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I met Ana Esther Ceceña, researcher/professor in geopolitics, National Autonomous University of México, Director of the Geopolitics Latinamerican Observatory, in Lisbon, Portugal. She presented her paper for the Project on Polarisation in the last 500 years led by Immanuel Wallerstein, where she examines ecology, indigenous peoples and movements in March 2010.

“We have to find new ways of understanding the world in order to change it. We have no ready-made recipes but it seems that the economists who have the quick-fix answers are called in to find urgent political solutions: there are crucial political pressures on governments; even Left-wing governments in Latin America need to quick-fix solution and some have the ready-made routes.” For instance questions of ‘industrialisation-as-the-strategy for socialism’, energy issues (remember the old recipe in the post-October revolution on electrification, mineral extraction which provide badly needed dollars etc). “When you speak to Chavez you realise that he understands – he is a clever man; he even concedes that this must be done, but then the urgencies of everyday reality or
perhaps the economic advisors of his provide him with the strategy based on the ‘old recipes’ as quick-fix solutions to mounting political, social and economic pressures – the next election is around the corner or coping with the next economic or other turbulence is never too far away.

Ana Esther Ceceña, an economics professor who teaches geopolitics, for the Polarisation project is in charge of mapping the ecological and indigenous peoples’ struggles over the last 500 years: “the indigenous peoples movements with their variety and differences offer alternative ways of viewing the world; we must learn from them as they offer us routes beyond the current impasse”. Her paper is an amazing map of railways, pipes, communications, mineral extractions, and systems of surveillance of the Americas and she wants to cover the whole world and span it over the last 500 years.

Ceceña speaks enthusiastically about numerous initiatives in Latin America, where the social movements (i.e. grass root organisations) are engaged in interactions between them organisations of indigenous people, trade unions, political groups –small and big- meet and have processes of exchanging ideas and experiences throughout Latin America: there is a an empty box called ‘good living’ or ‘welfare’ [not to be confused with ‘welfare’ as there is an epistemological difference] which is to be filled by people on the ground in search for ways of development, coexistence and ecology in the post-colonial context. There are some important victories via the electoral process (Chavez in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia etc) and there is Cuba – a difficult case - as well as other countries where social democratic forces- which are not resisting neoliberalism as the more radical movements. For Ceceña Bolivia has a dual project, a 

communitarian social democracy (under Morales) and a ‘andine developementalism’ bourgeois traditional power (under the vice-president); it’s a fine-delicate and difficult balance between the two. In Venezuela it is not easy.

Nicaragua is lost for years now under a corrupt leadership; Lula is maintaining the status quo and so is Argentina and Chile; but there is a vibrant social movement which rethinking the world in Latin America.
Ceceña is very concerned with the current situation in Mexico: ‘You read the newspapers and you are horrified: only the other day I read about 15 decapitations; and this Mexico! Who would have thought about this a few years back?’ Ceceña refers the operation of the ‘enterprise’ called ‘Black Water’, which is based in Mexico-the USA and is involved in all sorts of ‘training activities’ of paramilitaries and torturer-officers throughout Latin America. After so much hope about the Zapatistas Mexico is under turmoil. Ceceña is a staunch advocate of radical transformation of the world: she considers half of John Holloway’s pro-Zapatista insurgency book Change the World Without Taking Power – The Meaning of Revolution Today, as a great insight into the future; the other half is a little too journalistic, but overall great. But she is also critical. She believes that he candidate of the Left probably won of the last elections but was not allows to take power; it was so close – the ‘Government in Exile’ will not last long. The Zapatistas position was mistaken: failing to take sides was a miscalculation as they assumed that the Left would win, which would allow them to negotiate with the new Left-wing president. It is apparent that those in power and privilege will just allow the Left to take over. No one understood Zapatistas’position and there was confusion; even today they are not engaged in explaining and engaging with society and the Left is badly divided. The Zapatistas have become more and more inward-looking failing to connect with the rest of the forces who want transformation in society, both in Mexico and the whole of Latin America. They don’t even refused the invitation by Evo Morales to be present at his assumption of attend the meetings presidency of indigenous peoples or the Social Forum in Latin America.

As for the future, the radical professor does not agree with Immanuel Wallerstein’s defiant assertion that by 2050 we will not see the capitalist world as we know it today. She just does not see it happening, at least in the near future. ‘But then again who said that changing the world would be an easy affair?’ she asks rhetorically with an ironic smile. But then again Ceceña retains room for
optimism, somehow agreeing with Wallerstein, who likes to repeat the quote from Winston Churchill: ‘I am optimist; I have always found that the most useful thing to do’. 