Between the emancipatory imagination and the constraints of reality: Examining the potential of post-development theory for realising an alternative conceptualisation of "development" through the case study of Ecuadorian's 'Buen Vivir'

Research Question:

How does the case study of Ecuadorian Buen Vivir showcase the potential and limitations of post-development theory in reimagining and realising an alternative conceptualisation of "development"?

Thesis MA International Relations, Global Order in Historical Perspective

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Modernity and the "development project"

"Traditional Ladakhis did not consider it a hardship, as we would, to fetch water every day from a stream or cook their food on a dung fire. Nor did they feel the cold to the same extent that we do. On the other hand, there are plenty of hardships that we consider tolerable in the West - breathing poisoned air in our cities, working under great stress for eleven months of the year, being all but completely isolated from our neighbors, having next to no say in how our communities and workplaces are organized - that would be insufferable to the Ladakhis. So, despite the very real problems in the traditional society [Child mortality, life expectancy, literacy, etc.] and the equally real improvements brought about by development, *things look different when one examines the important relationships: to the land, to one another, and to oneself*" - Norberg-Hodge 2001: 337 (emphasis added)

This lengthy passage illustrates how Ladakhis people (people of buddhist culture and living in the indian-administered region between Nepal and Bhutan) have their own perception of what a desirable way of living should look like, a perception that may contradict that of a more modernist mentality. Indeed, the many ways of perceiving what type of relation individuals should have to themselves, to society and to nature, as well as what should be seen as "progress" by political and social structures that they constitute (like states, among others), reflects the plurality of worldviews that emanates from human cultural diversity. And yet, the "development project"[1] that is somewhat unevocaly exported and "imposed" throughout the globe (mainly through "mainstream" international development organisations) doesn't seem to reflect that diversity - those who seem unfit to

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[1] For the purpose of this thesis, the "development project" is defined as a belief in "a linear process of life that establishes earlier and later states of underdevelopment and development as a dichotomy through which people must move to attain well-being" (Viteri Gualinga 2002, cited in De Zaldívar 2017: 193), with this move being only achievable through modern knowledge and wellbeing defined in solely modern terms.

the modern perception of "progress" (largely defined by individual's consumer capabilities and countries' economic growth), are labeled "underdeveloped" and "helped" to reach the uniformity under this banner of modernity through "neutral technical assistance", and the case of Lakdakhis people are just one among many examples. For example, Riggs (2017) have demonstrated, through the case study of development project within South East Asian region, how the idea of "poverty", defined in the narrow terms of income/consumerist capacities and integration within the market economy, can be projected on non-modern societies that often internalise this image and start see themselves in those terms of "poor" and "in need of development"[2].

We can then argue that the globalised "development project" is not a "neutral technical assistance" as it is usually inferred in its discourse, but is an intrinsically political (and, as I will argue, imperialistic) project, aiming at deeply transforming the aspirations and mentalities of states, societies and even individuals. James Ferguson in his work titled "*Anti-politics machine*" (1993) had demonstrated this convincingly through the case of Lesotho in its development period of 1975-1984: aside from being a failure in its own terms, the project had achieved an important goal of shifting power structures within Lesothonian society, making them much more dependent on the markets and state bureaucracy for their daily lives. To be sure, some aspects of development projects may be less political or imperialistic than others - it is hard to argue that the material help of achieving literacy, reducing child mortality and increasing life expectancy may be part of it. However, the development project rarely stops at those points, and often tries to restructure economic, social and political life along the lines of the dominant worldview that is conveyed by it and its dominant international organisations.

But what is this dominant worldview of the development project then? I would argue that this dominant worldview is that of Western modernity, that I will divide (somewhat simplistically) between "capitalist modernity" and "socialist modernity" (both of whom are Eurocentric traditions of thought that share same epistemic roots and an ontological unity). To be sure, as Boaventura de Santos have written, all the critiques "of Western modernity

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[2]Another example are the Ladakhis youth that, as Norberg-Hodge have argued, "were seduced by the power of the great dream factories of Western media and advertising. Having been made to feel poor, stupid, and backward, they developed a desire for the neon-lit Western "good life" (as they were denied any depiction of the darker side that goes with it)" (Norberg-Hodge 2001: 333).

must take into account the complexity and internal diversity of this social, political, and cultural paradigm", since it is "a very complex set of phenomena in which dominant and subaltern perspectives coexist and constitute rival modernities", and thus all of the critiques that do not acknowledge that enough "run the risk of becoming reductionist and of being like the very conceptions of modernity they criticize, that is, mere caricatures" (Santos 2014: ix-x). However, for the sake of clarity and concentration, my thesis will only treat certain threads of the enormously complex belief-system of modernity that I find pertinent to the goal of this thesis - three of which I've borrowed from Blaser's (2010) interpretation of modernity, while the fourth one that I've added being a distinctive thread of capitalist modernity. Those threads are: "the great divide between nature and culture (or society), the colonial difference between moderns and nonmoderns", "a unidirectional linear temporality that flows from past to future" (Blaser 2010: 4), as well as the individualistic materialism of capitalist modernity (while socialist modernity may have a more collectivist materialism). All while the criticism of that worldview will be elaborated on the line of those four factors, it is the fourth one of "capitalist modernity" that will particularly draw our attention, since it is inscribed in the economic system that is now mostly globalised and permeate most of the aspects of life of individuals as well as states, constraining their aspirations and actions to the rules of such economic system.

1.2 Development project as the perpetuator of globalised capitalist economic system

So far, we have seen that development is less a neutral and technical endeavor, and more a political project that aims at restructuring states and societies according to its modernist worldview (whether it is of capitalist or socialist variations)[3]. Due to this, the development project had also played a perpetuating role vis-a-vis the maintenance of the currently globalised economic system (that is predominantly of capitalist mode of production), by seeking the solutions for "underdevelopment" in the convergence of targeted countries and individuals to the model of "capitalist modernity". Historically, the

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[3] Although both are a variation of the modern belief-system, the two are not equal in their merit, as this will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

efforts of current international development practice were by far not the first efforts of converging diversity of the ways to conceptualise socio-economic and political organisation into one model that is deemed "rationally superior" - different periods of colonialism engaged in such enterprise, mostly by conquest and forceful imposition of one's model. The particularity of the post-colonial development project, however, is that during the post-colonial period since the end of the World War II, when the "colonial norm" of inferior/superior" relations were somewhat requalified by the emerging international law in "developed/underdeveloped" (Anghie 2005), this project seems to have played a role of a perpetuator of similar imperialistic tendency (that is underpinning the similar "economic imperatives" of capitalist system). It has done so by requalifying same imperialistic tendencies for uniformity and the belief in the superiority of own worldview in more internationally accepted terms and a more institutionalised form, with its own internationally-recognised institutions and "technical experts" that would "benevolently" help countries and individuals alike to achieve this modern "ideal-type" of development. By projecting the ideal type of development as modern (and mostly liberal, if we set aside the socialist variation on modernity), it pushes international actors (with relatively constraining "encouragements" to do so by international development organisations such as World Bank, IMF or UNDP), to pursue and conform to that model of liberal democracy, market economy and modern worldview in general (with, for example, its dualism between Nature and Society). As such, development project may act as a sort of "soft power" of the modernist endeavor that, in the words of Wolfgang Sachs, enables "two-thirds of the population of the earth" to be "enslaved to others' experiences and dreams" (Sachs 2010: 6). In doing so, it continues to converge diverse human experiences and worldviews to one narrow and somewhat faulty modernist frame, although not as directly as it was through the colonial expansion, but more indirectly, as Jason Hickel (2017) had demonstrated - by imposing "structural adjustments programs" (underpinned by exponentially growing international debt of the developing countries), applying international pressure to conform through such tools like "Doing Business" annual rankings of countries (compiled by the World Bank), or enacting "Green Growth" aims of "Sustainable Development Goals".

1.3 Objectives, methodology and thesis outline

From what we have just seen, it can be infer that, in order to contribute to a change in the predominantly capitalist economic system, one needs to help uprooting one of its perpetuators on the international arena, by redefining the concepts of "development" and "progress" away from the current dominant trends that arguably leads us in the pathway to "maldevelopment" (Amin 1990). One of the theories that preoccupies itself with just that problem, is the "post-development theory", and its insights (mostly reached through an anthropological approach) do indeed seem powerful enough to imagine an alternative conceptualisation of "development". However, as with all propositions of fundamental alternatives, the question of feasibility and of appropriate strategies to realise such alternatives poses itself, and here post-development theory has faced numerous (and at times justifiable) criticism of not sufficiently addressing the power relations that disallow any fundamental social change to happen in the detriment of today's status quo of predominantly capitalist system. One of the rare manifestation of post-development alternatives (that all authors on its theoretical spectrum seem to endorse) is also the one that seem to mirror this problematic of "desirable but hardly achievable" - that is Ecuadorian's philosophy of Buen Vivir, constitutionalised and used as a public policy guide by Rafael Correa's socialist government during its mandate between 2007 and 2017.

This thesis will therefore perform a case study of Ecuadorian's Buen Vivir as an insight into Postdevelopment theory, by asking the following research question: "*How does the case study of Ecuadorian Buen Vivir showcase the potential and limitations of the Post-development theory in reimagining and realising an alternative conceptualisation of "development?*" In essence, it asks to what extent "Buen Vivir" (and by extension post-development) may challenge this "development project" as well as the economic system that it seems to perpetuate, by offering its own "vision" of "progress" inspired by the indigenous knowledge of the Andean populations of Latin America.

Pertaining the methodology chosen to explore this question, this thesis is going to take the form of a theoretical case study of Ecuadorian's philosophy of Buen Vivir, both in its theory and its practice. My analysis will be mostly qualitative, gathering some of the

primary sources (in form of indigenous representatives' interviews, or citations from Ecuador governments' official documents), but mostly relying on the secondary sources, building on the works of scholars that had treated different critiques and appraisals of Buen Vivir, but synthesising them according to my angle of approach. To assess the representative position of those I qualify as being behind the modernist development project, I have chosen such dominant international organisations as the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund). Pertaining the position of Buen Vivir, I will stick to the interpretation of this philosophy by its indigenous leaders and non-indigenous scholars that I find most representative and most fitting to the angle of this thesis (all while recognising the plural nature of the concept of Buen VIvir).

The theoretical approach that I will adopt throughout this work would be that of the "sceptical post-development" strand of this theory, whose traits and "contours" I will outline in the literature review.

Generally, my thesis will concern the 2007-2017 period of Rafael Correa's socialist government in Ecuador, and I will divide my argumentation in two parts: I will firstly explore "Buen Vivir in theory", delving into how its "pluriversalistic" and relational worldview may act as a valiant counterbalance to the modernist ontology, by emphasising not only a possibility for plurality of worldviews coexisting in one world, but also the importance of sustainable relations to society and nature. My second part will then explore "Buen Vivir in practice" by delving into problems of implementing such an ontology on the level of political economy, that are mostly due to its insufficient translation in the "language" of political economy, as well as to the "real-life" constraints put by today's global system that coerces the states to always adapt to the interest of the "Capital". I will then conclude by elaborating on the idea that, despite the desirability of "implementing" Buen Vivr's ontology, it may be hardly possible to do so within the material constraints of today's globalised economic system dominated by the framework of "capitalist modernity", and a transition period is thus needed. Such needed transition period may take form of an ecosocialist current (defended by Correa's government) that, all while remaining within the modernist framework, is much closer to Buen Vivir's principles, and thus may be able to foster conditions for Buen Vivir to flourish by prying open the constraints imposed by the capitalist system.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 The ideational and philosophical origins of "developmentalist laws"

Let us first trace the ideological origins of "development laws" in general through an interesting account of it done by Pankaj Mishra (2017), since the modernist nature of the development project can be clearly seen if one looks at its ideational and philosophical roots. The precursor of the modernist worldview, the project of Enlightenment, was driven in particular by the fascination for the scientific revolutions of the 16th-17th centuries, especially for Isaac Newton's ability of confining the physical world within a set of general laws. This optimism about the power of rationality (as opposed to religious dogma of the Middle ages) and the scientific approach for most of the Enlightenment thinkers (with some notable exceptions), had pushed them to advocate for its appliance on the "social realm", on defining the rational model of society (and implementing it through social engineering) that would lead to the increased well being of most[4]. This endeavor had been completed during the latter part of the 19th century, when numerous "social sciences" had sprunned from this positivist period to "understand" societies in a scientific ways (with such fields as anthropology, sociology, or economics), and endeavors to scientifically conceptualise the progression of history had resulted into the elaboration of the philosophical concepts of "development laws" - first in form of Hegel's dialectics, and then in its "materialist version" of "historical materialism" by Karl Marx (both of whom elaborate their own laws of progress of societies from a more primitive stage to a more advanced one and, eventually, to the "end of history") (Mishra 2017).

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[4] As Pankaj Mishra had insightfully written about this ideational shift: "A religious or medieval society was one in which the social, political and economic order seemed unchangeable, and the poor and the oppressed attributed their suffering either to fortuitous happenings – ill luck, bad health, unjust rulers – or to the will of God. The idea that suffering could be relieved, and happiness engineered, by men radically changing the social order belongs to the eighteenth century." (Mishra 2016: 156)

2.2 The post-war realisations of the "development project"

Let us now retrace the "bibliographical evidence" which showcases that, since its practical consecration in the immediate post-war years, the development project was intrinsically linked with the modernist worldview divided in its "capitalist" and "socialist" variations. Indeed, despite numerous horrific spins of the pre-war ideas related to development that became discarded overtime (such as "social darwinism"), the particular idea of a linearity of social progress in history was ingrained in the development project since its international consecration by Harry Truman's "Point Four" speech in 1948. In his speech, Truman had divided the world in the now-commonplace terms of "developed" and "underdeveloped", while the ambitions of his "Truman Doctrine" seem similar to those of the "development project" today. Arturo Escobar (2012) writes that those ambitions was to "bring about the conditions necessary to replicating the world over the features that characterized the "advanced" societies of the time-high levels of industrialization and urbanization, technicalization of agriculture, rapid growth of material production and living standards, and the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values. In Truman's vision, capital, science, and technology were the main ingredients that would make this massive revolution possible. Only in this way could the American dream of peace and abundance be extended to all the peoples of the planet." (Escobar 2012: 4). Through this insightful argumentation we see that, suddenly, the imperialistic tendencies of transforming social, political and economic structures of the countries labeled as "underdeveloped" or "backwards" (that were commonplace during the colonial age) became again internationally acceptable in the post-colonial world order as long as these tendencies tried to conform these countries to the "scientifically-elaborated" models of development. It has transformed this endeavor into a "technical", a "neutral" one, an endeavor that is not up for debate, and has labeled those resisting it as "obstacles" on the common way towards progress.

As a consequence, most of the dominant approaches towards the practice of development in the post-colonial age, whether they are "capitalist" or "socialist", seem to be constrained by the modern framework within which the "developmental laws" were born. All

of them seem to have industrialisation and economic growth as their cornerstone, with very little space for non-modern ways of thinking.

On the "capitalist" side, the driving idea was the one elaborated in Rostow's work "Stages of Economic Growth" (1971) where the capitalist strategies of liberalisation and the centrality of perpetual economic growth were seen as the sole road towards development. Its influence can still be felt to this day, as it can be seen through the liberalisation and growth-centered policies pushed by the World Bank, IMF and (perhaps to a lesser extent) the UN. We can see, for example that Sustainable Development Goals (2015) still have economic growth as one of its central goals (albeit "cushioned" with some environmental and social regulations).

On the "socialist side", it is the emergency of the "dependency theory" that has dominated socialist development debates. Springing mainly from such works as the "Prebisch-Singer thesis", it argues that the development of developed countries (the "center") is perpetuated only through the constant "underdevelopment" of developing countries (the "periphery") mainly through the mechanism of unequal trade relations that perpetuates the latter's primary-export based economies, impending economic diversification and thus also true economic independence from the former. Walter Rodney's famous "How Europe underdeveloped Africa" (1971) is one of the most representative empirical study based on this theory, and it has not lost its prevalence even in recent times, as Ha Joon Chang's relatively recent thesis of "Kicking Away the ladder" (2003) demonstrates[5]. In this theoretical approach, none of the modernist principles are challenged - indeed, further industrialisation is seeked, only through a different strategy based on protectionist measures under the umbrella of "import substitution industrialisation" and on reforming international trade relations.

Even the emergence of "mainstream" critical approaches[6] to development since late 1960s (such as "Green Growth", "Sustainable Development", or "Human development") emanate from a modernist perspective and thus do not question the fundamental and

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[5]Ha Joon Chang had argued that the developed countries are 'kicking the way the ladder' of 'early protectionism' to the underdeveloped countries, on which the former had climbed to their economic development by being able to "nurture" a competitive industrial capacities before opening up for international competition (as historically was the case with US and the UK, among other countries).

[6] The degree of "mainstream-ness" of development approaches will be measured in this thesis by the degree of their integration within main international organisations such as the United Nations or the Bretton Woods institutions

structural problems of development discussed previously, as Merino (2016: 280-282) has convincingly argued.

Thus, through this overview of the selective but representative literature, we can argue that in the post-colonial period, the way to societal well-being became a unilinear endeavor, with only modern knowledge being capable of offering a roadmap to it, whether it is the capitalist variation, socialist ones, or somewhere in the middle with the sustainability approaches arising from the 1960s period ("Sustainable development", Green Growth, Human development, etc). None of those consider non-modern visions of what development should be, and see modernisation (industrialisation and exploitation of nature in particular) as the sole road to development. Hence, we find here all the elements of modernity as defined by Blaser (2010). The "individual materialism" manifests itself in the capitalist view of what human flourishing should be defined as, and it usually done so in terms of consumerist capacities of individuals and their "freedoms" within the market economy (while socialist modernity, on the other hand, has a much different, albeit still modern, definition).

2.3 Modernity and the "development project" within International Relations

In general, despite the ample amount of studies related to the origins and the spread of "western modernity" on the international level, it is relatively rare to see IR's criticism of development project being one of the perpetuators of the globalised capitalist economic system that takes its roots in precisely that modernist worldview.

To be sure, there are ample studies documenting how a modernist order was progressively spreading globally through different historical stages of colonialism, capitalism and globalisation. Barry Buzan (2010) had enumerated different dominant accounts of such an expansion, and the "syncretist account" seems to be the most convincing - it states that, all while Western modernity is not a distinctively "Western" belief-system (since it has co-constituted by influences from outside the West), its truly global expansionist period dates to the 19th century when second industrial revolution and financialisation in the West had led to an internal emergence of a "new type of social order that began to be projected

outward by the West" (Buzan 2010: 14) through the second wave of colonialism. Antony Anghie (2005) have demonstrated convincingly that even the avenment of the "post-colonial" period after World War II had not halted this expansion. Even in the age of post-colonialism, when the "colonial norm" was said to be replaced by the universalisation of the international law that gives equal sovereignty (and thus an equal say) to all countries, we see that the "coloniser/colonised" relationship may have been re-qualified in "developed/underdeveloped", retaining colonialist urge at 'civilizing the underdeveloped peoples' but now under the banner of liberal international law (Anghie 2005: 196-223).

Other authors like Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney in their "International Relations and the Problem of Difference" (2003) had studied the problems related to the ideational aspects of modernity, asserting that the idea of development was historically made possible in order to "make sense" of the different "Other" (non-european) in relation to the (european) "Self" during the colonial age, by labeling the former as "inferior" and the latter the model for this "inferior" to conform to. In their work, authors demonstrate that throughout the history of international relations, the perception of "Difference" was mostly negative, and thus it was either to be put in separate bubbles and avoided (as with Westphalian order [that became the cornerstone of Realist thinking] that emerged as a consequence of religious wars in 16th-17th century Europe) or something to be labeled inferior and assimilated (as with universalistic tendencies [that became crucial within Liberal school of thought], that "started" internationally from the colonisation of the Amerindian "Other" in 15th century Americas). Authors had also pointed out very interestingly that these trends are still very entrenched in the IR thinking and thus (consciously or not) it safeguards the heritage of modernity by uncritically accepting "development" at its face value (as something that is self-evident) if looked on through the lenses of the mainstream IR theories. This can partially explain the presence of IR's literature on development through a practical lens, but rarely through a critical one that would point out the development project as inherently modernist and as a perpetuator of the economic system that is also inherently modernist.

A similar criticism of the mainstream IR theory's approach to development, but from a more theoretical perspective, comes from Amaya Querejazu's article "*Encountering the Pluriverse: Looking for Alternatives in Other Worlds*" [2016]. Querejazu criticise the epistemological and ontological "gatekeeping" performed by the Western-centered IR

despite its aspirations for creating knowledge about the whole world[7]. He retraces this problem to the 'modern age thinking' from which all the sciences ("hard" as well as "soft" ones) stem from and reproduce similar gatekeeping practices (with various degrees of intensity). Author argues for the injection of "pluriversal" thinking within IR, allowing for ontological pluralism and depicting modernity as 'just another myth' that tries to make sense of the world around us, on par with any other "indigenous" myths (instead of seeing modernity as the sole true vision of the world). It is this aforementioned safeguarding that may also contribute to disregard of the mainstream IR thought towards any conception of "progress" and "development" that would not be set within a modernist framework, and thus discouraging these theoretical lenses to analyse alternative ways of conceptualising development (since they may be seen as "irrational" and/or "irrelevant"). For this reason numerous scholars (mostly within critical theories) have criticised the "colonisation of the imagination" pertaining to the ideas of development and progress in general.

Thus, an exploration of the field of critical development studies may serve as a useful tool for its "decolonisation", and it is this study of the development project from a critical angle is of interest to us - seeing it mostly as the perpetuator of efforts to converge diversity (in structuring socio-economic and political relations, among others) into one narrow modernist model that is conform to the economic system of globalised capitalism.

One of the school of thought that does in fact explore this criticism on a global scale and in a systematic manner, is the "post-development theory" - an approach that seeks to offer a true "alternative to development" (rather than an "alternative development") aiming at liberating the imaginary of "progress" and wellbeing from the constraints of a culture-specific modern worldview, and thus making the world order more "pluriversal" rather than universal (famously described by Zapatista movement as "a world where many worlds fit" (cited in Kothari et al. 2019: xxviii). This is the approach that seems to tackle the decolonisation of the imagination of progress, thus bearing in it a real possibility of instigating a truly radical change, and it will be of interest for this thesis. Let us now look at this theory in detail.

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[7] As he puts it rather ironically: "a discipline like IR that intends to produce knowledge about the world is by definition a discipline that should have space for theoretical perspectives *from* around the world" [Querejazu 2016: 10]. Unfortunately, he concludes, this is not really the case even today.

2.4 The post-development theory

Post-development theory is a controversial but insightful school of thought that had emerged in 1980s-1990s as a reaction to the "lost development decade of 1980s" in form of a body of different works, the most representative of which according to Matthews (2010) are four fundamental works - Wolfgang Sachs's "The Development Dictionary" (1992), Arutro Escobar's "Encountering Development" (1994), Rahnema and Bawtree's "Post-development Reader" (1997) as well as Esteva and Prakash's "Grassroots Post-modernism" (1998). Generally, one of the most fundamental insights of the PD that is widely shared across its different strands is their emphasis on the contingent nature of what "development" is, thus criticising the colonisation of the imagination that naturalises the Western-self as the sole model of progress (while labeling the "Other" as inferior unless he conforms with the model), and criticising the depoliticisation of development practice that follows this naturalisation (pretending that the model of progress is not up for debate, only the tools to get there are) (Matthews 2010; Ziai 2004).

However, beyond this common stance, there is a great variety in the degree to which the rejection of modernity and the defense of the grassroot goes. This variety is best summarised in Ziai's (2004) article, that categorise Post-development thinking into two broad categories. Authors falling within "reactionary populism" category tend to romanticise the "pristine" non-western worldviews (that got "infected" by the outside modernity) as well as the grassroot movements that they tend to see as non-hierarchical and egalitarian, all while "demonising" the western modernity as a force to be. Stemming from this analysis, they usually tend to be culturally relativist, and advocate for a return to the practices of the (partly imagined) past even if it means to support an authoritarian regime to maintain the homogeneity of a given culture (Ziai had associate the work of Rahnema and Batwee with this tradition). The authors within the category of "radical democracy" have a very different approach - they see cultures as a constructed (and not ontological, solid and unchangeable) concept, and thus are more nuanced in their critique of western modernity while also being cautious towards their non-modern alternatives. Their selective criticism lead them to usually endorse (albeit indirectly) radical democracies worldwide, in order for the local people to democratically enact their local worldviews in the political, economic and

social sphere, thus opposing the current centralised notion of expanding development from the "west" to the "rest" (works associated with this tradition, Ziai argues, are those of Escobar, Esteva and Prakash).

It is the latter approach that this thesis will adapt, an approach that Ziai (2017) had termed "sceptical Post-development" - a strand that is solid in its critique of modernity, all while realising its complexities as well as its "good sides"; that upholds the cultural-specificity of what "development" and "progress" should be, without going to the postmodern extreme that rejects any possible universality in human experience (and thus the construction of a pluriverse) or enabling romanticization of non-western perceptions of "progress".

There are numerous criticisms that have been addressed to this theory that, as Ziai (2017) had rightfully noted, "all of these criticisms were justified in regard to some PD texts, but not to all" (p.2549)". Esteva and Escobar (2017) had highlighted the two major criticisms that this thesis will try to correct. First criticism of "dichotomisation" (of perpetuating the division of the world between the "West vs Rest", but in a somewhat inverse manner) is already corrected by the "sceptical PD" nuanced criticism of modernity, centering it mostly on one of its main aspects (its political imperialistic tendencies), and admitting the constructed (rather than ontological) nature of human cultures. The second criticism of romanticisation of non-Western worldview is also avoided by the "sceptical PD" by not only allowing for critically investigating non-modern worldviews (and their grassroot structures), but also recognising the culture-specificity of all worldview, making them unfit for global universalisation (thus avoiding arguing for universalisation of Buen vivir as a better alternative to modern dominance, recreating in such a way the same problem that we had started with)[8]. Matthews (2010) adds that Post-development is usually criticised of "Pontius Pilate's politics" of all "criticism but no construction" (which is a criticism that this thesis will thoroughly touch upon when reflecting at practicalities of some of alternative constructions actually proposed by the theory). But more recent post-development works seem to take

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[8] It is important to highlight that, all while sceptical post-development defends the cultural-specificities of worldviews and the undesirability of imposing one worldview on all others, it does not fall into the extreme of "cultural-relativity" advocated by post-modern approach that disables any possible political projects on the scale of humanity as a whole. Sceptical post-development, as we shall see, does believe in the possibility of restructuring the world order along the lines of the "Pluriverse", achievable only through global expansion of radical democracies.

those criticisms into account, as we can see with Klein and Morreo's 2019 book "Post-development in practice" as well as 2019's "Pluriverse: a Post-development dictionary" by Kothari et. al.

It is in these two recent books that we can see the elaboration on Buen Vivir from a post-development perspective, with both of the works dedicating a chapter and an entry respectively on the philosophy of Buen Vivir. However, none of them (or any previous post-development writings centering on Buen Vivir, such as those of Gudynas (2011) or Acosta (2017)) seems to extensively evaluated Buen Vivir not only in its theoretical desirability, but also together with its feasibility on the ground (thus analysing the power relations, that may stand in the way of its realisation). This is a small gap in literature that my thesis will try to fill, all while extending the critical appreciation of Buen Vivir on post-development theory as a whole.

Chapter 3: Buen Vivir in theory - a "plurivesalisitic" and relational ontology as a counterbalance to modernity

3.1 Introducing "Buen Vivir"

"In the worldview of indigenous societies, in the understanding of the meaning that the lives of people have and should have, there is no concept of development. That is, *there is no conception, as in the Western world, of a linear process of life that establishes earlier and later states of underdevelopment and development as a dichotomy through which people must move to attain well-being. Nor are there concepts of wealth and poverty determined by the accumulation and lack of material goods. But there is a holistic view of what the goal of every human effort should be, namely, to seek and create the material and spiritual conditions for building and maintaining 'good living'...'"* (Viteri Gualinga 2002, cited in De Zaldívar 2017: 193, emphasis added)

Buen vivir[9] is a Spanish adaptation of the Quechua concept of "sumak kawsay", that can be roughly translated in English as "good living", and that has originated in the Andean region of Latin America among many of its native populations (although I will concentrate mainly on the Ecuadorian Quechua's interpretation). It is a recent concept, dating only to mid-twentieth century (although it is inspired by traditional indigenous knowledge of this region), that was enacted upon in the political realm even more recently, with milestones being its recognition within Ecuadorian and Bolivia constitutions of 2008 and 2009 respectively. It is complicated to talk about "Buen Vivir" in a general sense, since it is not a unitary concept, as it "includes different versions specific to each social, historical and ecological context" of the Andean regions, with most well known variations being those of "Aymara's suma qamaña, the Bolivian Guarani's ñande reko, sumak kawsay, the

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[9] It should be seen as an "umbrella term" that encompasses a rich variety of traditional andean philosophy that will be discussed further.

Ecuadorian Kichwa's allin kawsay, and the Peruvian Quechua's allin kawsay" (Chuji, Rengifo and Gudynas 2019: 111). However, some basic principles are widely shared across those different interpretations, and they constitute a contour of what Buen Vivir is supposed to represent.

In the age of today's societal and environmental problems that seem to be perpetuated by the "development project" and its mainstream critical "add-ons", Buen Vivir's cosmovision may represent a much needed perceptual shift that may procreate policies that would be more adapted to the problems on hand. Its main originality (widely shared across its myriad interpretations) goes into four points: Since its cosmovision takes its sources from traditional Andean knowledge and philosophy, and it does not seek to universalise itself nor decredibilise other worldviews, Buen Vivir may be an important "tool" to decolonise the imaginary and allow for multiple culture-specific ontologies to coexist in "a world where many worlds fit" (Kothari et al. 2019: xxviii). Other than that, Buen Vivir's originality resides in the fact that its main principles orbit around a biocentric, rather than anthropocentric, conception of the world (with "*Pachamama*" being the Mother Earth, and all that comes from it being included in one community), a relational approach that underpins a strong emphasis on communitarianism (through radical democracy, "convivir bien", etc.), as well as the conceptualisation of "happiness that reaches beyond the material accumulation and individualism typically endorsed by capitalism" (Carlisto Friant and Langmore 2015: 65).

It is along those lines that I will proceed exploring the most important elements of BV (all the while keeping in mind the plurality of its interpretations), and I will do so in a way to showcase how it may counterbalance those aspects of modernity that is maintained and perpetuated by the "development project" and, as I have argued, are destructive for the nature, societies and individuals alike.

3.2 Pluriversal conception of the world and of the ways to experience it

In 2012, heads of states and other government representatives had attended a meeting in Rio de Janeiro within the framework of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable development (known as Rio+20) in order to negotiate on the ways to reconcile the "imperative" of the economic growth with environmental sustainability in the "sustainable

development" style of thinking. The resulting document - "The Future We Want" - outlined the usual mainstream position of pushing the governments of the world to implement "Green Growth" strategies and societal policies that would alleviate the social and environmental externalities of such growth[10]. Despite the self-proclaimed universality of the proposal, the example of Buen Vivir (an example among many others) shows clearly that this position does not represent a unanimous consensus, since at least its indigenous and ecologist interpretations do not accept any further large-scale extractivist policies to be the fuel of the development project. And yet, international organisations like the United Nations Development Programme continues to speak on behalf of humanity, as "we the peoples of the united nations", when they elaborate the Millenium (2000) or Sustainable Development Goals (2015) based on a particular view of development being growth-centered (despite attempts at "cushioning" it) and in line with capitalist modernity.

Numerous scholars that had performed the discourse analysis of UN and Bretton Woods Institutions' major documents had came to the conclusion that the universalising vocabulary they use, as well as the universal reach of their particular market-based "technical" strategies, points at their unitary ontology - they perceive the world according to the dominant liberal ideology, and seem to be convinced that everybody else should do so too (hence their legitimacy of speaking on the behalf of all and defending common human interest) (Ziai 2011; Telleria 2017). From this unitary ontology, or the way of seeing the world, stems the way to gain knowledge on the ways to change it, to steer it in the "desirable" direction of modern/liberal development, and here we see the epistemic colonialism appear. The ways of researching for the "development solutions" are often portrayed as "scientific", with the predominance of economics taking hold. None of them allow for a non-modern interpretation of the world to be on equal stance with the dominant interpretation, and the non-scientific ways of knowing are seldom taken seriously. And since organisations like these are dominant within the international development practice, they can universalise their development project, that is elaborated in a very centralised manner but somehow perceived as to be fitting every region of the planet, no matter its cultural-specificity.

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[10]   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/733FutureWeWant.pdf

The potential of Buen Vivir in de-universalising the development project resides precisely in the fact that its relationship to modernity (and other belief-systems) allow for a more "pluriversal" dialogue between them. As mentioned in the preliminary chapter, there is no unitary conception of Buen Vivir, and different interpretations vary in their relationship to modernity. De Zaldivar (2017) elaborates on some of the most commonplace interpretations in Ecuador. First being the interpretation of Buen Vivir by Correa's government (exemplified, according to the author, by Rene Ramires) that sees it through a modern lens as a "socialist buen vivir", and (somewhat paradoxically) enact its neo-extractivist policies in its name[11]. On the other side of the spectrum lies the essentialist-vitalist interpretation of BV (exemplified by Atawallpa Oviedo) that, all while bringing an interesting criticism of government's usurpation of Buen Vivir, is itself perpetuating the romanticized interpretation of Buen Vivir - a sort of Rousseau-esque repackaging of the myth of "noble savage" that is uncontaminated by modernity and retains the keys for a pure and righteous lifestyle[12].

However, there are plenty of academics and indigenous representatives that choose a middle ground between the two extremes, seeing Buen Vivir as an alternative project to modern framework, all while not falling for romanticisation or dichotomisation. As the interviews of indigenous representatives across the Andes conducted by Merino (2016) have shown, there are numerous groups of indigenous peoples that tend to integrate the fruits of globalisation within their world view, rather than the other way around. For example, one indigenous leader, Gil Inoach, had "explained how the indigenous vision does not mean a return to ancient practices, but a wish to fortify indigenous cosmology by integrating the good things of globalisation and reinforcing indigenous territory and self-government."(277); In a similar line, we can find another indigenous intellectual, Awajun, who tries to integrate modern fishing techniques within the lifestyle of his indigenous community, in an attempt to "adapt globalisation and technology to his people's reality (not the other way around) in order to find alternatives to extractive industries, so that people can maintain their own territoriality and traditional cultural and legal systems and

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[11] A more harsher critics of the government state that for them, "socialism is the banner and Sumak Kawsay is only a folkloric ornament on the socialist flag" (Atawallpa Oviedo cited in De Zaldivar 2017: 192).

[12] This interpretation, represented by Oviedo's "Qué es el Sumak Kaysay" (2012) "touts an archetypal, decontextualized, and mystical image of an 'Andean civilization' animated by relational and vitalist ontologies that, mysteriously or in ways are never made explicit by the author, have remained 'uncontaminated' by Western culture (De Zalidvar 2017: 192).

can co-exist with modern technology" (277); This mitigated position can also be tracked with the mining question. Author has highlighted that "nobody objects to mining altogether, but it must occur in places where environmental impacts can be mitigated, and not at river sources", or, in Gil Inoach's own words, "Not only from mining is it possible to live, it is possible to live off environmental goods and services that eco-systems provide to humanity. The country has to be visionary in that sense and it must not only be based on primary exportation; this is just a short term-vision."(279)

In a similar manner, non-indigenous scholars tend to share the same line of thought. Gudynes (2011) captures the relationship that BV academics should have in relations to western modernity through the example of building bridges - " the Buen Vivir will not stop building bridges, and will not reject the use of Western physics and engineering to build them, but the ones that it will propose may well have different sizes and materials, will be placed in other locations, and certainly willserve local and regional needs and not the needs of global markets"(446).

Buen Vivir is thus not a "culturally-protectionist" return to an non-existing past and rejecting all other cultures, as some usually portray it to be - as "as a return to a distant Andean past, pre-colonial times."(Gudynas 2011: 443). Rather, its pluriversalistic nature allows for it to interact dynamically with modernist worldview (for example, integrating some of its medicinal or technological innovations), all while rejecting and combating its political vision of uniformisation of the world and the perpetual accumulation of profit that its perceive as progress (but that are in reality destructive of our social and environmental factors). Hence It is this interpretation of Buen Vivir that would allow for a pluriverse to exist - a Buen Vivir that is true enough to its principles to challenge modernist thinking, all while rejecting its own dichotomisation with the "decadent modernity" (that some of its essentialists militants advocate for); A Buen Vivir that allows for some fruitful "dialogue" with modernity, without hollowing itself out of its essence by being integrated within its framework.[13]

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[13] This can be seen as a long shot if we compare how such ontologies are treated within modern social sciences. Even within the study International Relations, that suppose to capture the diversity and multiplicity of human groups between each other, most of non-Western visions of the world are discarded as "myths", while own "myth of modernity" is held as a uniquely true way to see the world (Querejazu 2016).

The degree to which a cohabitation is possible also depends on what "version" of modernity we are talking about. Indeed, multiple belief systems that are similar to Buen VIvir (such as Ubuntu in Southern Africa, or Gross national happiness in Bhutan, just to cite a couple of them) share some common points on the view of our relationship towards nature and society, and those common points contradicts modernist position on those issue (since, for example, it sees humans and nature as ressources - as buyable workforce and extractable primary goods - that should be channeled towards perpetual growth as the end for itself in all the corners of the world). Thus, a pluriversal alternative may be imaginable only as a "global tapestry of alternatives" (Kothari et al. 2019: xxviii) "sewn" with these common threads[14].

3.3 Multi-dimensional conception of well being, characterised by a relational view towards society and nature

The pursuit of wellbeing within the development project tends to be dominated by the economic-centered approach of "poverty reduction" and "basic needs approach" for individuals, and "economic development" for states. It is commonly understood that the integration of individuals within the market economy will solve their 'unhappiness' (since they would able to use their purchase power to buy into 'consumerist happiness') and the perpetuation of state's economic growth will allow for growth's redistribution in a way that will increase state's capacities of creating wellbeing for its citizens. Around this materialistic and individualistic conceptions of wellbeing, most 'mainstream' development policies are constructed - whether it is the World Bank following the "international poverty line" and (neoliberal) policies of liberalisation, or United Nations "Sustainable Development Goals" seeking to assure economic growth while cushioning its supposedly-correctable 'externalities' and assuring individual well being through the "human development approach" (that seeks health and education investment to facilitate the integration of more humans beings within the capitalist market economy). And indeed, it may seem hard to

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[14]This point will be elaborated upon further in the conclusion section as one of the strategies to enact a 'pluriversal' global order.

argue against this approach - who would be against eradicating poverty and against a potentially redistributive enrichment? All while the materialistic dimension of wellbeing is important, the problem is that it is not the *only* dimension of wellbeing (something that the modernist vision tends to ignore). The predominance of the "homo economicus" model within mainstream economics projects a one-dimensional image of what a human being is, defining his well-being in terms of 'consumerist happiness', and denying its non-materialistic aspects (such as healthy social bonds or environmental conditions of living). The same perception is transposed on states, whose drive for perpetual accumulation is encouraged, all while the nefaste consequences that seem to be inherent to this drive (social and environmental destruction) are attempted to be cushioned through technical and technological tweaks of "Green Growth" 'alternatives'. Hence, by projecting both of these faulty conceptions of wellbeing being 'consumerist happiness' and 'perpetual economic growth', the development project replicates and imposes this conception worldwide through its practices.[15]

This modernist view of wellbeing is also evident in the theoretical approaches towards wellbeing (from which development practice derives its "blueprints"), that is consumed by the so-called "science of happiness". The hedonic strand of thought, that is dominant within this "science of happiness" and within wellbeing-oriented development studies, sees the immediate satisfaction of material needs, usually through market-based solutions, as the most optimal way to measure wellbeing and to derive policies aiming at fulfilling it (Smith and Reid 2018). However, again, there may be a problem with that unidimensional view, and this for numerous reasons: The difference in worldviews may constitute different conception on what brings about happiness ; Basic needs satisfaction can be provided outside market forces (as for example with subsistence farming or goods exchanges) ; Extra-economic factors, such as societal and environmental ones, also account for the wellbeing and thus wellbeing cannot be achieved if those are neglected (Guardiola and Garcia-Quero 2014: 179). All of these nuances are demonstrated and deepened by Buen Vivir's philosophy that adds the communitarian and environmental

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[15] As Querejazu (2016) had intrinsically remarked along the lines of this argumentation : "By telling reality we produce and practice it; if we tell, accept and practice a one-world narrative, we produce a universal reality. The universe is then an ontological historical product, with epistemic consequences; a construction" (5)

dimension to currently one-dimensional conception of well-being. It is this contribution that the two of Guardiola and Garcia-Quero (2014; 2017) studies tried to demonstrate.

In the first 2014 study, the authors had evaluated the validity of two dominant Ecuadorian's interpretations of how to achieve well-being through Buen Vivir - the productivist interpretation (defended by Correa's government) more aligned with basic needs approach, and the conservationist interpretation that is much truer to Buen Vivir's philosophy. The research (conducted in two mostly rural provinces of southern Ecuador) had showcased that both approaches should (somehow) be complementary in order for the Ecuadorian well-being to be sustained or maximised, since none of the approaches would be able to increase well-being by itself. It concludes that "policy interventions focusing on raising income or Buen Vivir dimensions alone will be insufficient. Policies that foster Buen Vivir ethos while raising income and employment would succeed; aiming at improving economic potential while preserving people's ties to the community and the land."(182). It was also highlighted that reducing materialistic scarcity is possible through non-market solutions, like self-production related to food sovereignty or exchange of goods related to fostering a tight community (which, again, shows the relevance of Buen Vivir's relational view on land and society and its impact on wellbeing).

The second 2017 study follow the similar line by studying the discrepancy between International poverty line (or IP, measured in income sufficiency), and "Subjective Well-Being poverty line" (or SWBP, measured along Buen Vivir's socio-environmental principles), to understand why there are economically poor portion of the population that does not consider itself poor or unhappy. It again stresses the alternative conceptualisation of Buen Vivir in relation to poverty : "The idea of poverty on Buen Vivir is being detached from the community and the solidarity and reciprocity dynamics, and a person who is in this situation could be considered to have a low quality of life."(913) Hencewhy, "someone can be considered poor if she/he lives excluded from the community, regardless of the amount of money she/he owns."(912). By voicing those alternative dimensions of wellbeing, this study explains that the unidimensional account of poverty fails to capture the non-materialistic aspects of wellbeing, that are continuously ignored by mainstream development practices, and that are endeavored to be heard through Buen Vivir's philosophy.

To be sure, the necessity of material well-being should not be underestimated. However, this necessity (that should not evolve towards consumerism) is only *one* of a complex set necessary factors, and if the priorities of development project are not re-calibrated towards the side emphasised by the Buen Vivir's philosophy, it risks projecting the one dimensional homo economicus model on the people it is trying to help, as well as trapping the states into the perpetually (and eventually self-destructive) cycle of infinite growth.[16] Hence, a similar analysis can be made on a state level - unless the development of a country stops being measured solely by its economic growth (no matter how cushioned it may be by technological innovations or the alleviating strategies of social welfare), and starts to include some of the environmental and societal factors akin to Buen Vivir's principles, we may see the same trajectory of 'maldevelopment' being replicated during and even after the period of the UN's "Sustainable Development Goals". These new state-level measurements may for example include the degree to which a state uses its legal apparatus (and other public policy tools) to include nature as a subject (rather than an object) of law on an equal ground with its human citizens, or to protect the self-determination of the diverse parts of its pluri-cultural societal fabric (not only by allowing for "food sovereignty" and self-production to thrive, but also encouraging a more communitarian environment with strengthened social bonds). If development and progress is conceptualised and seeked after in such a way, we may see a whole new concept of development that may be more responsive to our today's societal and environmental pressing issues.

We have seen that, in theory, a balanced and a harmonious approach of Buen Vivir is very potent, allowing not only for a more plurversalistic system to exist (by allowing some sides of modernity to coexist or even being implemented within Buen Vivir), but also for the pursuit of different definitions of wellbeing and happiness (instead of modernistic

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[16] In both of those cases, we also face the problem of "colonising of the imaginary". By defining what wellbeing should be and towards what individuals and states alike should be tending towards, the development project holds an immense "normative" "soft-power" influence on those actors. Depending on what are the guiding principles of this project (its dominant worldview), it can procreate a sustainable "pluriversalistic" world order (along the lines similar to Buen Vivir and its integration of some parts of modernity), or an unsustainable "universalistic" one (which, as I have argued, is the case today).

materialistic "pursuit of happiness") in all of its multidimensional essence, including societal and environmental bonds. However, in practice, the implementation of this worldview seems to stumble upon the constraints of the global order and of local economical context, putting the Ecuadorian government into the position of "Great Dilemma". It consists of trying to find a middle way between balancing economic prosperity with the economy that still carries the weight of colonial history (being dominated by primary exports), and the authentic Buen Vivir's positions that are equally important for wellbeing. This is what the next part will try to explore in depth.

Chapter 4: Buen Vivir in Practice: Road to "good living" under construction or hijacked by modernist thinking?

4.1 Introducing the political context of Ecuadorian's Buen Vivir

The so-called "pink tide", instigated by the elections of socialist governments across the Latin American region since the early XXI century (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, etc.) had brought about the "return of the state", with its new thinking stemming from a double criticism of neoliberalist policies and of modernist development projects, to which an alternative is needed to be found (Villalba-Eguiluz and Erxano 2017). It was due to this context that the inspiration for an "alternative to development" was found in the principles of Buen Vivir, that originates from the indigenous worldview of the Andean peoples (and thus being also culturally-fitting for this Latin American region). Its constitutional recognition by the Ecuadorian Government within its 2008 Constitution ("Rights of Buen Vivir" articles 12-39; "Rights of Nature" articles 71-74), as well as the elaboration of two four-years "National Plans for Buen Vivir" (*Planes Nacionales para el Buen Vivir 2009-2013 and 2013-2017*), had showcased the willingness of Correa's government to indulge in such post-development agenda.

However, despite the novelty and the necessity of these measures, there are numerous critiques of the state's interpretation and enactment of Buen Vivir. We will first explore how Buen Vivir's philosophy is attempted to be translated in policy recommendation within the framework of political economy along the lines of "post-extractivism" and by its conservationist defenders (sub-part I), before analysing how Ecuadorian state may have been straying away from it (by, among other things, promoting neo-extractivist policies) and the complex reasons behind this (sub-part II).

4.2 Problematic political translation of Buen Vivir gravitating around post-extractivist thinking

There is relatively little literature that helps to translate Buen Vivir's principles in the vocabulary of political economy. However, it is of utmost importance that more research goes into this political translation, if it is to avoid being labelled as "naif" or "romanticized" in the face of the question of applicability. As Merino (2016) has argued : "as more radical measures such as territoriality and self-determination have the potential to contradict the state logic of aggressive promotion of extractive activities, it is necessary that Buen vivir presents a feasible alternative political economy … If Buen vivir is going to be implemented beyond simple rhetoric, this is its most urgent challenge" (278).

Buen Vivir's general approach is already innovative and applaudable for its "inversion of political imaginare", since the question it asks "is not about how to include (integrate, assimilate or accommodate) indigenous peoples within the state liberal capitalist logic, but the other way around: How can the state engage with the indigenous vision in order to transform itself?" (Merino 2016: 279) (something that capitalist-based "alternative developments" lack). And it tends to try performing such "inverse integration" along post-extractivist thinking, that is commonly misrepresented for being against any type of mining or drilling, in order leaving nature untouched in a radically conservationist way. A more accurate portrayal of its advocacy would be that it is arguing against any extractivist policies which would disturb environmental cycles that cannot be regenerated, as the large-scale oil and mining extraction projects tend to be. Lalander (2016) had concisely summarized this argument through the position of historian and anthropologist Pablo Opina Peralta, who "argues that their (post-extractivist) claims are rather that traditional (artisan) mining should not be substituted by a new larger-scale model of extractivism that according to them would clash with the environmental objectives of the Buen Vivir Development Plan. As an alternative, they argue that the State economic policies should be oriented toward bio knowledge and tourism" (636). Hence, it is a post-extractivist thinking (if by extractivism we

understand large scale projects that disrupt ecological cycles) that goes much beyond the technological optimism of sustainable development, but does not encroach in the extreme conservationist territory.

This post-extractivism tries to break the dependency on resource extraction for economic prosperity (a dependency endowed upon Ecuador by the colonial and neoliberal legacies, making primary exports its main source of revenue) while limiting the necessary extractions to being performed under acceptable conditions. However, this vision is currently lacking Buen Vivir-inspired strategies to this transition from an extractivist anthropocentric economy to a post-extractivist biocentric one without sacrificing one principle for another: without assuring preservation of nature at the cost of losing most of the revenues (necessary for social spendings) in the context dominated by capitalist modernity. If that shortcoming persists, it may lose ground to more anthropocentric approaches, such as that of ecosocialism defended by the Correa's government. In order to correct this shortcoming, more dialogue and research is needed to elaborate a more comprehensive political translation of Buen Vivir's philosophy. There may also be the need to adapt its vision to the urban population whose lifestyle and conditions are different from the rural environment. Such fruitful dialogues could thus be performed with the urban-centered paradigm of "the Commons", or "Solidarity Economy" and "Degrowth", among many other paradigm, in order to foster demarketization, decentralization (and even to some extent dematerialisation) strategies (Villalba-Eguiluz, C. Unai, and Iker Etxano 2017: 10) in order for Buen Vivir to obtain a full panoply of a political vision and thus being fully opposable to dominant modernist ideologies.

4.3 The "Great Dilemma" of realising Buen Vivir within the globalised capitalist economy

As mentioned previously, the Ecuadorian government of Rafael Correa (2007-2017) have made much to bring Buen vivir onto political and policy-planning levels. Its rights-based approach had led to constitutional recognition of the rights of Buen Vivir as well as rights of Nature[17]. On the policy side, it has enacted two four year plans (PNBV

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[17] In the words of Santos (2018), Pachamama (or Mother Nature) "designates a non-Cartesian, non-Baconian conception of nature, that is to say, nature not as a natural resource but rather nature as a living being and source of life, to which rights are ascribed as to humans: nature rights side by side with human rights, both

2008-2013; 2013-2017) for the implementation of Buen Vivir's principles in practice. But there is abundant criticism on both of these fronts.

4.3.1 Constitutional shortcomings

Concerning the Constitution, the way that the "legal indigenism" (Merino 2016) is implemented seems to be riddled with contradictions, as the "Rights of Nature" come into conflict with other articles within the same constitutional framework. For example, while its article 71 states that "Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes.", the article 74 in its turn precise that " Persons, communities, peoples, and nations shall have the right to benefit from the environment and the natural wealth enabling them to enjoy the good way of living"[18]. In a case of two potentially contradictory legal rules of the same hierarchical position within a constitutional framework, it is usually practice that resolve this conflict and gives preference to one of them. And the government's practices had done just so, since its continuous pursuit of "neo-extractivist" policies[19] (despite its instrumentalisation for redistributive justice) have confirmed the possibility to violate Rights of Nature if the nation's interest requires so. This could have been avoided if a precise mechanism for assuring the respect of legal force of such articles was contained within the text, but instead the constitution is only limited to (somewhat vague) declarations of those rights, leaving secondary legislature and its practice largely responsible for interpreting its legal weight.

Another weakness of this constitutional incorporation is the limited voice that the indigenous peoples supposedly have in the debates on policy planning: despite Buen Vivir's insistence on radical democratisation and participation (Gudynas 2011), the only power that the constitution gives them is the right to "free prior and informed consultation" (article 57 parag. 7) about extractivist projects, with no power of coscent or veto over those projects (Merino 2016: 276; Lalander 2016: 632; Villalba-Eguiluz and Etxano 2017). This confirms

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having the same constitutional status" (10) and it is in this revolutionary reconceptualisation of nature that represents a major challenge to a modernist view on nature solely as a resource.

[18] https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ecuador_2008.pdf

[19] Neo-extractivism can be defined as extractivism dominated by the State rather than the private sector (and thus may be made more "responsible"), and whose legitimacy is drawn from the fact that profits gained from it are fueling social spendings to ameliorate material condition within the countries (rather than going into private pockets) (Lalander 2016: 625 ; Villalba-Eguiluz and Etxano 2017 :2-3)

that the ownership of natural resources still belongs to the state that (despite theoretically giving nature rights) reserves its own right to continue extracting them on a large scale if the nation's interest demands so, without the need of indigenous couscent. This limited attribution of rights that the government of Ecuador is willing to tolerate is also exemplified by the government's repressive policies towards those who protest against these projects - hundreds of activists had been arrested and labeled as saboteurs (Calisto Friant and Langmore 2014: 69), thus effectively criminalising social mobilisation that tries to protect the Rights that the Constitution itself had attributed to nature.

4.3.2 Extractivist "imperative" and other pressures

Aside from the problems with the Constitution, a major part of criticism is addressed to the discrepancy between Buen Vivir's seemingly ecocentric/biocentric approach and the government's ecosocialist (and thus still anthropocentric) approach to it. Indeed, while Buen Vivir tends to go towards post-extractivist ideas, governmental policies on the contrary embrace "neo extractivism" as a necessary and temporary 'evil' in transition towards Buen Vivir, that the current (relatively dire) material conditions of the country may not allow for. "Use the extraction of raw materials in order to stop the extraction of raw materials" as the 2013-2017 plan has paradoxically claimed (SENPLADES 2013: 48). In essence, the aims of presumably temporary neo-extractivism are threefold (Carlisto Friant and Langmore 2014) : Diversify the economy (by shifting it from dependency on primary exports to tertiary sector of ecotourism, services and biotechnology), ensure redistributive justice (by alleviating poverty, inequalities, and strengthening public sector such as education and health through robust social programs), and entrenching participatory democracy.

Faced with a situation of great inequality and poverty within the country, Rafael Correa called the paradoxical situation a "false dilemma" stating that, in his view, a "responsible extractivism" is compatible with Buen Vivir (as long as it is a temporary "road" to it), all while not hiding his anthropocentric stance that he justifies with the current situation - "For us, and for the Revolution, the human being is not the only important thing, but still more important than Pachamama" he proclaimed in one of his speeches. "We cannot be beggars sitting on a sack of gold." (Correa Delgado 2012, quoted in Lalander

2016: 621). Despite this somewhat understandable position, Buen Vivir's response also merits to be considered and taken into account nevertheless, since it criticises a particular type of extractivism (a large scale one) as well as the growth-based economy (even with its redistributive purposes), not the idea of utilising natural resources for profit *per se*. Moreover, government's logic may be criticised in other important ways - the limits of this temporary transition period are not clearly delimited (and thus this temporary transition may endure for an indeterminable amount of time) and, as some of the analysis of its results points at the reverse of benefits in 2015 (that coincide with the fall in oil prices), some had offered an alternative source of revenue such as an improve taxation system, that could bring a relatively comparable amount of profits without large scale extractivism (Villalba-Eguiluz and Etxano 2017: 8-9).

Despite the shortcomings of Correa's position (that clearly does not follow the main line of Buen Vivir), a number of internal and external pressures are needed to be considered in order to truly understand the choice behind such a position and to do it justice. Internal pressures are mostly due to the structuration of the Ecuadorian economy that is dominated by and dependent upon primary exports as a legacy of the colonial and neoliberal period (Galeano 1973) ; It is also largely dependent for its own survival on foreign capital due to the architecture and norms of current capitalist global system, and this foreign capital will be repulsed by policy lines that may radically curb economic growth for whatever reason (whether it is environmental protection or societal wellbeing)[20]Factors related to the domestic political situation are also often mentioned, with the timid interpretation of Buen Vivir sometimes being assigned to the willingness of not angering the Ecuadorian economic elites (that were already sceptical of his socialistic tendencies) within the region where tactics of economic suffocations (as well as of political coups) are not a

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[20] All the biggest international investors are measuring countries "business-friendliness" before investing their capital in them. An infamous example of such measuring tool is World Bank's annual "Doing Business" classification, whose indexes of measurements favor countries with policies that encourage growth and liberalisation at all cost (For example: Countries with weakest societal protections, environmental regulations, and so on, are put higher in the list, making investors inject their capital). Due to the high mobility of that capital (that came with the deregulation of capital flows), they can "drain" their capital overnight if a country decides to implement radical "growth-harming" policies, potentially economically suffocating it. This creates a global system where countries are coerced to listen to the interest of the capital for their own survival and to participate in this "race to the bottom" to please profit-obsessed international investors (Hickels 2017). Even if Correa had implemented Buen Vivir "by the letter", such unfavourable power relations with the necessary foreign capital may have been economically suicidal for the country.

rarity (Calisto Friant and John Langmore 2014: 69).

External pressures (intrinsically linked to internal ones) consist of "the interconnected global market and a legal and political global framework which promotes business-friendly legislation and policies perpetuate dependency on natural resources in third-world economies, reinforcing the extractivist political economy." (Merino 2016: 276). In addition, the global economic conjecture that coincided with Correa's period had facilitated the maximisation of profits from extractivism (and thus pushed even more for this position in order to maximize the amelioration of social materialistic factors), namely due to high oil prices and increase demand primary resources, primarily from Asian countries (at least until the fall of oil prices in 2014, when these gains were largely reversed) (Villalba-Eguiluz and Etxano 2017: 6).

Hence, it seems that here we face the question of whether it is realistically possible to apply Buen Vivir's philosophy (that so far had been rarely properly translated in the language of political economy) within today's local and global context (dominated by the coercive interest of capital and growth). Or is the "responsible" but still somewhat destructive extractivist policies of Correa is as close to Buen Vivir as we can get in this context, or at least as long as the "basic" economic development and the shift in power relations with capital will not allow for conditions of Buen Vivir to flourish? As Lalander (2016) has formulated, the main problem is "the issue of granting Mother Nature her own rights in a society plagued by a relatively high level of poverty and with ambitions to carry out welfare reforms backed by incomes of extractive industries" (625) as well as being embedded in a capitalist world system.

4.3.3 Case study of Yasuni-ITT

The complexities of this situation are captured by the somewhat tragic case of Yasuni-ITT initiative, in which a sincere and original effort to seize a middle ground, between Buen Vivir and material embetterment of society within capitalist global economy, had led to a failure that has "forced" the government to proceed with its prioritization of human beings's interest over the integrity of nature.

This project (proposed by then-minister of mining Acosta in 2007) does indeed represent an accurate translation of some of Buen Vivir's principles in practice. Instead of

drilling the 850-millions barrels worth of oil reserves under the soil of Yasuni National Park in Ecuador (one of the richest in biodiversity in the world), a process that in the long term (13 years of drilling) could bring 5 billion in revenue all while releasing 410 tons of Co2, Correa's government tried to forge an international solution to the dilemma. The initiative asked international donor countries to reimburse half of the potential sum that would be gained from the drilling (around 2 billion) in exchange of refusing to drill, with the donated money going into environmentally-sustainable investment. This donated money would serve as a warranty that donors would be able to retrieve (with interest) if Ecuador starts to drill this region. (Santos 2017: 30-31). After the Yasuni-ITT trust fund was established (in partnership with UNDP), worldwide enthusiasm and acclaim followed. It was seen as "as an indigenous contribution to the entire world." (*ibid*: 31), creating strategies on environmental protection that rely not on commodifying or marketizing this protection (as it was with the modernist Kyoto Protocol and its "carbon tax"), but on the reduction of energy use. Calls for "Yasunizations" of the environmental protection were widespread and slogans like "We are Yasuni" were trending. (Lalander 2016: 633).

However, it did not last long. By 15th of August 2013, president Correa decided to scrap the project since, by that date, "only 0.37 per cent of the projected donations had been accomplished" and, since the social policies desperately needed funding, the president proceeded with his 'responsible extractivism' arguing that "'minimal environmental damage' caused by the planned oil drilling should be balanced with the possibilities to improve life conditions for the people living in the Amazon." (Lalander 2016: 634). This argument was understandable, and the way in which Correa had proceeded with his plan also showcased that he did indeed intend to minimize all environmental damage that was impending (decreeing that only 0,1 percent of the Yasuni Park could be drilled).

4.4 Complex essence of the "Great Dilemma" and possible roadmaps out of it

In essence, the situation of this "great dilemma" is extremely complex - Buen Vivir's post-extractivist alternative seems as the most desirable one, but its political vagueness makes it hard to envision within the context of extractivist logic (globally and locally) and vast material inequalities within ecuador; Ecosocialist logic seems to be a continuation of

some of modernist tendencies (especially anthropocentrism), but due to the complexities of the local and global context, it may indeed be seen as a possible road towards Buen Vivir. There is a real and palpable endeavor to break with the capitalistic tendencies of exploiting natural resources for the sake of perpetual economic growth as an end (and not the mean) - Correa's government had proceeded with "responsible extractivism" (as the Yasuni project and the decision of drilling only 0,1 percent of it has shown) with the economic growth being the means to an end of the much-needed societal and redistributive justice, and as a supposedly temporary/transition measure.

In general, the ecosocialist position is much closer to Buen Vivir than that of capitalism or neoliberalism (or even "sustainable development"), despite it still being modern. It may serve as a transitional period that would allow to break the constraints imposed by capitalist modernity, and thus create conditions for the re-conceptualisation of Ecuadorian social, economical. and political order along the lines of human flourishing as defined by Buen Vivir (with nature as an equal part of the community). As Gudynas (2011) has insightfully written, "we will not be able to move beyond modern thought from the right, because the exit towards alternatives to development is on the left." (Gudynas 2011: 446-447)". In order for this to happen, however, a work on two fronts may need to be intensified : Buen Vivir's political translation in the language of political economy is needed to tackle the problems created by capitalist modernity (over-exploitation of human beings and nature being one of them) on its ground, without at the same time losing own's ontological particularity; At the same time, the government needs to be more precise about their "threshold" of economic development after which the societal material conditions are going to be sufficient for Ecuadorian economy to not implement large-scale extractivist policies - otherwise they risk passing for a "neo-developmentalist" movement that uses the "horizon of Buen Vivir" as an eternal source for popular legitimacy, all while being perpetually modernistic in its policies.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and final considerations

5.1 Conclusions of the study

This study of Ecuadorian Buen Vivir from a theoretical as well as practical perspective may had offered some interesting insights to the desirability and feasibility of a "pluriversalistic" and relational concept of "development" as advocated by the post-development theory. "Sceptical" post-development convincingly advocates for the decolonisation of the imagination concerning concepts of "development" as well as "progress", and Buen Vivir represents one among many interesting examples of an alternative that can stem from such decolonisation. Its balanced approach towards other worldviews (even to the one of western modernity) leads to a possibility for culture-specific regions to define a "good living" based on their respective histories and cultures (all while recognising that those are not monolithic and ontological, but rather socially constructed), while its relational view on well-being may discourage any policy that submit nature and other human beings to overexploitation for the goal of perpetual accumulation of profits. Regardless if one agrees with Ecuadorian government's strategies of implementing it, Buen Vivir seems to be standing on its own as one of the most desirable alternatives to today's dominant trends of "maldevelopment".

However, a more empirical study of how the philosophy of Buen Vivir can be integrated in practice gives us additional practical insight into the post-development theory, shedding lights on some of its shortcomings. The current predominantly capitalist system disables the desirable Buen Vivir "guidelines" from being fully implemented, and the fact that both Buen Vivir philosophy and post-development theory rarely address the power relations that constrain its implementation impedes its implementation even further. But in order to exit the predominantly capitalist world economic system (that is global in its constraining power of submitting every human enterprise to the perpetuation of capital accumulation), alternatives like these may need to first "unshackle" its respective regions from these global restraints. Thus, as argued in chapter 2, the research within the post-development theory (and research concerning different ways one can implement the

philosophy of Buen Vivir on the political arena[21]) may need to shift from the *descriptions* of the valiancy of such alternatives like Buen Vivir in comparison to today's system, to elaborating strategic *prescriptions* that would tackle the existing power relations (with the dominant actors in those relations being interested in maintaining the status-quo), if the theory wants to remain practically relevant for the "pluriversal" objectives it endorses. There may be a need in more dialogue of post-development theory with the field of critical political economy (and the "translation" of corresponding alternatives in its "language"), and such political current like ecosocialism may be considered as "transitional tool" necessary for the realisation of Buen vivir (by creating favorable material conditions for it). It may be also useful to perform more of such case studies similar to that of this thesis : case studies that will be looking at the desirable alternative from a practical angle by addressing the power relations by which it may be constrained. This may allow for further insight into the feasibility of the desirable (instead of the desirability of the "unfeasible", a theme that seems to be overrepresented in the post-development literature), so as to counter the all too commonplace criticism of post-development theory being indulged in too much "wishful thinking".

5.2 Considerations for a "pluriversalistic" world order

Another less-materialistic problem needs to be highlighted, when it comes to the question of feasibility of the project of "Pluriversal" world order : it is the modalities of relations that alternative worldviews on "development" and "progress" ought to maintain between themselves[22]. What to do with the conflicting worldviews, like those who see the world in terms of perpetual extinction and not so respectful of the position of the others? Should those unsustainable principles (like those of perpetual expansion and accumulation) be "banned" from the Pluriverse? And if so, what is the body of criteria for worldviews to be allowed to enter the Pluriverse, and who will be elaborating them? These are extremely complicated and important themes that are important to consider about the practicality of a

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[21]Numerous scholars have highlighted, in the words of Gudynas (2011), that Buen Vivir "is not a static concept, but an idea that is continually being created (443). Hence, this leaves an opening for redefining Buen Vivir in strategic terms without necessarily losing its essence in the process.

[22] This is a problem that could not be treated explicitly in the body of my work that is a case study of one such alternative, but it is nevertheless imperative to address it (even shortly) since it is a common criticism that seems important to address thoroughly.

Pluriversal world order, if this concept is to exist outside academic discourse. I will try to briefly outline the direction in which I feel that further research is needed to explore these practicalities.

At closer inspection of "pluriversalistic alternatives" (at least those explored in "Pluriverse: a post-development dictionary"), we may see an emerging pattern of loose "common rules" that most of those alternatives share, albeit elaborated upon in different culture-specific forms: whether it is Buen Vivir, Ubuntu, Bhutan's Gross National Product, Swaraj or "bio-civilization", or even some of the western "subalter" alternatives like Degrowth or the Commons (to name just a few), we can see the recurrence of a relational worldview that includes nature in its community and sees the "Other" as another "Self" rather than a distinct entity situated somewhere on an arbitrary scale of "development" (and whose position determines "superiority" or "inferiority" of the Other). It thus may be possible to perform an extensive study that tries to shed light on the implicitly-existing "common rules" between those alternatives, to allow for these set of "common rules" to label the currently dominant principles as "deviant" (rather than the other way around as it is today, where profit-hurting anti-consumerist ideas are seen as regressions) and thus truly re-conceptualise development as going away from it and towards the aforementioned alternatives. In addition, it may demonstrate just how much the worldview of "western modernity" is a particular (and not a universal) set of beliefs, countering its naturalisation as representative of all humanity.

Such anthropological study necessarily needs to be paired with the ones that could shed lights on the materialistic realities and power relations that constrain any transition of the current world order away from the status quo and towards this alternative set of "common rules". In general, post-development theory's merits and limits seem to be mirrored in the case study of Buen Vivir, insofar as it is convincing in elaborating on reasons for the desirability of a transition, but it is also somewhat constrained by the material situation in which it is embedded to truly act upon that transition. Both post-development and Buen Vivir allow for the flowering of a truly emancipatory imagination that, however, exist in the rigid constraints of reality, and thus the efforts of imagining a world 'where many worlds fit' within a pluriversalistic matrix of its "common rules" needs to be supplemented with imagining strategies that could effectively tackle the "guardians" of the status-quo, and an extensive dialogue with an ecosocialist tradition may be a fruitful

start for it.

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