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THE NEW POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA: THE (DIS)ENCOUNTERS OF *BUEN VIVIR* AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

Roger Merino Acuña

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last years the concept of *Buen vivir* (Good life) is diffusing in Andean countries as an alternative to the development paradigms, based on indigenous cosmologies instead of Western political philosophy. *Buen vivir* is being implemented in constitutions, legislations and policies, in particular, environmental and developmental policies in Bolivia and Ecuador. In Peru, the term is starting to be used as a political project to express self-determination, territoriality and cultural rights of indigenous peoples. Thus, today *Buen vivir* is a concept related to political theory, political economy and legal studies, and not only related to history and anthropology. It addresses the limitations of current development theory and development policies and proposes new political paths guided by non-Western principles.

In that context, by analysing the theoretical foundations of *Buen vivir* vis-à-vis conventional development paradigms and its contentious formulation and implementation in Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru, this article argues that *Buen vivir* is becoming a platform for political articulations. In that sense, its original version related to indigenous politics cannot be epistemologically assimilated by human development or other conventional approaches because it transcends the ontological boundaries of the current political economy. Thus, beyond the different conceptualizations of *Buen vivir* (ecologist, socialist, liberal, post-modern and so forth), the concept is being re-appropriated by indigenous movements to articulate their politics of self-determination towards a state transformation.

The research methodology of this article was based on qualitative methods, particularly the case study, participant observation, and semi-structured and unstructured interviews with indigenous communities in the northern Peruvian

Amazon and indigenous national and regional organisations. In total I did 33 interviews with indigenous peoples in Peru and 13 interviews with international activists who are aware of the political processes in Bolivia and Ecuador. This information allowed me to develop the case studies of the three experiences in order to find connections and to deny dominant assumptions.

The academic literature on *Buen vivir* has focused on the experiences of Bolivia and Ecuador, explaining the meaning of the concept or critiquing how it has been co-opted by the governments. The original contribution of this research is to present how *Buen vivir* is still an emerging political platform that articulates a new political imagination that confronts the developmental paradigms (not only in Bolivia and Ecuador, but also in Peru), and to explore the challenges of *Buen vivir* implementation when state structures still are embedded in the political economy of extraction.

The article approaches these issues by firstly discussing the foundations and scope of *Buen vivir* in relation to the different development theories grouped under the label of 'alternative development', particularly, human development. Then, it analyses the implementation of '*Buen vivir*' policies in Bolivia and Ecuador and the tensions and problems derived from the translation of indigenous principles into a new development paradigm. Finally, it explains the emergence of '*Buen vivir*' in the Peruvian Amazon and the possibilities and challenges it proposes to the dominant development theory and praxis.

2. THE LIMITATIONS OF «ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT»

The current debates on development theory should take into consideration the notion of *Buen vivir* as an alternative to the developmental paradigms (Altmann, 2013), such as economic growth, human development or the different variants of «alternative development». *Buen vivir* (Good life) is the Spanish translation of the Quechua and Aymara words *Sumac kawsay* and *Suma qamaña*, which express indigenous cosmologies of Andean countries (particularly from Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru), nonetheless, there are similar notions from other indigenous peoples in Latin America: *Nandereko* (Guarani), *Shiir waras* (Ashuar) and *Küme Mongen* (Mapuche), all these indigenous concepts broadly converge in the idea of living in plenitude, in a state of permanent respect, harmony and balance between the individual, society and the cycles of nature (Kauffman & Martin, 2014; Altmann, 2013; Blaser, Costa, McGregor & Coleman, 2010; Huanacuni Mamani, 2010 in Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Then, this concept requires to assume and respect differences and complementarities (among humans and between humans and non-humans) from an ecological perspective that could be described as holistic and

mutualistic, reason why its fundamental principles are reciprocity, complementarity and relationality (Villalba, 2013).

Therefore, by emphasising the interdependence between society and its natural environment, *Buen vivir* breaks with modern Western assumptions (Gudynas, 2011; Blaser, Costa, McGregor & Coleman, 2010) about society–nature dualism and Eurocentric universalism, namely, it departs from the reductionist Cartesian worldview in order to adopt a systemic perspective encompassing the entire ecosphere, obliging us to rethink the way peoples and nature become political (Latta, 2014). For instance, De la Cadena (2010) has shown how through the discourse of earth-beings in social protests indigenous peoples dispute the monopoly of science to define «nature» as resource, proposing the idea of «nature» as being, overcoming in this way the Western universal ontology or proposing a political subversion of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2010). It also breaks away from the Western epistemology of lineal development and progress because most indigenous world-views do not conceive a beginning or end in time, thus, there can be no «development» insofar as there is no preliminary situation of underdevelopment (Villalba, 2013; Gudynas, 2011; Acosta, 2011; Esteva, 2009). *Buen vivir*, thus, represents a particular way to know (epistemology) and being (ontology) in the world.

It does not mean a denial of a critical dialogue between indigenous views and critical Western approaches (political ecologists, eco-feminists and so forth), but that indigenous thinking must be fully understood before any attempt of conceptual assimilation. It does not mean either that all indigenous peoples oppose conventional development or extractivism. Indeed, there is certain plurality within indigenous struggles, but what it is important to recognise is that within this plurality there are non-Western epistemologies and ontologies and that, derived from them, there are other ways of social, legal and economic organisation that cannot be labelled as un-civilised or under-developed.

This framework makes *Buen vivir* different from development theory and praxis, which are based on Western, liberal and anthropocentric theoretical assumptions. Most development policies are still based on modernisation theory and the emphasis on economic growth, being dominant in the international arena (Blaikie, 2000) and in national policies (Dinerstein & Deneulin, 2012), whereas development theory is led by different approaches encompassed in the label ‘alternative development’, such as human development, sustainable development, participatory development and so forth. These approaches are very critical of the growth-based development, but indeed they do not criticise its structural conditions and fundamentals (Esteva & Suri, 1998), and in this way they legitimise the material basis on which is deployed the modernising perspective of development (Cornwall & Brock, 2005).

According to Cornwall and Brock (2005) the language of alternative development emphasises words such as sustainability, participation, empowerment and so forth, but these words are not connected to important challenges to structural injustices, and indeed they let aside important ideals such as solidarity or social justice. For example, sustainable development involves making trade-offs decisions about investments, consumption and sustainability, in such a way to not compromise the wellbeing of future generations (Loomis, 2000). Economic growth is not criticised in itself, but only the negative effects that it might generate if there are not restrictions and limitations in production mechanisms and emissions. However, Larrea (2010) perceptively argues that capitalism and sustainability are contradictory terms: it is impossible for a capitalistic society to be sustainable because it would contradict the basis of the model of capitalist accumulation in which nature is a resource to be exploited.

A similar problem emerges with the human development and the capability approach, a perspective developed by Amartya Sen and today dominant in the academy and the United Nations. This approach is different from the classical theories of development such as modernisation and dependency theory, macro and structural approaches concerned with national industrialisation and economic growth (Long & Van der Ploeg, 1994). In contrast, human development is a micro-approach concerned with the freedom of individual people. From this perspective development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy: the social arrangements should aim to expand people's capabilities (Sen, 2000). In fact, human development and the capability approach takes the normative principle of ethical individualism, the view that what ultimately matters is what happens to every single individual in a society. In that context, the term «agency» refers to a person's ability to pursue and realise goals that he or she values and has reason to value. Agency is a democratic value and entails that development processes should foster participation, public reasoning and democratic practice (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

For this approach although economic growth should not be the only concern of development, it is still very important as a means to expand the freedoms enjoyed by individuals. Therefore, freedoms depend also on material determinants, such as social and economic arrangements (for example, infrastructure for education and health care) as well as political and civil rights. It is clear that more than radically criticising economic growth, Sen simply emphasises that growth is a means not an end. The exploitation and dispossession deployed by the capitalist logic is not analysed. In fact, the extension of capabilities is made on the basis of the development of what exists and is hegemonic: liberal democracy and economic growth. These concepts and other regulatory devices establish in advance the possibilities and limitations of human development (Larrea, 2010).

The flaws of political liberalism are also embedded in this framework. There are no responses to the problem that emerges in societies in which different views of development are irreconcilable. The emphasis on public reasoning omits to pay attention to contexts in which the possibilities of negotiation and interactions are restricted by power inequalities and the prevalence of a system of thought. Indeed, this approach does not challenge the Eurocentric roots of Western modernity. The term development is not problematized, nor the colonial reasons of «underdevelopment». Poverty, democracy, freedom are seen on developing countries from the epistemological perspective of the developers, based on Rawlsian or Habermesian concepts to explain the detriment and the ways to improve their wellbeing.

The usual response to these critiques is that the capability approach, as an evaluative model, is not concerned in addressing the underlying causes of injustices but evaluating the wellbeing of each person (Robeyns, 2009). But, in reality, there is no such thing as a neutral evaluative theoretical model; all theoretical models are intrinsically performative since they assume a certain way of understanding the world, and their arguments are deployed on that basis.

In sum, human development and the different versions of «alternative development» become no more than variants or corrections to the general theory of development, namely, the different theories grouped under the label «alternative development» *are still theories of development*. On the contrary, *Buen vivir* is proposing a radical critique to the foundations of this conventional view. For that reason, it is important to be alert to the tendency to «modernise» *Buen vivir*, by transforming it in an acceptable form through its assimilation by conventional visions (Walsh, 2010; Gudynas, 2011), a sort of Latin American variation of human development (Villalba, 2013).

First of all, it must be admitted that the transposition of *Buen vivir* into a Western, liberal and individualistic theoretical framework is necessarily reductive and cannot account for the philosophical richness of the original concept (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Unlike *Buen vivir*, the human development approach focuses more on «living» and «growing well» as individual than «live together well» (*convivir bien*) in humanity and harmony with nature, which only can be achieved through a structural change in the whole system of coexistence (Albó, 2011). These issues are not discussed by most human development scholars and are not observed in policies inspired in human development.

Similarly, it is not possible to celebrate *Buen vivir* and at the same time, combine it with neo-developmentalism or neo-extractivism (Santos, 2010), although it has been the case in the concrete experience of *Buen vivir* implementation in Bolivia and Ecuador. In fact, the institutionalisation of this principle has made it vulnerable

to the discursive appropriation by those actors who seek to advance their own political agendas (Latta, 2014).

3. *BUEN VIVIR* IN BOLIVIA AND ECUADOR

The principles and core concepts of *Buen vivir* are not simply a matter of philosophical disquisition (Villalba, 2013), they have deep implications in policymaking and it is exactly in these processes when *Buen vivir* becomes ambiguous. Thus, in the context of Bolivia and Ecuador the ideas of *Buen vivir* are disputed for appropriation by contemporary critical intellectuals and the political sphere. That is why it is possible to distinguish two groups: the statist extractive position (commonly known as «republican biosocialism», «twenty-first-century socialism» or «*Buen vivir* socialism») is represented by the governments and views natural resources as tools for achieving *Buen vivir*, using its rhetoric as a power dispositive to administrate the population (Bretón, 2013); and the ecologist position, represented by critical political organisations and intellectuals, which emphasise respect for nature and community relations as ways of maintaining *Buen vivir* (Guardiola & García-Quero, 2014; Villalba, 2013; Vanhulst, 2015).

The ecologist view is inspired by indigenous thinking and the post-structuralist approach, and is closer to the idea of «post-development»; whereas the statist extractive view is influenced by neo-marxist approaches, such as «socialism of the XXI century», «communitarian socialism», «citizens revolution», «Bolivarian revolution», «social and solidary economy», «republican bio-socialism», among others (Hidalgo-Capitán, 2014). The way they relate to indigenous perspectives is also different. The statist approach calls this view ironically as «*pachamamista*» or «animist», accusing it of essentialising indigenous peoples as pre-modern ideal communities and being inoffensive to the neoliberal model (Sánchez, 2011; Bretón, 2013). The ecologist view is friendlier to indigenous movements, but it also includes socialist, feminist, ecologist and other approaches to propose a post-modern collage of different ideas (Hidalgo-Capitán, 2014), risking to become a Pandora box that can include very different and even opposed conceptions (Bretón, Cortez & García, 2014).

Indigenous *Buen vivir* represents something different from these two perspectives, and this is the reason why indigenous movements are struggling to re-appropriate and reconnect it to their demands of self-determination and territoriality. Consequently, it cannot be understood just as an «invented tradition» (Bretón, 2013), but as a reconstruction of traditional principles, re-invented by contemporary indigenous and not indigenous social movements (Vanhulst, 2015). It is necessary to acknowledge that *Buen vivir* is a representation of certain ideas that formerly had been presented in the indigenous thinking (Altmann, 2013), and now serves as

platform for articulating critical views in order to enlarge the political dimension of the current debates and fostering for the emergence of new conceptions, institutions and practices through collective learning (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). That is the reason why the ecologist perspective and «post-development» critical intellectuals are inspired by the potential of *Buen vivir* (Gudynas, 2011).

Of course, there are divisions, complexity and ambiguities within the indigenous movement, that is why De la Cadena and Starn argued (2007) that indigenous activism is an unavoidable fragmented process; thus, some of its elements are absorbed by hegemonic practices and discourses, others occupied counter-hegemonic spaces and others both of them or move from one to the other. However, within this complex political dynamics it is possible to observe a politics of *Buen vivir* advanced by most indigenous movements. And this political articulation of *Buen vivir* enters into tension with the post-neoliberal state model in Bolivia and Ecuador, expressing what Bolivian vice-president García Linera (2007) calls the dis-encounter of two revolutionary reasons.

Thus, even though the institutionalization of *Buen vivir* has had global attention and optimism by intellectuals and social organisations for presenting an alternative to capitalist development (Kauffman & Martin, 2014), in practice the implementation of *Buen vivir* has been very contentious. In the Ecuadorian new Constitution *Buen vivir* is developed in the form of «rights of *Buen vivir*», including many social rights (alimentation, environment, water, education, housing, health, etc.) which have the same value of other set of rights (collective indigenous rights, participation, rights of nature). It is also relevant the constitutional recognition of the rights of «Mother Earth» (arts. 71, 72), which for Escobar (2010) constitutes an epistemic-political event that disrupts the modern political space because this notion is unthinkable within any modern perspective within which nature is seen as an inert object for humans to appropriate. On the other hand, the Constitution regulates a section named «regimen of *Buen vivir*» which focuses on the fostering of inclusion and equity, and the conservation of biodiversity and the management of natural resources. In addition the *Buen vivir* regimen is supported by the development regimen: development is not a value in itself, it must serve to *Buen vivir* (Gudynas, 2011).

In Bolivia, *Buen vivir* is the ethic foundation of the plurinationality, the recognition that the state is a unity constituted by multiple nations (Larrea, 2010). The constitution of 1994 had acknowledged the multi-ethnic and pluricultural character of Bolivian society, providing some political rights to indigenous groups. By this time, as part of the neoliberal multicultural reforms, was enacted a law that decentralised the state by redistributing economic resources from the nine departments of the country to hundreds of municipalities. Those areas with large numbers of indigenous people were granted the possibility of becoming indigenous

municipal districts organised according to their customs, but still subject to a top-down state decision making (Galindo, 2010). The new Constitution of 2009 goes beyond the previous one by recognising the plurality of Bolivian society and by providing a plurinational character to legislative, judicial and electoral government branches. Thus, Bolivia has moved from a multicultural state that recognises social and political rights for indigenous peoples to participate within the Unitarian liberal state, toward a plurinational state that stresses the character of nations of indigenous peoples (Galindo, 2010).

In spite of the similarities, there are important differences in both constitutional texts. In Ecuador *Buen vivir* has two levels: framework for a set of rights, and mechanisms of implementation of those rights. In the Bolivian Constitution this connection between *Buen vivir* and the rights is not explicit (there is no a reference to this concept in the section on fundamental rights), and there is not explicit recognition of the rights of nature. Nonetheless, in the Bolivian Constitution the notion of plurinationality is strongly developed (Gudynas, 2011).

In spite of the notorious improvements of the new regulations regarding the rights of indigenous peoples, the two constitutions maintain dark sides related to the ownership of natural resources, the possibility to exploit indigenous land on behalf of national interests and the lack of recognition of prior and informed *consent* of indigenous peoples.

In the case of Bolivia, the new state design has not focused on the political economy. In spite of the repetitive allegation in the new Constitution of the necessity of industrialisation to break the dependence on extraction (art. 316, 319) and the autonomy of indigenous peoples (art. 1, 2, 289, 290), the state dominates all natural resources of the country (art. 298, 309, 316); in spite of the constant recognition of the right of 'consultation' (art. 11, 352, 403) there is not recognition of the right to provide 'consent'. In practice, the economic extractive model has not been challenged, so, there is a constant threat on indigenous peoples' territories. Similarly the Ecuadorian constitution establishes that the state dominates all natural resources (art. 317, 408) and it can even exploit exceptionally the protected areas (art. 407). There is no recognition of the right of consent.

For indigenous populations this legal framework is very problematic because they see their territory as intangible so there is no reason why the state has a latent power over it. Furthermore, since indigenous peoples struggle for self-determination many of them see the right of consultation as an attempt of the government to justify a project already decided, not as a medium to express their view on the way of life they want to live.

At the level of policymaking there are also many inconsistencies. In the development plan of Ecuador there are contradictory conceptions (regarding the

role of economic growth), and lack of clarity in the processes to implement the Plan. It maintains the macro-developmentist principles and a strong individual orientation (based on human development), opposed to the collectivistic potential of *Buen vivir*. Similarly the development Plan of Bolivia (2006) is still rooted in conventional views of development (Radcliffe, 2012).

The maintenance of conventional views of development in policies and legislation is problematic because many indigenous peoples are not agreeing with these views and how these are conceived as synonymous of economic growth plus redistribution, or as the improvement of individual capabilities. Instead of seeing wealth as a lineal economic progress or human flourishing as the improvement of individual capabilities, indigenous movements struggle for the reinforcement of their culture and tradition, the communal welfare and the recognition of their territorial rights.

Furthermore, there is a big distance between the official pronouncements and the governmental practices (Escobar, 2010; Radcliffe, 2012). The problem of these experiences is that the financing of all programs still is based on the conventional development of appropriation of nature, maintaining the pattern of exportation of natural resources: the increasing of social spending makes the government even more dependent on exporting minerals and hydrocarbons. In sum, *Buen vivir* and conventional development are in tension because they express different views about the political economy of extractivism (Gudynas, 2011).

In the case of Ecuador, despite the original potential and significance of the Yasuní-ITT initiative—a project directed to leave at least 850 million barrels of crude oil beneath vulnerable areas of the Amazon in order to protect biodiversity—the project today has been let aside and oil exploration in the Amazon region is being increased: the Ecuadorian government has zoned 65% of the Amazon for oil activities (52 300 km²), overlapping the ancestral territories of ten indigenous groups (Finer *et al.*, 2008). The activities are undertaken by Andes Petroleum, which is owned by the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Petrochemical Corporation (SINOPEC), on behalf of Petro Ecuador. Likewise, the Correa government has initiated the process of opening Ecuador's gold and copper reserves to exploitation. These plans have generated strong resistance from indigenous communities who fear that the expansion of mining will only worsen their livelihoods (Bebbington, 2009; Arsel, 2012; Finer *et al.*, 2008).

In the last years, President Correa has completely changed his political discourse. In the past, he proclaimed a very strong environmentalist agenda and now he celebrates the benefits of oil and mining extraction, emphasising that the revenues generated can be used for social development (Bebbington, 2009). *Buen vivir* discourses now are used by the Ecuadorian government to justify state

actions whereas indigenous movements and social organisations are trying to re-appropriate these discourses (inspired in their own form of life) to transform them in emancipatory tools (Báez & Sacher, 2014).

In that context, economic elites have incorporated indigenous movements into the formal political system without reducing their own power. To achieve this aim the strategy has been to use economic development funds to integrate the leaders of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) into the formal political system; or to appoint indigenous leaders to governmental offices. With these mechanisms indigenous peoples have been included into the formal political system and in this way their more radical demands have been limited (Bowen, 2011). And when the indigenous movement does not work within the formal institutions of democracy, they are strongly criticised and criminalised by the state (Bowen, 2011).

In Bolivia, in spite of the environmentalist rhetoric, there is a stress of extractivist activities, and at the same time, it is announced a flexibilisation of environmental norms (Radcliffe, 2012). Indeed, under the Morales government, hydrocarbon operations have expanded in the Bolivian northern Amazon, producing tensions between indigenous peoples and the government. In addition, hydrocarbon concessions in Bolivia overlap with protected areas and indigenous territories, particularly in the departments of La Paz, Beni, and Cochabamba (Radcliffe, 2012). Similarly, in the Gran Chaco of Tarija, most of the Aguargüe National Park has been affected by contracts given to Petrobras and Petroandina that allow for exploration and drilling. The argument provided by the government in favour of these policies is that natural resources belong to the nation and are needed to finance social policies of poverty alleviation (Bebbington, 2009; Finer *et al.*, 2008).

In general, it is true that the improvements related to the constitutional recognition of plurinationality and *Buen vivir* in Bolivia and Ecuador have opened a space for the expression of indigenous concerns, facilitating policies and legislation for indigenous peoples (Sieder, 2011). But it is necessary to acknowledge the limits of that space and its content. The institutionalisation of *Buen vivir* in plans, policies and laws has not challenged the current political economy because the new institutionality has been constructed within a sphere of action that does not go beyond the logic of extractivism.

Indeed, Ecuador and Bolivia became redistributive models embedded in a national and developmentalist discourse related to the *indianidad* in the case of Bolivia and the *Revolucion Ciudadana* in the case of Ecuador, but whose economic foundations are still based on the political economy of extraction. That is why Bretón (2013) prefers calling these governments as neo-cepalist or neo developmentalist, instead of post-neoliberals.

As we can observe, the political tensions around *Buen vivir* in the context of Bolivia and Ecuador are examples of the deep political-economic conflicts between liberal capitalism and indigenous self-determination. The latter is limited by the former through internal and external forces. Internally, the national state depends economically on the extractive industry, foreign capital, and the exploitation of indigenous territories in order to obtain revenues from extractive industries to support social programs. Externally, the interconnected global market and a legal and political global framework that promotes business-friendly legislation and policies, perpetuate dependency of natural resources on third world economies, reinforcing the extractivist political economy.

4. THE RISE OF *BUEN VIVIR* IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON

I observed during my fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon¹ that the concept of *Buen vivir* has now been translated into the language and discourses of the Awajun (as «*Tajimat Pujut*») and Ashaninka (as «*Kametsa Asaike*»), two Amazonian indigenous peoples in Peru that use the term as a political platform for their agenda of self-determination and territorial rights.

For one Awajun leader² there is a clear contradiction between *Buen vivir* and extractivism: «The government prefers companies' concessions because there is an 'economy', they believe that without extraction won't be development. This is very different from the 'buen vivir amazónico', our ancestors lived without raw material exploitation». For another Awajun³, is not possible to obtain *Tajimat Pujut* by exploiting natural resources, destroying forests, polluting the water. He related a compelling story in which companies and public servants brought one Awajun leader to Lima to convince him that extractive companies would foster development by exploiting natural resources: «The Awajun asked: I would like you show me just one developed city to have a model of how we should be. Then, someone answered: 'the city of Lima is developed' and the Awajun responded:

¹ In 2012-2013 I did fieldwork with the Awajun people in northern Amazon and the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon (AIDSESP). The Awajun is one of the 52 indigenous peoples officially recognised by the Peruvian state (Official Data Base of the Ministry of Culture, 2014). According to the Vice Ministry of Intercultural Affairs (Official Data Base, 2014), the census of indigenous communities of the Amazon of 2007 estimated there were 55 366 people self-identified as Awajun, inhabiting native communities and *centros poblados* located mainly in the departments of Loreto, Amazonas, San Martín and Cajamarca. Most Awajun organisations are part of AIDSESP, the most important Amazonian indigenous organisation.

² Interview, 08-04-13.

³ Interview, 10-04-13.

[...] In Lima I see that all days people is killed, I have seen landfills [...], robbery, there is not pure air [...] I don't want that kind of development for my people».

To understand the Amazonian perspective of «development» the word «vision» is fundamental. The visionary act is a process to acquire «strength and power» that allows people to orient their future, acquire capabilities and promote health and success (Belaunde, 2005). The old way to acquire vision is through visionary experiences lived in dreams or in trances produced by the ingestion of potions based on snuff or other psychoactive plants such as *Ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and *datura* (*Datura arborea*). Today there are new forms to acquire vision, for example young seek their visions in waterfalls for purification baths (Belaunde, 2005; ODECOFROC, 2009).

The «vision» is an individual power, but it seems also a collective strength. An Awajun teacher and activist⁴ says: «before the arrival of Spaniards we had Tajimak pujul, we had a vision of development, but it was not a vision of destroying the environment, the other way around. We want to rescue this, our ancestors had their Tajimak, they lived with the land and resources, and they didn't drill the land [...] that is our aim, on that basis we want to prepare our people so they are able to develop without destroying the environment». As we can observe indigenous peoples see themselves not as pre-modern ideal communities but as political communities that engage with modernity through academic studies: «indigenous peoples are trying to prepare academically, so we can diffuse to the world our culture, to say that we are not wrong with our cosmology»⁵.

Buen vivir becomes thus a cultural artefact used to formulate indigenous politics. It does not mean that indigenous peoples hold a unique position on the idea of development. In the case of the Awajun people, indigenous leaders, indigenous organisations and indigenous intellectuals usually hold contrasting visions regarding globalisation and extractive industries. For instance, Gil Inoach⁶, former leader of AIDSESE, explains how the indigenous vision does not mean a return to nudity, but to fortify indigenous cosmology by integrating the good things of globalisation and reinforcing the indigenous territory and self-government. On the contrary, an intellectual Awajun who holds a master degree and doctoral studies in environmental management, expresses the maximum point of a modernist indigenous perspective. For him the term *Tajimak* means a man who has «vision»: a house, family, animals, good living conditions and today he would be an entrepreneur. He argues that today there are two opposing visions: «there

⁴ Interview, 09-04-13

⁵ Interview (2), 09-04-13.

⁶ Interview, 17-10-12.

is one vision that totally rejects extractive activities, it is very radical... but there is another group which has decided to work with the company, then, how you can act against them? We must respect them and in the process we will see [...]»⁷.

Another intellectual Awajun has a very different position⁸; he holds bachelor degree and postgraduate studies in physics and is developing projects of fishing farms and modern techniques of cultivation. He argues that his goal is to adapt globalisation and technology to his people's reality (not the other way around) in order to find alternatives to extractive industries, so their people can maintain their territoriality and traditional cultural and legal system with modern technology: «we are promoting the academic and professional preparation of more young people in order that they learn how we can defend our territories».

A young Awajun writer⁹ explains the tensions between these different views: «what happens is that for Awajun it is no longer easy to access forest resources, they cannot just live from gathering and hunting, many of them have entered into the market system... in the end these tensions generate conflicts inside organisations and groups [...]».

For Green (2009) these tensions must be seen as forms of active negotiation with the state and market actors rather than interpret them as oppositions, these are the diverse paths on which the Awajun construct their different projects. Indeed, these contrasting visions do not mean the renunciation of indigenous self-determination. Themes such as territoriality and a strong environmental concern still are crucial in the general indigenous agenda. Most discussions are not directed to deny those ideals but to define if the engagement with the capitalist political economy and liberal legality would end up (or not) affecting them. Therefore, what indigenous peoples want to negotiate is not the renunciation of their self-determination but how this self-determination will interact with the market and the state.

Thus, *Buen vivir* is becoming a national project in Peru. The Coordination of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), that represents national organisations of all Amazonian countries has elaborated its «*Plan de Vida*» in 2005, called «Amazonian indigenous agenda: returning to the *Maloca*». This agenda emphasises the right to territory and self-determination without affecting national sovereignty. It entails the right to influence and control what occurs within indigenous territories and to participate in decisions that affect those territories. It also entails the respect of indigenous norms, customs and tradition, to guide and administrate the economy and the distribution of wealth and natural resources

⁷ Interview, 14-04-13.

⁸ Interview, 15-04-13.

⁹ Interview, 04-04-13.

exploitation, and to protect the ecological equilibrium (COICA, 2005). Likewise, AIDSESEP is elaborating a comprehensive vision of *Buen vivir* for all Peruvian Amazonian peoples through a Plan of «*Vida Plena*» (Plentiful Life). Similarly, in a public declaration of the Unity Pact between Amazonian and Andean indigenous peoples (April 2013) it is asserted: «We will reinforce our work oriented toward our Strategic Plan and we will establish strategic alliances at national and international level that contribute to achieve our paradigms of *Buen vivir* and Plentiful Life of our peoples».

These plans mainly focus on the regions inhabited by indigenous peoples, but they have also a national projection by claiming for an indigenous institutionality in the state, the recognition of territoriality and self-determination. These aims go beyond the current indigenous institutionality (the Vice Ministry of Interculturality) and legal indigenism (the approbation of the Consultation Law and other norms that recognise indigenous rights) that have been implemented as result of social conflicts but that do not contradict the state's political economy. Indeed, as more radical measures such as territoriality and self-determination would have the potential to contradict the state logic of aggressive promotion of extractive activities, it is necessary that *Buen vivir* presents also a feasible alternative political economy. Indeed, it could be articulated with the economic strategies of the «post-extractivist agenda».

During my fieldwork I found very interesting discussions amongst NGOs and activists on the project of «post-extractivism» that would seek to address the political economy factors missing in the new political and institutional reforms of Bolivia and Ecuador. In fact, if *Buen vivir* is going to be implemented beyond simple rhetoric, this is its most urgent challenge. Post-extractivist strategies do not promote the elimination of all forms of extractivism, but the exploration of paths that allow resizing some sectors in order to do not depend economically on them, and to maintain just those which are really necessary and under acceptable operation conditions (Gudynas, 2011). These strategies cannot be implemented abruptly but must involve a transition.

The post-extractivist project entails proposals for a local and sustainable economy with regional and transnational networks, the necessity of national and international political articulations around the idea of post-extractivist transition, the exploration of new strategies for economic diversification and so forth. What I would like to highlight for now is that it is possible to construct useful articulations between the *Buen vivir* and the post-extractivist project in order to propose an alternative to the conventional views on development.

Thus, indigenous peoples has contested the «inevitability» argument that supports the necessity of extractivism as the only path to development (Urteaga-

Crovetto, 2012). An Awajun claims: «without natural resources exploitation it is argued that Peru is broken. We are indigenous and ask: Where is the development of our people after decades of exploitation? In all areas of exploitation the minority is benefited and the majority is worse: the rivers, land, environment is polluted [...]»¹⁰. Moreover, Amazonian indigenous peoples value their biodiversity as mechanisms for overcoming extractivism. Thus, one indigenous asserts: «Why these spaces of biodiversity land are not taken as alternative to oil and mining extraction? [...] The state has not clarity. We propose environmental services, eco-tourism [...]»¹¹.

For Gil Inoach¹² nobody completely disagrees to mining, but it must be made in places where environmental impacts can be mitigated, but not in river sources; besides, he proposes: «Not only of mining is possible to live, it is possible to live of environmental goods and services that ecosystems provides to the humanity. The country has to be visionary in that sense and not only it must be based on primary exportation; it is just a short term-vision».

The term «vision» is important here not just as a collective vision of the Awajun, but as a vision that might be assumed by the state and that can provide hope to the humanity. This proposal is powerful because it entails an inversion of the political imagination: the question is not more how to include (integrate, assimilate or accommodate) indigenous peoples into the state liberal capitalist logic, but the other way around, the question is how the state can engage with the indigenous vision in order to transform itself.

Is this vision possible to implement in a context of aggressive extractivism? For some authors, in Peru it seems to be a transition from a neo-conservatism of President Garcia (2006-2011) to a neo-extractivism of President Humala (2011-2016), who was supposed to initiate a post-extractivist era (Pajares, Loret de Mola & Orellana, 2011); for others, Peru still promotes a market extractivism (Azpur, Baca, Viale & Monge, 2011). It seems to be better characterise Humala regimen as neo-extractivism since it has made some relevant changes (increment of taxation for mining, reinforcement of the environmental and indigenous institutionality). However, in spite of the initial optimism, today there is no space for post-extractivist strategies in the state, on the contrary, there is an accentuation of extractivism.

Thus, for De Echave (2011) Peru still exemplifies the «predator extractivism», then, it is crucial to initiate a transition. It entails, firstly, to break the current scenario of prevalence of self-regulation mechanisms, such as code of conducts and social responsibility instead of command and control (De Echave, 2011).

¹⁰ Interview, 09-04-13.

¹¹ Interview, 12-04-13.

¹² Interview, 17-10-12.

Francke (2009) proposes more state participation in the mining sector through public and mix companies, even with the participation of subnational governments and communities. Other proposals include a new institutional framework for extractive activities in order to consolidate independent institutions for environmental certification and controlling; empower local and regional governments to rule the extractive sector in their areas with competences on territorial management (ecologic zonification); designing and implementing a new energetic strategy that prioritises renewable energy; a new policy of mining concessions that suspend the mining claims, reviewing the concessions already provided, and establish a windfall tax (Azpur, Baca, Viale & Monge, 2011).

In that sense, post-extractivist strategies can support the concretisation of *Buen vivir* aspirations. Indeed, fundamental indigenous rights such as territoriality and self-determination and indigenous environmental concerns could be complemented by a post-extractivist political economy. The challenge of this alliance is that its implementation faces a situation where the state and global structures are profoundly embedded in the political economy of extraction, and in addition there is a highly technocratic view of development that disregards social and indigenous organisations in policy-making.

What are the lessons that we can have from the experiences of these three countries? In Bolivia and Ecuador *Buen vivir* has been fully debated in intellectual circles and promoted by indigenous and social movements since the last decade, whereas in Peru it is recently emerging from the proposals of indigenous movements, social movements and NGOs, with little attention of the Academia. Regarding policymaking, in Bolivia and Ecuador the discourse has been appropriated by the governments, recognising it (and concepts related such as «rights of mother earth» and «plurinationality»), in legal and constitutional texts, as well as in strategic plans and other public management tools (the National Development Plan of Ecuador is called «National Plan for the *Buen vivir*»; Bolivia has enacted the Law of the Mother Earth and Integral Development for Living Well). In these countries *Buen vivir* has been appropriated to justify the policy agenda instead of genuinely represents indigenous concerns and aspirations. In the case of Peru, *Buen vivir* has not been recognised in any normative text or policy instrument, Peru has just recently developed the «intercultural approach to public policies» as a result of social protests.

Nonetheless, each day in Peru *Buen vivir* is being articulated more strongly around indigenous movements as a political platform for their agenda of self-determination and territorial rights. Indeed, the current context of socio-environmental conflicts and the rise of indigenous activism and organisations expresses how *Buen vivir* has the potential to be developed in Peru as a powerful political discourse and agenda. It could follow the path of the Bolivian and

Ecuadorian experience, reason why it is relevant to acknowledge that the main problem is how to ensure the feasibility of *Buen vivir* implementation.

Thus, the three countries are similar in macroeconomic performance, productive matrix, and social deficiencies. They have had a favourable economic growth, which has been depended in the promotion and expansion of extractive activities, namely, these governments have confirmed the political economy of extraction. This has generated in these three experiences massive social unrest and aggressive governmental responses, particularly against indigenous peoples and peasant communities. In these aspects, the institutionalisation of *Buen vivir* and other institutional arrangements have not made any difference among them.

What it is important to admit, nonetheless, is that *Buen vivir* seems a notion that will remain in the public debate since indigenous activism is consolidating a place for political contestation at national and global forums. The issue is how to deal with *Buen vivir* at the academia, social movements and the government. Appropriation and re-appropriation of the concept in order to assimilate it to particular theoretical views or political agendas does not seem the best option for achieving social justice. On the contrary, *Buen vivir* must be understood as a platform for open discussions around indigenous principles and about the possibilities to really transform the current political imagination of our governments that cannot conceive any future without the paradigm of development that sees the environment as something external to human nature, just a resource to be exploited.

5. CONCLUSION

Since the last decade the concept of *Buen vivir*, originally elaborated from non-Western concepts and principles as an alternative to development theory and praxis, has been proposed by indigenous movements, has been massively discussed in academic debates and implemented in public environmental and development policies in Bolivia and Ecuador. However, in these two experiences the governmental appropriation of *Buen vivir* has converted it into a discourse that justify policy actions that even contradict indigenous self-determination and ecological concerns: extractive activities in these countries have been deepened, generating a lot of tensions between indigenous peoples and the national governments.

In Peru *Buen vivir* is emerging from an active indigenous politics that promotes an agenda of self-determination, territoriality and environmental regulations. The new emergence of indigenous activism and organisations, particularly in the Peruvian Amazon, has fostered some institutional changes in Peruvian public policies related to the recognition of interculturality. Although this trend has not yet achieved the institutionalisation of *Buen vivir*, this concept has the potential

to be developed as a powerful political discourse and agenda. However, it risks to be appropriated by governmental discourses to legitimise extractive policies as in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, reason why it is relevant to acknowledge that the main challenge is how to ensure the feasibility of *Buen vivir* implementation.

The problem with the concrete application of *Buen vivir* is that it has not addressed the political economy. Andean countries still heavily depend on the political economy of extraction, and this generates competition for resources (agriculture vs. mining), expectations about the gaining from the activities, tensions due to threats to the way of life and the natural environment of many communities, amongst other problems. At the same time, *Buen vivir* is assimilated by conventional views of development, diminishing or eliminating its potential to propose an alternative to development paradigms. In fact, the translation of *Buen vivir* into a Western, liberal and individualistic theoretical framework disregards the ontological and epistemological perspective of indigenous peoples.

Therefore, *Buen vivir* must be understood as a dynamic political platform in which indigenous principles can be negotiated and articulated with other critical views on the current development models. Beyond the appropriation of the concept for governmental political agendas that justify extractive policies or theoretical perspectives that do not question the foundations of the current political economy, *Buen vivir* emerges as a new concept that disrupts development theory and allows to dispute the present boundaries of our political imagination.

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