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Reflections on the Ecuadorian Buen Vivir and *Sumak Kawsay*

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Methods.....	8
3. Modernization Theory and Values.....	15
3.1 Max Weber: Protestant Ethic and rationalization.....	15
3.2 Talcott Parsons: The values of American society.....	24
3.2.1 On individualism.....	27
3.3 W. W. Rostow and <i>The Stages of Economic Growth</i>	30
3.3.1 On universalism.....	34
3.3.2 The analysis of history.....	37
4. The Ontological Turn: answering the needs for a paradigmatic change.....	39
4.1 Structuralism as the prelude to the Turn.....	41
4.2 Descola and Viveiros De Castro: ontologically different ethnographies from the Amazon.....	43
4.3 Ontology as a <i>war of worlds</i> : its political declination.....	46
5. Sumak Kawsay: an indigenist approach to the notion.....	50
5.1 Carlos Viteri Gualinga in the building of a concept.....	50
5.2 Rights of Nature and the Biocentric Turn.....	54
5.3 GDP <i>versus</i> GNH.....	58
6. Buen Vivir – Analysis on the postmodern declination of the notion.....	62
6.1 Buen Vivir in the Ecuadorian law: towards a plurinational state.....	62
6.2 Politicizing Buen Vivir.....	65
6.3 Indigeneity: a relational approach as the key to the application of the concept.....	71
6.3.1 Indigeneity in Ecuador.....	75
6.3.2 The fluid aspect of indigeneity.....	77
6.4 FPIC: a legal relational element.....	80
6.4.1 FPIC and Ecuadorian Law.....	82
6.4.2 FPIC in two main sources of International Law: the UNDRIP and the ILO 169.....	84
6.5 Moving towards Self-Determination: Etnodesarrollo.....	86
7. Conclusion.....	92
Reference List.....	97
Appendix.....	105

List of Abbreviations

AF	Amazon Frontlines
CODENPE	<i>Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos de Ecuador</i> , National Development Council of the Nationalities and Populations of Ecuador
CONAIE	<i>Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas de Ecuador</i> , Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
ER	Economic Rationality
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OWW	One-World World
PE	Protestant Ethic
PRODECO	<i>Proyecto de Desarrollo de Cotopaxi</i> , Cotopaxi Development Project
PRODEPINE	<i>Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros de Ecuador</i> , Project of Development of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Ecuadorians of Ecuador
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SENPLADES	<i>Secretaría Técnica Planifica Ecuador</i> , National Secretariat of Planning and Development
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WGIP	Working Group on Indigenous Peoples
WWII	World War II

1. Introduction

In choosing the title for the present work, I had some doubts in selecting the adequate phrasing and using the most appropriate words to convey the idea that this work is built upon. More specifically, I wanted to avoid any misunderstanding regarding the relationship that I intend to establish and the approach that I will use in dealing with the paradigm of modernization. For this reason, I was not sure whether to use the verb “challenge” or “defy”, as often they are regarded as synonyms. However, I believe that the shapes of the meaning that they convey differ in some aspects, important in order to begin the analysis of this work with the right premises. The verb “to defy” implies the act of refusal towards something, which is therefore completely rejected or avoided. On the other hand, “to challenge” is defined as “an invitation to compete or take part, especially in a game or argument”¹. For this reason, I believe that this closely resembles what I am trying to do with the paradigm of modernization: challenging, unpacking it. If the act of defying recalls the exclusion of something from a given context, I aim at doing the contrary: analyzing it, will namely constitute the first step of my work. More precisely, I will investigate on how can this paradigm, analyzed from the work of Rostow, be re-conceptualized on the basis of another notion, that of Buen Vivir.

Therefore, as stated above, this work begins with an analysis of the modernization theory, which I will deal starting from the work of Walt Whitman Rostow (who outlined it in the book “The Stages of Economic Growth, a non-communist Manifesto”, 1960), as he is acknowledged as the one setting the conditions and the main stages of economic growth, through which every country should transit, in order to achieve modernization and development. In order to introduce the work in the best possible way, I will provide a little background on this theory, making reference to the authors that have influenced Rostow the most in portraying his theory: Max Weber and Talcott Parsons. I will deal with the former’s Protestant Ethic, analyzing how it shaped the modern notion of capitalism, as well as the latter’s approach to the study of American values, taking the first steps towards the institutionalization and bureaucratization of society. This will constitute the prelude to the evaluation – also throughout a deeper focus on the work of Rostow – of one of the defining elements of the modernization theory: rationalization.

This theory, despite still having a great deal of influence in the global scenario, has proven to be problematic under many circumstances. Therefore, I will further reflect on the main points that it brings

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/challenge> , retrieved on 23rd March, 2021.

up, that play a fundamental role in its articulation, and how they highlight issues of lack of social, economic and social sustainability of the notion. These points are: the analysis of history, individualism and universalism. On general lines, I will argue that the linear understanding of history promoted by the modernization paradigm is wrong because it mirrors a way of conceiving culture which is strongly influenced by evolutionism or social-Darwinism. This is also in accordance with a universalistic and dogmatic view of progress that is also to be re-thought, as it has already proven to be obsolete (Boas' historical particularism²). Finally, the role of individualism can be considered also a defining factor of the so-called modern developed society. In this study, linking it especially with the work of Parsons and the concept of institutionalized-individual, it will be dealt also from its *economic* meaning, very relevant to understand the development of the main features of the utilitarian society.

This first section is thus part of a bigger process of (de)construction of the structure of the rostowian notion that will be further problematized and discussed in the rest of the work. In debating the aforementioned points, I will also provide some of the criticism that has been addressed to the modernization theory, with the final aim of opening up space for its re-conceptualization.

Before going on, there is an important remark to make: a term that will often come up in the inquiry is that of “development”: despite being it a key term, it is extremely wide and, more importantly, it has a meaning that touches many different fields. For these reasons, its boundaries can be difficult and tricky to trace. However, it is important to say that a very common declination of the concept shared by many authors can be closely related to the topics and spaces involved in the modernization theory. This is just to clarify the general ways in which the concept will be dealt with, with the purpose of avoiding any confusions or misinterpretations.

Proceeding with the analysis, I argue that it is necessary to focus the attention on some aspects of the anthropological Ontological Turn in order to achieve the paradigmatic change that, at least to a certain extent, is necessary in order to redefine and rethink the modernization theory. Therefore, the inquiry will involve the legacy of Descola, Viveiros De Castro and Escobar. Before digging into their works, the decisive contribution of Claude Lévi-Strauss will also be presented, as his structuralism (which will be dealt especially from his notion of totemism), although not really part of the Turn, is extremely influential in the works of the others. Both Descola and Viveiros De Castro conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Amazon Rainforest (the former mainly in Ecuador and the latter mainly in Brazil): in

² Defined by Eriksen as “the view that all societies and cultures had their own, unique history that could not be reduced to a category in some universalist scheme of development” (Eriksen, 2015:18).

this work I will concern what I believe being the most relevant parts of their works, stressing how their experiences help us in re-thinking the relationships existing in our world, leaving aside the dominant anthropocentric perspective. Moving on, the decisive step towards the next chapter is made by Arturo Escobar. I argue that his contribution, in which the notion of political ontology plays a central role, overcomes already in some ways the ontological turn itself. In dealing with ontology at the political level, he goes beyond the structural and mainly cosmological representations provided by his colleagues, moving on to a *quasi* on-the-ground projection of the Turn. Throughout the portrayal of his *pluriverse*, I will demonstrate how territorial defense goes hand in hand with the ontological reaffirmation of identity, setting the ground for the next parts of the inquiry.

Moving on to the regional focus of the work, I will debate the notion of *Sumak Kawsay* (Ecuadorian declination of Buen Vivir, literally its Kichwa translation). My first point is that the understanding of the notion has been often characterized by an oversimplified look. In particular, I am referring to the fact that, since its theorization, it has been portrayed as *the* alternative to the western development model. I believe that such a consideration of the notion does not take into consideration the many interpretations or meanings that the notion has acquired and that recall in some ways that very same modernization paradigm from which it wanted to detach. For these reasons, I will deeply analyze the concept, presenting both its positive and negative sides and giving voice to its supporters as well as its detractors.

More precisely, I will articulate the analysis moving along two major lines: following a differentiation operated by some experts (Cuestas-Caza 2018, Cubillo Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitan 2016), I will concern the notion first from its *indigenist* perspective, and then I will tackle it from its *postmodern* one. This division will be explained, accompanied and emphasized by an equivalent one for what concerns the terms that will be used to make reference to the notions: indeed, I believe that the former approach corresponds to the *Sumak Kawsay* idea, while the latter can be connected to the notion of Buen Vivir.

For what concern the first aspect, it is to be understood as a part of the process of deconstruction of the modernization paradigm, as I will deal with *Sumak Kawsay* trying to grasp the ways and the ideas that stand in contradiction with that notion. At the same time, my aim is that of presenting them in their complexity, trying to obtain an all-round analysis. Therefore, I will firstly recall the work of Viteri Gualinga (the first scholar to recall *Sumak Kawsay*), highlighting the origins of the term also in relation to the indigenous cosmology. This will put the accent on the role of nature and on the importance that it

acquires within the indigenous tradition. Secondly, and in close relation to what just stated, I will deal with a concept that positions itself in oppositional relation to the anthropocentric perception previously debated: that of “biocentrism”. Namely, my first intention is to deal with the biocentric aspects of the Republic of Ecuador: I will provide a portrayal of the situation that characterizes the country in terms of “Rights of Nature”, since Ecuador is the only country in the world that implemented them in its Constitution. Thirdly, considering the conceptual opposition existing between the universalism promoted by the modernization theory and the pluralism enhanced by the ontological turn and by the Ecuadorian legislation (I will touch this point later on), I will analyze the so-called growth indicators, questioning the role of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing an interesting alternative, Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness (GNH). The literature here is very vast, and I do not want to get lost into it, but I believe it is interesting to analyze briefly the paradigmatic shift that the aforementioned notion suggests. Rostow states that countries that find themselves in what he defines as the “take off” phase, should aim at raising the rate of productive investment from 5% to over 10% of the GDP, clearly defining the indicators according to which we can measure the growth of a given country. In other words, a country that is pursuing “modernization” should focus all its energy in reaching those numbers, which therefore have to be considered central in the inquiry. Many objections have been raised towards these considerations, arguing for other, more human-centered, indicators in order to measure the economic and socio-political health of a country in a sustainable way. Leading example in this sense is the Constitution of Bhutan, which talks about GNH. I will analyze the framework around which this GNH has been created and the ways in which it defies the aforementioned paradigm, enhancing a pluralistic evaluation that is also a fundamental aspect of the notion of *Sumak Kawsay*.

Moving on, the next step will deal with Buen Vivir in its postmodern aspect, therefore in relation to all those elements that do not directly belong to the indigenous tradition, cosmology and ontology. Therefore, this part of the analysis will allow linking the notion to other extremely meaningful ones, very much tied to indigenous identity and land-related issues. Firstly, I will make reference to the legal implementation of the notion within the legislative skeleton of the country: in doing so, there will be time to evaluate also some general aspects of the plurinational character that characterizes Ecuador since 2008. Moreover, the politicization of Buen Vivir will also be considered, as it allows us to identify some of the most recurrent and relevant controversies that the notion entails. In this sense, a widely recalled point by the critics regards the absence of ethnographic evidence that sustains the main

points of the notion. In other words, from the Andes to the Amazon Rainforest no ethnographer has ever been able to recognize and write an accurate ethnography of the notion. As it is possible to imagine, this contributes to the rising of the concerns about the origins of *Sumak Kawsay*. Secondly, a lot of criticism has been directed towards the very same politicization of the notion, which re-shapes and gives new meaning to the notion, with the effect of forging what can be seen as a political tool, rather than an indigenous concept.

Moving on, these two points bring us to another concern, addressed by some experts, in responding some assertions that would position Buen Vivir as *the par excellence* alternative to Western development. These criticisms regard the fact that, on a political level, the two ideas are constructed on very similar premises, at least in structural terms. Buen Vivir itself, in some of its most modern interpretations, as well as in some passages contained in official Ecuadorian documents (for instance, the SENPLADES³), implies a development process based on stages, that recalls structurally that of Rostow. Finally, another point concerns the work of Oviedo (2012), when he deals with the “cocktail” of notions and concepts that, in his opinion, Buen Vivir has turned into. Also due to the many interpretations and to the reasons that I explained previously, it has become very difficult to understand its real meaning. However, with this point, Oviedo presupposes a distinction based on a dichotomy that I will discuss more in depth, as I consider once again too simplistic.

Subsequently, the concept of indigeneity will be dealt closely: I will argue that the different ways in which the indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon enact and perform indigeneity can be related to the different interpretations that the notion of Buen Vivir acquires in that scenario. In doing so, both the break with essentialism and with the oversimplified understanding of the mechanisms that characterized the region will be reinforced.

Moving on, I will reference what is probably one of the major legal concepts when it comes to Indigenous Peoples and territoriality: Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC). It recalls some aspects of the right of self-determination, and it is important in our analysis as it will allow us to analyze more closely the legal structure of the country, also with a reference to the implementation of international treaties. In this sense, the Ecuadorian scenario is indeed extremely particular, and it surely deserves a better look.

Finally, I will shortly concern the notion of Etnodesarrollo (ethnodevelopment), whose main

³ “Secretaría Técnica Planifica Ecuador”, officially born in 2019 in Ecuador with the mission of conducting the medium and long term planning, oriented towards development and with the aim of improving the quality of life of the population. (<https://www.planificacion.gob.ec/filosofia-institucional/>)

contributors are Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1982) and Pablo Palenzuela (2008). The former is the first one to forge the term, which he defines as the merging together of self-determination and plurinationalism: this implies that Indigenous Peoples could control the natural resources (or obtain stronger natural management) on their land, as well as having great autonomy on their cultural and social determination. On the other hand, Palenzuela focuses more on the political aspects of the concept. He analyzes it also in comparison to Rostow, questioning the postcolonial characters of the modernization theory, slightly touching also Buen Vivir.

Once again, the notion of Buen Vivir is central to this work: what I will try to do is analyzing its development beginning from the premises and standards set by the modernization theory. Therefore, in order to do so, a process of deconstruction and unpacking of both the notions has to occur. As I will show in the work, this process touches upon different dimensions, and it is fundamental to understand the link that these facets share if we want to grasp the complexities that this comparison reveals. I argue that the Ontological Turn, together with Escobar's political ontology, play a pivotal role in this linking process, bridging the gap existing between modernization theory and Buen Vivir. Up to this point, the developmental lines of the work generally articulate on two principal lines, potentially hinting at a binary analysis, in which two apparently opposed concepts are confronted and evaluated. Contrarily to what might appear at a first glance, however, this reading of the work will be strongly contested in the following chapters. Namely, my choice of following two main lines of argument (indigenist – postmodern) also for what concerns Buen Vivir should not drive the reader into thinking that this is the only possible way to tackle the notion. This is just one of many different parameters on which the discussion can take place, and I have chosen it as it allows me to structurally organize the work in a clearer way. As especially chapters five and six will show, the meaning of Buen Vivir entails already many different interpretations and varieties, that strongly detach from everything that could remind to a dichotomic conception of the inquiry. Thus, my aim in this paper is surely that of re-conceptualizing the modernization theory on the basis of the notion of Buen Vivir, but this represents only a part of the goal. Namely, in doing so I will demonstrate how the complexity of the latter concept shows how it does not represent alone a real, sustainable and implementable alternative to the former model.

What I described above will be the main path that I intend to follow in the work: it is mainly theoretical exactly due to the reasons that I will explain in the following section. However, from time to time I will also provide some hints or examples of how the debated notions have been translated from the purely theoretical to the legal or political dimensions. This is done for two main reasons: the first is to better

explain the ways in which they have been absorbed and understood at a broader level, while the second is that an evaluation of this facet allows me to enrich the debate that is built around them, and stimulate further reflection. The theoretical (philosophical and legal) aspect will still be the dominant one in the work: in fact, I will never investigate in deep empirical on-the-ground implementations of the notions that I discuss. Only in the conclusion I might speculate a little bit more in that direction, but I will do it just to indicate in which ways should further research move.

2. Methods

In this section, I would like to start with a presentation of the work as it had been planned originally, as I believe that it is only by understanding its trajectory that it will be possible to fully comprehend the reasons that drove me to organize it the way that I did, and to tackle the issues primarily from a theoretical perspective. For this reason, it may be appropriate to begin with the choice of the topic and of the regional focus of my research.

My interest in the Ecuadorian Amazon⁴ was sparked a couple of years ago, after two indigenous communities in that area obtained two very significant victories against the Ecuadorian government: the first was obtained by the Cofán Peoples (July 2018), while the second one saw the Waorani Peoples (April 2019) as protagonists. Both the populations are from the Amazon Rainforest region in the country, and both the cases concerned the protection of the forest, extremely rich in terms of natural resources, against mining. In those circumstances, and in the sociopolitical scenario of Latin America, two victories of that size really caught my attention: investigating more deeply, I came to learn that the FPIC right played a central role in addressing these disputes. It is in this context that the peculiarity of Ecuador comes once more on the surface, as it is one of the very few countries to recall this specific right in its Constitution, as well as having ratified both the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, non-binding) and the ILO Convention 169 (International Labour Organization, binding), documents that openly refer to it.

Already around that time, despite my thesis was still far away in time, I started to get in touch with some people from there, as well as with volunteers that worked for some time with the Indigenous Communities in the Amazon, in order to have an idea and understanding to what extent a fieldwork there would have been feasible. Unexpectedly, the first people I got in touch with was an Ecuadorian indigenous lawyer based in Vienna, with which I immediately established a relationship of good friendship and with which I am still in touch. Getting in touch with her had a very positive impact in my research: namely, she could be considered as my very first gatekeeper in what I was planning to be my future fieldwork. Friendship aside, talking to her and hearing her sharing experiences about the country was of incredible importance for my gathering of information and awareness about both the present situation and the historical background of the country, also and especially from an indigenous – legal perspective. During her time in Ecuador, Verónica worked for an NGO called “INREDH”,

⁴ For a detailed map of Ecuador, see Appendix 1.

formed mostly by lawyers, which has to do with Human Rights and that collaborates with different indigenous communities. However, being it based in Quito, pretty far from my specific regional interest, I discarded the possibility of involving that specific organization in my work.

Despite what just mentioned, the work of the NGOs have always been one of my main interests (surely also sparked by my personal experience); moreover, there are many organizations that are active in the Ecuadorian Amazon, collaborating precisely with the aforementioned indigenous communities. For this reason, one of my firsts intentions was to direct the work towards an analysis on the collaboration happening between these NGOs and the communities in that specific region of the country. In doing so, I hoped to find out some of the reasons that made that area and those groups in particular, so successful in their activism and in having their voices heard both at national and international levels. Talking to some professors during my exchanges (I moved to Ireland, National University of Ireland Maynooth, in the meantime) I became aware that the work of the NGOs had been (and still is) object of bitter criticism from the anthropological realm, which accused the former to act responding to a post-colonial ideology, and that sees their activities in “third world” countries throughout a so-called “top-down” intervention. I thought that this might constitute a serious issue for my project, as the organizations that should collaborate with the Indigenous communities are accused to belong and to reason according the system from which the former are “escaping”. This has surely already been the case in Latin America as well as elsewhere, however, exactly for the reasons that I mentioned above, my aim became the one of analyzing how and to what extent this can be considered true in my specific regional context. Therefore, I identified my fieldwork area in the town of Lago Agrio, located close to the Colombian border. In this town is also active the NGO called “Amazon Frontlines” (AF), on which I was planning to focus the majority of the work. Moreover, I also wanted to analyze the relationships between “AF” and its “indigenous counterpart”, Ceibo Alliance (“Alianza Ceibo” in Spanish, which brings together four different indigenous societies in the Amazon: Siona, Secoya, Waorani and Cofán).

The next step was therefore to connect the interest in terms of concepts to the feasibility of an ethnographic research: and also for what concerned this phase, luck was on my side. Throughout some common friends, I got in touch with some Italian volunteers, coming from my very same small hometown, who were spending one year in the town of Lago Agrio. As we can imagine, their experience and help was fundamental in the process of organizing the ethnography: namely, I got a clearer idea of the bearing costs that a three months stay would have required, as well as one more confirmation that my Spanish proficiency was more than good enough in order to have daily

interactions with the people there and to conduct semi-structured interviews with my informants. Lastly, and probably more importantly, I got in touch with a Cofán leader with which I came across already back in 2018, while reading about the Indigenous victories in the country.

While all this was happening, I moved to Barcelona (February 2020), to fulfill the second part of my exchange. There, I began to work more closely with the co-supervision of Prof. Montserrat Ventura i Oller, from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She has in her background years of research and fieldwork in Ecuador: that is why her advices and supervision are extremely helpful and important.

In order to sustain my fieldwork financially, I applied to a scholarship offered by the University of Vienna, called “Förderstipendium”, which covers some of the financial costs of the work for MA and PhD students, upon project approval. The application and the project got approved and I was granted the amount of money I requested.

Despite all the previously described efforts and organization, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a drastic change in all my plans. As we all know, the outbreak of the virus, which according to most of the official records arrived in Europe around the beginning of February 2020, had a massive impact on our daily lives, as it changed completely the way we thought about our routines. Many countries in Europe adopted, at a certain point, lockdown measures, as well as extremely rigid restrictions for what concern social contact and everyday activities. Given the spreading speed and the power of the virus, I realized that it was only a matter of time before it reached also other continents. Moreover, thinking about the very peculiar context that characterizes my fieldwork, I considered the possibility that the communities could self-isolate in advance, in order to prevent the impact of the virus. In fact, considering the remoteness and the lack of fast connection between that part of the Amazonian region with the rest of the country, the potential consequences of an outbreak of COVID-19 would have been dramatic.

This new scenario raised also some important ethical questions, the first and most relevant of which being the impact of my presence in the field. To this regard, I reflected upon the well-known Code of Ethics, issued and approved in 1998 by the AAA (American Anthropological Association); in the first section, particularly meaningful for my case are the first two points:

- A. Responsibility to people and animals with whom anthropological researchers work and whose lives and cultures they study.

1. Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work. These obligations can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge, and can lead to decisions not to undertake or to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities, such as those owed to sponsors or clients. These ethical obligations include:

- To avoid harm or wrong, understanding that the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people or animals worked with or studied
- To respect the well-being of humans and nonhuman primates
- To work for the long-term conservation of the archaeological, fossil, and historical records
- To consult actively with the affected individuals or group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved

2. Anthropological researchers must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities. Anthropological researchers working with animals must do everything in their power to ensure that the research does not harm the safety, psychological well-being or survival of the animals or species with which they work. (AAA, 1998:2).

It is mainly for these reasons that, despite the funds granted to me by the University of Vienna were available until March 2021, I had to accept the impossibility of conducting fieldwork in person in Ecuador.

Despite this unexpected inconvenient, I was still hoping to be able to find a way to somehow get in touch with the people on the site, both those from the communities and the ones working in the NGOs. Given the very particular historical period that was taking shape, I also considered the possibility of dedicating a section of the whole work on the way in which the organizations and the communities were cooperating in order to face the pandemic. Being sporadically in touch with the aforementioned Cofán leader, surely very influential in that context (but also very busy), I hoped I would have been able to reach and interview/talk to other people, using some ethnographic fundamental techniques such as semi-structured interviews as well as elicitations. For this purpose, I prepared a consent document (both in English and Spanish) that my informants and participants would have signed and agreed in

order to proceed with the work. However, as the pandemic was reaching and impacting Ecuador and Latin America stronger and stronger, the answers from my informants were coming more seldom, and the same can be said about an answer from the Alianza Ceibo, to which I sent the aforementioned form and a description of my project. Furthermore, reading from their website and from local media, I realized how complex and delicate the situation was, and that is when I came to the conclusion that even interviews or informal talks with the local residents would have been impossible.

At this point, my choices were basically two: I could have either abandoned completely my project, switching to a topic that would have allowed me at least some sort of “online ethnography”, or sticking to my focus, I could have tried to find other ways to investigate on my research object. I decided to go for the second option: despite being ethnography the centre of the anthropological work, and despite being the fieldwork in the Ecuadorian Amazon one of the most exciting and stimulating part of my work, I still thought that the complexity of the theoretical concept that concern my topic deserved better and deeper analysis, also with an eye on a potential future (post-MA) ethnography there.

That is how my research has become purely theoretical: this turn obliged me to re-conceptualize the whole work. One of the most important adjustments that I had to make was on the part that I decided to dedicate in my work on the role of the NGOs. In fact, my initial focus was on their empirical agency and the methods with which they enacted some specific concepts in the context of their collaboration with the local communities. However, I believe that in order to deal with this part properly, interviews and participant observation would have played a key role. Namely, grasping the way these organizations are currently organized and the way they intend to plan and structure their future growth and collaborations is an attempt which I believe being almost impossible to obtain without a direct contact with their members.

For these reasons, I believe that this work could be intended as a preparation for a future ethnography: in other words, a profound analysis on the theoretical concepts that I underlined in the previous sections could be ideal to pave the way for a fieldwork. In doing so, I would be already familiar with the features that characterize the country on paper, and it would be certainly easier to relate them with a first-hand personal experience.

At this juncture, it was fundamental for me to take a step back and analyze the aspects of my work that could have suited a more theoretical analysis: I was aware of the multitude of ethnographies that had

been performed in Ecuador⁵, and I knew that referring to them could have been a good solution from time to time (as well as being very aware of the risks that this practice could entail). The most important concept in the work is surely that of Buen Vivir, therefore I decided to build my analysis around it; at the same time, however, I enlarged the purely theoretical section, involving theorists and academics that contributed to the development of the modernization theory, which I would have then compared to the former one. To both bridge and better unpack these two concepts, I decided to concern more deeply a moment in anthropology that emphasized the turn that could be portrayed as the passage from epistemology to ontology. In highlighting this contrast, I hoped also to emphasize some other changes, which were happening at the level of the notions (and at the empirical one, but I will not focus too much on this in the present work).

This new approach to the work also implied a re-structuring of the research question: if the former one was focusing on the way in which Buen Vivir was perceived in the implementation process in the Ecuadorian Amazon, now the re-shaping involved exactly what I was discussing above. Consequently, it has become an inquiry around the re-conceptualization of modernization theory on the basis of the Ecuadorian notion of *Sumak Kawsay* (translated by many into Buen Vivir).

For what concerns the sources, I used online academic journals and databases, using the access provided by the different universities in which I was staying. In this sense, the library of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona was extremely useful and rich of books. Moreover, I also borrowed many books and articles from Professor Ventura i Oller, who kindly lent them to me. In the building process of this bibliography list, the suggestions and recommendations of Professor Peter Schweitzer and of Professor Ela Drazkiewicz-Grodzicka (National University of Ireland Maynooth), specialized in NGOs and bureaucracy work, were also extremely important.

It is important to underline that, in the context of the topic that I am tackling here, the majority of the literature is produced in Spanish (that I can read and speak fluently). Therefore, a lot of the references that I will use will be my personal translations from one language to the other: in order to avoid misunderstandings of any kind, whenever I will be quoting the exact words of the author, I will always provide the original quotation in the footnote, as well as the bibliographic reference.

Finally, despite all the difficulties encountered in the process, and despite the impossibility of conducting first person ethnography, I believe that the changes that I had to make turned into a great

⁵ I report some of them in the sections on Buen Vivir (indirectly) and on indigeneity (with direct and explicit references).

chance to explore these concepts from a perspective that I would have probably slightly overlooked otherwise. The eagerness of going into the field could maybe at times prevent the researcher from spending the right amount of time in the theoretical framework that the work entails, and that plays always a pivotal role.

3. The Modernization Theory – concerning the principles of its foundation

3.1 – Max Weber – Protestant Ethic and Rationalization

The work of Max Weber (1864-1920) is extremely complex and vast, and my intention here is not to deal with all of it in deep. However, his contribution to the definition of values concerning what will later become the modernization theory is extremely significant and it coincides also with a big part of his interests. Therefore, I am going to investigate more in this direction and highlight some key passages of Weber's theory.

The unification of the German empire occurred in 1871, and after that, in the last decades of the century, the country experienced a period of strong industrial development (also thank to the natural reserves acquired with the annexation of the formerly French regions of Alsace and Lorraine). In this socio-historical context, Weber was interested in explaining the origins of capitalism, being fascinated by the economic development that characterized his country during the 16th Century. Namely, he noted how the occupational statistics in Germany (but also in other countries in which different religions were coexisting) those in the higher levels of capitalistic enterprise were Protestant (Chriss: 2019:52). He therefore looked for connections between the religion and the accumulation of capital, bumping into the work of Benjamin Franklin: despite him not being a religious man, he was raised according to the principles of Calvinism. It is a religious doctrine founded by John Calvin (1509-1564) based on the idea of predestination: it asserts that God has a plan – which is unknown to humankind – and that he has already selected the individuals that will be “saved”, and those who will be damned. The criterion in order for the believers to grasp the group to which they belonged was economic success: therefore, they would have to dedicate their life to work, in order to avoid temptations and acquire wealth. This idea is based on the same premises that characterize Martin Luther Protestantism, with the only distinction that, in his teachings, the priest argued for a so-called economic traditionalism: “The individual should remain once and for all in the station and calling in which God had placed him, and should restrain his worldly activity within the limits imposed by his established station in life.” (Weber in Chriss, 2019:54). However, what Weber took from the work of Luther was the idea of “Calling”, which will later become central in his work. Namely, in German the word can be translated into *Beruf*⁶, which has a double meaning: it stands both for *profession* and for *calling*. Therefore, it inherently bridges a person's job (or vocation) and also its “ultimate goal” in life, that is to say salvation. Going

⁶ It seems that Luther got this notion from the Old Testament, inspired by the life and experience of St. Paul. (see Ghosh, 2014 or Chriss, 2019).

back to Calvinism, “fulfilling the tasks of one’s *calling*...took on a peculiarly concrete-*impersonal* character, that of service towards the *rational* formation of the social cosmos which surrounds us” (Ghosh, 2014:236). Finally, Weber found the point of connection between Calvin and modern capitalism in the theories of the Puritan theologian Richard Baxter (1615-1691). Throughout an analysis of his writings, Weber derives the main points of Protestant asceticism, which becomes fundamental in relation to business activity (Chriss, 2019:56). This aspect of religious belief was already typical of Catholicism, but in that case, what is missing is the link with the entrepreneurial facet of the individual, who, on the contrary, encouraged it in relation with monastic life. Therefore, asceticism in the Protestant realm acquires another meaning: “This worldly Protestant asceticism, as we may recapitulate up to this point, acted powerfully against the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions; it restricted consumption, especially of luxuries. ...It broke the bonds of the impulse of acquisition in that it not only legalized it, but (in the sense discussed) looked upon it as directly willed by God.” (Weber in Chriss, 2019:57).

After this brief excursus on what can be considered Weber’s most important contribution, it may be possible already to grasp the real *leitmotiv* which somehow guides this reflection. Weber identifies two main spheres in his thought: the religious one and the secular one. In his view, the former one lays the basis on which capitalism, which clearly belongs to the latter one, can stand and proliferate. The concept of asceticism plays a pivotal role at this juncture, since it is precisely its translation and movement from one sphere to the other that allows what previously was religious ethic to become capitalistic ethic. To this regard, we witness the application of the concept of rationalization (which is present in Catholicism, Calvinism and Protestantism) to the ascetic life conduct, which becomes a very powerful driver in the accumulation of capital and, more generally, in the conduct of a very specific lifestyle.

Looking at today’s reality, we realize immediately how a significant part of the religious aspects that built the notion at the beginning have disappeared: emblematic in this sense is the fact that some of the key points of the Protestant doctrine concerned avoiding making visible the wealth that the individual was accumulating, or saving money in order to avoid committing sin. However, what Weber is discussing here to a greater extent is the passage from a systematic religious ethic to a secular rational behavior, which is extremely actual and a relevant feature of present Western society. In Ghosh’s words,

“The *PE* [Protestant Ethic], complemented by the later religious writings, offers a *religious history*: a history of Occidental Christianity’s engagement with the temporal “world” (*saeculum*), and so (one might say) a process of “secularization”, that greatly expands our understanding of the ‘modern *Kultur*’ lying at the heart of his [Weber] enquiries.” (Ghosh, 2014:223).

Weber himself was aware that the religious ascetic dimension of his theory was disappearing in modern society, and he did not like the shape that the rationalization process empowered by the overarching utilitarianism was taking. One of the effects that he noticed was the formation of a ruling class that was at the same time extremely “impersonal” and also really powerful. He describes them and laments this turn paraphrasing Nietzsche: “[They are] Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.” (Weber in Chriss, 2019:57). Once again, rationalization is the process that lies behind this bureaucratization of society: Freund defines it as “the organization of life through a division and coordination of activities on the basis of exact study of men’s relations with each other, with their tools and their environment, for the purpose of achieving greater efficiency and productivity.” (Freund in Lai, 2005:117). This definition portrays the structuralist facet of the notion, which has on one side the benefit of achieving the domination of the social and natural environment, while on the other this is done in the name of an organization principle that unavoidably provokes the formation of an oligarchic-like ruling class of bureaucrats.

What described above come is the expression of a more general change noticed and described by Weber throughout an evaluation on the conceptual reasons that drive social actions. He believes that these actions are shifting from traditional to rational; and, further deepening this thought, he comes to the conclusion that the aforementioned rationalization can be achieved only when traditional ways of life are abandoned (Lai, 2005:120-121). He motivates this theory by providing a division of social action in four different categories:

- Zweckrational refers to those social actions that are rationally chosen with the means to attain a particular goal very much in mind. Such actions have also been referred to as ‘technocratic thinking’ and the action of an engineer in the construction of a bridge to cross a river is an example of zweckrational thinking.

- Wertrational refers to those social actions that are value oriented characterized by striving for a goal that is not at all rational in itself but is pursued by rational means. An example of wertrational action is of an individual who seeks salvation by following the teachings of a prophet.
- An Affective Action is one that is based entirely on the emotional state of the person rather than on the rational weighting of the pros and the cons.
- A Traditional Action is a social action that follows tradition or custom or habit without so much as reflecting on the purpose or on the meaning of that action. People engage in this type of action almost without thinking because the action is always done by society. (Lai, 2005:116)

Therefore, leaving behind traditional action and turn towards *zweckrational* can be thought as the precondition for the formation of a social structure that characterizes modernity. This last passage is extremely important, as it defines some of the pivotal features that will be decisive in the *Rostowian* definition and conception of the modernization theory. Throughout the analysis of Weber's thought, we can therefore recognize a structure formed by certain precise values, that Lai suggests are "individualism, efficiency, self-discipline, materialism, and calculability (all of which are included in Weber's concept of *zweckrational*)" that come out extremely empowered throughout the bureaucratization process (Lai, 2005:117).

3.2 – Talcott Parsons – The Values of American Society

The first remark that I believe we need to consider before moving to the analysis of Parsons' work, is the influence that Max Weber had on his development. One emblematic example of this is the dissertation that he wrote at the University of Heidelberg was entitled "The concept of capitalism in recent German literature", with clear reference to the work of Weber, who died some years before his arrival. Therefore, this influence somehow shaped a part of his work, and when he started to become interested in the values of the American society, he also raised questions that concerned closely the main determining factors of social action and social structure.

At this juncture, it may be useful to begin with his concept of *values*, as his way of conceiving them transcends Weber and go beyond the spheres that the German sociologist outlined. In Parsons' words:

“A value system of a social system is therefore by definition a *common* or shared value system as between the units of the system whether they be individual personalities in roles, or collectivities at various levels of the structure of the system.” (Parsons in Turner, 1991:39).

Values have therefore normative function, but at the same time he does not attribute to them a direct causal power: they situate themselves at the highest level of generality. An assertion of value contains an ideological statement, which, having existential references, operates at a lower level of generality. In other words, they are the principles from which other norms and hence actions can be derived (Parsons in Turner, 1991:39). However, this state does not preclude them to be influential in maintaining social order. From this, with the help of Thomas (2006), we can further deduce that the institutionalization in a given society of these values sparks a process that moves along the aforementioned normative pattern and which provides the lines on which its social identity can be traced. To this regard, Parsons states that the "concept of values provides the focal center for analyzing the organization of [social] systems, of societies and of personalities." (Parsons in Thomas, 2006:411)

Once again, at this point of Parsons' analysis, we come to notice the influence of Max Weber, especially for what concern the involvement of religion in the discourse. An analysis provided by Turner (1991) shows as how Parsons argues that in lower order systems, the specificities of the single (or group of) actor(s) will play a role in the characterization and adaptation of the norms, which will be derived from the order immediately above. This theory might in the end explain the differences that we observe in societies, as well as those present in the religious sphere; moreover, the importance of this last element lays exactly in the fact that the grounding of a value system has to be treated as religious. Consequently, becomes emblematic the relational analysis of the comparison – firstly presented by Weber and then developed also by Parsons – between the essence of Confucianism and Puritanism. Especially the former sociologist was very interested in the existing differences between Christianity and other religions and the interpretation that they acquired in other parts of the World⁷. He described the first as a doctrine of rational adaptation to the world, while Puritanism implied rational mastery on the world. The main point about this is that the world as it is it is not something to be accepted, but to be controlled in the name of a (in this case transcendental) idea. (Turner, 1991:47).

⁷ “...Weber's universal history involved him in writing extensively about non-Western religions, whereas Parsons' writings on such were sparse. That difference arises partly from the point which I have just made, for whereas Weber emphasized the great differences between East and West, Parsons followed him only – but it is a big "only" – in concentrating upon the West, pivotally upon Christianity, and speaking only intermittently and briefly of the problematic inclusion of other civilizational elements within a system of modern societies created from a West-led evolutionary thrust.” (Robertson, 1982:313).

The trajectory of Parsons' contribution is incredibly vast, and his position concerning certain specific aspects of his work did not remain the same all the time. However, with respect to what just stated and to the role that religion played on the social sphere, the power that Parsons attributed to it is in full accordance with his structural functionalism. I already mentioned the institutionalization process that the values (which share intimate connection with religion) go through in a given society; in order to move from this aspect to the more functionalistic one, he "spoke of the ways in which religious symbols, values and beliefs entered the concrete realm of institutionally structured social relationships; and of the significance of religion in the structuring of motivation to participate in the social domain via role-performance" (Robertson, 1982:311). In doing so, he was providing the social system with conceptually rational points, which legitimated the structure of the system and, to a certain extent, provided the structure of the system with a rationale.

Moving on with the analysis, there is another point of Parsons' work that it may be interesting to debate. Namely, his conception of individualism (I will investigate more on individualism later in the work), if examined in the framework of his approach to societies, can acquire a very important role in the development of the relational role of the individual both as self and within a societal group. This passage of Parsons' work has been deeply analyzed by Mayhew (1984), who provides also a good overview of how this concept is entangled within the skeleton of the whole theory. He begins from the concept of "institutionalization":

"A well-formulated concept of institutionalization justifies the claim that the members of society form, sustain, and interpret commitments and attachments to the normative order by their participation in its established institutions. Such institutions are said to embody, in functionally relevant ways, the values of the larger society." (Mayhew, 1984:1289)

However, in dealing with Parsons' utilitarianism, it is possible to realize how individualistic his understanding of the concept is. The problem that this situation may raise is therefore connected on the way in which it is possible to bridge the existing conceptual gap between this latter feature to the (arguably dominant) rationalistic aspect of utilitarianism. At this juncture, the approach that the author shows in relation to this reflects his structuralist side: individuals are inscribed in society throughout their belonging to social groups mirrored by organized institutions. It is exactly the coordinated activity of these institutions that allow the coherent interdependence of the actors, and they do even more: these organized systems shape the personalities of the individuals, influencing and guiding their actions. This

is what Parsons means when he outlines his notion of “institutionalized individualism”: accepting that someone’s individuality is subject of rules imposed by the cooperation with others. He argues that this notion is fundamental within the American values system: if it is true that on the one hand the structural shape of societal institutions plays an important role in determining social reality, on the other this declination of the notion of individualism is built on the value that individual activity makes as well a decisive social contribution. (Mayhew, 1984:1290-1291).

Finally, in the structural-functionalist understanding that Parsons has about society it is possible to recognize many interesting features, especially in relation to what will become the modernization theory – which can arguably be considered an almost direct consequence of Parsons’⁸ (see Thomas, 2006). The concept of institutionalized individualism, forged by the author, surely contributes in balancing some of the aspects of rationalization theorized also by Weber, with the utilitarian notion of individualism. Furthermore, the value system provides a suitable explanation for the evolution of societies: even if from a very general level, the norms that we have in societies derive from ideological statements, which are deducted from values. In Parsons’ opinion, norms are vital in determining the behavior of the actors: “According to Parsons,... *'there is no such thing as action except as effort to conform with norms'*” (Cohen in Thomas, 2006:413).

3.2.1 - On Individualism

I believe it is possible to argue that, in the context of the anthropological and sociological theories examined above, the individualistic conception of life among human groups turns to be a relevant building feature of the so-called modern developed society. Arguably, within a utilitarian understanding of society and given the important role played by Parsons institutionalized-individual, it is possible to agree that the conception of the individual can be regarded as a defining feature in the inquiry. Investigating this issue from the economic and financial aspects, that is to say the most relevant categories in the modernization theory, many theorists and experts have presented the figure of the *Homo economicus* to explain a precise orientation of human being’s behavior in society (Ball 2001, Barnes 2013, Spiker 2013, only to quote some). This view finds confirmation in the work of Barnes (2013): he argues that it is precisely the aforementioned form of individualism that takes as departure points self-interest and calculative rationality (Reisman in Barnes, 2013:11). This conception of social life characterized by individuals who seek to remain independent of each other has – together with

⁸ even if, as Thomas (2006) argues, he probably was not totally aware of it.

many others – the effect of encouraging competition among its members⁹. This reinforces the idea that sees a derivation of Social-Darwinism as a foundational feature of this kind of society. I am here referring to one of the first meanings associated with the notion: we are talking about an American publication in 1903, in which the sociologist Edward A. Ross (1866–1951) applied individualism to those who saw “in the economic struggle a twin to the ‘struggle for existence’ that plays so fateful a part in the modification of species.” (Ross in Numbers, 2015:144). Here, Ross comes to compare and evaluate as pertaining to the same level the fight for existence, and the economic struggle of the individual. It may be clearer now why I am calling into play Herbert Spencer’s work, in order to describe a society which has in the “survival of the fittest” one of its dogmas. By “fitting”, I mean the capacity and the flexibility to be able to adapt, survive and emerge in a given context. This is confirmed by the fundamental tendencies that, according to the main individualistic theories, portray human beings as independent, rational/calculative, goal oriented (in some ways utilitarian), egoistic/self-regarding.

These postulates give credit to the thesis for which individuals are naturally oriented towards the pursue of their own goals and aims, this automatically implying the targeting of the other members of society as potential obstacles in the completion of the process. Finally, it is commonly assumed that the wants and desires of individuals relate to their own benefit rather than the benefit of others, that individuals are egoistic and self-regarding (Barnes, 2013:12). This individual is often referred at also in economic theories: economics is indeed one of the most important categories and features along with modern society articulates itself upon; therefore, “fitting” also presupposes some sort of economic performance or knowledge. In this context, society becomes nothing more than a togetherness of this kind of individuals, defined by Barnes as “ER” (since they manifest Economic Rationality, among their main characteristics). In this very meaningful passage, he insists in some of the previously mentioned features, and he further inquires on the ER individual:

In a society of ER individuals, all actions are individually calculated, rational, goal-oriented and (usually) self-regarding. Individualism implies therefore that all the actions actually found in social situations are of this kind, and seeks to predict the overall patterns of action

⁹ This idea is strongly recalled and remarked also in the work of Valdivia (2005): she associates the same patterns to the consequences of neoliberalism (concerning the regional focus of the Ecuadorian Amazon). To this regard, she states how “Neoliberalism is associated with the belief that individual human beings (regardless of cultural differences) are in direct competition with each other and are ‘responsible’ for making rational decisions or choices to improve their transaction positions within the market” (Valdivia, 2005:289).

we are likely to find in social situations given that every individual action is indeed of this kind. (Barnes, 2013:13).

This analysis coincides to some extent to what we recalled already above, about the so-called *homo economicus* since, in both cases, the accent is put on the same aspects. What emerges from this inquiry is the strong bond existing between our conception of individualism and economics: the former representing the social behavior and the form of interaction among the members of a given community and the latter being, on the other hand, one of the (principal) means throughout which the purposes of human beings (and social groups) can be fulfilled.

In the light of what stated, it might be appropriate to conclude with a remark from Louis Dumont's work: his contribution in this sense is extremely strong for what concerns the impact that individualism has in defining society. It is labeled as the "cardinal value of modern societies" and its consequences "will simultaneously mean blindness towards the social. The modern ideology is individualistic by the means in which it values the individual as conceived as moral subject, independent and autonomous and ignores or subordinates the social totality. (Dumont in Stolcke, 2001:19, translation of the author)"¹⁰. Interestingly, in this passage from Dumont (whose investigation on the concept of individualism come from his fieldwork conducted in India and the first-hand experience with the caste-system), it is possible to observe how the author marks the end of a process of evolution of the notion that goes beyond Parsons. In this interpretation, individualism is conceived as driving the individual almost outside the social: it emphasizes its independent facet, opening space for an understanding that does not necessarily stands in contradiction with the structural-functionalism, since the individual's agency remains the same, but that certainly suggests new lines of thought to interpret human's orientation within social action. What just argued finds its proof also in the work of Parsons himself, which was perhaps slightly hinting at this development in the discernment of individualism: he formulated the notion of *intelligent choice*, which finds its equivalent in the one of *individual reason*. He argues that the latter comes from societal structure, it is hence not a natural acquired feature of human beings, but he also believes that modernization increased the potential evolution and application of this feature. Finally, faith in the institutions that form the social skeleton means automatically an improvement of individual's capacity of participating in the modern utilitarian order (Mayhew, 1984:1300).

¹⁰ "El individualismo es el valor cardinal de las sociedades modernas. El surgimiento del individualismo significará simultáneamente la ceguera ante lo social. La ideología moderna es individualista en la medida en que valora al individuo concebido como sujeto moral, independiente y autónomo e ignora o subordina la totalidad social." – original quotation.

3.3 – W. W. Rostow and the Stages of Economic Growth

The influence of the work of Walt Whitman Rostow (1916-2003) in the fields of economics, development and political sciences is enormous, and especially for what concerns the first, he is at times appointed as the most influential economist in the entire 20th Century. Due to the high number of political positions that he covered in his lifetime¹¹, his legacy can be considered as oscillating between the political and the academic. However, due to what stated before and due to the fact that his work strongly influenced a high multitude of scholars, I believe it is possible to try and analyze separately his academic production, dividing it from his political activity.

The most significant contribution that Rostow had in the economic realm concerns the depiction of the “modernization theory”. He did it first with the publication of an article in 1959 called “The stages of economic growth” and then, one year later, with the book entitled “The stages of economic growth, a non-Communist Manifesto”. In this works he highlights the set of conditions through which every country should transit in order to achieve modernization: in his view, “tradition” had to be considered the main enemy of modernization, as it was the socio-cultural cause for which some specific countries were “stuck” and could not progress further on. In the post-WWII scenario, the international reputation and power of the United States, absolutely at their peak, were followed by the influence that this theory had (and still has). It acquired hegemonic status, as it was offering a very systematic view of the world, providing universally valid standards applicable to all countries. Therefore, a lot of the developmental policies were designed according to those criteria, identifying their position in the virtual ladder proposed by Rostow and trying to adapt accordingly.

This theory contains a lot of key element in order to understand the binaries on which the modernization process of development moved in the last decades, and we are going to unravel the most important ones. The modernization theory articulates around five steps, which coincide with the socio-economic and technological innovations that a country has to implement in its development process. As it has been already remarked, the *traditional society* is considered the very first tread; Rostow, due to his academic background, allocates to the economical perspective a privileged position in the analysis, therefore he notices immediately how their central economic feature was that they evolved with limited production functions. Moreover, their social structure was hierarchical and a lot of power resided in the

¹¹ He also covered the role of National Security Counselor under the presidency of Lyndon Johnson.

regions where the landowners exercised some sort of authority (Rostow, 1959:4). Moving on, the second phase is called that of the *preconditions for take-off*: the author states that these features appeared firstly in Western Europe due mainly to two factors. Firstly, the evolution of science and secondly the discovery of new lands (which allowed the market to enlarge overseas): both of them refer to the post-medieval Europe. At the same time, this stage is characterized by the implementation of a very strong development of the industry: to this regard, Rostow argues that improvement in other sectors is required, notably transport, agriculture and imports financed by the exploitation of some natural resources. Interestingly, this heavy turn towards industrialization was thought to have some meaningful effects also on the sentiment of the population, which could be – at least to a certain extent – connected to Parsons’ concept of ideology. Rostow writes:

“A reactive nationalist sentiment-rooted in a perception of the link between industrialization and effective power in the world arena-came to be an extremely important factor¹² in leading men to take the steps necessary to unhinge and transform the traditional society in such ways as to permit growth to become its normal condition.” (Rostow, 1959:6).

Moving on, the third step towards modernization is the so-called *take-off*: here we assist both at a consolidation of the aforementioned conditions and a parallel rapid growth of the modern industrial techniques. This phase should aim at becoming self-sustained and in order to prove that should be able to carry on a constant 10% annual rate of net investment growth: in total, it should comprehend a period of about two decades. Finally, the take-off is the stage that sanctions the final cultural triumph over the traditional society.

The fourth stage of economic growth is the *drive to maturity*: it is characterized by an improvement of the technological maturity (a result of the process that started in the previous steps), accompanied by an increase in consumption. Interestingly, we also register a change of attitude towards industrialization in the strict sense of the process: from enchantment of the early stages we switch to a rather sentiment of boredom. At the same time, we assist at a change in the working force, featuring the emergence of semi-skilled workers and “highly trained technicians and professionals... [as well as]... efficient professional managers” (Rostow, 1960:71-72). Finally, the response of the population towards the current state of what once was the “miracle” of industrialization is, according to Rostow, to be

¹² In this case, Rostow locates himself on the same wavelength of Hamilton, when he argues that American industrialization was necessary. The latter, however, believed that the reasons for which the U.S. had to undertake this process went beyond the mere economical ones.

attributed to the raise of concerns about the “harshness and social cost of the drive to maturity” (ibid). Namely, in a turn of quasi-hobbesian matrix, the author states how “the extension of industrialization ceases to be acceptable as an over-riding goal [...] men appear to place a lowered valuation on further increments to what they have in abundance, and, at the margin, to seek new satisfactions.” (ibid, 11).

The fifth and last stage is called *age of mass consumption* and one of its focal points regards the directions that economy can take with a deceleration of the development of modern technology. At this juncture, Rostow examines the boom of durable consumer goods production¹³ – that characterizes the country’s society in two different phases, hence the ‘20s and the post-war period – observing the incredible escalation in the production of automobiles¹⁴ as well as the (simultaneous) de-urbanization of a big part of the population. Finally, in this phase (concept that he will shortly concern also in the part that he dedicates to the *beyond consumption* era) he analyzes also the level of *welfare*: interestingly, he associates this period to what he seems to describe as an almost physiological protracted depression. Namely, in a pre-war decade of economic recession, the author talks about a “compensatory turn to the welfare state” (Rostow, 1959:12), implicitly suggesting the hard time that a given state has when it comes to combine the elements of welfare and economic growth.

After this brief excursus throughout the five stages of economic growth, it is our duty to go through some of the theoretical concepts that this theory raises. In particular, the legacy of Parsons and Weber appears clear from the very beginning of Rostow’s work, and this is true in many aspects: firstly, the reference to the utilitarian ethic of mastering the world, instead of adapting to it. In Rostow’s view, mankind has to go through all the different stages of growth and in order to finally achieving modernization, all the resources that the inhabited environment offers have to be considered as mere tools to be exploited. This can be noticed explicitly in many passages of his work: an example is when he considers the preconditions for a development of the industrial capabilities of a country, and he states that it is important to develop an efficient transport system “to permit an economical national market to be created and to allow natural resources to be productively exploited” (Rostow, 1959:5). Another extremely relevant feature that recalls the work of the aforementioned sociologists concern the many reminds to the idea of *rationality*. Valenzuela S. and Valenzuela A. (1978) work can surely help us in understanding the role that this concept plays within the modernization theory:

¹³ In the book Rostow makes reference to electronic goods such as the television, vacuum-cleaner, refrigerator and electric washer (Rostow, 1960:79).

¹⁴ Rostow makes the comparison between the four major European nations (Great Britain, Italy, France and Germany) and the U.S., stating that the former produced in 1929 roughly 720000 vehicles, while the latter 5.4 million).

“Rationalization, or the "institutionalization of rationality," is defined as the "normative expectation that objective information and rational calculus of procedures will be applied in pursuit or achievement of any utilitarian goal It is exemplified but not exhausted in the use of sophisticated technology in construction and production” (Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1978:539).

In this definition it is possible to find and explain the interpretation and use that Rostow had on the legacy of Parsons and Weber¹⁵, with the clear reference to the utilitarian goal (economic growth and therefore modernization). In Rostow’s work (1960:72), the concept comes up really often with the role of defining the both the process of growth, but it is also (positively) used as a feature to indicate a given country. If we take the fourth stage of the growth and analyze its name, we notice that *drive to maturity* presupposes implicitly a sort of path that aims at reaching (and finally overcoming) *maturity*: this has to be intended that an historical phase characterized by irrationality will be replaced by a rational one, which will also coincide with economic wealth. To this regard, when talking about the traditional society, Rostow states how those communities lacked a systematic understanding of their situation and environment (Rostow, 1959:4). Finally, as in the case of Weber, this aspiration to maturity has to coincide with a rationalization of society which has a lot to do with the aforementioned change in the working force, hence the real skeleton of a country. In achieving “difference”, a country on its way to modernization had to come to terms and implement what the author calls a “highly bureaucratized and differentiated machine”, capable of guaranteeing the efficiency of the structure, especially in terms of making the right changes at the right moment.

One last remark that it is important to make has to do with the distribution of power, that has only briefly mentioned during the recalling of the five stages. One of the main features of both the first and the second stages of the process is the struggle to consolidate the power in a clear *centre* (ibid, 4 and 6). This is to be understood as a mean of raising the governmentality of a country, to speed-up the decision-making process and to avoid conflicts. However, this division could also be analyzed as transposition of a bigger scale general process that characterizes a very precise idea of the world. One of the key points of the *dependency theory* articulates exactly around the fact that the world has been divided into *centre* and *periphery*. The former would coincide with the industrial and scientifically

¹⁵ Shortly before that explanation (*ibid*, p.537), the authors make explicit reference to nineteenth century sociology as the foundational point of *rationality*: in that case also the value system is concerned, and the list of referenced authors is extended to Maine, Tönnies and Durkheim.

advanced countries, while the latter would be the so-called underdeveloped ones. In short, this political organization of a country could have some unexpected implications, which will be dealt a little bit more in depth later on in the work.

3.3.1 – On Universalism

In the last section it has been mentioned already the hegemonic status achieved in the international sphere by the modernization theory. Some of the premises on which this theory is based, however, postulate some elements that can be considered at least questionable. An hint in this direction can be found in the work of Reyes (2001), and especially in his analysis of the aforementioned theory: he questions the dichotomy traditional-modern by exposing the universalist assumptions that this claim has. He states:

“Third World countries do not have a homogeneous set of traditional values; their value systems are highly heterogeneous. [...] A second aspect for criticism here is the fact that traditional and modern values are not necessarily always mutually exclusive: China, for example, despite advances in economic development continues to operate on traditional values and this appears to be the same situation in Japan. Moreover, it is not possible to say that traditional values are always dichotomous from modern status, for example, loyalty to the Emperor can be transformed to loyalty to the firm.” (Reyes, 2001:112).

If, for what concerns the claim about China and Japan, Rostow himself stated that such conditions could verify simultaneously in certain cases (including also Russia in the analysis), the rest of Reyes’ claim can be a good starting point in order to put light on the notion of universalism.

The universalistic dimension of the modernization theory was therefore perceived and spread as a “one size fit all” model, throughout many transnational development-aid policy plans¹⁶, aiming at bringing

¹⁶ To this regard, the academic material and literature on topics like development-aid, dependency theory and world-system theory is extremely wide and complex. My aim here is not to deal in deep with these aspects of the modernization theory, even if I am aware that they fit very well with my work and that further research in this direction would be certainly beneficial to a deeper understanding of the entanglements that these topics involve.

the so-called developing countries on the track indicated and provided by that theory¹⁷. Consequently, this idea became the parameter to follow, and all the countries that did not fit into those criteria had to adapt. This concept is recalled by Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1978), when they refer to the historian C. Black, who this conception of modernity is literally used as a yardstick, with which to measure any society. This understanding of modernity becomes then a model, or an ideal type, embodying a set of features believed to be applicable to all societies (Black in Valenzuela, 1978:538). At this juncture, it seems clear that the reaction against this universalism is some sort of particularistic way of tackling reality, some other criteria for differentiation. Proceeding along this path, the risk that we encounter is that of dichotomization: since these *rules* for achieving modernization have a clear source, the most instinctive reaction would probably be that of finding something to stand in opposition to that. An interesting hint in this direction can be found in an interview that professor Andreu Viola did with Arturo Escobar, in which the latter was asked to elaborate on modernization from a systemic perspective. He affirms:

At the level of the discursive regularities we find the position of a subject called “West” which is taken by the subjects – at least the hegemonic subjects, such as the World Bank, the economists, the United Nations – when they speak in the name of “Mankind”, in the name of the Universal, when they speak in the name of Science and Technology, which is a unique positionality of a subject, which comes precisely from the big results of modernity, of science, of reason, of rationality, of progress, etc. (Escobar in Viola, 2000:150, translation of the author)¹⁸.

Here, Escobar is talking about a critique that was addressed to him, and that was accusing him of considering and presenting in his work the “West” and the so-called “Third World” as monolithic entities. In other words, of making the mistake that we were suggesting earlier. As it is possible to

¹⁷ To this regard, the U.S. was regarded as the real model to emulate. Already from Parsons, the path towards modernization was elaborated looking at the U.S.: “Parsons viewed the United States as occupying the apex of this evolutionary trajectory.” Moreover, since historical change had to come from outside the system, Americans were obligated to go out and help other societies get moving toward greater differentiation. “Parsons’ prescriptions for “help” were “welcomed with especial warmth in development studies.”. The application of Parsonian analysis to the objective of economic development would produce one of the leading policy frameworks of the mid-to-late twentieth century, Modernization Theory” (Thomas, 2006:424).

¹⁸ “a nivel de las regularidades discursivas hay una posición de sujeto llamada “Occidente” que se arrogan los sujetos -por lo menos los sujetos hegemónicos, como el Banco Mundial, los economistas, las Naciones Unidas- cuando hablan en nombre del “Hombre”, en nombre de lo Universal, cuando hablan en nombre de la Ciencia y la Tecnología, que es una posición de sujeto más bien única, que viene precisamente de los grandes logros de la modernidad, de la ciencia, de la razón, de la racionalidad, del progreso, etc.” (Escobar in Viola, 2000:150) – original quotation.

observe in the quote above, he does not completely dissociate himself from such a critique. On the contrary, he recognizes that some of the most influential and important institutions secure themselves the right to speak in the name of the totality of mankind, giving credit to the aforementioned theory of universalism and reinforcing a framework that can be recognized under the label of “essentialism”. To this regard, the reduction of diversity within a group is one of the processes on which this concept is formed upon, and it coincides perfectly with part of the *modus operandi* of the universalistic approach. According to Starr, the “making” of universalism itself presupposes the existence of two intertwined processes: firstly, a process of social categorization, which divides the members of a group according to different criteria (and we analyzed already some of the most important). Secondly, the assignation of the members to the categories just created (Sarr in López Novo, 1994:46). Needless to say, this process implies an authority with the power of putting in practice such a division; in other words, an already decided hierarchical structure in society, or – as in our case – *among* societies.

From what has been portrayed until now, a look for potential ways of coming to terms with a notion that makes of inclusivity and the search for particularism its most important features is needed. This, at least from a theoretical perspective, does not necessarily have to coincide with the total absence of universalistic practices. Namely, it is not for the persistence of a dualistic criteria that we are advocating: to some extent, particularism and universalism can indeed coexist: to this extent, the work of López Novo (1994) can once more help us in shedding light on the issue. He states that the anti-particularistic approach has the limit of ignoring the benefits that universalism can bring in certain circumstances: the latter can indeed assume the role of acting as a provider of equity. Thus, to some extent, the fundamental opposition between particularism and universalism does not exclude their empirical combination (López Novo, 1994:47).

The poles “universalism” and “particularism”, and their consequent tension exist, and it is important to acknowledge them, as it is in the space between these concepts that we need to find their right combination, in order to design a concept with a correct degree of application. The movements that are pushing for an implementation of a more particularistic approach also and especially at a systemic level, often represent the same ethnic minorities that are excluded by this paradigm. This also explains the existing tensions that mechanisms or attempts such as cultural assimilation created. Therefore, the struggle follows a line that, despite being divided into two main streams – depending if we consider the local or the global sphere – aims at the creation of an identity space that has in the recognition of some form of cultural particularism its most important element. Exactly to this regard, and with what just

stated in mind, we can briefly refer to the work of Moraña, as he considers the problem in a way that recalls what we have done previously here, with an eye already at the next step: the response that some specific communities had towards this particularistic attempt. More specifically, he considers the indigenous cause, suggesting that the creation of an identity space capable of coming to terms with the aforementioned two poles (as a reaction against what he calls “imperialist and hegemonic ideology”, situating the anti-universalistic approach as “emancipatory”), re-negotiating its status especially at the local (national) dimension. (Moraña, 2018:235).

3.3.2 – The Analysis of History

This last sub-chapter will be dedicated to a further inspection in the analysis of a very important element, that we had the chance to touch already in the previous chapter throughout the work of some experts: the relationship of the modernization theory with history. The work of Rostow is just another example of the fact that, already from the 19th Century, history became the object of analysis in a very precise way: namely, it was perceived as linear, following an imaginary wire on which individuals and consequently civilizations and societies could only move on/backwards. Despite the extremely important work of Franz Boas in terms of his historical particularism, the aforementioned tendency remained very influential, also due to the popularity acquired by the modernization theory. The basis on which the approach taken by Rostow was laying was indeed pretty solid, as his contribution was strongly legitimized also by Talcott Parsons: his theory of societal evolution was articulated in a “sequence of stages” (Thomas, 2006:411).

Concerning what just stated, the choice of recalling the work of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss may not seem as appropriate at first: he belongs to a firmly structuralist tradition, and therefore his conception of history might seem as not fitting well in the argument that we are dealing with. However, exactly due to his orientation, his position is built in clear opposition with the evolutionism promoted by Rostow, who finds its anthropological ancestors in Spencer, Tylor and Morgan. Therefore, countering the mainstream hegemonic discourse on progress, he questions the notion of “evolutionism”, universally applied according to Western standards. He states:

“[Talking about evolutionism] In what does this consist? It is really an attempt to wipe out the diversity of cultures while pretending to accord it full recognition. If the various conditions in which human societies are found, both in the past and in far distant lands, are treated as phases or stages in a single line of development, starting from the same point and leading to the same end, it seems clear that the diversity is merely apparent. Humanity is claimed to be one and the same everywhere, but this unity and identity can be achieved only gradually; the variety of cultures we find in the world illustrates the several stages in a process which conceals the ultimate reality or delays our recognition of it.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952:13).

Therefore, Lévi-Strauss recognized the problem that a universalistic and ethnocentric evaluation of history would cause, which corresponds to the almost complete overlooking of a potential coexistence of cultural difference – hence pluralism – within society. In other words, diversity is thought as a concept only perhaps useful to compare and evaluate different stages of the evolutionist process, not as something intrinsic to societies. Once again, this process of analysis happens due to the belief that depicts a given culture as model to the others.

What emerges from what has been argued until now is therefore the need for a different understanding and analysis of history, as this will necessarily coincide with a re-evaluation of the trajectory of progress. In particular, at this juncture, I think it might be useful to reflect on the importance that the acknowledgment of difference acquires in the picture, as it may be exactly this the pivotal element capable of explaining the necessity of a turn in the analysis. The fundamental premise that we have to consider, is that societies and culture are in constant evolution, from one dimension to another; this already implies a certain degree of fallacy in the theories and approaches that aim at depicting societies as static and linear entities. This idea also belongs to history and its evolution; the belief that emphasizes a development which stretches on linear lines is clearly reasoning according to broad schemes of thought and large concepts. Hence, the unavoidable simplistic reduction of the historical mechanisms to these concepts results in overlooking their depth, and with it all the inner differences, layers, shapes that they contain. Again, Lévi-Strauss contribution makes us reflect on the approach that sees human culture as stationary: he argues that whenever we have such an approach, we should first question the criteria that we are (consciously and/or unconsciously) making reference to. At times, their apparent immobility is nothing but the result of us looking from the wrong perspective (Lévi-Strauss 1952:26).

4. The Ontological Turn: answering the needs for a paradigmatic change

In the previous chapter we ended the discussion with the emphasis on one of the universalistic dimension acquired by the modernization theory, which reached hegemonic status within the global scenario. One of the central points that has been highlighted in the articulation of the notion, from the very premises to the publication of its *manifesto*, is the relationship with nature, and the role that industrialization plays, both throughout the exploitation of natural resources as well as the way in which the environment gets shaped and mastered by mankind to fulfill its purposes. At this juncture, it is important to understand that this conception corresponds to a particular ontological way of conceiving the world: in the case of the Western tradition, this understanding of the role of nature is the result of various scientific and philosophical contributions that find their roots way back in the centuries. Therefore, this chapter has the goal of opening up a space that will allow us to re-evaluate the role of nature throughout the emphasis on the existence of many different ontologies, that will finally set the ground for legal-theoretical and political discussions on the notion of Buen Vivir.

Surely, the accuracy with which modern science started to understand, study and describe reality played a big role in the development of this view. To this regard, the French Philippe Descola indicates the Italian scientist Galileo as one of the major promoters of this turn: also influenced by the contribution of Foucault, Descola argues how in the 17th Century nature came into play as human ontological dominion, as something suitable for scientific and experimental researches, as well as something to exploit and improve. At the same time, the human realm was conceived as rationally composed of nature and of a “something else”, which would transcend the former element. This division was emphasized by René Descartes (1596-1650), who also developed his thought along similar lines: he distinguishes between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, analyzing how the former corresponds to the mental substance, while the latter refers to the physical reality. His work was the prelude to a harsher split which would happen during the 18th Century, in which the concept of society as organized unity (or totality) starts to take shape and therefore to be considered in opposition to nature (Mancuso, 2016:98).

What just stated is shared also by French sociologist Bruno Latour, who refers to nature as something whose artificialization has been growing during the decades, in a process that begins from the 17th Century. This was possible only due to a gradual but constant trend of polarization in the opposition between nature and society: as we have seen with Descartes, we are talking about a dualist shape which finally favors the proliferation of ontological models built on that distinction (Latour in Descola,

1996:89). What is highlighted here is once more the reinforcement of the Western paradigm which sees human development as completely detached by the natural one. The historical period that accompanies this shift is of fundamental importance, as it has been decisive in the reaffirmation of the anthropocentric position within the human ontological scheme of the time. It is interesting to notice how for the change that has been theorized in the work of Weber (analyzed in the previous chapter), to continue, now apparently it needs to leave behind its religious features and leave room for other values. Namely, in putting religion aside and reinforcing the secularization of society, the effect is (once again) a rationalization of thought, which labeled as potentially fallacious anything that could not be proved by science. Again, as remarked above, this historical process intensified in the centuries, with the Industrial Revolutions not only accentuating this division, but also reaffirming and reinforcing the power and control that man had over nature. Therefore, we reach the point in which we acknowledge, as it is of common agreement, that the majority of the factors that are causing climate change and deeply affecting our ecosystem are responsibility of the human activity. Especially in the last two centuries, the human modernization attempts started to affect the environment like never before: this is why many experts agree on finding a definition for this era, in order to differentiate it from the previous ones. Thus, “Anthropocene” is the term that has been accepted by the majority of the scholars. The scholars that forged the term are Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, that in their work (2000) state: “it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term “anthropocene” for the current geological epoch.” (Crutzen, Stoermer, 2000:18). Even if this definition, and especially the slot of time within which this “epoch” is encompassed received a lot of critics, it appears clear how the growth of human agency in terms of influence on the environment has changed the subject-object dichotomy of the human-earth relation. To this extent, the work of Latour, whose notion of “agency” mirrors perfectly this important shift, can enlighten the concept. He states:

“It is in this radical sense that humans are no longer submitted to the diktats of objective nature, since what comes to them is also an intensively subjective form of action. To be a subject is not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy. [...]. It is also in another radical sense that the Earth is no longer “objective”; it cannot be put at a distance and emptied of all Its humans” (Latour, 2014:5).

It is arguably this loss of autonomy of nature that reinforced the dualistic paradigm enhanced by the Western ontological understanding. Namely, reviewing Descola's work, Lambek seems to confirm this thesis, as the French anthropologist "appears to reject the centrality of the nature-culture opposition to all forms of human thought, considering it precisely and exclusively a modern preconception" (Lambek, 2014:412). I think that this fracture had strong empirical consequences that can be noticed only by giving a quick glimpse of the extreme exploitation of natural resources that occurs especially in Latin America. To reinforce his point, Descola talks about an emblematic elaboration of the conception of culture, portrayed as everything belonging to mankind and its products, which detaches from nature, organizing it in a meaningful manner. (Descola in Mancuso, 2016:98) Furthermore, following the lines provided by Italian expert Mancuso in his analysis of Descola's work, it is interesting to note how the dualistic tendency that we are considering characterizes different disciplines, all obeying to one postulate. This postulate asserts the possibility of the world to be divided into two kinds of realities, our role would then be that of trying to demonstrate the existing interconnections between these realities. It is therefore clear how what just stated, advocating for the objective universalistic character of these dualisms, becomes an enormous obstacle in the attempt of clear comprehension of ontologies and cosmologies whose premises differ from ours (Mancuso, 2016:98-99).

4.1 – Structuralism as the prelude to the Turn

In his extremely long activity, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) had a great impact to what will later become the ontological turn¹⁹. One of the concepts around which his work is built is the one of "structuralism" (the legacy of Radcliffe-Brown acquires great relevance, even if he will be criticized by Lévi-Strauss himself). His understanding of the term is highly influenced by the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and by his structural theory applied to language (see also Kohn, 2015 or Debaene & Vial, 2013). In doing so, he makes a big step forward for what regards the anthropological legacy of the term, as through an interdisciplinary approach he succeeds in emphasizing once more the eclectic understanding of the discipline. In arguing that structure is a code, Lévi-Strauss seeks to understand culture within a broader system, focusing also on the set of relationships that, without belonging directly to the human sphere, still influence its culture in a more indirect way. Again, what arises here is the conception that sees the search for a general framework capable of analyzing and classifying societies as the center of his work. In his words:

¹⁹ Kohn defines Lévi-Strauss as the "original ontological anthropologist" (2015:316).

“[...] commonly zoological and botanical classifications do not constitute separate domains but form an integral part of an all-embracing dynamic taxonomy the unity of which is assured by the perfect homogeneity of its structure” (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p.139).

To justify this claim, he makes reference to the Pawnee Indians tradition, characterized by the use of different species of trees of different colors symbolizing the seasons and, more broadly, the year. It is in this context that the notion of “Totemism” takes shape, and I believe that it can be really useful to understand the kind of idea developed by the author in dealing with *structure*. From his perspective, the Totem ends up as being the symbol throughout which it is possible to order a given society; it provides the schemes and the guidelines on which we can align the object of analysis. Lévi-Strauss, already in the introduction of the book “Totemism” (1962), claims that it is really complicated (if not impossible) to find a general definition of the term (Lévi-Strauss, 1962:9): this because it is extremely context dependent, depending on the purpose and on the population to which it is related. As the author affirms in two different occasions, “Everything is a potential totem” (Lévi-Strauss, 1964:155), and “Totemism is an artificial unity, existing solely in the mind of the anthropologist, to which nothing particularly corresponds in reality” (Lévi-Strauss, 1962:10). However, what it is important to stress about the notion is that it functions as a marker of difference: following the lines of the relationships between men, plants and animals, it recalls the sets of contrasts existing in a given cosmology. In other words, the concept that it represents and the way totemism is thought is purely abstract; nevertheless, at the same time it shows the empirical differences in the world in which we live. This also means that, in the words of the author:

“The animal world and that of plant life are not utilized merely because they are there, but because they suggest a mode of thought” (Lévi-Strauss, *ibid*, 13).

This passage is already key in order to understand the ontological assumptions that his work contains: in claiming a difference in the “mode of thought”, the author is not merely arguing for a change of perspective, or of approach to the world, but in my opinion it is possible to state that he is hinting already at *other worlds*. So, what is this mode of thought? One of the main contributions of the author, which will also acquire great legacy with his successors, concerns the clear distinction between nature and culture. Even if he does so always in relation to the ideological dimension of Lévi-Strauss’ work, Nutini (1971) argues something that can help us in unpacking this division. Namely, this oppositional dichotomy plays a very important role in analyzing the conceptual system that Lévi-Strauss theorized,

since it reflects a real ontological property of the social. In this sense, and recalling what has been explained above in relation to Totemism, this structural distinction does not only take its shape at the epistemological level, but at the ontological one (defined as meta-linguistic by Nutini).

Finally, in marking the differences, the Totem also groups and assembles the different parts of a community, with the final result of classifying them. It is therefore possible to claim that the notion of “structuralism”, embodied in its most complete understanding in the concept of “Totemism”, functions as an all-inclusive framework, whose purpose is to finally analyze and organize societies (Eriksen, 2015:25). As it is possible to imagine, a concept characterized by such holistic claims, was object of very strong reactions from the academic world, both positive and negative.

4.2 – Descola and Viveiros De Castro: ontologically different ethnographies from the Amazon

The legacy of Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated to be very strong in what then will be named “ontological turn”: the French anthropologist’s understanding of structuralism in relation to the analysis of societies was certainly fundamental in the development of further theories in the ontological direction, but it is possible to argue that it acquired itself different shapes. Daebene and Vial (2013:38) suggest that the way the concept has been re-elaborated points towards a reverberation of the Amazonian ontologies in Western thought: in this sense, structuralism becomes the bridge between different realities, allowing us to consider a transformation in the form of thought that guides our analytical principles. This might already suggest us that the process is more complex, and it explains only one facet of the approach to different ontologies. To this regard, Viveiros De Castro (2015) brings in a very interesting notion, that of *delegation*: he starts from the conception proposed by Salmon (2013), who considers a situation in which the anthropologist faces an analytical situation that becomes “too costly (politically and/or epistemically) to be realized in a sovereign, monopolistic fashion, [therefore], he/she transfers it to the actors themselves. This causes a total *rebooting* of the investigative endeavour, forcing the analyst to confront the unexpectedly powerful speculative forces that spring from the actors, far more philosophically-minded (in a broad sense) than we normally take them to be” (Salmon in Viveiros De Castro, 2015:7). From this concept, Viveiros De Castro develops his own declination of this notion, talking about *ontological delegation* in relation to the need that the anthropologist has to leave its ontological assumptions out at the time of the investigation. This implies the will (and the risk) of letting be counter-analyzed by indigenous practices, hence seeing its very original postulates being

questioned (ibid.). It is with this principle and this mindset in mind that other ways to look and analyze different ontologies were depicted.

A first example in this sense is the one of “Perspectivism”²⁰, portrayed once again by the Brazilian theologian and anthropologist. He focused a substantial part of his work on Amerindian populations²¹, and on the Amazon Rainforest: I therefore believe that, in order to understand better what happens in the ontology and cosmology of these communities, it is fundamental to focus on their way of perceiving the environment. It is under these circumstances that we come across the concept of “Perspectivism”, which refers to the perception with which animals and spirits see themselves and the rest of the world:

“Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings” (Viveiros De Castro, 1998: 470).

Beginning from the examples of the animals (and the spirits), Viveiros De Castro points out how, for the people of the forest, there is no conceptual or spiritual difference for the inhabitants of that environment, which includes humans, animals, spirits and plants. In this case, we notice how it is the shift of perspective that allows us to see things beyond the mere anthropocentric stand. The author here draws from (Århem 1993) and defines the practice of perspectivism as having a “perspectival quality”, to refer precisely to this specificity of Amerindian thought.

Viveiros De Castro concludes his analysis on perspectivism by providing a case in which differences in perspectives are exacerbated; they lose completely their meaning as they are confronted with an absolutizing case: myth. The author states that, in these circumstances, the species appear to the others in the same way in which they appear to themselves: that is to say, as humans. At the same time, they do so by showing their real inner qualities and essence, which could also not belong to humankind. (ibid, 483). Finally, the general rule remains the same, and it can be found once again in Viveiros De Castro’s words: “we must remember, above all, that if there is a virtually universal Amerindian notion,

²⁰ Despite this, he states that the concept of perspectivism can be applied also to other indigenous communities, and not only Amerindian ones. To this regard, he brings the example of the North America and Asia. (Viveiros de Castro, 1998:471).

²¹ During his work on mythology, the same Lévi-Strauss already pointed out how the nature-culture differentiation was already a very important feature of Amerindian mythology.

it is that of an original state of undifferentiation between humans and animals, described in mythology” (Viveiros De Castro, 1998: 471).

Moving on with the analysis, the work of Philippe Descola shares many similarities with the one that has been shortly concerned above, but also some differences that could be interesting to briefly address. The French anthropologist also spent a considerable amount of time in the Ecuadorian Amazon, getting familiar with an environmental context that characterized also the work of Viveiros De Castro. Also due to the great influence of Lévi-Strauss, Descola puts the accent of his criticism on the dualisms that feature modern society, all of which lay behind the generalization that sees a multiplicity of cultures opposed to a background of an ever-lasting nature. These are the same that Viveiros De Castro (ibid.) recalls, among which we find the given and the institute, animality and humanity, body and mind, immanence and transcendence, and so on. To this, Descola’s theory opposes an Amerindian thought characterized by a fundamental cosmological feature represented by a totality of existence animated by a single cultural regime that becomes diversified (Descola, 2013:18).

To orientate his work, Descola finds another dualistic principle with which he tries to organize the different ontologies: in his opinion, since nature-culture belongs itself already to one ontology – that he will define under the label of naturalism – he identifies in the opposition body-mind (interiority-physicality) a more widespread and general feature. Therefore, his structure sees the division in four different ontologies, depending on the aforementioned factors:

Similar interiorities Dissimilar physicalities	<i>Animism</i>	<i>Totemism</i>	Similar interiorities Similar physicalities
Dissimilar interiorities Similar physicalities	<i>Naturalism</i>	<i>Analogism</i>	Dissimilar interiorities Dissimilar physicalities

(retrieved from Descola, 2013:67)

As mentioned above, Descola’s naturalism coincides with what has been defined until now as Western ontology; while its symmetrical opposition is constituted by the so-called *analogism*, characterized by both dissimilar interiorities and physicalities. Moving on, in *animism* we find what Viveiros De Castro calls perspectivism, as beings differ in physicalities but share similar interiorities: within the animistic conception, natural beings are provided not only with human qualities, but also with a proper social

role (see also Brightman et. al., 2012). Descola argues elsewhere (1996) that animic systems “use the elementary categories structuring social life to organise, in conceptual terms, the relations between human beings and natural species” (Descola, 1996:87-88). Finally, *totemism*²² – perceived in a different way than in Lévi-Strauss’ interpretation – locates itself as the opposite of animism, as it presents a double continuity of interiorities and physicalities.

Lastly, I believe that it is really important to stress how the emphasis on the perception of the world and of the modes of thought does not presuppose any distinction between the human realm and the rest. That is to say, humans are -“body objects in ecological interaction with other bodies and forces” (Viveiros De Castro, 1998:481) ruled by the natural laws. It is within this anti-anthropocentric perspective that the conceptual shift, and with it also Indigenous ontology, has to be understood. Concluding, extremely relevant in the process is the remark made by Descola, concerning the application and implementation of his categories: he states that they are abstract topological grids whose aim is to ordinate relational identities within both the human and non-human domains. However, these identities will be contextually mediated by the great variety of interactional schemes that can be found in society (Descola, 1996:89).

4.3 – Ontology as a *war of worlds*: its political declination

The last passage that I would like to involve in the chapter concerns a declination of ontology that, it could be argued, goes beyond the ontological turn as we have observed it until now. In other words, we are going to concern some examples of on-the-ground projections of the Turn, and consequently, we will try to examine some of its effects. Namely, dealing with ontology on the political level means moving to a more empirical sphere, therefore automatically also extremely context dependent. In arguing that the Turn is to a certain extent overcome, I wish to underline that its structuralist dimension, despite being still very relevant, leaves some space to some questions that deal directly with the ways in which the carriers of these “alternative” ontologies can pursue their own development. Hence, I am going to lay down some basis on how to move from the ontological turn to issues concerning self-determination in relation to Indigenous Peoples. Looking once again at the (very few)

²² It can be interesting to observe Viveiros De Castro’s comment on Descola’s totemism, as it highlights its classificatory dimension: “Totemism, as defined by Descola, seems to me to be a heterogeneous phenomenon, primarily classificatory rather than cosmological: it is not a system of relations between nature and culture as is the case in the other two modes, but rather of purely logical and differential correlation” (Viveiros De Castro, 1980:473).

hints that Rostow has in his work in dealing with them, and the contribution of John Law (2015), we can get an idea of the way in which Indigenous Peoples enter into the modernization narrative. The latter sociologist talks about the doctrine of *terra nullius*, to refer to the labeling that the English gave to the way the Australian Aboriginal occupied the land: they did not cultivate it, did not settle down and did not rationally organized it. Hence, the land was considered empty (Law, 2015:126). Along the same lines of this view stands also Rostow (1959), which makes a very interesting consideration in one of the footnotes of his article, with which he presented to the world his modernization theory. Namely, in concerning the so-called *Preconditions for Take Off*, he explicitly states how he will not spend time in analyzing that process in nations that were (and here he quotes American political scientist Louis Hartz) “born free” of traditional societies (Rostow, 1959:5). Here, he is referring to the countries whose modernization process was to some extent influenced by the British colonization: United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Interestingly, these are also among the countries with the highest percentage of Indigenous Peoples: therefore, Rostow is completely overlooking an historical phase, that of colonialism, which can also be considered as being a determining factor in the modernization process of these areas.

What we have analyzed above is just one example of the way in which modernization as ontology has overarched any other conception or understanding of the world²³. The way in which the former approach divides the world is not universally valid, and it is also important to acknowledge that it is not only a matter of different beliefs. Going back to Law (2015), and as we have shown in the previous subsections, the ontological turn drives us out of what is merely perspective and epistemology, and pulls us in the ontological realm: again then, it is not about different beliefs, but about different realities being enacted and practiced differently. In this sense, the hierarchically overarching narrative empowered and manifested by the modernization theory disappears, leaving room to different and simultaneous contingencies and local practices. In moving away from the hegemonic²⁴ value of the single world approach, we enter in the realm of ontological differences; at the same time, in doing so, we are also almost automatically, hinting at a politicization of the issue. Viveiros De Castro (2015) is on this same wavelength, as he argues about an ongoing war of worlds, in which the way we

²³ Interestingly, Viveiros De Castro (2015) deals with this issue considering this aspect dominance of the modernization ontology directly from an ethnographic perspective, warning the very anthropologists of the power of this ontological relation: he states: “We have been there as anthropologists, I am afraid. When a shaman shows you a magic arrow extracted from a sick man, a medium gets possessed by a god, a sorcerer laboriously constructs a voodoo doll, we only see one thing: Society (belief, power, fetishism). In other words, we only see ourselves.” (Viveiros De Castro, 2015:14).

²⁴ To this regard, De la Cadena reacts against what she labels as “the ontological occupation and destruction of worlds affected by the globalization project” (De la Cadena in Escobar, 2017:244).

(westerners) see it is imposed on other people and on their worldviews. He also observes how this world appears to be on the brink of its ending, claiming that it is not a coincidence that ontology is gaining more and more attention exactly in this precise historical moment. In his words:

“Ontology came to the fore precisely at the moment the ontological foundations of our civilisation — and the unquestioned cultural supremacy of the peoples who founded it — are seen as starting to crumble. This led, among other things, to a growing tendency (not without its fierce enemies, it might be said) to accept the plural inflection of the word and the thing, either ‘internally’ (the profession of a pluralistic ontology) or ‘externally’ (the idea of an ontological pluralism), and even to the ‘post-plural’ awareness of what I would call a performative condition of *ontological anarchy*, to borrow a concept from Peter Lamborn Wilson.” (Viveiros De Castro, 2015:10)

The call for a reaction on – in Law’s terms – the over simplified and binarized portrayal of the world is loud and clear, as it becomes clearer also the way in which the political dimension of ontology entangles with the Turn. Arturo Escobar is surely a key figure in this sense, as he provides a useful example of a theory that can be recalled in relation to the analysis of social ontologies in a way that counters the traditional approach. He (2007:107) talks about *assemblages*: wholes defined by the interactions occurring among each other, expressing the great social complexity that the ontological pluralism asserted by Viveiros De Castro demands. In theorizing this concept, Escobar is beginning to question some of the postulates of social sciences, taking the first step towards the overcoming of the structuralism of the Turn.

Furthermore, Escobar (2011, 2017, and 2018) is also widely regarded as one of the main contributors to the so-called “political ontology”; on this point, one of the central notions that he theorized and deeply examined is that of *pluriverse*. It is defined as a “tool for reimagining and reconstructing local worlds” (Escobar 2018:4), and it is a condition that political ontology directly enhances and pursues. In other words, the pluriverse does not stand in total opposition to what has been defined by Law as One-World World (OWW), as its intention is not that of correcting something that is wrong. On the contrary, it embodies the fostering of the presence of a multiplicity of worlds that are intertwined and interdependent, but also distinct.

Moving on with the analysis, Escobar investigates on the frameworks that characterize the ways in which policies are thought and implemented, especially from an ecological perspective, asserting how the central focus is put on “reducing unsustainability”, rather than promoting a systematic vision

capable of operating a paradigmatic turn throughout the consideration of the coexistence of different ontologies. He states that, from an activist perspective, we may refer to the Zapatista formula “un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos” (a world where many worlds fit), to envision the understanding of reality embodied and expressed in many indigenous revindications. Finally, “territorial struggles (by Afrodescendants, indigenous peoples, peasant, and often times poor urban dwellers) can be seen as ontological struggles; they interrupt the globalizing project of fitting many worlds into one. These struggles are important contributions to ecological and cultural transitions toward the pluriverse. As such, the knowledges they produce might be particularly relevant for the search for post-capitalist, sustainable plural models of life.” (Escobar, 2017:239). Furthermore, these conflicts can be considered as being ontological as much as they are ecological: this because, what has been defined as hegemonic modernization involves in many ways the projects of territorial dispossession and natural resources extraction and exploitation. For this reason the author argues for the need of thinking *from* these spaces of struggle and reiterate the importance that political ontology acquires today: exactly because those very same spaces are occupied by a particular ontology, that of individuals, expert knowledge, markets, arms and technology²⁵ (ibid, 243-248).

Finally, territorial defense goes hand-in-hand with ontological reaffirmation of an identity which, as we will see more clearly later on in the work, has in its ancestral aspect one of its key points. In the case of many Indigenous Peoples’ struggles²⁶, ancestrality is understood as being a very powerful driver for their territorial struggles, as it symbolizes not only the spiritual value of land, but also the extremely intimate relationship that they share with their elders and ancestors. In the light of what just stated, it is possible to argue that what Escobar and Ingold define as relational ontology can be a very useful concept to define this relationship with land. The former (2017) observes how this kind of relation implies an almost absolute continuity of existence among the beings and parts that constitute it; on the other hand, Tim Ingold (2011) builds up by stressing the way in which the territory is inhabited and performed by the indigenous communities.

²⁵ Within this list of state tools Escobar also cites the academy, arguing that it is itself part of the occupying ontology (ibid:251). This reflection might be interesting also in the broader context of the authors and issues that this work is trying to address. A dimension that contributes in the collision of politics and academy is embodied once again by Rostow, who worked for a period as a teacher of economics at the Columbia University and that, consequently, also served as a politician (serving as spokesperson of President Eisenhower as well as other positions).

²⁶ Even if it is important to remember that this is not true for all the cases: there are groups in the Ecuadorian Amazon that do not rely on ancestrality as the primary source for their struggles or to claim their rights.

5. *Sumak Kawsay* – An indigenist approach to the notion

In this chapter, I would like to continue the process of deconstruction of the western modernization model. This will be done throughout an analysis of Buen Vivir according to what has been labeled as the “indigenist” perspective: : that is to say, as a philosophical understanding of life based on the ancestral traditions of Indigenous Peoples and, as such, forming integral part of their cosmovision (Cubillo Guevara, 2017, Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015). For this reason, in this chapter I will refer to the concept mostly in its Kichwa translation: *Sumak Kawsay*.

This said, and in continuation with what has been argued in the previous chapter about ontology, one of the purposes of the notion is to promote a way of intending life that transcends western ideas of development, modernization, ecology and equity. As Altmann (2017:249) argues, it was founded and entangled immediately in the fight against power structures that had in the (post)colonial dimension their most important constitutive element. This discourse is ontological as much as (it has become) territorial and legislative, and it has to be analyzed in a way that begins from the peculiar historical situation that characterized Ecuador in the second half of the 20th Century. Namely, beginning from the ‘1970s, Ecuador experienced an explosion in terms of oil discovery and extraction: this happened especially in the Amazonian region, where the exploitation brought very strong and environmental consequences (see also Acosta 1995, Altmann 2017, Ludlow et. al. 2016, Gudynas 2011). For these reasons, a big wave of protest started to arise, questioning and approach to modernization, criticizing both the involvement of supranational banks and institutions and also the effects that the implemented projects had. It is in this context that, after the stretching of this situation over a couple of decades, in which the indigenous movement gained international attention and became one of the driving forces in the country, that the notion of *Sumak Kawsay* started to come to the fore.

5.1 –Carlos Viteri Gualinga in the building of a concept

According to the firsts indigenous intellectuals that (re)discovered the notion, *Sumak Kawsay* is directly inspired by the Andean cosmology, and it is a concept that can be dated back to many centuries within that tradition²⁷. However, as the Ecuadorian Biblical Association²⁸ reports, *Sumak Kawsay* appears in

²⁷ Around the precise origin of the notion in terms of indigenous cosmology there is still some debate in the academic realm: I will deal with this in the next chapter.

²⁸ Sociedad Bíblica Ecuatoriana.

the country in the written format only beginning from the late 20th Century²⁹, in a Kichwa³⁰ Bible found in the Chimborazo region; in the document, the words “peace” and “shalom” are translated as “sumaj causai” (Ecuadorian Biblical Association in Ludlow et. al., 2016:5). Interestingly, the framing provided by the Ecuadorian Constitution refers exactly to this tradition, using the Kichwa translation of the word, that is to say *Sumak Kawsay*. This has been done because this declination is thought of better translating the meaning that the concept acquired in the indigenous tradition. From a merely linguistic perspective, the work of Zimmerer (2012) helps us in grasping the reasons of this translation: he affirms that the meaning of the term *Kawsay* (which can be encountered spelled in many different ways, one of the most commons in his work is *causay*), has been associated to different semantic fields, which in general share a connotation of sustainability. However, the author explains us how its meaning is relational: it can be used in different contexts and applied to other different concepts with its significance adapting to the circumstance. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze it in relation to the other concept that we are dealing with: *sumak*. In the context of the aforementioned Constitution, *Sumak Kawsay* “embodies the values of social justice, inclusion, and equality” as well as the fact that, being Nature entitled of Rights (we will discuss this later in this chapter), it closely recalls environmentalism (Zimmerer, 2012:602-603).

Moving on, the most relevant work on the term is surely that of an indigenous intellectual and academic from the Ecuadorian Amazon, Carlos Viteri Gualinga, who published a short paper in 2002 called “Indigenous vision of development in the Amazon”. Here, he debates the concept of development in relation to the indigenous realm, pointing out the principal distinctions with the western conception, and defining the *Alli Kawsay* (which he uses as a synonym for *Sumak Kawsay*)³¹, as “an indigenous concept of sustainability and a paradigm alternative to development” (Viteri Gualinga, 2002:2, translation of the author)³². In this short text, the author identifies what he sees as the main essence of the notion:

“However, there is an holistic vision close to what has to be the goal and mission of the whole human effort, which consists in looking for and creating the material and spiritual conditions to

²⁹ For what concerns the analysis of the concept from an historical perspective, Inuca (2017) investigates and establishes its prehistory within the indigenous movement since the 1930s.

³⁰ Kichwa is one of the fourteen ancestral languages in Ecuador and also one of the three official languages for “intercultural relations”, together with Shuar and Spanish.

³¹ Opinion shared also by other scholars who focused on the translation of the term. However, there is still a big ongoing debate around this issue, and among the authors who oppose the theory that sees the two expressions as synonyms we remember Cuestas-Caza (2017) and Guandinango (2013).

³² “El Alli Káusai: Un concepto indígena de sustentabilidad y paradigma alternativo al Desarrollo” – original quotation.

build and keep the “buen vivir”, which can be defined also as “harmonic life”, which in languages such as runa shimi (quichua) is translated as “alli káusai” or “súmac káusai””. (Viteri Gualinga, 2002:2, translation of the author).³³

This understanding goes clearly beyond the mere notion of development (due to its “holistic” character): this means not only overcoming of the western paradigm of that same idea, but also the fact that the notion cannot simply be regarded as an “alternative” to that, but it is more, an all-encompassing way of life. Of the two concepts that he recalls in this work, the *Alli Kawsay*, is recognized by many experts as being older and having deeper roots in the indigenous cosmovision. Guandinango (2013:9) affirms that it is a very common expression in the everyday life among the Kichwa-speaking communities: it is reflected in agricultural, political and socio-cultural activities, as well as in environmental and gastronomic matters. It speaks to ethical and moral behavior such as the *ranti ranti* (reciprocity), passed on from generation to generation and reconfigured according to the different historical events occurring in indigenous’ history³⁴. Thus, despite *Sumak Kawsay* is surely the principal notion expressed and highlighted by Viteri Gualinga, in the context of his contribution, it has to be analyzed with an eye on Guandinango’s *Alli Kawsay*, too, as their performative and linguistic functions are strictly bounded.

The initial focus of Viteri Gualinga’s research concerned exactly the notion of development, in relation to an ethnographic (he is a trained anthropologist) experience in a community closed to where he grew up, in the Sarayaku area. He realized how the hegemonic position of the West in terms of development was forging a paradigm that had the effect of relegating other *others* to positions identified with labels strategically designed on their situation. Moreover, he noticed also how the creators of this narrative tended to see the Amazon as an empty land, highlighting once more the “underdeveloped” position of its inhabitants. Moving on, he further analyzes the western conception of history, perceived as a linear path towards modernization, as well as the concept of poverty. In his idea, in the indigenous realm there is no such a thing as the chronic poverty that comes to existence as a result of the consumerist values that characterize western society. Instead, he identifies the Kichwa notion of *mútsui*, which

³³ Mas existe una visión holística a cerca de lo que debe ser el objetivo o la misión de todo esfuerzo humano, que consiste en buscar y crear las condiciones materiales y espirituales para construir y mantener el ‘buen vivir’, que se define también como ‘vida armónica’, que en idiomas como el runa shimi (quichua) se define como el ‘alli káusai’ o ‘súmac káusai’. – original quotation.

³⁴ “El *Alli Kawsay* es una expresión *kichwa* frecuente en la cotidianidad a nivel lingüístico, histórico, espiritual y vivencial, reflejadas en actividades agrícolas, políticas, culturales, sociales, socioambientales y alimenticias de las comunidades indígenas; que, transmite y refleja comportamientos éticos y morales como el *ranti ranti* (reciprocidad) heredados de generación en generación y reconfigurados de acuerdo a los procesos históricos y sociales vividos durante nuestra historia.” – original quotation.

corresponds to the so-called circumstantial poverty, which, for example, finds its manifestation in the lack of primordial and agricultural products, in the temporary absence of biodiversity from an agricultural perspective. This particular perception of the notion is another proof of the strong communion existing between mankind and nature in the indigenous realm, as the poverty of the former is equally mirrored in the poverty of the latter. The author then poses a question: how do Kichwa people overcome the condition of *mútsui*? He answers shortly after, remarking how are the “solidarity and reciprocity that characterize the economy and the culture of indigenous society” that constitute the best answers to the *mútsui* (Viteri Gualinga, 2002:3, translation of the author)³⁵, highlighting once more the strong communitarian feeling that characterizes this conception of society. The notion of *mútsui* is accompanied by others of equal importance, and it is important to analyze them in their interrelation in order to obtain a complete idea of the *sumak kawsay*. To this regard, Philipp Altmann’s work (2017) is to be considered central, as he provides a rather accurate investigation of the indigenous ideas that form the notion. One of the passages of the article refers to the analysis of a document (for another in-depth analysis, see Guevara, 2017) published by the community of Sarayaku as a press release in 2003 (one year later the one by Viteri Gualinga) in which the Kichwa mythology is described, and with it, also the relationship with the land and with the gods that these communities recognize. Interestingly, the *sumak kawsay* is also entangled in this discourse: namely, the cosmological concepts presented function, according to the authors, as premises of the notion, which does not play itself a principal role (yet), as it is still conceived as a “sum” of many parts. Going back to Altmann, I believe that the most relevant concepts that he highlights are the ones connected to nature, as they stand in perfect ontological continuity with what has been argued in the previous chapter, and represent the central aspects of the notion that we are unpacking here. Firstly, *Mushuk Allpa* can be defined as “land in constant renovation”, and it is a concept that is related to the defense, care and nurture of the land. The behavior that mankind should have in approaching nature responds to rules set by *Amazanga* and *Nunguli*, the two main divinities, who remark how important it is to treat the forest as equal, and take from it only what is really needed for the survival of the community (Sarayaku in Altmann, 2017:755). This emphasis on living in harmony with nature takes shape under the concept of *Sumak Allpa*: this time is Viteri Gualinga that clarifies the relationship that this notion enacts with the environment:

³⁵ “La solidaridad y la reciprocidad que caracteriza la economía y la cultura de la sociedad indígena resulta la mejor respuesta al Mútsui” – original quotation

“The cyclic rotation of our growings and the permanent mobility of the human settlement allow a constant renovation and recreation of the soils, of the territory and of its lifes. This search for the *sumak allpa* implies a deep communion of man with his environment, norming its use and administration, avoiding like this any alteration like the contamination or looting, in the framework of an equilibrium and a permanent dialogue between *runa*³⁶ and the spiritual dimension of nature. All this represents the essence of the *sumac causai* or harmonious life, based on the egalitarian, solidary and reciprocal character of the society. There is no *sumac causai* without *sumac allpa*. (Viteri Gualinga in Altmann, 2017:755-756).

As it has been shown, it is almost impossible to distinguish one specific notion without making reference to the others: this is the main conceptual feature of *sumak kawsay*, it embodies and enacts itself the process of coming together, of spiritual continuity.

5.2 – Rights of Nature and the Biocentric Turn

As it has been shown in the previous section, one of the key aspects that characterize and define the notion of *Sumak Kawsay* is the relationship with nature, an understanding that comes from the heart of indigenous ontologies and cosmologies. This dimension has been stressed and analyzed under many different perspectives in this work, and in this subsection we are going to deal with another declination of the effects that the aforementioned indigenous vision of nature has. It has been shortly remarked in the previous chapter how already from times that preceded the arrival of the *rostowian* doctrine, embodied in the modernization theory³⁷, nature was relegated to a background role, with the task of providing resources, energy and capital to mankind. To this regard, in highlighting some of the reactions against this perception of the environment, Gudynas (2009:37-41) argues that the new conceptions of the natural ecosystem entail a perspective of fragmentation, control and manipulation of nature. Therefore, this approach might become extremely convenient for those who hope to gain access to economic resources: in the ‘80s, a widespread idea in Latin America was that it was possible to implement successful projects of environmental management *throughout* the perspective of the market.

³⁶ “Runa” is the Kichwa term for “human being”. It may at times be encountered as “Runa simi”, in reference to human language.

³⁷ The legacy of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer is fundamental at this juncture in order to understand the incredible faith that industrialization gained among the population and the scientific community at the time. This surely had a particularly strong impact also in the future policy-implementation and understanding of what was defined “progress”.

In this light, the problem would become how to treat and organize nature so that it could be governed by this tool in the best possible way. It is precisely in this context that the concept of “natural capital” takes shape: here, conservation of the ecosystem and of the biodiversity is pursued, but it is done according to parameters that respond to values such as profitability and payoff. In other words, what is conserved and “protected” is especially what is thought to be useful or capable of producing potential benefits.

As we can see, the structural construction of the model is the same, since an anthropocentric perspective is still dominantly involved: however, already from the ‘80s we begin to encounter currents of thought that started to question this approach, and that will play a central role in the re-conceptualization of the legal skeleton of the country at the time of the drawing up of the new Constitution (2008). Among those, surely the work of Arne Naess acquires great relevance: he is considered to be the theorist of the so-called *deep ecology*, an idea that challenges the aforementioned conception and that he defines according to eight points. I will shortly list the most important ones³⁸:

- The well-being of nonhuman life on Earth has value in itself. This value is independent of any instrumental usefulness for limited human purposes.
- Richness and diversity in life forms contribute to this value and is a further value in itself.
- Humans have no right to interfere destructively with nonhuman life except for purposes of satisfying vital needs.
- Present policies must therefore be changed.

(Naess, 1984:266)

Naess’ theory is really interesting within the turn that we are portraying, not only because it positions as a rupture against the previously analyzed stands, but also due to the effects that it will have and the legacy that will acquire. The turn we are hinting at is (once again) a conceptual and paradigmatic one: we move from the anthropocentrism to the so-called *biocentrism*. In legal-theoretical terms, this means a turn from the view that sees mankind entitling nature of specific legal rights and thus, automatically also of an essence, a life, (as if, without mankind, nature would not be able to carry on in performing its functions and cycles) to the idea of rights inherently possessed by nature. This turn became reality in

³⁸ In this short work, Naess reaffirms the key values of deep ecology and opposes them to the critic received by R. A. Watson (1983). However, for a more complete understanding of the deep ecology notion, I suggest to have a look at the edition of the journal “The Trumpeter” vol.3, n.4, Fall ’86, which also contains an brief article by Naess and Sessions, and that analyzes the debate around the so-called *ecosophy* and the idea of “intrinsic values”.

the Constitution that Ecuador wrote in 2008, under the presidency of Rafael Correa, in which for the first time in history; Nature³⁹ is recognized as possessor of its own rights. Namely, Chapter 7 of the document is dedicated to the “Rights of Nature” and already in art.71 it is possible to observe a remarkable detail: the text refers to nature as *Pachamama*, indigenous word which could be translated with “Mother Earth”. As Gudynas (2010:52) underlines, this is not a simple nuance of the term, as terms or concepts such as “environment” or “nature” are of clearly western conception. Therefore, bridging and putting on the same degree these terms means on a theoretical level also to establish a correspondence and opening space for other perceptions and understandings of these notions. Moving on, the subsequent article is really explicit, and talks about another fundamental right attributed to nature: that of restoration. To this regard, art.72 states:

“Nature has the right to be restored. This restoration shall be apart from the obligation of the State and natural persons or legal entities to compensate individuals and communities that depend on affected natural systems.

In those cases of severe or permanent environmental impact, including those caused by the exploitation of nonrenewable natural resources, the State shall establish the most effective mechanisms to achieve the restoration and shall adopt adequate measures to eliminate or mitigate harmful environmental consequences.” (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008: art.72).

The significant change in this situation concerns the use of the terms: we are not talking about *reparation* anymore, but of *restoration*. This word has a stronger conceptual meaning, which alters the essence of the action of the State, which remains the one who has to compensate the damage. If before the State could indemnify the harm just by paying back money to the affected community, now this action has to include the actual remuneration in terms of compensation directly to the natural environment. In other words, it is not a human being who gets repaid because the damages inflicted to nature indirectly affect also its lifestyle, but nature that gets back what was taken from her⁴⁰. This point is perfectly explained and summarized once again by Gudynas (2009:38), who writes that “when we affirm that Nature holds its own rights, independent from human assessment, [...] it moves from being

³⁹ This time the capital letter is needed, as it moves from the position of object to that of subject-carrier of rights.

⁴⁰ I use the feminine pronoun to talk about Nature in this passage of the sentence as, moving in this dimension of understanding; I believe it is more appropriate to talk about Pachamama, which, in Spanish, is a feminine word.

object of rights granted by human beings to be herself subject of rights, and, therefore, we posit that she has intrinsic values⁴¹”.

Another important passage in the chapter dedicated to the Rights of Nature concerns an hint that art.74 gives us in relation to the “good living”⁴². In particular, the first paragraph of the article goes like this:

“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.”
(Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008: art.74)

Therefore, from the phrasing it is possible to understand that Buen Vivir remains conceived as the ultimate goal that any sort of development process might seek. In this sense, nature plays a pivotal role in defining the notion of *Sumak Kawsay* as well, allowing, throughout its qualities, people to get closer to the concept. Therefore, someone might argue, the anthropocentric perspective has not totally disappeared, as it is encouraged the enjoyment of the beneficial features and of nature. Nevertheless, the way in which the relationship between *Sumak Kawsay* and nature is portrayed, and considering the specific article in the broader context of chapter 7, it can be grasped how the biocentric turn is still central in the discourse.

In the light of what analyzed above, it is possible to say that – at least to a certain extent – the Constitution of Ecuador embodies elements of the biocentric turn, distancing from the anthropocentric characters of the modernization theory model. To this regard, this turn builds on the postulates provided by the ontological one, drawing from it and deepening the understanding of the role, position and essence of nature. It does so by bestowing the elements that allow the translation of the concept on the legislative sphere, making one fundamental step towards the empirical application. Concluding, Cubillo-Guevara (2016:50) highlights what can be considered as another central aspect of the biocentric turn: she states how it enhances and advocates for the ecologic, aesthetic, socio-cultural and religious dimensions of nature, moving away from the economical one. Thus, it is in its pluralistic conception that it is possible to overcome this idea; the same plurality that forms the core structural element of the biocentric turn.

⁴¹ The issue of “intrinsic values” is something that has been object of a large debate, around which I do not have the time to focus here. In short, some critics argue that, as last resort, it is always mankind that makes the assessments and that therefore it is impossible to radically move from the anthropocentric position (see Gudynas, 2009, 2010, Gillroy, 2002). This very same concept has also been defined with the term “immanent” (see Larrea Killinger, Martínez Mauri, 2012:268, Ramírez Gallegos, 2010:24).

⁴² The official version of the Constitution, written in Spanish, uses the term “Buen Vivir”

5.3 – GDP versus GNH

A recurrent concept that came out in this work, first as in contrast and opposition with the principles enhanced by modernization and then as a central feature in the conceptualization of the *Sumak Kawsay* is pluralism. It stands in natural dichotomy with the universalism of the former notion, and it fosters a different structural configuration for the perception of societies: advocating for the evaluation and assessment of the different facets of the whole, it promotes a holistic model that defines every aspect of the community. Likewise, the *well being* enhanced by Buen Vivir is conceived as an entity composed by many different sets, which aim at analyzing and considering the wholeness of life, intervening in all its parts. This is one of the reasons for which the modernization theory, which speaks to a hierarchical model that sees in economic growth the central goal to be achieved, cannot constitute a viable and sustainable path in itself, but it needs to be re-thought both in relation to the many existing realities, as well as to the multitude of perspectives from which each and every reality can be analyzed from. Along this line of thought, it has been demonstrated already (chapter 3), how the rationalization of thought forms one of the most important building blocks of the aforementioned theory. To this regard, the way in which a given society keeps track of its development towards a given goal is also of extreme relevance, as it implicitly gives us the tools to understand the core values along which it moves. In other words, the analysis and the process of deconstruction of the principal indicators used by a country to evaluate its growth process enlightens on the reasons behind the implementation of specific policies, and it provides some hints on the theoretical lines that push the country towards a particular strategy.

Concerning what stated above, it is possible to claim that, in parallel with the hegemonic role occupied by the western ontology on a global level, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the most relevant indicator that is used internationally to measure the status of a country. Pillay (2018:149-150) argues that the premises from which this indicator (which he defines as the “*talisman of the growth paradigm*”) grew, have to be individuated in the industrial capitalism and its treadmills of production and consumption. Moreover, he adds that the basic assumption of this paradigm is that it defends the thesis according to which continuous economic growth has an end in itself. However, it is undeniable how, despite this exponential growth in the production of goods has brought a great amount of material wealth to a lot of people, it has also had disastrous economical, social and environmental counter-effects. At this juncture, it is clear how fundamental aspects of society are left out by this paradigm: De

Graaf and Musikanski (2011), taking the United States as a case study, underline that, despite the average GDP has doubled in the last 30 years, other factors such as the greenhouse gas emissions, the rates of diabetes or the number of threatened species have also increased a lot. Simultaneously, the United States registered the highest income gap in the whole world, with the one percent of the population benefitting from almost all the income gained from the GDP growth (de Graaf, Musikanski, 2011:57). In the light of what stated, it appears clearly the need of a shift of focus, moving more towards policies that aim at re-considering the modernization paradigm also from this perspective. In confirmation of this, one of the criteria of measurement that the World Bank uses is called “adjusted net savings”: they account exactly for the elements that we were recalling above, and it is estimated that they have decreased of about 25% since the late ‘90s (ibid, 58). These data confirm what argued at the very beginning of this section, therefore the need for indicators to have a more pluralistic orientation⁴³. More precisely, the need is to consider and put on the same level indicators that show the different aspects of society. Same for what concerned with the anthropocentrism – biocentrism dichotomy, also in the case of GDP, we are not arguing for a total cancellation of this indicator: on the contrary, what is important is to avoid the creation of a hierarchy of values. That is to say, re-discussing and question the undisputed supremacy of a single approach.

This change of perspective is also pursued by Buen Vivir, who engages with aspects of life that are conceptually detached from the mere capitalistic and materialistic understandings of growth. As we have seen in the previous sections, protection of nature, life in community and *well-being* can be highlighted as the core values of the notion. Interestingly, another doctrine, which sparked far away from Ecuador and Latin America, stresses on very similar dimensions of development: it is the so-called Gross National Happiness (GNH), and it comes from Bhutan. Despite being an idea which was already circulating since the mid-70s in the country⁴⁴, it was only in the national Constitution of 2008 that Bhutan officially addressed this concept. In the document, article 9, paragraph 2 states that:

“The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.” (Constitution of Bhutan, 2008, art.9 par. 2).

⁴³ Reasserting this point, the authors write: “the fundamental weakness of GDP is that it ignores interconnections. It only covers a single metric: economic growth” (ibid:59).

⁴⁴ More specifically, it was the “the fourth king of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, in 1974, realizing the mismatch in the trajectory of growth-oriented market economics as a developmental philosophy, formulated the concept of GNH” (Tobgay et. al., 2011:294).

Once again, this paradigmatic switch is, from a conceptual perspective, similar to the Ecuadorian one both for what concerns the relevance that the concept of Buen Vivir acquired and also for the aforementioned biocentric turn. Namely, we can notice some commonalities in the four pillars⁴⁵ on which GNH is built upon; these are:

- sustainable and socioeconomic development (economic self-reliance);
- preservation and promotion of cultural heritage;
- preservation and sustainable use of the environment;
- good governance

(see Ruttenberg, 2013 and Guillén, 2016)

This idea acquired a great deal of international attention also because it recalls closely the UN SDGs, the so-called Sustainable Development Goals⁴⁶. Tobgay helps us in portraying it in a clearer way, as he defines them as a form of development that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and that encompass social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The values generated from these important concepts can be used for active promotion of health and pursuit of happiness. Moreover, environmental preservation is one of the foundations of GNH, and in Bhutan, the Constitution mandates that a minimum of 60% of land area must have forest coverage (Tobgay et. al 2011:297). Nevertheless, despite what just stated, already from its conceptualization it is possible to portray and conceive GNH as a concept whose legislative and analytical characters acquire a dominant position. In this sense, someone could argue, it could be seen as a transposition of the means expressed in the notion of Buen Vivir on a systemic policy-relevant dimension. However, even in this case, there would still be some important differences, the most evident of which would be the matrix: GNH (and also GDP) remains a concept with a clear western print, which shares only some elements with the ontological turn (and with political ontology) and almost none with the indigenous realm⁴⁷. Furthermore, pillar n°4 emphasizes how the notion was

⁴⁵ Majumdar, Chirodip and Gauam Gupta (2015) distinguish nine different domains: wellbeing, cultural diversity, education, health, time use and balance, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and living standards (2015:51). Guillén (2016) seems to solve the controversy: he states that there are four main domains that are divided in nine subcategories.

⁴⁶ The SDGs are a list of 17 goals enhanced by the United Nations, which will have to be reached within 2030, as a strategy to achieve a “better and more sustainable future for all” (retrieved from the UN SDG official website, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> on 1/3/2020).

⁴⁷ In the case of Bhutan, concerns have been raised by the academic community about the treatment that the central government has towards religious and ethnic minorities, in terms of human rights violations. These controversies highlight a certain degree of paradoxical double-standard, that has very few to do with the pluralism that GNH proclaims and aims at promoting. More specifically, the government is simultaneously:

thought and built already as a tool to intervene also on the political dimension: this is something that should not be underestimated since, as we will see better later on in the work, political implications could at times alter the initial purposes or means on which a concept was built. At the same time, however, the GNH indicators somehow break away from the rationality of the GDP, and not only because “happiness” is not something that you can either calculate or measure mathematically (even if this is as well an ongoing study project). To understand this, we need to consider the structure of the indicators, which are themselves composed of different domains, as well as the broader context in which they are implemented. Majumdar, Chirodip and Gauam Gupta (2015:51), for instance, considered GNH as a methodology that overcomes the single-question approach about happiness, on which the system will be organized. Namely, on the one hand the pluralistic character in the structure of the notion and, on the other, the (consequential) multidimensional approach to the notion of happiness, allow these indicators to be very precise and context oriented. In other words, these features make the approach taken by GNH oriented and constructed considering the local meaning of “happiness”.

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- seeking to uphold the economic and social rights of the nation to facilitate the spiritual, emotional, and cultural well-being of society, while
 - continuing to restrict the rights of minority populations to maintain a uniform national identity for this pursuit of happiness.

The Bhutanese government thus presents a paradox in human rights realization, developing policies to fulfill the right to health through the health system’s GNH focus while undermining this rights-based effort through violations of cross-cutting human rights principles for non-discrimination and equality, participation, and accountability (Meier, Chakrabarti, 2016:196).

6. Buen Vivir – Analysis on the postmodern declination of the notion

In the previous chapter, the notion of Buen Vivir has been dealt from what has been characterized as the so called indigenist perspective. Therefore, it has been dealt beginning from its conceptualization, with reference to the Kichwa language and indigenous tradition, moving then on some of the most relevant theoretical aspects that characterize it. Namely, we moved from the relationship with nature – and the biocentric turn – to its conception of the idea of happiness, with a specific focus on how it opposes the rationalization of some of the western indicators (specifically GDP). To do so, another concept has been brought into play, that of Gross National Happiness: in doing so, we are already moving towards a field that concerns more closely the empirical implementation of the notion, as this idea comes in close contact with an hypothetical transposition of concepts belonging to Buen Vivir into the legislative, juridical, identitary, and political spheres. Thus, I have decided to leave this analysis as the last part of the chapter, exactly because I believe that it can bridge very well with what we are going to deal with in this section.

In this part, the main focus here will be what has been described as the postmodern perspective on the notion, as it entangles the implications that *Sumak Kawsay* acquires after being shaped by concepts that do not strictly come from the indigenous realm (Cubillo Guevara, 2017, Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015), and that refer to the aforementioned categories. Hence, the political connotations of the notion of Buen Vivir, that will be analyzed together with a deeper inspection on the Ecuadorian legal context. Beginning from the former aspect, we will finally move towards issues that recall more closely land-rights and development from an indigenous perspective. At the same time, this will also bring to light some extremely interesting contradictions that concern the notion. In this sense, the concept of indigeneity will acquire great meaning: it will be shortly concerned in the debate that has created (and that still stimulates), and then it will be dealt with a special focus on Ecuador. Finally, merging indigenous identity and land rights together, the notion of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) will be debated, attempting in highlighting its relational aspects as well as outlining the dimension that it acquires in the very specific Ecuadorian legal scenario.

6.1 – Buen Vivir in the Ecuadorian Law: towards a plurinational state

As we have recalled in the previous chapter, the fact that the concept of Buen Vivir – inspired by the indigenous tradition – appeared officially for the first time in the Constitution of 2008, assuming a central role, was observed with interest by the international community, and was received with hope by

the indigenous groups. Moreover, the fact that Bolivia emulated Ecuador one year later by mentioning the *Suma Qamaña*⁴⁸ notion in theirs, was also regarded positively, as it somehow embodied the desired turn towards a different model of society. However, the wide public to which these notions were exposed also opened the field to many different interpretations, depending on the context and the actors that were performing and enacting them. In the following section, Buen Vivir will be dealt with specific reference to the Ecuadorian law.

The Ecuadorian Constitution recalls openly “Buen Vivir” in chapter 2, called “Rights of Buen Vivir”. In particular, art.14 states:

“The right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees sustainability and the good way of living (*sumak kawsay*), is recognized.

Environmental conservation, the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity and the integrity of the country's genetic assets, the prevention of environmental damage, and the recovery of degraded natural spaces are declared matters of public interest.” (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, art.14)

This passage refers to what is probably the widest accepted meaning of the concept: the relationship of harmony between mankind and nature (*Pachamama*). We have already dealt with the biocentric turn, which this article recalls once more, and it is now time to make one more step, even if we still remain within the indigenous realm. Namely, another consequence of the recognition of concepts pertaining to the Indigenous Peoples reality corresponds to the implicit and automatic respect for their values and cosmology. Therefore, at the legal and political level, this means bringing them inside the sociopolitical reality of the country in a way that clearly overcomes any (past) attempt of forced assimilation or even of ethnocide. Given what has been argued in the previous sections and given the ontological, cosmological, socio-cultural and political differences that Indigenous Peoples share with the rest of ethnicities that compose the country's population, this point carries many meaningful implications. The most significant one is surely the turn towards a more marked plurinationalism, of which it is possible to find many evidences in the Constitution: to this regard, articles 57 to 60 make explicit reference to all the ethnic minorities in the country⁴⁹:

⁴⁸ Which, in aymara language, means something like “living a full life, in harmony with Mother Nature”.

⁴⁹ Art. 57 in particular contains a list of twenty points that explain in detail all the collective rights granted to the Indigenous nationalities in the country. For what concerns art. 58 and 59, they are addressed specifically to afroecuatorians and montubios.

“Ancestral, indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and coastal back-country (montubios) peoples can establish territorial districts for the preservation of their culture. The law shall regulate their establishment. Communities (comunidades) that have collective land ownership are recognized as an ancestral form of territorial organization.” (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008: art.60).

Already from this passage, it is possible to notice the strict connection that exists between multi-ethnic (plurinational) recognition, and issues regarding collective land rights, as well as ancestry. Thus, the difficulty of dealing with one sphere without making reference to the other is clear and undeniable. At the same time, respecting, acknowledging and remarking the territorial peculiarities of ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples is both the first step and a condition *sine qua non* towards the recognition of the cultural differences (co)existing within the country. Namely, it is not a coincidence that one of the main functions that the academics attribute to Buen Vivir is the role that the concept plays in stimulating the dialogue between different cultures. This results in the empowerment of an intercultural organization of the country, which has once again its political reaffirmation in the concept of plurinationalism. (Cuestas-Caza, 2017:364).

In the light of what just stated, and always in reference to the territorial issues involving many national and international players, the role of Buen Vivir emerges also as an epistemic anti-colonial option, that is to say, the attempt to rethink society, nation, state, and democracy on other bases than Western ones. The plurinational state, surely an important part of the political project of indigenous movements since decades before its official implementation, breaks with the postcolonial logic of power of the Latin American countries, leaving behind the mechanics of integration and assimilation as equal individual citizens and creating spaces for an understanding of a multiple citizenship (Altman, 2017:753). On the same wavelength is Schavelzon (2015:185), who insists on a similar point: he argues that a notion such as Buen Vivir can only acquire meaning within a plurinational state. This because it functions as a sort of contract embodying both the radical alterities in the country as well as its intercultural proposals; in this context, the final goal is that of opening up society to the recognition and dialogue among the differences inherent to itself. Finally, it is only from the perspective of a plurinational state and an intercultural society that it is possible to build a different form of relations within society.

6.2 – Politicizing Buen Vivir

The theoretical construction at the academic level of the concept of Buen Vivir in a time of intense indigenous activity at a political level⁵⁰ allowed it to gain more and more attention. It is in this particular moment that we can observe how the concept is shaped and adapted to the purposes of the ones that own and use it. This issue is facilitated by the fact that, as I was recalling previously in the chapter, it is hard to find a clear and universal definition even within the indigenous tradition. Using Bretón's words, we witness "the difficulty of precisely defining what does Buen Vivir refer to, as it depends on the point of view from which it is looked at, being it the one of government or the opposition" (Bretón, 2013:73, translation of the author⁵¹). As we recalled already, it is a relational and pluralistic notion, hence hard to systematically deconstruct.

To this regard, one of the firsts organizations to use the concept for political means was the CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador)⁵². The expert Philipp Altman (2017:752) helps us in going through the main stages of a process that may be described of appropriation and reconfiguration of the notion from the organization, which registered one of its central moment in the presentation of Buen Vivir as a pivotal notion in their political project, proposed to the Constituent Assembly in 2007⁵³. This did not happen immediately: firstly, the narrative of the CONAIE was mainly articulated around a harsh criticism towards the Ecuadorian political establishment, accusing it of being "segregationist and antidemocratic" (ibid.). Namely, in 1994, at a time in which it surely was the biggest and most powerful indigenous organization in the country, the CONAIE "published its main demands in a "political project." This project was revised in 1997, 2001, 2007, and 2013; however, the content relevant here was left basically intact. The text provides a clear definition of what the indigenous movement fights against: "The Uninational Bourgeois State, hegemonic in his juridical-political and economic nature, is exclusive, antidemocratic, repressive and pro-imperialist" (CONAIE 1994, 6). This state is characterized by "heavy problems of underdevelopment, dependency and political-administrative corruption" (CONAIE 1994, 1) that are an integral part of its structure from the origins. [...] The indigenous movement does not stop at the level of the state understood as "exclusive, uninational, monocultural nation-state with colonial content" (CONAIE 2013, 31). It also

⁵⁰ In this scenario, it is important to remember that the indigenous movement participated in the political electoral campaign as well as in the (short) government of President Lucio Gutiérrez, in charge from 2002 to 2003.

⁵¹ "la dificultad de definir con precisión a qué se refiere el Buen Vivir según se ubique el punto de mira desde posiciones de gobierno o de oposición" – original quotation.

⁵² Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador in Spanish

⁵³ However, we can notice clear references to Buen Vivir already in the CONAIE 1997 political plan, even if it is never explicitly mentioned (Cortez, 2011).

conceptualizes capitalism as “the economic model that de-humanizes and destroys the equilibrium society-nature” (CONAIE 2013, 31). Both are based on the systematic exclusion of the vast majority of the population to the benefit of a small group.” (ibid.). Thus, despite Buen Vivir being thought of belonging to the spiritual and mythological aspect of indigenous tradition, its aspects are quickly adapted by the CONAIE and by other institutions for other means. In addition to this, we could add that it is arguably also the transition from theoretical idea to empirical fact that plays a vital role in the aftermath of the concept. Interesting to this regard is the example brought by Maldonado, that recalls one of the first occasions in which we find Buen Vivir introduced within the realm of the developmental policies by the CODENPE (National Development Council of the Nationalities and Populations of Ecuador)⁵⁴, a former state agency for development controlled by indigenous organizations and closely tied to the CONAIE. In this circumstance, it is defined as objective of their efforts:

[...] the process that allows to reach the individual, familiar and collective wellbeing, the same that includes aspects of: social, political, cultural, economic and natural integrity. It carries sustainability as a productive relation in accordance with the preservation of a permanent process of pursuit of personal, communitarian, familiar and collective buen vivir or wellbeing.” (Maldonado (2006: 114) in Altman, 2013:292, translation of the author)⁵⁵.

Interestingly, even if it is managed by indigenous actors, the concept here is recalled already as a western matrix: it is designed to work in – using Escobar’s words – post-development, post-neoliberal and de-colonial (Escobar, 2010) – context, reaffirming the collaboration between the government and other institutions, and in full accordance with the CONAIE project portrayed above. Therefore, we see clearly how this politicization of the concept also implies shaping its meaning according to the political goals that in our case the organization had, and to the political plan than they wished to accomplish. At this juncture, it might be interesting to look at the way Buen Vivir was re-conceptualized beginning from 2009-2010⁵⁶, that is to say after the Correa government passed the Mining and Water Act (on

⁵⁴ Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador, in Spanish

⁵⁵ “[...] el proceso que posibilita alcanzar el bienestar individual, familiar y colectivo, el mismo que incluye los aspectos de: integralidad de lo social, político, cultural, económico y del entorno natural. Involucra la sustentabilidad en cuanto a una relación productiva acorde con la preservación de un proceso permanente de búsqueda del buen vivir o bienestar personal, familiar, comunitario y colectivo” – original quotation

⁵⁶ It is important to remember that, prior to that, in late 2008, Alberto Acosta and Monica Chuji, among the fiercest supporters and defenders of Buen Vivir, left the government. At the same time, Marlon Santi – one of the authors of the Sarayaku Manifesto in 2003, which had references to Buen Vivir in relation to the refusal of mining operations – was elected president of the CONAIE.

which we will debate later in the chapter), which was phrased by the CONAIE as an explicit attack to themselves⁵⁷ and to Buen Vivir (Altmann, 2013:294). We come therefore once more to the importance of land and territoriality in addressing the relationships between the indigenous representations and the government in the country. From the consequential rupture between the CONAIE and Correa, we automatically obtain two different interpretations of the notion, in the attempt from both actors to appropriate it. Thus, on the one hand, the indigenous perspective, enhanced by the CONAIE, insists in a pragmatic approach to the concept, pointing out its most relevant points in order to achieve an implementation at the territorial level. On the other hand, the government and the intellectuals outside the indigenous sphere, tried to bring the discussion of the concept to a more abstract level, especially underlining the importance of the harmony between human beings and nature and, from this, trying to link Buen Vivir with philosophies belonging to other traditions (it is at this juncture that the concept of *eudemonia* was recalled most frequently by academics collaborating with the government⁵⁸). Glimpses of what just stated can be found in the official governmental documents issued by the SENPLADES (National Secretary for Planning Development), initially called “National Developmental Plan” and, afterwards renamed “National Plan for the Buen Vivir”. There is more: once again in these documents, we encounter another reading of Buen Vivir, which reveals the extent to which the meaning of the concept can change depending on the actors using it. One of the most extreme examples in this sense is represented by the proposals made by Ramírez Gallegos (2010:69-72), who, in one of his works, talks about “socialism of Sumak Kawsay, or republican bio-socialism”. Here, he suggests how in order to achieve this specific political doctrine, which he claims as being the outcome of the natural political trajectory of *Sumak Kawsay*, an initial exploitation (which he defines “responsible extraction”) of natural resources is necessary. He justifies his claims by explaining how this initial phase is unavoidable, and how the redistribution of the incomes that such an activity would generate⁵⁹ would allow the country to set the basis for a new energetic development. Hence, this would facilitate a diversification strategy and a contemporary substitution of the exportations whose consequences would

⁵⁷ It is of common agreement the fact that President Correa tried in many ways to bypass the role of the CONAIE during his presidency (see, for instance, Becker, 2013)

⁵⁸ The notion has been analyzed especially by Aristotle, but also Epicure made reference to it and it the association is due to the fact that also this notion emphasizes the “good living/living well”. Furthermore, being *eudemonia* a notion that belongs to the ancient Greeks, there are also authors that claim that it could have had a direct influence in the conceptualization of Buen Vivir itself. Alonso Gonzalez (2015) for instance, argues that the colonial heritage of the missionaries and of the religious orders might have determined, throughout its hybridization, the outcome of the meaning that Buen Vivir acquires nowadays.

⁵⁹ All the interpretations of Buen Vivir operated by so-called “socialist” intellectuals or academics had in the concept of “redistribution” one of their pivotal points.

set free Ecuador from the burden of extractivism. Quoting Bretón (2016), “throughout an incredible dialectic twirl, extractivism becomes a conjectural necessity, whose transitory intensification would also mean its same overcoming and, together with it, the opportunity of reaching the desired Buen Vivir” (Bretón, 2016:33, translation of the author⁶⁰).

This understanding of the notion does not only contradict one of the foundational points of *Sumak Kawsay*, that is to say its relationship with nature, but echoes a familiar narrative that we already analyzed in the firsts chapters of this work. In other words, the recalling to the very same modernization theory from which, according to many, Buen Vivir is trying to escape, are very clear. Finally, Ramírez is reaffirming step-by-step the main stages indicated by Rostow: the “preconditions to the take-off”, which in Ecuador would be embodied in the “responsible extraction” of natural resources, will in the end lead to the so-called “maturity”.

These different interpretations of Buen Vivir inevitably end up loosening the strength of the concept, creating a process that opens up to many potential outcomes, each en every one of which could lead to different conceptions of the notion. Especially due to the great resonance acquired by Buen Vivir, one possibility could concern closely the identitary feeling of belonging among the population: in this case, it would become something that has been defined by Caria and Domínguez as “mobilizing utopia”. This understanding of the notion is portrayed as something somehow positive by the authors, which argue that it provides social cohesion and a collective identity with which almost anyone can identify, as it reflects the aspirations of various groups (Caria, Domínguez, 2016:27). This interpretation goes very well along with the model that Bretón was criticizing in the first part of this section, as Buen Vivir here is turned into its potentially most abstract version. In this sense, one could argue that this understanding is the less “dangerous” for the Ecuadorian government, as its meaning turns to be extremely flexible, hence weak. Moreover, in this way Buen Vivir sees itself stripped out of its elements pertaining to the indigenous tradition, losing any tie with pluralism and plurinationalism; and therefore, assuming traits that could remind of some forms of universalism. Finally, the potential of Buen Vivir is reduced to “the lemma of an ideological discourse, a signifier with no meaning of its own, that is used to construct and perform an identity, it has what Žižek would call a performative function”. (Caria, Domínguez, 2016:28).

Another potential turn that we could encounter is very much related to the previous one, and has to do

⁶⁰ “En una audaz pirueta dialéctica, pues, el extractivismo deviene en una necesidad coyuntural de cuya intensificación transitoria dependerá su superación y, con ella, la posibilidad de alcanzar el anhelado Buen Vivir de la vida plena maximizadora de bienes relacionales.” – original quotation

with a concept that is familiar, as it comes up often, when we deal with Indigenous Peoples: essentialism. In trying to find a way to react against the essentialism that the neo-colonial Latin American context represents, it is a common problem that of idealizing the counterpart in this opposition. Merging this tendency with the ideological dimension that Buen Vivir acquired means obtaining a sort of counter-essentialism that has its roots in some of the stereotyping figures that have traditionally been associated to Indigenous Peoples (Noble Savage, Bloodthirsty Savage etc, just to mention some especially related to the Native American legacy). Hints of what just stated is provided by Atawallpa Oviedo, who opposes the postmodern declination of Buen Vivir to a traditional “original” one. This latter notion is contextualized within the “millennial Andean tradition”, giving to all the discourse a taste of exoticism which, someone could argue, highly contributes to its detachment to any sort of empirical reality (*Sumak Kawsay* included), concurring finally in the weakening of its meaning and intrinsic power. In Oviedo’s words:

“The 21st socialist postmodern Buen Vivir is only a variation of the Aristotelian Buen Vivir, which does not share almost anything with the Andean Sumak Kawsay. (...) The Buen Vivir present in the Political Constitution of Ecuador and the Vivir Bien present in the Political Constitution of Bolivia, it is a mix or a “shampoo”, just like the one appreciated by post-modernity to make a “mix up” with a little bit of everything. It is a combination of the platonic Buen Vivir, with some Christian and humanistic aspects, some concepts of the ecologist, ethnic, socialist paradigms to which finally some general principles of Sumak Kawsay are added, and all this is called Buen Vivir or Sumak Kawsay: in doing so, lacking respect and undervaluing the wisdom of the millennial Andean tradition”⁶¹ (Oviedo in Bretón, 2016:35).

This passage from Oviedo is emblematic, because it sheds light on a vision that divides clearly Buen Vivir and *Sumak Kawsay*. This interpretation is partly shared also by Cuestas-Caza (2018:56), which divides them both ontologically and conceptually, claiming that the latter concept constitutes the epistemological translation of the Andean way of life and institutions: an enactment of the indigenous social project. It is part of a bigger process of reaction against the colonial and post-colonial attempts of

⁶¹ “El Buen Vivir posmoderno de los socialistas del siglo XXI es sólo una variación del Buen Vivir aristotélico, pero que no tiene casi nada del Sumak Kawsay andino. (...) El Buen Vivir en la Constitución Política del Ecuador y el Vivir Bien en la Constitución Política de Bolivia, es una mezcla o un ‘champús’ como la que gusta actualmente a la posmodernidad para hacer un ‘mejunje’ de todo un poco. Es una combinación del Buen Vivir platónico, con ciertos postulados cristianos y humanistas, algunos conceptos de los paradigmas ecologistas, étnicos, socialistas, y finalmente añadiendo ciertos principios generales del Sumak Kawsay, y a todo lo cual le llaman el Buen Vivir o Sumak Kawsay: de esta manera, consumando el irrespeto y desvalorización a la sabia y milenaria tradición andina (2012, 203-204).”, original quotation

social acculturation and cultural assimilation, which has in the re-discovery of the native language one of its cardinal points. On the same wavelength is Simbaña (2013) who argues that Buen Vivir, in its postmodern meaning, has been theorized outside of the indigenous movement (Simbaña in Alonso González, 2015:5). Despite this, the exasperated exoticism proposed by Oviedo reduces the comparison between the concepts to a strict dualistic essentialism that has been object of criticisms from other scholars. The fiercest of them is probably Victor Bretón (2013 and 2016): he defines Oviedo's claims as providing an archetypical, de-contextualized and mystic image of a "Andean civilization", which has remained pristine despite the many contacts with western culture (ibid, 2016:34). Moreover, this dichotomic division stays in clear opposition towards the on-the-ground reality of indigenous communities in Ecuador (as we will see later on).

In the light of what stated above, it is important to recall another great controversy that arises when it comes to analyze the origins of Buen Vivir, which puts into question also what seemed to be the strongest claim from Oviedo, that is to say the strong roots that the notion has in the indigenous tradition. Namely, one of the things that the majority of the ethnographers remark is the absence of ethnographic evidence that sustains the main points of Buen Vivir⁶². In other words, from the Andes to the Amazon Rainforest no ethnographer has ever been able to recognize and write an accurate ethnography of the notion. There is more: some indigenous communities, who do not speak Kichwa, use the concept either in Kichwa or in Spanish, which shows how Buen Vivir is something coming from "outside" for them as well. To this regard, it is important to remember that there is a small part of Indigenous Peoples that are Kichwa speakers in the Amazon Rainforest (the area from where, according to Viteri Gualinga, the notion comes from), which adds some doubts when it comes to determine whether *Sumak Kawsay* comes from the Andean tradition (the area of the mountains, as claimed by many) or from the Kichwa one.

These are some of the segments that evidence the vicious circle within which Buen Vivir is entangled, and confirms once more the reasons around the hard time that we have whenever we try to find a definition. Consequently, the next step in the process is suggested by Walsh, who asks herself "whether buen vivir is becoming another discursive tool and co-opted term, functional to the State and its

⁶² Despite this, there are some monographs that were able to bring empirical examples on what some specific groups of people generally consider as being a "good life", "good death", "good relation", "good marriage" and so on. However, these examples show the reasons that determine the hard time that the experts have when it comes to bring these points together under one label, as well as finding common (universal) traits between indigenous communities from different parts of the country.

structures and with little significance for real inter-cultural, inter-epistemic, and plurinational [and, we would add, productive structural] transformation" (Walsh in Caria and Domínguez, 2016:29).

6.3 – Indigeneity: a relational approach as the key to the application of the concept

As it has been recalled at the beginning of this chapter, the postmodern meaning of Buen Vivir is entailed with concepts and practices that tie it to other dimensions: among these, the identity one is extremely meaningful. This because, in contradiction with the simplistic dichotomy (that could be summed up into pure notion *versus* infected notion) suggested by Oviedo and mentioned in the previous subsection, it reveals the complexity that the enactment of Buen Vivir (or of *Sumak Kawsay*) can acquire also in the indigenous realm. To this regard, the concept of indigeneity surely plays a role in the overall decolonization process that the indigenous communities are facing, since it has functions of legitimating the identity in relation to a usually stronger power embodied by another hegemonic entity. In this subsection, we will concern how this concept, in working towards the definition of a given identity, recalls self-determination in a non-essentialist way. More specifically, the debate around its meaning and the complexity that its application entails also in Ecuador, will shed light on the aforementioned dimension of Buen Vivir, and it will pave the way for the next sections.

The concept of “indigeneity” has been object of a great deal of debate, from its definition until its implementation and application to other related sources of international law. In order to clarify around this notion I believe it might be useful to make reference to a classification proposed by Francesca Merlan (Australian National University), which divides relational standards to criteria ones. The former refers to “definitions that emphasize grounding in relations between the “indigenous” and their “others” rather than in properties inherent only to those we call “indigenous” themselves”, while for what concerns the latter we are dealing with “definitions that propose some set of criteria, or conditions, that enable identification of the “indigenous” as a global “kind.”” (Merlan, 2009:305). Despite these categories may sometimes overlap or not being clearly distinguished one another, they are important, as they express two ways – (either being looked beginning from their inner identity or in relation to others) in which Indigenous Peoples can be conceived.

If we move to a more international level of recognition of the concept, very important to recall is surely

the work of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), which emphasizes four principles in the recognition of indigenous peoples:

- priority in time in occupation of a specific territory;
- perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness;
- self-identification and recognition as a collectivity by others, including the state;
- experience of marginalization and dispossession either now or in the past” (Trigger, Dalley, 2010:47).

These standards highlight how the post-colonial reality in which most Indigenous Peoples live nowadays is still a burden for their existence. What is interesting to observe is that the dualism expressed by some of these criteria could lead (and has led) some experts to think that the same principle is based on an essentialist (mis)representation of the Indigenous Peoples. This is what argues Kuper, among the fiercest critics of the notions of “indigeneity” and of “indigenous”, who claims that “the conventional lines of argument currently used to justify “indigenous” land claims rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision. Fostering essentialist ideologies of culture and identity, they may have dangerous political consequences.”(Kuper, 2003:395). Before this claim, he also attempted in connecting Indigenous land claims and some of the principles adopted by the ILO Convention 169 to safeguard Indigenous Peoples as resembling the framework of extreme right-wing parties in Europe.

As it is possible to imagine, this paper was widely criticized, also because Kuper does not seem to take into account the peculiar history that characterizes Indigenous Peoples worldwide, which is also emphasized by the aforementioned four criteria of the WGIP ⁶³. Firstly, it is easy to prove and notice how generalized Kuper’s assumption is, by referring to Indigenous Peoples as a whole block unit, without acknowledging any difference whatsoever. Secondly, it is possible to consider the comparison with the right-wing movements in Europe fallacious, as it implies a violent nature or feature that the indigenous movement never possessed. Moreover, another interesting point is made by Kenrick, who challenges indirectly Kuper for “failing to interrogate equally problematic terms – such as the ‘nation’, ‘modernity’ and the ‘market’ – which are deeply implicated in processes that deny such Peoples rights to land, livelihood and self-determination?” (Kenrick in Guenther, 2006:20). Beginning from this last point, I believe I am not pushing the debate too far if I argue that, in questioning only the concept of

⁶³ which, at the beginning of the article, the author mistakenly confuses with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as reported by Kenrick and Lewis (Kenrick, Lewis, 2004:4).

“indigeneity” while comparing it to other extremely complex and debated “western” ones, we are reiterating that same colonizing practice from which the Indigenous Peoples are escaping. Therefore, it is in this specific context that the essentialist approach turns to be sometimes the only tool possessed by these peoples against the colonizers (Kenrick in Guenther, 2006:19).

The automatic effect implied by this last allegation is that, especially in postcolonial scenarios, it fosters the will of emphasizing the existing differences between the colonized and the colonizers. This tendency might give credit to Kuper, as his theory lied on the basis of a passage wrote by Thomas on the negative side of essentialism:

“... this essentialism has a negative side: the celebration of authentic Aborigines or Navajo fixes the proper identity of those peoples in their preservation and display of a folkloric and primitivised culture and denigrates and marginalizes urbanized or apparently acculturated members of these populations who speak English, lack ethnic dress, do not obviously conduct ceremonies and do not count as real natives to the same extent as those who continue to live in the bush and practice something closer to traditional subsistence (Thomas 1994: 30).

What just stated is nevertheless not enough to fully sustain Kuper’s point: the negative sides of essentialism exist, and so do the conditions that might facilitate the spread of those. However, the cause for it can be found, quoting Thoen, in the “anthropological fallacy of picturing peoples through a limited list of features assumed to be typical or representative that ignores internal diversity and fuzzy boundaries.” (Thoen in Guenther, 2006:24). In other words, we are talking about the universalizing of the meaning of a concept that is clearly not made to suit and encompass such a big variety of peoples. Furthermore, another fundamental general feature too often overlooked comes into play, and it has to do with the dynamic aspects of indigenous way of living, which, despite having in ancestral knowledge and tradition one of its pivotal points, it is at the same time in constant evolution. This might be a problem for both the sides of the coin that we have analyzed until now. In Placle’s words: “As ways of living, cultures do not stay static. Yet we have fallen into the trap of codifying certain cultures, and those deemed ‘indigenous’ have been particularly prone to such reductionism.” (Plalce in Guenther, 2004:23).

In the light of what has been argued until now, we come back to the initial differentiation in the analysis of the concept, relational vs. criteria. The problem with the latter approach, object of Kuper’s critics, is that to a greater extent attempts to find commonalities between indigenous communities

worldwide and to create general guidelines that the countries would have to result in the promulgation and implementation of laws related to that matter. This is surely needed, but it also opens up space for criticism, since reductionism and generalization are right around the corner. For this reason, if we analyze and look at “indigeneity” according to this approach, the best advice that we should probably follow is suggested by Barnard:

“To reject ‘indigenous people’ as an anthropological concept is not the same thing as rejecting it as a legal concept, or rejecting it as a useful tool for political persuasion. If the United Nations and governments accept it, then it can have utility. Defined polythetically in law (which it is), and defined intuitively by ordinary people –indigenous and non-indigenous alike – around the world, it does have meaning. There is therefore no reason to reject it...” (Barnard, 2006:7).

In other words, acknowledging the limit of a universal definition does not mean ignoring the benefit that the notion can have as a legal tool and concept. For this same reason, however, a relational approach is probably more precise and accurate, taking into account the specificities and the peculiarities of the single countries. This division can be conceptually compared with what has been argued in the previous chapters, on the limits and the dualism between universalism and relativism, with the latter who is probably the only solution capable of highlighting the ethnic (and cultural) pluralism in a given society. Moreover, the relational approach empowers “indigeneity” of some specific attributes, only visible when the term is related to something else, which is in this case the postcolonial nation-state. The contrast of meaning and the production of knowledge that this creates is what gives meaning to the notion, whose significance remains reduced if considered merely on its own. This is precisely the message that Kenrick and Lewis try to convey:

“A relational understanding of the term focuses on the fundamental issues of power and dispossession that those calling themselves indigenous are concerned to address, and on the enduring social, economic and religious practices that constitute their relationship with land, resources and other peoples. From this perspective, “indigenous” describes one side in a relationship between certain unequally powerful groups of people. The indigenous side is the one that has been dispossessed, not the quintessential primitive that Kuper misleadingly suggests, and indigenous rights describes a strategy for resisting dispossession that employs a language understood by those wielding power” (Kenrick and Lewis, 2004:9).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that “indigeneity” is the starting point to a wider and much more complex debate: the one around self-determination, which closely recalls the right of peoples to pursue their own form of development. This because, as we have seen, it is a powerful legal tool that indigenous peoples can use in order to address disputes with other players. Moreover, it is implicitly disrupting: it defies indeed the modern conception of nation-state, by highlighting and recalling the cultural specificities and the historical background of the ethnic groups that form it. As Moraña notes,

“[Indigeneity]... puts the accent on the phenomena of fragmentation, hybridism, migration, deterritorialization, etc., questioning the principles of cohesion, uniqueness and consent on which the hegemonic discourse and the institutionalization of power in Latin America rest upon.” (Moraña, 1998:231)⁶⁴.

It is precisely for this reason that it is important to consider this concept in dealing with the socio-legislative structure of a country, especially in the geographical area of Latin America. As Rata notes: the evaluation of the concept of indigeneity opens up a space “in which difference rather than similarity is emphasized, particularly difference in relation to place, though still embedded within the older historical self-other construction” (Rata, 2001:175). The triumph of difference defies universalism, and enhances new conglomerations which stand as an answer to the dominant modernization model: “indigeneity” is conceptually fundamental in this scenario, as it is capable of highlighting the historical and cultural peculiarities of Indigenous Peoples while questioning the existing power relations between them and other players in the society.

6.3.1 Indigeneity in Ecuador

In accordance to what stated in the previous section, particularly enlightening is the case-study evidenced by Daniel Eric Bauer, who focuses his analysis on the relevance that the concept takes in the Macaboa *comuna*⁶⁵, in the coastal region of Ecuador. The community was historically recognized as being *mestizo* or *montuvio*: the former is an ethnic group that, according to the statistics, makes up the 72% of the Ecuadorian population and to which people of mixed Amerindian and European heritage

⁶⁴“...poniendo el énfasis en los fenómenos de fragmentación, hibridez, migración, desterritorialización, etc., desestabilizando así los principios de cohesión, unicidad y consenso en que se apoya el discurso hegemónico y los procesos de institucionalización del poder en América Latina.”, original quotation

⁶⁵ The term *comuna* was originally used to refer to populations with shared access to communal land: it is an extremely recurrent way of political organization in the rural communities on the country, with a notable presence in the forest, in the East and in some parts of the coast. However, *comunidades* can also be found in the urban areas. (Jeremy and Mérida, 2019:21).

belong. The latter group is much smaller (7.5% of the population) and its ethnic specificity was officially recognized by the state only in 2001. Their identity is rather complex and, like the *mestizo*, it is characterized by mixed heritage. However, this ethnic group is peculiar as they are known to have resided along the nation's coast for centuries.

Bauer explains that the problems in Macaboa began when the Swiss-Ecuadorian businessman Christophe Acklin decided that he wanted to buy a large piece of land that was owned by the community. Leaving aside the controversial ways in which Acklin managed to get the approval to the purchase of the land from the *comuna*⁶⁶, what is important to highlight here is the reason for which the central government authorized the whole operation, and I will get there in a moment. Furthermore, it is the *comuna* itself, being a politically recognized area, which plays a vital role in allowing territorial unity for ancestral communities. This is done with the aim of creating an obstacle to the so-called land market, preventing the commoditization of the territory. Therefore, the political organization of the *comuna* conditions the way citizenship is embodied and the way in which justice is administered. (Jeremy, Mérida, 2019:23). The question then becomes how did Acklin manage to buy the land anyway? At this juncture, we have to go back and reconsider the fundamental importance of the way in which the Ecuadorian government recognizes officially the communities that inhabit Macaboa. Being the land relegated as a commodity (as a result of the Agrarian Modernization Law, 1994), the government did not accept the community's claim of ancestral ownership of it: the territory was considered "integral part of cultural reproduction", but its inhabitants, despite archeological record supporting their millennial presence in the area, were not considered indigenous. (Bauer, 2009:179).

In the aforementioned circumstances, appears clear how land ownership and land management issues can be strongly influenced by identity and ethnic ones. Indigeneity acquires then a central role: another question rises almost spontaneously, and makes us reflect on the level of acknowledgment that this notion has in the country. Why the Macaboan did not requested their indigenous identity to be recognized earlier? Or, perhaps better phrased: how do they perceive their identity? Bauer tells us that they self-identify as *mestizo* or *cholo* (mixed descent peasant fishers). However, they do so not because they do not recognize their indigenous heritage, but because they associate "indigeneity" as belonging mainly to the Amazonian region of the country, and because they feel that, on the ideological level, it is

⁶⁶ In Bauer's words: "At the time of the sale, 55 members of the comuna claimed that they had not approved the sale of the land despite the fact that their names were listed on the escritura (title). According to many people, Acklin was using economic incentives to corrupt local leaders and gain access to land; moreover, many people that I spoke with called into question the fact that the deal was made on 31 December, a day on which public offices are normally closed" (Bauer, 2010:178).

a concept relegated to the past. Finally, the concept has gained new attention only in recent years. (Bauer, 2009:175).

In the light of what has been discussed in the previous sub-chapter and how it has been shown in this case-study, what is at stake is not the quest for authenticity. The Macabo *comuna* assessed their protest and battle on recognition of collective cultural identity on the basis of an imposition coming from the government. Therefore, they legitimized their indigeneity in a relational opposition to the government. It is very easy in these circumstances to fall on the trap of essentialism (Valdivia, 2005:291): for this reason, it is important to recognize authenticity “not as a characteristic possessed by one group or another, but rather as a product of the interactions of authenticators” (Lucero in Bauer, 2009:183).

6.3.2 The fluid aspect of indigeneity

Going back to what we were analyzing at the beginning of this chapter, it is possible to argue that the plurinational dimension characterizing that the Ecuadorian State emphasizes the role played by “indigeneity” in the country’s sociopolitical scenario. The legal change that occurred in 2008 with the new Constitution, oriented towards a more ethnically inclusive model, was also thought to have the effects of redefining the perception of what it meant to be indigenous on a national level. In a country still strongly affected by the legacy of colonialism and impregnated by the ideals promoted by the modernization paradigm, being indigenous, and being recognized as such, has some important implications in terms of discrimination. As Valdivia (2009:540) suggests, the concept of indigeneity, if inscribed in a social hierarchical structure, may at times acquire shapes that are connected with the “marginalized socioeconomic position, history of colonization and subordination, and experiences of discrimination associated with the indigenous subject.”. This happens due to the fact that it is the very notion of difference itself which comes out reinforced: in this way, it is easier for it to become rooted in and interiorized among individuals (ibid.). This is so true that the same narration permeated within and among indigenous communities themselves, for which “indigeneity” becomes a valid marker of difference. The cause for this has to be found in the fact that these notions are entangled and understood within the reiteration of norms that exclude, restrict and classify the indigenous as inferior in society. Therefore, the feeling that indigenous peoples have when it comes to self-identify as such is also influenced by these power relations. As Valdivia argues also referring to the work of Du Bois, this can also be interpreted as a kind of ‘double consciousness’, where structural and psychological

elements combined result in understandings of difference that are interiorized by indigenous subjects seeing themselves through the imagination of others (Valdivia, 2009:541).

In the light of what stated above and despite the (reasonable and understandable) attempts of categorization of indigeneity, it is important to acknowledge the fluid aspect of this notion. Once again, in putting the accent on the relational dimension, we are not arguing for any form of essentialist paradigm; on the contrary, it is exactly this aspect that underlines how the context and the players involved are often actively shaping these discourses. What just stated is therefore to put in opposition to “authenticity” claims made by Kuper as they foster strict dichotomies and dogmatic views. Later on in this chapter we will examine how falling in this stereotypical reduction of the indigenous means overlooking completely the real social, economical and geographical scenario in Ecuador, for the sake of what can be defined as a toxic over-simplification.

In order to try and grasp the different ways in which indigeneity is enacted, we can draw examples from the Amazonian region, as the communities inhabiting this area had historically different reactions towards the neoliberal turn that the country took. To this regard, the ethnographic experience of Gabriela Valdivia. She states:

“Ecuadorian Amazon, some indigenous peoples participate in oil-extraction negotiations, tourism, and intensive cattle ranching and agriculture as part of increased market integration. In the midst of these changes, questions about what ‘indigeneity’ means, both in integrating into and in resisting neoliberal reforms, are increasingly important for understanding social justice and environmental conservation issues in the Amazon region.” (Valdivia, 2005:285).

This is a great point of departure for our inquiry, as the association of indigenous groups to neoliberalism, extraction of natural resources and, more generally, the participation to the capitalist economic market is already a big step towards the breaking of “indigenous-equal-noble savage” stereotypes (Radcliffe, 2016:179). By looking at the different (and sometimes contrasting) ways in which indigenous communities perform their indigeneity we can observe how these groups are re-negotiating their position on the field. In order to understand this last passage it is necessary to start from the assumption that sees the assimilation attempts from the Ecuadorian government carried on from the ‘80s and following the general lines of cultural neoliberalism, failing. This because of the very strong and successful indigenous activism, which demanded for recognition of difference rather than plain incorporation to the hegemonic capitalist scenario. This is the first and fundamental step in re-

positioning the indigenous subject within the (pluri)national framework without letting the main features of the modernization paradigm disrupt or influence this process. This detachment from this paradigm does not mean that it is completely rejected: to this regard, Cofán and Secoya people of the Amazon embody two opposite approaches in their ways of enacting indigeneity. Especially among the younger generations, the frequent contacts and experiences with reality outside the community (a lot of them seek their education in the bigger cities) shaped in them a different understanding of society and, consequently, different desires and aspirations. If we consider this phenomenon in relation to the postcolonial scenario of the country and to the overarching racism that the dichotomy forest-city (periphery-centre) automatically imply, we can come even closer in understanding how turning towards modernity can be associated to the desire of being accepted and recognized as equals (Valdivia, 2005:297). This is a conceptual fact that might (or might not) have consequences also in the orientation of the whole community, which might enact these desires in different ways. Needless to say, the decision on the adoption of neoliberal economic practices depends also on the enactment of the indigenous-self and on the reaction to the aforementioned process. Finally, by embracing the standards and values set by modernization, indigenous groups might change the self-perception of their condition.

Going back to the Cofán and Secoya⁶⁷ case, if the former chose a more traditional positioning based on the protection of the environment, therefore firmly against oil extraction, the latter had different interpretations of cultural difference. For the Secoya, gaining total control on their resources was the main factor in the definition of their indigenous-self, even if this meant in some ways getting closer to the capitalist neoliberal economy promoted by modernization and . Namely, activities such as cattle ownership, oil extraction or development of tourism are all building parts of the empowerment aspirations to which aspire (Valdivia, 2005:296-297). “Empowerment” in this case means exactly liberation from postcolonial practices that are still in place, and that can often coincide with the aforementioned essentialist and reductionist stereotyping to the “noble savage” indigenous protector of the forest. This happens completely regardless of the fact that, as Bebbington suggests, this same process implies a degree of dependency on the dominant society (Bebbington in Valdivia, 2005:298).

Concluding, what we obtain is a set of extremely complex and different performances of indigeneity that enact contrasting ways of perceiving indigenous’ positioning in relation to the wider

⁶⁷ In the academic realm these populations are referred as “Cofán” and “Secoya”, even if at the moment they claim the ethnonym A’i Kofan and Siekopai respectively.

socioeconomic scenario. This positioning, however, is in the majority of cases to be understood as a rational reaction against postcolonial practices that undermine in some ways the self-determination of these communities. Consequently, these diverse ways of performing indigeneity mirror also the oppositional perspectives through which Buen Vivir is understood. Namely, despite the fact that the indigenist approach to the notion would, at a first glance, perfectly fit the narration of the indigenous as protector of the ecosystem, we witness how the re-appropriations of identity from other indigenous groups re-shape the conception of Buen Vivir in ways that transcend *Sumak Kawsay* (and with it the equivalent indigenist approach). At this juncture, the postmodern declination of the term comes on stage, accompanied by a similar understanding of indigeneity: it is exactly due to this complexity that the relational aspect of the latter notion is still the most valid and fundamental approach in order to grasp indigenous people's role and relationships with the other players in the country.

6.4 FPIC: A legal relational element

After what has been debated in the previous sections, it is time now to make reference to one of the most influential and important legal concepts which involves Indigenous Peoples and their territoriality. Going back to the previous sub-chapters, and to the suggestion made by Kenrick and Lewis on the relevance of the so-called “relational approach” when it comes to the understanding of indigeneity, it is possible to notice how immediate the link with territorial disputes is. Once again, as the two experts underline, dealing with reiterations of hierarchical dynamics in post-colonial scenarios directly involves Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty on land and on what lies beneath it. To this regard, dealing with the legal concept of “Free Prior Informed Consent” (FPIC) could be a useful way in order to understand how the legal Ecuadorian system works and acts in cases that concern land disputes between Indigenous Peoples and other players. I believe that this relationship is particularly interesting in the Ecuadorian context since, as I will try to illustrate later on, its legal framework stands out in terms of explicitly recalling this legal principle.

As Ward defines it, highlighting the main bricks that build the concept:

“it is the right of indigenous peoples to make free and informed choices about the development of their lands and resources. [...] The basic principles of FPIC are to ensure that indigenous peoples are not coerced or intimidated, that their consent is sought and freely given prior to the authorization or start of any activities, that they have full information about the scope and impacts

of any proposed developments, and that ultimately their choices to give or withhold consent are respected” (Ward, 2011:1).

Within the legal theoretical framework of the notion, it is especially the notion of “consent” that sparked a big debate, since it is not clear in what way it should be interpreted and how much power does it actually give to the entitled subjects. As Tomlinson argues, this uncertainty might be one of the ground reasons for which so many states seem reluctant to adopt FPIC in their legislation: in his words, “there is still a lack of agreement on what some of the language, especially “consent” means in practice, which highlights some of the gaps between the theories and principle of a rights-based approach advocated by NGOs and International organizations, and the problematic nature of implementing this in practice” (Tomlinson, 2017:7). Many scholars are on Tomlinson’s same wavelength: they claim that an interpretation of the right that would grant Indigenous Peoples with veto rights on the projects would basically turn out to be anti-democratic. Using again Tomlinson’s words: “giving a right to veto to a particular sub-group within the state would be antithetical to the state’s democratic foundations” (Tomlinson, 2017:6). Therefore, this would – paradoxically – result in a hierarchical relationship between Indigenous Peoples and state/corporations, in which the former would have the power to deny any activity planned to take place on their land. Nevertheless, if we observe the historical development of this kind of relationships, we will notice how the former’s opinion has often been ignored concerning these kinds of projects. For this reason, the main aim of the FPIC right is probably what is suggested by Szablowski:

“...to promote forms of direct "horizontal" engagement between EI [extractive industry] firms (or states) and affected communities in order to influence decision making on EI development. By *horizontal* I mean that, to varying degrees, these regimes structure engagement as an interaction between nominally equal parties. The proliferation of direct engagement has arisen in part out of recognition of the failure of many states to protect the interests of marginalized peoples, and especially indigenous peoples from the negative consequences of the extractive industry development” (Szablowski, 2011:112).

We can therefore argue that, the notion of “consent” should neither be a veto right, nor merely an information notice to be sent to the Indigenous Peoples on the intentions of the state/corporations. It should be something in between, in order to grant a “horizontal” development of the processes between these actors.

6.4.1 FPIC and Ecuadorian Law

FPIC appears in the Ecuadorian legislation in three official documents: the Ecuador Mining Act (2009), the aforementioned ILO Convention n°169 (ratified by the country on May 15th, 1998) and the Ecuadorian Constitution (2008). Concerning the Mining Act of 2009, a meaningful part can be found in art.87, contained in Chapter 3, “Social Management and Community Participation”. It states:

“The State is responsible for implementing the social participation and consultation processes, acting through the corresponding public institution, in accordance with constitutional principles and the legislation in force. Said responsibility cannot be delegated to any private entity” (Ecuador Mining Act, art.87, 2009).

If it is possible to claim that the state responsibility is well specified, not the same can be said about, how should the consultation be carried on: many experts argue that these “consultation sessions” carried on by the government (or by the corporations throughout the state) consist barely in power point presentations, in which almost no room is left for questions or any kind of participation from the audience. For similar reasons, this specific law was strongly criticized especially by the CONAIE, who denounced its unconstitutionality:

“CONAIE’s arguments are: According to the Constitution, indigenous peoples should have been consulted before the law was written and they were not. The Mining Law contemplates consultation after the concessions to companies are made and not before, as mandated by the Constitution. The Mining Law claims to prevail over all other laws. However, an ordinary law cannot prevail over organic laws”. (Martínez Novo, 2010:19).

So, FPIC is not explicitly quoted, but there is still the reference to the concept of consultation. Extremely ambiguous is especially the point that allows Indigenous Peoples (or the affected part) to be informed *after* the concessions are granted. This would turn the whole issue into a mere acknowledgment from the communities of what will inevitably happen on their land, leaving them *de facto* powerless. As already denounced by Novo, different is the case of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, as here the principle is quoted openly in Chapter 4, art. 57, subsections 5, 6 and 7: the Indigenous Peoples have the right,

- 5. To keep ownership of ancestral lands and territories and to obtain free awarding of these lands.

- 6. To participate in the use, usufruct, administration and conservation of natural renewable resources located on their lands.
- 7. To free prior informed consultation, within a reasonable period of time, on the plans and programs for prospecting, producing and marketing nonrenewable resources located on their lands and which could have an environmental or cultural impact on them; to participate in the profits earned from these projects and to receive compensation for social, cultural and environmental damages caused to them. The consultation that must be conducted by the competent authorities shall be mandatory and in due time. If consent of the consulted community is not obtained, steps provided for by the Constitution and the law shall be taken. (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008, ch.4, art.57).

What strikes in these subsections is how open and clear the reference to *free and prior* consultation is, which makes the issue, if considered in comparison with other legal sources, far from legally clear. Martinez-Novo reasons on this, and can help us in understanding some of the reasons:

“Furthermore, it is clear in the constitutional text that non-renewable resources belong to the central state. The chart of indigenous rights in the Constitution establishes that communities should be consulted when their territories or rights are affected, but it is not clear whether this consultation is binding for the state. Alianza País did not accept unambiguous binding consultation of indigenous peoples in the Constitution. This point created tensions between a section of the ruling coalition led by Alberto Acosta and close to environmentalist and pro-indigenous concerns that promoted autonomy and the importance of binding consultation with communities, and another sector of the ruling coalition that prioritized national development and the extraction of natural resources. [...]. They included in the chart of indigenous rights of the Constitution that Ecuador would respect all international treaties regarding indigenous and human rights. That would include the new United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights that stipulates that the consent of indigenous communities is needed in order to extract natural resources from their territories.” (Martínez Novo, 2010:14-15).

It is therefore possible to understand how complex is the issue regarding land management. Namely, we witness a scenario in which the country issued different kinds of legislation that at times contradict each other, or that at least leave a lot of room for interpretation. Needless to say, strategic local indigenous development is extremely dependent on the way their ancestral land is managed; therefore

that is how concepts such as FPIC become determining ones in addressing these disputes. Concerning the last point of the quote, in the next section I am going to spend some words on the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), as exactly for the reasons illustrated by Martinez-Novoa, has assumed a significant role in the country's legal scenario.

6.4.2 FPIC in two main Sources of International Law: the UNDRIP and the ILO Convention 169

Although there are many documents that recognize Indigenous Peoples and their rights, the right to Free Prior Informed Consent is not always present among them. However, there are some sources of International law that make explicit reference to this right: in this section, I am shortly going to go through two of them, in order to give an appropriate overview of the legal tools that the IP can use when it comes to approach causes concerning their lands.

Among the documents that recognize the FPIC right, one the most important is surely the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). It was endorsed during the General Assembly on December 13th, 2007 and it is a non-binding instrument of soft law whose aim is to guide the states' behavior. Moreover, it is considered to be the "minimum standard of treatment" of IP. In this document, even if FPIC is not mentioned openly, it is recalled in articles 18 and 19. I think that, particularly in this case, it can be very interesting to examine the differences on article 19, from the Draft (1994) to the final version of the Declaration. In the Draft, it was phrased as follows:

„States shall obtain the free and informed consent of the peoples concerned before adopting and implementing such measures [measures that may affect them].” (United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples Draft, art.19, 1994).

Instead, in the final version of the article were added some small but extremely meaningful changes:

“States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them” (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007:15).

The changes adopted are mainly two: firstly, the first verb has been changed, from “shall obtain” to “shall consult and cooperate”, which emphasizes the fact that the consultation does not necessarily have to reach the consent of the Indigenous Peoples. Secondly, worth of a remark is undoubtedly the

notion of “good faith”: this means that the cooperation has to be conducted with real efforts from the government/corporations, and that it should lead to a complete understanding of the Indigenous Peoples’ position.

Another extremely important document that refers to FPIC is the ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention n°169, the first International binding legal treaty creating binding obligations for states on Indigenous Peoples. It was signed in 1989 and ratified by twenty-two states (today is not open to ratification anymore). Even if, as Ward (2011) remembers, “The Convention is still controversial given that indigenous peoples were not involved in the negotiation of the text” (Ward, 2011:60), in my opinion it can still be considered a groundbreaking document, as it recognizes Indigenous Peoples as “Peoples” (and not populations) and “permanent societies”. Thus, it acknowledges their ethnic and cultural diversity, their communal land rights and their rights to natural resources. In the Convention (1989), FPIC is recalled in article 6 and 7; they state that “the consultations carried out in application of this Convention shall be undertaken, in good faith and in a form appropriate to the circumstances, with the objective of achieving agreement or consent to the proposed measures” (ILO Convention, art.6, 1989). Again, here we find the reference to the “good faith” idea, with the final purpose of achieving either agreement or consent: clearly, being this a legally binding document, it has a very strong impact on the legislation of the countries who decided to ratify it, as it imposes big obligations concerning relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the state. I have decided to focus the attention on these two fundamental documents not only because they clearly recall the FPIC right, but also because we can learn a lot about a state’s orientation by observing the ones that actually ratified them. Especially for what concerns the UNDRIP, it is extremely interesting to notice that it has been endorsed by 143 of the 158 members of the General Assembly; however, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and United States – all countries characterized by big percentages of Indigenous Peoples, voted against the adoption. This to show how strong could be the impact of such a document, even if it is legally non-binding.

As it has been argued in the chapter, FPIC acquires the dimension of a *quasi* legal transposition of the process initiated and affirmed by the concept of indigeneity, and positions itself along the lines of the decolonization mechanism throughout the recognition of sovereignty of land. The plurinational imprinting acquired by Ecuador, the ratification of the ILO Convention ‘169 and the adoption of the UNDRIP all point in the direction of a higher level of consideration of Indigenous Peoples rights. In doing so, they recall a dimension enhanced by what we defined postmodern Buen Vivir, especially in

relation to the meaning that the notion acquired in the interpretation proposed by the CONAIE. Despite the fact that the on-the-ground reality of the country does not see an always effective application of FPIC – also due to the aforementioned contradictions with other legal sources – it would be wrong to conclude that the concept has not been useful up to this point. Namely, if the controversies and pitfalls of this legal concept – both in terms of understanding of its actual meaning and also for what regards its contextual implementation – can partly be identified as the causes for its “failures”, we register also some recent⁶⁸ fundamental legal victories, exactly based on FPIC. In this sense, we are referring to the ones obtained by the Cofán Peoples of Sinangoe in April 2018 and that of the Waorani Peoples in October 2019. These victories occurred in the legal and social framework that has been described above, marking a turning point and creating precedents that will surely play an important role in similar future disputes. This whole process of rise, adoption and implementation has to be understood in the broader scenario of the relationships between the indigenous communities and the government. To this regard, we will examine in the next section a proposition raised by some scholars that further extends, enriches and simultaneously modifies these relationships, building on (and from) the self-determination right.

6.5 Moving towards Self-Determination: Etnodesarrollo

This section has to be understood as another step within the variety of considerations that the concepts that Buen Vivir entails, this time going more towards the direction of a potential way of implementing elements in the pursue of indigenous self-determination. To this regard, both in the section of indigeneity and in the previous one on FPIC, we have concerned the ways in which talking about these notions means automatically to consider territorial issues of indigenous Peoples. These land fights are obviously related to the degree of freedom of management that is recognized to the indigenous communities who inhabit the lands. Therefore, the ways in which these issues of ownership and control are addressed is of primary importance in this context, as well as the way in which those affect the

⁶⁸ Another landmark victory achieved on the basis of the FPIC right was the one obtained by the Sarayaku People, in the case “Sarayaku vs. Ecuador”, at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2012. In that case, oil companies have been granted permits of extraction on Indigenous land, and the fact that they did not consult the indigenous communities in the area turned to be the decisive element in the dispute. Just one last remark: this victory lies on the shoulders of what is widely considered the most important legal case in terms of FPIC: Saramaka People vs. Suriname. The verdict of this dispute was pronounced, once again by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in 2007, and it was the first case of legal recognition of the rights that the Saramaka People have in terms of land property (based on the Constitution of Suriname, 1986).

relationships between indigenous groups or institutions and the central government. In this sense, as we will try to demonstrate later on, the legacy of the colonial approach to the indigenous communities is a constant presence and it is possible to argue that ethnodevelopment, as a social, economical and political proposal comes to the fore exactly in order to question this model.

In the light of what stated above, it would be almost impossible to understand the meaning that the concept of ethnodevelopment (“etnodesarrollo” in Spanish) acquires in the Ecuadorian context without first shortly concerning some key points of the history of the country in terms of colonial influence. In his work, Fajardo (2011) analyzes the main steps that characterized the aforementioned relationship also from a continental perspective: to this regard, it is indeed possible to find similarities among the Latin American countries for what concerns the dealing of the “indigenous problem”. He highlights the legal conceptual switch from the liberal constitutionalism of the 19th Century to the social constitutionalism of the following century, moving towards the recognition of collective ownership of land and social rights. However, these lands were not officially considered indigenous lands: in Ecuador, for instance, they were (and are) called *comunas* (see footnote n°59), and they were part of a restructuring⁶⁹ program of the government. In doing so, the central state was hoping to turn the indigenous communities into *campesino* (farmer) collectivities. This plan has to be understood in a context of both integration and forced assimilation (see also Palenzuela, 2009) of these communities into the national market, an objective that the central government was pursuing since way longer before.

It is precisely in this context that the concept of ethnodevelopment takes its shape: the main theorist of the notion, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, portrays it for the first time in 1982, a time characterized by a growing indigenous activism in the entire Continent (and in Ecuador especially, as the many *levantamientos indigenas* – indigenous uprisings – testify). Therefore, the reaction against the attempts of assimilation from the government finds in the Mexican anthropologist an important contributor: to counter those, he uses the notion of cultural control, meaning the “social ability of taking decisions on natural resources, that is to say, on all those components of a culture that need to play a role in order to identify the needs, problems and aspirations of society, and trying to satisfy, solve and comply with

⁶⁹ Part of the bigger “Agrarian Reform” (October 1973).

them”⁷⁰(Bonfil Batalla, 1982:134). Furthermore, the expert also slightly touches the problem of the language⁷¹: he argues that the insistence that the central government showed towards the downgrading of indigenous languages can be understood as another facet of the post-colonial influence. These come at times to be understood and regarded as merely dialects and, more in general, as sully the national language. To this regard, the reduction of the percentage of native speakers in the country was celebrated as a success in the process towards civilization (ibid, 141-142).

Another voice that echoes that of Bonfil Batalla comes from Pablo Palenzuela (2009), who involves exactly the modernization (that, given the circumstances, he equates with that of development) developed by Rostow, considered in the bigger process of re-affirmation of the guiding principles of ethnodevelopment. To this regard, he describes modernization as a process throughout which individuals go from a traditional lifestyle to another one, more complex and technologically superior. This has to be understood as the premise for the shaping of the concept of modernization which, using a definition by Rogers and Svenning (1973), Palenzuela describes in the following way:

[It is] a class of social change in which new ideas are introduced in a social system with the aim of obtaining more per capita inlets and better quality of life throughout more modern means of production and a better social organization. Often we divide the countries of the world in two fields, according to social and economical criteria: the less developed and the more developed, the traditional ones and the modern ones (Rogers and Svenning in Palenzuela, 2009:132, translation of the author).⁷²

In this definition we find a lot of what, also according to what has been analyzed in this work, the modernization paradigm is about⁷³: from the universalism, and the consequent analysis of history, to the process of re-structuring society along rational lines, to finally get to the economic income as the main driving force. In the light of this, the Spanish author observes how this idea has pervaded and deeply influenced society, reinforcing the ethnocentric conception of development. This process

⁷⁰ la capacidad social de decisión sobre los recursos culturales, es decir, sobre todos aquellos . componentes de una cultura que deben ponerse en juego para identificar las necesidades, los problemas y las aspiraciones de la propia sociedad, e intentar satisfacerlas, resolverlas y cumplirlas – original quotation

⁷¹ Intended here not only from the linguistic aspect of communication, but concerned also from a more holistic perspective, as a symbolic mean of expression of a given tradition and cosmology.

⁷² [...] una clase de cambio social en el que se introducen nuevas ideas en un sistema social a fin de obtener mayores ingresos per capita y mejores niveles de vida mediante la utilización de métodos de producción más modernos y una mejor organización social. A menudo dividimos a los países del mundo en dos campos, de acuerdo con criterios económicos y sociales: los menos desarrollados y los más desarrollados, los tradicionales y los modernos – original quotation.

⁷³ Later on in the document, Palenzuela will also touch on the topic of indicators, which we shortly concerned in section 5.3.

determines that the so-called underdeveloped countries find themselves in this state exactly because they are “failing” to conform to the model, overlooking all the points that Fajardo was analyzing before. Again, from this perspective, we come to confront a model that has a clearly marked political dimension, and which is structured according to specific postcolonial mechanisms that do not have to be explicitly recalled or implemented by the government, as they are reiterated automatically and already ideological, empirical and integral part of the system. A good example of what just stated is provided to us by Bonfil Batalla (1982:136) once again, who argues how the social relations that are produced within this specific system are immediately of a hierarchical kind. This leads him to claim that the changes implemented in such a scenario – as well as the designing of policies that guide them – have to be understood accordingly. He brings the example of agriculture, explaining how if we move from an approach of agricultural of subsistence (which the author describes as characterized by autonomous means and decisions) to one with commercial purposes, we are reiterating a postcolonial framework of “imposing a culture” on the other.

Inverting the structure that makes these relationship exist and flourish is therefore one of the major steps that ethnodevelopment has to make according to Bonfil Batalla. Building on this, Palenzuela (2009) suggests how a stronger emphasis on the ethnical identity could be a good starting point in the process of resistance and reaction against what he labels as “domination outlines”. This perception of identity based on ethnicity recalls in many ways what we highlighted previously about indigeneity, as it is constructed on similar points. To this regard, Palenzuela quotes also the Peruvian anthropologist Montoya, who already in 1986 identified five main points in the depiction of this form of identity. This points are:

1. Individual and collective consciousness of belonging.
2. The central role of tradition and roots of a group as the condition for the creation of a permanent culture.
3. The pride that such belonging produces.
4. The existence of a minimum consensus on a collective project for the future.
5. The ability of creating a culture both with the internal resources and also by incorporating the external ones inside the basic cultural matrix of the group.

(Montoya in Palenzuela, 2009:135).

Interestingly, these points, beginning from the sense of belonging to a given identity, highlight also the cultural dimensions that it entails, emphasizing the communitarian aspect of the group and hinting at playing an active role in relation to what Montoya defines as “external resources” within the cultural identity of the group. This aspect of ethnical identification sums up a lot of the points we discussed in this chapter, from indigeneity to land management and FPIC, to the political dimensions of Buen Vivir, as it has in self-determination and in plurinationalism its main points⁷⁴. However, due to what has been stated at the beginning of this section, processes of cultural alienation move along the lines of post-colonialism, since, as Palenzuela (*ibid*, 136) recalls, the western development model sees cultural diversity as a breaking factor in the ideal application of its driving paradigms⁷⁵.

As it has been evidenced until now, Bonfil Batalla (Palenzuela also takes inspiration directly from his work also in relation to the definition of the notion) builds ethnodevelopment step by step. At the beginning of his work (1982), he defines it as follows:

“... the exercise of the social ability of a people to build their future, using the experience obtained from their past as well as the potential and real resources of their culture, in accordance to a project being defined in consonance with their values and aspirations⁷⁶” (Bonfil Batalla, 1982:133, translation of the author).

This definition is enriched later on in the text, arriving at including all the main elements that we were recalling above; namely, the author adds that ethnodevelopment can be thought as the ability of a culturally different society of pursuing their development in an autonomous way. This can be achieved only if these societies constitute a political body capable of granting them real possibilities of self-determination (*ibid*, 142).

⁷⁴ Bonfil Batalla (1982) recalls these dimensions in the condition of autonomy in the managing of the environmental resources and also in the recognition of indigenous groups as political entities.

⁷⁵ It can be argued that, since Bonfil Batalla’s document was written in 1982 and that the anthropologist died in 1991, some of the conditions that he claims to be essential for the accomplishment of ethnodevelopment are effectively in place now. The question therefore becomes how this crucial shift – that is, from the bureaucratic dimension to the empirical implementation – is put into place, according to what paradigms, with what structure and, ultimately, with what effects. There are many examples that can be recalled in this sense, but for reasons of time we are not going to deal with them here (also due to the other concepts and issues that they automatically bring up). However, some references to this regard can be found in the work of Bretón (2005, 2015), who concerns mainly the so-called PRODEPINE (Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador – Project of Development of the Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Ecuadorians of Ecuador), Olivi and Palenzuela (2011), who write on the PRODECO (Proyecto de Desarrollo de Cotopaxi – Cotopaxi Development Project) and Reed (2011), Radcliffe (2016), who concern the implementation of the UN REDD+ (United Nations Plan for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation).

⁷⁶ “... el ejercicio de la capacidad social de un pueblo para construir su futuro, aprovechando para ello las enseñanzas de su experiencia histórica y los recursos reales y potenciales de su cultura, de acuerdo con un proyecto que se defina según sus propios valores y aspiraciones” – original quotation

In conclusion, if it is true that ethnodevelopment remains merely an academic proposal, it is possible to argue that the premises from which it starts, the points that it raises and the models that it questions are of absolute importance, as well as extremely relevant in our inquiry. In this context, the process of decolonization can be identified both as a cause and a consequence of the notion: in this sense, we are now obliged not only to question it, but also to deeply analyze the ways in which it has permeated society. This unfolding of the many ground stones on which a given society is founded shares a lot of similarities with the postmodern meaning that Buen Vivir acquired. For this reason, the two notions have to be understood as tied in a sort of hand in hand collaboration: they postulate the same ground values and coincide in many aspects, but they enact them at two slightly different dimensions. On the one hand Buen Vivir, even if understood in its postmodern sense, contributes at the theoretical formation of a certain view and strategy that is to become praxis. On the other, ethnodevelopment already implies a strong tie with interventions on the ground, as well as with the NGOs and other kinds of organizations that directly operate and enact these processes.

In this sense, aiming towards the restructuring of the relationships between indigenous groups and other actors in the country is fundamental: nevertheless, this has to be achieved throughout the reaffirmation of mechanisms capable of embodying the task of cultural decolonization.

7. Conclusion

While I was writing this work, I realized that, among the many sides from which it can be looked at, trying to analyzing it from the perspective of the extremely new situation that we are experiencing in the present could have been extremely interesting, as well as pretty appropriate. The COVID-19 pandemic that is affecting our lives since more than one year has revealed a lot of the weak points of the system in which we are living. By further contributing to reinforce the mechanisms that confirm the increasing of social inequalities, this virus has once again put the accent on the unsustainability of the development model that we have been following since the end of World War II. While the economic side was acquiring more and more importance within this paradigm, the work of Walt Whitman Rostow became iconic, linking the race to modernization to clear and rational economic standards. “The Stages of Economic Growth”, published for the first time in the form of an article in 1959, was the portrayal of this paradigm: it is for this reason that understanding part of the philosophical legacy on which this work was based was the very first step of this work. In doing so, I exposed the main conceptual elements that constituted the core and the roots of the paradigm, and that I summed up in rationalization, universalism, individualism and a very specific way of analyzing history. Being this the beginning of the research, it is consequentially from this passage that the main focus of this work can be presented. Given the problems that this theory presents, how can it be re-conceptualized? And from here, considering Buen Vivir, which has been portrayed as the real alternative to his model, is it possible – and in case of affirmative answer, how – to re-think the aforementioned paradigm on the basis of this concept?

As I showed in the work, the way in which this question can be read has two sides, depending on the approach: in bridging the two notions, we have on the one hand a comparison set on the different facets and aspects that can/cannot work in the process of re-conceptualization. On the other, we have the more structural and theoretical ways of tackling the issue, that concerns the comparative discussion between the notions at a more systemic level. Furthermore, if the modernization theory, *being it a theory*, can be understood as something static and therefore potentially easier to approach, the same cannot be said about Buen Vivir. This automatically implies that one of the main aims of the work has been that of conjugating the unpacking of the main questions with that of Buen Vivir, which I did following a clear paradigm, approaching the notion firstly from an indigenist and then from a postmodern angle. Despite what stated previously, also the enactment of the modernization paradigm has acquired different

meanings, and to this regard I have shown in the work how the two notions may, at times, even converge and touch one another.

Building on the just mentioned remarks, I have decided to deal with the double sided approach to the main goal of the inquiry throughout the analysis of the implications that some aspects of the ontological turn have in the issue. This because it operates at both levels, postulating both some key foundational elements that question and defy directly those of the modernization theory and, at the same time, bringing the debate also at the structural level. Moreover, I have demonstrated how the latter element has a direct influence in the process of re-shaping the concepts of the former. Namely, within the realm of ontologies, I opened up a space firstly to debate – and finally to defy – those points, showing how the differences in the cosmological perception of the world coincide with a paradigmatic shift in relational terms with the environment. This means, once more, to structurally overcome the one-world imposed by the modernization theory not just by challenging it directly but, on the contrary, also by providing valuable and interesting alternatives. Since these alternatives are far from being organized, and since they do not really represent (yet) a clear and specific unity, I presented them according to the principles of the ontological turn, providing a structural background which, in my opinion, is fundamental in order to re-design the approach to reality. Moreover, I showed how it is that same turn that, especially throughout the work of Arturo Escobar, is capable of providing a link to the territorial struggles that the indigenous communities are facing: in his way of understanding the comparison, the ontological and the ecological correspond to the same dimension of the fight. In other words, the hegemonic dimension of modernization involves both facets, which become therefore equally relevant in the inquiry.

Moving on with the work, the consequential succession of the sections portrays Buen Vivir as a “result” of the aforementioned frictions. Gudynas, author that I recalled in many occasions, states explicitly how “when it [Buen Vivir] criticizes development, it also questions the very foundations of modernity, causing tensions at a deeper level: the world views or ontologies. Following Blaser (2010), ontologies are world representations (both discursive and non-discursive), which determine what is inside or outside those worlds, what is true or not, and how we interact with this world. Modernity is a particular ontology that in the last centuries determined the division between nature and society, a colonial distinction between modern and non-modern indigenous peoples, the myth of progress as a unidirectional linear path, and a strong confidence on Cartesian science. All these assumptions are under critical review by the Buen Vivir platform. Buen Vivir offers a common ground where critical

perspectives on development, originated from different ontologies, meet and interact, is a new space for dealing with other alternate ontologies” (Gudynas, 2011:447). In bridging these different realities, the author here follows some accurate lines of thought: however, he represents Buen Vivir in a way that I strongly questioned in this work. Namely, one of my main goals to this regard has been that of challenging the conception that sees it as *the* alternative to development. Contrarily to my point, Gudynas does the opposite in emphatic way, stating that it is time to “promote alterative worldviews to move away from what yesterday we called development, and tomorrow will be replaced by Buen Vivir (ibid.). I do not share this understanding of the notion, which presupposes an evaluation on rather absolutistic terms and, in order to prove my point, I start from the very beginning, that is to say by the unpacking of the notion firstly from a cosmological and mainly theoretical perspective. Drawing on an already proposed division, I called this meaning of Buen Vivir “indigenist”, and I argued that the most appropriate translation in this case would be that of *Sumak Kawsay*, as the references to the indigenous tradition are clear. Interestingly, and contrarily to what might be expected, this de-politicized meaning of the concept⁷⁷ was not less controversial than the postmodern one: from Viteri Gualinga to later theorists and academics, we witness confusion in the translation and in the exact meaning of the term, also in Kichwa language. Expressions such as *Alli Kawsay*, *Sumak Kawsay* and Buen Vivir are often used interchangeably in many documents⁷⁸, almost as synonyms. It is also due to this situation that I decided to try and be clearer in distinguishing them; namely, I tried to show how *Alli Kawsay* and *Sumak Kawsay* correspond to slightly different ideas within the indigenous realm. As for Buen Vivir, I associate this term to its postmodern understanding, when its shape is molded by the other concepts to which it gets in touch.

To this regard, my point shares some similarities to what expressed by Andreu Viola, who states how *Sumak Kawsay* can be considered as a togetherness of practices and traditions belonging to the aymara⁷⁹ and quechua cultures, and that has been re-conceptualized as a paradigm alternative to that of western development (Viola in Killinger, 2012:15). The only differences are that I argue that the two concepts cannot be considered the same, and that the postmodern meaning does not constitute in itself an alternative to development.

⁷⁷ I have shown later on in the work how strongly Buen Vivir has been politicized by many and often opposing actors

⁷⁸ Even if here I am referring mostly to academic publications, this happens also in official ones, such as the Constitution (2008), or the SENPLADES.

⁷⁹ The aymara people are an ethnic group inhabiting the regions nowadays belonging to Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru. Their ancestral concept of *suma qamaña* is often compared to that of *sumak kawsay*, as they are considered extremely similar.

Moving on to the postmodern interpretation of the notion, I showed in this work some of the most relevant concepts with which it has been associated. I argue that the combination of Buen Vivir with indigeneity, FPIC and finally ethnodevelopment – considered within the plurinational reality of Ecuador – has proven to be capable of producing very interesting and potentially effective implications. Following the way in which the concept has been used by some specific actors, the capability of linking the different levels of the struggles has been probably their most exceptional achievement. Once again, in accordance with what I argued in chapter 4, the ability of moving along many layers has proven to be the key in the tackling the exasperation of the epistemological perception in approaching social issues. In the light of what stated, it is possible to evaluate how indigenous communities confront and perceive the issues of *Sumak Kawsay* (intended in the sense that I recalled above), plurinationalism and community as something united, without necessarily detaching them. In doing so, an ontological, immanent and ethical turn is achieved, allowing the access to think and discuss other modernities and worlds of knowledges (Alonso González and Vázquez, 2015:5).

Despite that these can be considered surely great achievements obtained by the re-conceptualization of the main points of the modernization paradigm that, at least to a certain extent, are to ascribe to Buen Vivir, it does not mean that the latter notion constitutes an alternative to the first. By shedding light on the main controversies that Buen Vivir carries in both its dimensions, I aimed at presenting its complexity and the contradictions that its different enactments implied in time. Once again, this is true both within the indigenist and the postmodern realm, and as we saw during the analysis of indigeneity, it does not necessarily regard only the governmental use of the concept. In this sense, the performative aspect of identity plays a fundamental role, as it sees emphasized the differences existing among the various indigenous groups.

Moving on, another meaning that Buen Vivir acquired, which could be read in a context of similarities with aspects of the modernization paradigm, is that of “mobilizing utopia”. I recalled this concept in the broader analysis of the politicization of the notion, stating how such a process would weaken the performative power of Buen Vivir, getting it closer to the philosophical interpretation proposed by the government and by Ramirez Gallegos. This point, however, does not stand in contradiction with the effect that Buen Vivir, according to some experts, had and still has: that of playing a decisive role in forging a collective identity in the Ecuadorian population. Likewise, even if with other means, the ideology imposed by the modernization paradigm also tended towards the realization of what has turned to be a social utopia, in the sense that such a project has been proved to be unsustainable and

unachievable. The difference with Buen Vivir, however, is that it is a concept that, regardless of its ancestral characters⁸⁰, has created a narration capable of questioning the postcolonial mechanisms that are still a clear and dominating feature in the country. Prudencio and Blanco (2017:80) confirm what I have just stated, by affirming that such a concept has surely largely contributed in the mobilization of some specific parts of the population, with the effect of forming a new collective subject⁸¹. Finally, these two dimensions of the perception that Buen Vivir acquires in the country are fundamental to understand once again its contradictory aspect.

Concluding, analyzing in which way the notion has been permeated through social texture and has been perceived by the population (both indigenous and non-indigenous) becomes something that we are probably in need of. This passage becomes of great importance also for what concerns a potential analysis of the projects that have been implemented in the country and advertised as being driven by the principles of Buen Vivir. Hence, it is clear to me that further research has to move exactly in this direction: towards the exploration of the impact that Buen Vivir has on the population, always with an eye on the continuation and re-affirmation of the process of decolonization of knowledge production in the country. This not only to obtain that the relationships between indigenous groups and governmental institutions can be carried along equal frameworks, but also to study ways of embodying empirical implementations of the concept at the ground level.

One last comment; the Ecuadorian presidential elections of last February witnessed the strong affirmation of Pachakutik (Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement), an indigenous party founded in 1995, that seriously threatened to become the second biggest party in the country. Especially in this context, and especially in the general scenario of the pandemic, it will be interesting to investigate to what extent the concepts of Buen Vivir and of *Sumak Kawsay* will still play an important role in the country.

⁸⁰ Whose millennial ancestral dimension, as I have shown, is far from being universally accepted.

⁸¹ This subject, despite the internal differences that I have highlighted in the work, still recognized itself under some general features, among which Buen Vivir acts as a sort of “glue”.

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Appendix

Abstract

The paradigm of modernization has been widely considered as the main driving force for development in the last decades. Today, more than sixty years after the publication of Rostow's "The Stages of Economic Growth" (1959), we witness the unsustainability of such a model. In this work, throughout a thorough unpacking of this paradigm, I open up a space for its re-conceptualization and re-elaboration: in doing so, I come to examine the notion of Buen Vivir (*Sumak Kawsay* in Kichwa), labeled by many as the real alternative to the aforementioned model. After coming to the fore in the early 2000s and constituting a key part in the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008, the notion has been enacted and shaped in many different ways, acquiring diverse dimensions and meanings. For this reason, my aim is to try and analyze it following its many facets, in order to obtain a clearer picture of its structure: to do so, I start from the ontological turn in anthropology to (partially) bridge the existing gap between Buen Vivir and the modernization theory. Furthermore, throughout an analysis of the legal, theoretical and political implications of Buen Vivir, I will demonstrate the need of framing its shape along the meanings that it acquires: to this regard, the postmodern and the indigenist perceptions of the notion will coincide with two different translations of the concept, which result in the differentiation between Buen Vivir and *Sumak Kawsay*. Moreover, in showing the developmental aspects of Buen Vivir, I will demonstrate how the modernization paradigm needs to be restructured both starting from ontological and political grounds. This will allow me to link Buen Vivir to the territorial struggles that Indigenous Peoples are facing in Ecuador and to show how the re-configuration of the relationships between them and the other actors in the country is fundamental and can be achieved by following these lines. In this sense, I claim that concepts such as plurinationalism, consent in the context of land-management and indigeneity play a decisive part in defining the role that Buen Vivir acquires in this kind of struggles. The challenge to the modernization paradigm will therefore be constructed along these lines: I will finally show that Buen Vivir does not (yet) represent "salvation" from the hegemonic western model of development. However, it brings up some elements that are surely fundamental in the turn to which it is contributing: the translation of those into empirical implementation will not be dealt deeply in this work, but it surely represents the next step for further researches in this direction.

Keywords: Buen Vivir, *Sumak Kawsay*, modernization theory, Ecuador, ontological turn, Indigenous Peoples, self-determination

Zusammenfassung

Das Paradigma der Modernisierung wurde in den letzten Jahrzehnten allgemein als der größte Antrieb für Entwicklung angesehen. Heute, mehr als sechzig Jahre nach der Veröffentlichung von Rostows „Die Stadien des wirtschaftlichen Wachstums“ (1959), sehen wir die Unhaltbarkeit eines solchen Modells. In dieser Arbeit versuche ich eine Dekonstruktion des Modernisierungsparadigmas und eröffne einen Raum für seine Neukonzeptionalisierung und Neugestaltung; dabei untersuche ich den Begriff des Buen Vivir‘ (*Sumak Kawsay* in Kichwa), der von vielen als echte Alternative zum oben genannten Modell bezeichnet wird. Nachdem der Begriff Anfang der 2000er Jahre in den Vordergrund getreten war und einen wichtigen Bestandteil der ecuadorianischen Verfassung von 2008 darstellte, wurde er auf viele verschiedene Arten umgesetzt und geformt und erhielt im Laufe der Zeit verschiedene Dimensionen und Bedeutungen. Aus diesem Grund ist es mein Ziel, den Begriff anhand seiner vielen Facetten zu analysieren, um ein klareres Bild seiner Struktur zu erhalten: Dazu gehe ich von der ontologischen Wende in der Anthropologie aus, um die bestehende Kluft zwischen dem Konzept des Buen Vivir und der Modernisierungstheorie (teilweise) zu überbrücken. Darüber hinaus werde ich in einer Analyse der rechtlichen, theoretischen und politischen Implikationen des Buen Vivir zeigen, wie wichtig es ist, seine Form nach den Bedeutungen zu gestalten, die es erhält: in dieser Hinsicht führen die postmoderne und die indigenistische Wahrnehmung des Begriffs zu zwei unterschiedlichen Übersetzungen des Konzepts, die damit zur Unterscheidung zwischen Buen Vivir und *Sumak Kawsay* führen. Außerdem werde ich anhand jener Aspekte, mit denen Buen Vivir Entwicklung vorantreibt aufzeigen, wie das Modernisierungsparadigma sowohl aus ontologischen als auch aus politischen Gründen umstrukturiert werden muss. Auf diese Weise ist es mir möglich, Buen Vivir mit den territorialen Kämpfen der indigenen Völker in Ecuador in Verbindung zu bringen und zu zeigen, wie notwendig die Neukonfiguration der Beziehungen zwischen ihnen und den anderen Akteurinnen des Landes ist und wie folgt erreicht werden kann. In diesem Sinne behaupte ich, dass Konzepte wie Plurinationalismus, Zustimmung im Kontext der Landbewirtschaftung und Indigenität eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Definition der Rolle spielen, die Buen Vivir in solchen Kämpfen einnimmt. Um das Modernisierungsparadigma herauszufordern, werde ich die folgende Argumentation konstruieren: ich werde schließlich zeigen, dass Buen Vivir (noch) keine „Erlösung“ aus dem hegemonialen westlichen Entwicklungsmodell darstellt. Es werden jedoch einige Elemente angesprochen, die in der Wende, zu der es beiträgt, sicherlich von grundlegender Bedeutung sind: Die

Übertragung dieser Elemente in die empirische Umsetzung wird in dieser Arbeit nicht eingehend behandelt, stellt jedoch sicherlich den nächsten Schritt für weitere Forschungen in dieser Richtung dar.

Schlagwörter: Buen Vivir, *Sumak Kawsay*, Modernisierungstheorie, Ecuador, ontologische Wende, Indigene Völker, Selbstbestimmung.

Appendix 1:



<https://www.mapsland.com/south-america/ecuador/large-physical-map-of-ecuador-with-roads-cities-and-airports>, retrieved on 29th March, 2021