many of these solutions will be seductive to well-meaning people. The problem, however,

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according to many of the contributors to the dictionary, is that ultimately such solutions can at most refurbish or greenwash a fundamentally destructive socio-economic system, thus both failing to challenge the structural roots of the problems they claim to address and becoming complicit to these problems' perpetuation.

The bulk of the dictionary, however, is devoted to the multiplicity of social movements and cultural traditions from around the world, which, in various ways, challenge the assumptions and dystopian realities of actually existing development. The entries in this section include agroecology, alter-globalisation movement, autonomy, buen vivir, commons, deep ecology, degrowth, direct democracy, eco-anarchism, ecofeminism, eco-socialism, environmental justice, food sovereignty, gross national happiness Bhutan, human rights, Latin American and Caribbean feminisms, liberation theology, nature rights, negentropic production, permaculture, popular solidarity economy, *praktirik swaraj*, queer love, revolution, social ecology, social solidarity economy, tribunal on the rights of nature, undeveloping the north, wages for housework, worker-led production, and Zapatista autonomy.

The great number of initiatives against capitalism's social and ecological destructiveness can be read in two ways. On the one hand, the fact that, in many ways, the problems besetting humanity and the planet seem to be getting worse by the day can easily lead a fatalistic acceptance of the continuing deterioration, thus also obscuring the proliferation of movements of resistance against this trajectory. By highlighting this proliferation, *Pluriverse* can temper this fatalism and introduce the growing number of people disenchanted with business-as-usual to all the different ways one could contribute to the effort to avert the even more dystopian future which, left unchallenged, global capitalism has in store for us. On the other hand, the fact that the deterioration proceeds apace despite the proliferation of oppositional movements and cultures is also a sobering reminder of how daunting a task it is to reverse the current trajectory. Perhaps the way out of this conundrum may lie in Romain Roland's (and later Antonio Gramsci's) insistence on the need for one's efforts to be inspired by an optimism of the will, informed as this has to be, however, by a pessimism of the intellect.

I will close with a brief comment on the title of the dictionary. The term 'pluriverse' alludes to the Zapatista movement's plea for a diverse world 'in which many worlds fit'. Thus, all the movements, practices and traditions which appear in the third section of the dictionary tend to be treated as potential components of such a desirable future, as well as prefigurative moments helping to bring this future about. The careful reader, however, may notice that it is by no means certain that convergence between all these alternatives is possible. This becomes clear in the subtle but real differences that emerge in the way that the authors representing the various alternatives view not only socialism but even the notions of development and universalism, which serve

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as the dictionary's primary objects of critique. Perhaps the presence of such differences suggests a need to talk about pluriverses rather than a pluriverse, each of the different pluriverses being made up of those of the movements and traditions which can come together into a world in which many worlds fit. And perhaps the debate between these possible pluriverses can help mobilise a majority large enough to turn the most desirable of these pluriverses into a reality.

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