

Decoloniality in Latin America and its impact on Ecuador's Constitution and the National Development Plan





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ABSTRACT

Since Ecuador was colonized by European conquistadors in the 16th century, the country has been under the influence of Western/modern culture. Although today Ecuador is no longer under colonial administration, *coloniality* is a model of power that continues to prevail. Coloniality as a power model describes the living legacy of colonialism in present societies in forms of social discrimination that underwent formal colonialism and became integrated in succeeding social orders. In other words, European colonialism imposed racial, social and political hierarchical orders in Latin America that ranked Europeans at the top and those that they conquered at the bottom due to their different race and culture that were assumed to be inferior. This power structure has remained in place even though political colonialism has been eliminated centuries ago. Moreover, in addition to systematic repression of the culture of the colonized, the repression also fell over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge and of producing perspectives. Thus, as a result of Eurocentered colonialism, European culture became a universal cultural model, with the hegemony of Eurocentrism as the only perspective of knowledge while other cultures and knowledges were silenced and devalued.

However, two decades ago, in the 1990s, a category of decoloniality was created by a group of academics based in Latin America and the United States. Decolonial scholars call for an understanding of Euromodernity not from modernity itself but from its darker side coloniality and propose that in order to challenge the existing “coloniality of power” and accomplish true decolonization in post-colonial countries, knowledge, which is colonized, need to be decolonized as well. This epistemological decolonization means shifting the location of knowledge from the dominant European epistemology to the colonized peripheries. Thus, decoloniality refers de-linking from Western culture and represents a critique of Eurocentrism from subalternized, silenced and devalued knowledges outside Western/modern epistemology. In a short period of time, decolonial projects received broad social, political and cultural support in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America.

This thesis takes a closer look of the epistemic transformation in Ecuador and aims to analyze how the decolonial turn, which took place in the 1990s, has influenced Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution and consequently the country’s 2009-2013 National Development Plan. The research is conducted and the research question answered by using qualitative methods. Moreover, the case study and the research question(s) are interpreted and analyzed through the theories of decoloniality, modernity and

coloniality. The category of decoloniality is used as a main theory and modernity and coloniality, which are inseparable in this context, work as sub-theories. The theoretical chapter also introduces and explains the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir*.

The analysis shows that the emergence of decoloniality had political and ethical effects in Ecuador. Due to the decolonial turn, which was strongly advocated by indigenous movements as well as Ecuador's new left government, Buen Vivir concept that represents historically subalternized indigenous traditions and worldviews was incorporated into Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and 2009-2013 National Development Plan representing a significant step forward in overcoming the country's colonial past. Buen Vivir is a decolonial option and a plural concept with two main entry points: On the one hand, it is a reaction to traditional Western development theory, and on the other hand, it offers an alternative to development emerging from indigenous epistemology and in this sense the concept explores possibilities beyond modernity and dominant Eurocentric epistemology.

Lastly, after analysing the impact of the emerged decoloniality on Ecuador's political framework, the thesis discusses whether and to what extent the Buen Vivir principles in the Constitution and in the Development Plan have been implemented in practice. The second part of the analysis shows that despite the formal political establishment of Buen Vivir principles in Ecuador, in reality the principles are poorly obeyed and thus the deeper structural change on the national level is yet to come. Hence, the epistemic colonization still prevails in Ecuador and the true decolonization of the state stays on the agenda.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“The economic pillar of Western civilization (now globally expanded) — is an economic system based on the belief that development and growth lead to happiness while many people, myself included, have stated that development and growth is leading us towards death”
- Walter Mignolo

1.1 Background

With the conquest of societies and cultures which populate what today is called Latin America, began the constitution of a new world order (Quijano, 2010). This process meant a concentration of the world's resources under the control and for the benefit of a small European minority, especially of its ruling classes. This process has continued ever since and today, five hundred years later, such concentration is being recognized with a new momentum, in a way perhaps even more violent and on much larger, global scale. The European dominators and their Euro-North American descendants are still the central beneficiaries, together with the non-European but anti-colonial part of the world, Japan mainly. The dominated and exploited Latin America and Africa continue to be the main victims (Ibid., 2010).

By conquering all continents, the Europeans established a relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination, known as a specific Eurocentered colonialism. Although political colonialism has been eliminated today in vast majority of countries,¹ coloniality is a model of power that continues. Central to the establishment of this model was the categorization of differences in ways that construct and establish a domination and inferiority based on race and ethnicity, serving as fundamental criterion for the distribution of the population in ranks, roles and places within the social structure of power (Walsh, 2010). This power structure was, and still is, the framework within which the other social relations of classes or estates operate. Similarly, the European culture (also called Western), continue to be dominant culture over others (Quijano, 2010).

The Eurocentered colonialism was an outcome of a systematic repression of the belief, ideas, images, symbols, languages, products and work of the colonized. The repression also fell over the modes of

¹ America was the first continent where political domination was defeated, and afterwards, since the Second World War, Asia and Africa (Quijano, 2010).

knowing, of producing knowledge and of producing perspectives. In Latin America, the cultural repression was also accompanied by a massive execution of the natives. The scale of extermination was so enormous that it meant not only a demographic catastrophe, but also a destruction of native cultures and societies. Thus, the massive genocide together with the colonialization of the beliefs and ideas turned the previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures (Quijano, 2010). Subsequently the colonizers imposed their own beliefs, images and patterns of producing knowledge and meaning on the remaining native societies. At first, they placed them far out of reach of the colonized but then began to teach them in a selective way in order to appoint some of the dominated into their power institution. This way the European culture was made seductive. It was a way of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans (Ibid., 2010). European culture hence became a universal cultural model, with the hegemony of Eurocentrism as *the* perspective of knowledge, while considering indigenous and black peoples as incapable of serious “intellectual” thinking (Walsh, 2010: 79).

As a consequence of colonialism, European modernity, including the traditional concept of development and the idea of success and happiness proposed by the West for the whole humanity, landed to Latin America and has stayed unquestionable for centuries (Lang & Mokrani, 2013). The usual meanings of the word “development” points to *advances* and *progress* in the economic and social sphere (Ibid., 2013:15). The Oxford dictionary, for instances, defines development as “growing larger, fuller or more mature” (Oxford dictionary, 2017), and Cambridge dictionary defines it as “the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced” (Cambridge dictionary, 2017). The definition of development is also often related to “a progress towards higher standards of living” or “of progress from past conditions of backwardness to better future” (Gudynas, 2013:15).

The traditional meaning of development gained popularity especially after the Second World War, when the idea, backed by economic theory, was presented as a practical response to challenges such as poverty and wealth distribution. At that time, a division between developed and underdeveloped countries (including Latin America) was established, after the speech by American president Harry Truman, in which he said that “the underdeveloped countries of the South should follow in the footsteps of the industrialized nations” (Gudynas, 2013:16). Thus, the idea of development became tied to economic growth and the issue of well-being was left in a secondary position, since it was argued that poverty and inequality would be solved essentially by economic means (Ibid., 2013). As

a result, development was transformed into a public policy objective and multiple institutions were set up to promote development at the local, national and international level (Lang & Mokrani, 2013).

In the end of the 1960s and in the beginning of the 1970s, when the idea about development had become widespread, the first critiques started to appear. In 1962 “The United Nations Development Decade: Proposals for Action” demanded that “development” should be separated from “growth”, while broadening the concept of development to include social and cultural matters rather than only economic ones (Gudynas, 2013:17). In the following years, several critical studies were produced, resulting in the formulation of what became known as Dependency theory. The central view of dependency theorist is that there is a dominant world capitalist system that relies on a division of labor between the rich “core” countries and poor “peripheral” countries meaning that the resources flow from poor “periphery” countries to a wealthy “core” countries, enriching the latter at the expense of the former (Economics Online, 2017). The starting point for the theory was the comprehension that underdevelopment is not a phase that leads development, but rather its consequence and, to a great extent, the result of colonialism. Thus, while traditional development economics did not take into account historical situations or power relations, dependency theory brought it to the foreground (Gudynas, 2013). However, although the theory strongly criticized the “onward march of development”, it still repeated some of its basic ideas, such as the importance of economic growth as the expression of material progress (Ibid., 2013:18).

During the same time as the debates about dependency were going on, environmental warnings began to be expressed around the world, growing louder especially after the presentation of the report called “The Limits to Growth” in 1972². The report stated that “the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years” and thus “perpetual economic growth is impossible” (Gudynas, 2013:18). As a result of these findings, the first version of the concept of “Sustainable development” appeared at the beginning of the 1980s. Sustainable development is understood as “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (IISD, 2017), or in other words, the possibility to extract renewable resources in a way that it does not exceed their renewal and reproduction rates. Such extraction should also be aimed at meeting human needs and ensuring quality of life, which differ from the goal of simple growth. Thus the idea of sustainable development is often considered as

² The report is written by Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens.

“development alternative” (Gudynas, 2013). However, despite the fact that the concept of sustainable development reacts to environmental impacts, it still sees nature as a source of resources and development as a form of progress achieved by means of material accumulation (Gudynas, 2013).

At the end of the 1980s the collapse of “real socialism” in Eastern Europe lessened the criticism about development (Gudynas, 2013). During the same time, neoliberal policies, which were sold to Latin American countries by the US and the Western development agencies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Bank, were starting to become consolidated in the continent (Christensen, 2015). In Latin America, the Washington Consensus³ reform package was imposed on Ecuador as well in order to solve its foreign debt problem and the economic crisis started in the 1980s, and it emphasized market rather than state led-strategies and promoted privatization, deregulation and economic opening with respect to both trade and investment (GTN, 2003). Thus, the neoliberal policies encouraged Ecuador to extract and export its natural resources in order to increase economic growth, allowing foreign companies to flow into the country to carry out extractive projects (Gudynas, 2010). As a result, Ecuador, fortunate with one of the highest biodiversity indices, currently also has one of the world’s highest rates of deforestation (United Nations Statistics Division, 2013). Moreover, in addition to environmental impact, neoliberal development projects also exacerbated poverty and inequality, making Ecuador one of the most income-unequal region in the world at the turn of the millennium (Ruttenberg, 2013). Above all, especially the historically discriminated and subordinated indigenous populations were the ones suffering the most from neoliberal policies (Plaschke, 2015).

Therefore, in reaction to failed classical development strategies that had negative social and environmental impacts, indigenous groups in Ecuador started to mobilize massive social movements against the government throughout the 90s with claims for cultural recognition, territorial sovereignty and environmental rights (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016; Gudynas, 2010). During the same time, the continued reliance on the exploitation of natural resources, which had not been sufficient to overcome high levels of poverty and social justice, combined with the high impact of climate change in post-colonial regions made scholars, especially of the South, question not only the Western concept of development but in general the Western hegemonic power in the world (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016;

³ Washington Consensus was a set of economic policy recommendations for developing countries, and Latin America in particular. The initial name Washington Consensus was derived by economist John Williamson who used the term in 1989 when referring to a list of reforms that he felt key players in Washington could all agree were needed in Latin America (Hurt, 2015).

Grosfoguel, 2011). These scholars were in particular questioning the paradox that although the classical Western development has been target of criticism over the last 40 years and even declared as defunct, it is still seen as the only way forward (Gudynas, 2011). That lead to a significant notion that this paradox about development is deeply embedded in Euromodern culture which was imported to Latin America under colonialism and has stayed dominant due to continuing coloniality of power (Ibid., 2011).

Consequently, the most recent school of critical thought, which emerged in Latin America in the late 1990s, made a key distinction between *development alternatives* and *alternatives to development* in order to criticize not only the universal development theory but more comprehensively Euromodernity (Gudynas, 2011). These scholars (Arturo Escobar in particular) stated that while development alternatives, such as sustainable development, are anchored in modernist paradigms, any alternative to development, which radically criticizes and challenges the universal model of development, must move beyond Western culture and modern thought (Gudynas, 2011). Western modernity expresses a particular type of ontology (a way of being and understanding the world) that in the past centuries determined the division between nature and society, a colonial distinction between modern and non-modern countries and the myth of progress as a unidirectional linear path and the only way forward (Ibid., 2011). Therefore, these particular scholars argued that in order to build alternatives to development, which move beyond progress and modernity, it is necessary to totally move away from Euromodern ontology and dominant Eurocentric epistemology and perhaps find alternatives from other, subalternized, epistemologies (Grosfoguel, 2011). As a result, following of this “epistemic turn”, a category of “decoloniality” evolved in Latin America, which in a short period of time received broad social, cultural and political support (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016; Gudynas, 2011).

1.2 Purpose of study

The purpose of this thesis is to understand, as a Western person, the whole phenomenon of decoloniality and to explain the emergence of decolonial projects in Ecuador. Moreover, considering the fact that Ecuador has lived more than 500 years under the influence of Western hegemonic power and has only recently started to advocate the decolonial turn in order to move away from Euro-modernist paradigms, this thesis aims to answer to the following question:

“How has the decolonial turn which took place in Latin America in the 1990s influenced Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution and the 2009-2013 National Development Plan?”

The focus in the thesis is in particular on the 2009-2013 National Development Plan, but the reforms in the 2008 Constitution are discussed as well since they were the point of reference to the National Development Plan. In addition to examining the political and ethical effects of the emerged decoloniality in Ecuador, further in the analysis the thesis addresses the challenges of the implementation of the decolonial projects in Ecuador and discusses whether and to what extend the decolonizing process has been effective in reality.

To conduct this study, first a methodology section will be presented, explaining the methods used and the limitations of the research. Then the theoretical framework will be introduced, comprising the definition of the main concepts and theories that provide a background for the research and which will be used later to analyze the political and ethical effects of the decolonial turn. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn from the analysis, where the answer(s) to the research question will be summarized.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter defines how the objective of the research is accomplished and the research question answered. The chapter starts with explaining the theoretical approach of the study, as well as the research methods used to conduct the research. Then, the study moves on to define how the data for the research is collected and why the certain theories have been chosen. The chapter also explains why the specific country was chosen as a case study and why this specific topic was chosen for the thesis. Lastly, the chapter discusses the limitations that the research faces.

2.1 Theoretical approach & research methods

This thesis assumes an interpretivist (often called a constructivist) position, with historical orientation. Interpretivist scholars argue that there is no objective truth, that the world is socially constructed and that the role of social science is to study those social constructions (Furlong & Marsh, 2010). Interpretivist approach is thus anti-foundationalist and critical of positivism, to whom there is no appearance/reality dichotomy and to whom the world is real and not socially constructed. Hence, while positivists can establish regular relationship between social phenomenon; using theory to generate hypotheses which can be tested by direct observation, in interpretivist/constructivist approach, social phenomena cannot be understood independently of one's interpretation of them but rather it is these interpretations/understanding of social phenomena that directly affects outcomes (Furlong & Marsh, 2010). In other words, in interpretivist/constructivist approach, the knower interprets and constructs a reality based on his/her experiences and interactions with the environment (Murphy, 1997).

The core distinctiveness of constructivism lies in its relationship to contingency. That is to say, while for non-constructivists contingency is not an integral part of their arguments, constructivists base their arguments in contingency. The logical format of any constructivist argument is that certain people faced an indeterminate set of "real" conditions (at least across some range of options), and only arrived at certain actions due to their adoption of certain "social constructs" to interpret their world. By accident or creativity in a moment of contingency they chose one of many possible sets of meaning, thereby building certain interpretations around themselves and "constituting" one world from many that were otherwise possible (Parsons, 2010). Hence, constructivists for example believe

that there was a time when people could have made many choices, but their creative or accidental adoption of certain ideas or norms engaged a series of social mechanisms that embedded them in one world. Therefore, based on the belief that the “world is of our making” (though changing it may be difficult) constructivist imagine that it is possible to remake it (Parsons, 2010: 89).

The research methods with which interpretivists/constructivists specify and support their claims are almost as diverse as the arguments they make (Parsons, 2010). This study assumes a narrative process-tracing method over time to seek evidence of the pressures, motivations and decision-making during different times and to show how certain ideas or norms inform certain actions. Since this thesis seeks to *provide understanding* and to *explain* how and why a certain phenomenon and outcome occurred, it is clear that the research question will be answered through using qualitative methods. Research questions and answers using qualitative methods can be differentiated from quantitative or statistical methods that focus on *measuring* causal effects and ask questions such as “*how many*” (Vromen, 2010: 256). Unlike in quantitative/statistical methods that focus on surveys, questionnaires and content analysis, in qualitative methods the focus is on textual and discourse analysis and detailed text-based answers that are often historical or include personal reflections from participants in events, issues or processes (Vromen, 2010). This is often characterized as the use of “thick” description and analysis rather than broad numerical generalizations (Ibid., 2010).

Moreover, according to Vromen (2010), there are four core attributes often considered to a more qualitative study that are also valid for this research. First, an inductive analysis that is premised on discovering and being exploratory with open questions, rather than only testing theoretically derived hypotheses through deduction. Second, a holistic perspective that seeks to understand all of the phenomenon and the complex interdependence in issues of interest rather than reducing analysis to a few distinct variables. Third, a qualitative and adaptive data collection based on detailed thick description and depth (for example analysis uses direct quotation to capture unique perspectives and experiences), and fourth, an empathetic neutrality in doing research is important as most qualitative researchers believe that complete objectivity is impossible. Thus, also in this thesis, the researcher’s agenda is to understand the complex social world with empathy, while also attempting to be non-judgemental.

2.2 Data collection

As mentioned above, in a qualitative approach, it is typical to study existing documents or texts as a part of the research (Vromen, 2010). Also in this thesis, both primary and secondary written sources have been used to carry out the research. Primary sources are original documents produced by political actors ranging from executive, parliamentary, or judicial arms of governments to NGOs. Secondary sources are in turn, for example, books, scholarly journal articles and newspaper articles. Unlike primary sources, secondary sources are generally considered to be documents that have analysis in them (Vromen, 2010).

Although this thesis mostly rely on existing literature, some data for the analysis is also collected by conducting informal interviews. Informal interviews mean that the interviewer talks with people in the field informally, without use of structured interview guide of any kind. Informal interviewing also goes hand-in-hand with observations made in the field (RWJF, 2008).

The informal interviews were mainly conducted in a community of San Pablito de Agualongo (SPA), located in the Andean highlands of Ecuador. SPA is a small rural community of only 500-600 people (about 150 families) of which majority belong to Ecuador's largest indigenous group, the Kichwa. In addition to San Pablito de Agualongo, one interview was also carried out in the capital Quito, which is located 1,5 hours South from SPA. All the interviews as well as observations were conducted during autumn 2016. Furthermore, this research also uses several interviews conducted by other authors. Interviews are commonly used in a qualitative research to produce qualitative data as they provide information on understandings, opinions, attitudes, feelings and the like (Vromen, 2010). Interviews and observations are also used in this research to give examples and to support statements made in the analysis.

2.3 Choise of theories

Theory is essential to the social researcher because it provides a backcloth and rationale for the research that is being conducted. It also provides a framework within which social phenomena can be understood and the research findings can be interpreted (Bryman, 2012). Since this thesis aims to find out how the decolonial turn has influenced Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and consequently the National Development Plan, decoloniality was chosen as the main theory. In addition, the concepts of modernity and coloniality, which are in fact inseparable in this context, work as sub-theories and

give a background for the emergence of decoloniality. For this reason, they are explained first before moving on to explain decoloniality. Lastly, the theoretical chapter introduces and explains the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir* (living well or collective well-being), which is a concrete expression of decolonial effort, developed in the Andean region by indigenous intellectuals.

There are several different expressions used for *Buen Vivir* such as *Vivir Bien*, which is more common in Bolivia, as well as Ecuadorian Kichwa expression *Sumak Kawsay* and Bolivian Aymara expression *Suma Qamaña*. However, this research uses the Spanish word *Buen Vivir* instead of other options because the concept is best known for its Spanish name and the thesis concentrates on Ecuador, not Bolivia. Moreover, although it would be logical to use the English translation of *Buen Vivir* since the thesis is written in English, the English translation “Good Life” or “Living Well” does not represent the richness of the term and thus is not equivalent to *Buen Vivir*, as will be explained further, due to which the original word is better.

2.4 Case study

Unlike quantitative research, which usually makes generalizations over many cases, qualitative research tends to focus on single or few cases in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the research subject (Vromen, 2010). Also this thesis focuses on only one country, Ecuador, and uses it as a case study to investigate the impact of the decolonial turn in Latin America. It is important to note here that the decolonial turn has similarly influenced Bolivia’s National Development plan and the Constitution. However, Bolivia was disregarded as a case study for this thesis due to Ecuador’s stronger institutional implementation of decolonial projects. Besides, the author is more familiar with Ecuador due to personal experiences from the country as will be explained in the next section.

2.5 Choice of topic

This specific topic for the master’s thesis was chosen due to several reasons. For instance, the author of the thesis spent four months in Ecuador in autumn 2016 working in a local NGO which supports indigenous groups and promotes decolonial projects. The author also lived with an indigenous (Kichwan) family in a community of San Pablito de Agualongo located in the Andean highlands. During that time in Ecuador, the interest towards indigenous people’s rights in general and the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir* in particular was born, resulting to the choice of this topic. The author also got to know Ecuadorians from different social classes, noticing that they have different

attitudes towards the West and the country's current policies. In addition to this all, the author finds the topic extremely interesting and relevant due to severe climate change and global warming.

2.6 Limitations

This research faces some limitations. Due to limited size of the study, it is difficult to discuss all the reasons and factors that challenge the implementation of Buen Vivir concept in Ecuador. Thus, while being aware of the fact that there are a variety of factors that challenge and limit the implementation of Buen Vivir, only the most salient ones will be discussed in the analysis. Besides, considering the fact that the size of the study is limited and the thesis is explaining and looking at events over long period of time, at times the analysis lacks a detailed narrative, especially when explaining historical events. However, in order to understand how decoloniality emerged in Latin America, how and why the concept of Buen Vivir was developed and how the decolonial turn influenced Ecuador's political framework, it is important to explain historical events over long period of time as a part of the thesis.

Moreover, although primary sources have been necessary for the research, this thesis uses mainly secondary sources as a source of information. Utilizing secondary sources makes it inevitable to critically analyze the collected information since especially data acquired from newspaper articles can sometimes give biased overview. To increase the validity of the research, the thesis aims to base the research on data from internationally recognized organizations and authors, and on the comparison of several sources. Also, the newspaper articles have been critically processed in order to determine the reliability.

Lastly, according to the rule of authenticity, interview transcripts should be applied directly, if available (Dahler-Larsen, 2008). However, as the interviews used in this research were informally conducted during discussions, not all interviews were recorded and thus the interview transcripts cannot be applied directly. Moreover, all interviews that were carried out in San Pablito de Agualongo were conducted in Spanish, due to which they had to be translated into English for the thesis and therefore are not original. However, the thesis does not base its analysis and answers on interviews, but the interviews and observations are used to provide information on personal opinions, feelings and attitudes as well as to give concrete examples and to support some arguments.

3. THEORY

Individual decolonial thinkers have existed for decades, such as Waman Puma de Ayla in colonial Peru and Mahatma Gandhi in nineteenth-twentieth century in India. However, it can be said that the foundation of the concept of *decoloniality* emerged when a Peruvian sociologist, Aníbal Quijano, published his seminal article at the beginning of the 90s, formulated as “decolonization of knowledge” (Mignolo, 2010: 11). Inspired by Quijano’s article, decolonial project was developed in earnest eight years later when a group of scholars (Walter Mignolo and Fernando Coronil together with Quijano) met in Montreal at the meeting of the International Sociological Association. Shortly after, another meeting took place independently in Binghamton, organized by Ramón Grosfoguel and Lao-Montes around the concepts of “historical capitalism, coloniality and transmodernity”. These two meetings created, by coincidence, a research, intellectual and political project known as modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (Mignolo, 2010:19).

This theoretical chapter introduces and discusses these three concepts; modernity, coloniality and decoloniality. The chapter starts with the introduction of the concept of European modernity and its dark side coloniality, since in order to understand the rise of decolonial thinking and decoloniality in general, these two concepts need to be discussed. After giving a background by explaining the concepts of modernity and coloniality, the chapter moves on to introduce the main theory of the thesis; decoloniality. Lastly the chapter presents the concept of *Buen Vivir*, which is an indigenous concept developed as an expression of decolonial efforts. Later all these concepts will be used to analyze the impact of the decolonial turn in Ecuador, decoloniality and Buen Vivir as the main concepts.

3.1 Modernity/Coloniality

During the same period as European colonial domination was strengthening itself, the cultural complex known as European modernity was being constituted⁴ (Quijano 2010: 26). Modernity, or the Modern Age, is typically defined as a post-traditional/post-medieval period which arose during the

⁴ The colonial period of Latin America started in 1492 and lasted until the Spanish American Wars of Independence, which took place during the early 19th century and resulted in the liberation of most Spanish colonies in the Americas (Gascoigne, 2001).

Enlightenment in Europe⁵ (Heidegger, 1977). More specifically, as a historical category, modernity refers to a period marked by a rejection of tradition and instead promotes industrialization, urbanization, secularization and individuality. Modernity also refers to increased faith in inevitable social scientific, technological progress and human perfectibility as well as rationalization and professionalization (Foucault, 1995). Moreover, modernity is described as a movement from feudalism toward capitalism and the market economy and associated with the development of nation-state and its constituent institutions such as representative democracy and modern bureaucracy (Ibid., 1995). Even though modernity was presented by European culture, the idea/movement arrived elsewhere in the world, such as to Latin America, under colonialism (Gudynas, 2013: 31).

Modernity has been studied by various disciplines through different theories for centuries. However, from the Eurocentric perspective, one of the major theories within a study of modernity is Modernization theory, which attempts to explain the global process through which traditional societies achieved modernity (Xing, 2015). Although European modernity arose many centuries ago, the history of modernization theory is much shorter⁶. Social scientists, primarily of white European descent, formulated the theory as a response to the international settings in the post-Second World War era (Crossman, 2017; Xing, 2015). In particular, the impact of the Cold War together with the emergence of Third World societies as prominent actors in world politics in the wake of the dissolution of European colonial empires turned intellectual interest beyond the borders of Europe and North America (Tipps, 2012: 200). Consequently, modernization theory was formulated to provide an implicit justification for the asymmetrical power relationship between “traditional” and “modern” societies and was the first to explain why some countries were developed and others not (Xing, 2015).

As a consequence, modernization school brought up the definition of “traditional Western development”, in which are present all the elements that form the backbone of modernity (Gudynas, 2013: 31). For modernization school, development is regarded as an evolutionary perspective which is a universal, spontaneous and irreversible process inherent in every single society rather than a concrete historical process taking place in specific societies during specific periods (Xing, 2015). According to modernization ideology, “development” and “underdevelopment” are differences

⁵ Some theorist place modernity in the Renaissance (Mignolo, 2010).

⁶ The current modernization theory originated with the ideas of German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) (Wolfgang, 2003).

between rich and poor nations in terms of observable economic, political, social and cultural gaps. Development thus implies the bridging of these gaps by means of an *imitative* process in which less developed countries gradually assume the qualities of industrialized nations. Moreover, according to modernization theory, development is a phased process; society begins with a primitive stage and moves to an advanced stage. Therefore, as modernization theorist argued, since the US is modern and advanced and the Third World is traditional and backward, the latter should look to the former for guidance (Xing, 2015). Consequently, according to Mignolo: “Under the spell of neoliberalism and the magic of the media promoting it, modernity and modernization, together with democracy, were sold (to Latin America) as a package trip to the promised land of happiness” (Mignolo, 2010: 304).

However, as first presented by Quijano and further argued by Mignolo, there is no modernity without *coloniality* and that coloniality is the dark side of modernity. While modernity is presented as the rhetoric of salvation for “underdeveloped” societies, it hides coloniality, which is the logic of oppression and exploitation. When people do not buy “the package trip to promised land” willingly or have others ideas of how economy or society should be organized, they become subject to all kind of direct and indirect violence, Mignolo states. Modernity, capitalism and coloniality are thus aspects of the same package of control of economy and authority as well as of knowledge and subjectivity. The concept of modernity/coloniality hence refers to the way in which the concepts (modernity and coloniality) are inseparable (Mignolo, 2010: 9).

It is important to see the difference between the concepts of colonialism and coloniality. While *Colonialism* is an administrative system of foreign occupation, *coloniality* refers to a hegemonic system that support total domination of subaltern peripheries (such as Latina America) by a colonial center. This process, today be known as Globalization, incorporates all peoples into a system centered on Western power. According to Grosfoguel, peripheral nation-states live today under “global coloniality” imposed by the Western countries through institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the Pentagon and NATO. Peripheral countries thus remain under coloniality, although they are not any longer under a colonial administration. In other words, the concept of coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination, created by colonial cultures and structures in the modern capitalist world-system. (Grosfoguel, 2011: 14)

The concept of modernity/coloniality, which was first time introduced by Quijano in the 90s, is grounded in a series of operations that distinguish it from established theories of modernity (Escobar, 2010: 38). For instance, it emphasizes locating the origins of modernity with the conquest of America

and the control of Atlantic at the end of fifteenth century, rather than in universally accepted landmarks such as Enlightenment or the end of the eighteenth century. Moreover, it gives persistent attention to colonialism and the making of the capitalist world system as constitutive of modernity. Consequently, modernity/coloniality concept views modernity as an intra-European phenomenon. Lastly, it identifies the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity, with the concomitant subalternization of the cultures and knowledge of these other groups (Escobar, 2010).

Furthermore, there are some key notions that make up the conceptual body of the modernity/coloniality research program. First and foremost is *Coloniality of power* created by Quijano, which identifies and describes the living legacy of colonialism in present societies in the forms of social discrimination that underwent formal colonialism and became integrated in succeeding social orders (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality of power recognizes the racial, political and social hierarchical orders imposed by European colonialism in Latin America that set value to certain peoples/societies while marginalizing others. Quijano argues that the colonial structure of power resulted in a caste system, where Spaniards were ranked at the top and those that they conquered at the bottom due to their different race and culture that were assumed to be inferior (Quijano, 2007). Maria Lugones extends the definition of coloniality of power by stating that it imposes values and expectations of gender as well (Lugones, 2008). Other important key notions within modernity/coloniality research program are *Colonial difference* and *global coloniality* by Mignolo, which refer to the knowledge and cultural dimensions of the subalternization processes effected by coloniality of power; the colonial difference brings out persistent cultural differences within global power structures. And lastly, *Eurocentrism* by Dussel and Quijano, as the knowledge model that represents the local European historical experience and which became globally hegemonic since the seventeenth century (Escobar, 2010).

According to Mignolo (2010), the formation of the modern/colonial world went hand in hand in the sixteenth century with theology; the eyes of God as the ultimate warranty of knowing. René Descartes, the founder of Modern Western Philosophy, launched a new moment in the history of Western thought when he replaced God, as the foundation of knowledge in the Theo-politics of knowledge with (Western) Man as the foundation of knowledge in European Modern Times. In other words, the capacity to produce scientific knowledge and theory was placed in the mind of Western Man. The Cartesian “*Cogito ergo sum*” (“I think, therefore I am”) is the foundation of modern Western sciences. By producing a dualism between mind and body and between mind and nature,

Descartes was able to claim universal, non-situated, God-eyed view knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2011: 5). A Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez (2003) called this “God-eyed view knowledge as “point zero” perspective of Eurocentric philosophies. “The point zero is the point of view that hides itself as being beyond a particular point of view, that is, the point of view that represents itself as being without a point of view” (Grosfoguel, 2011: 5). Historically, this has permitted Western man to represent his knowledge as the only capable of achieving a universal consciousness, silencing and relegating other epistemologies to a barbarian margins, a primitive past, communist or Muslim evil (Mignolo, 2010: 9).

All in all, to conclude, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed, colonality became the most general form of domination in the world today. The Western hegemonic power is totalitarian in a way that it encompasses all aspects of human existence, including economics, politics, language, education, arts and of course epistemology (Quijano, 2007). Indeed, as Grosfoguel states: “The success of the modern/colonial world-system lie in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant side” (Grosfoguel, 2011: 5).

3.2 Decoloniality

*“We need to break from the narrow ways of thinking about colonial relations in order to accomplish the unfinished and incomplete twentieth-century dream of decolonialization”
-Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano*

The category of decoloniality⁷, appeared in the 1990s as a consequence of Quijano’s foundational article and the modernity/coloniality research program (Mignolo, 2010: 17). Decolonial project, created by a group of academics based in Latin America and the United States, calls for an understanding of modernity not from modernity itself but from its darker side coloniality, and proposes the decolonization of knowledge as an epistemological turn with political and ethical effects. Decoloniality is thus both, political and epistemic project (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010).

As previously explained, one of the most powerful myths of the 20th century was the belief that the elimination of colonial administrations leads to the decolonization of the world. This resulted in the

⁷ Decoloniality is synonym with decolonial “thinking and doing” (Mignolo, 2010).

myth of a “postcolonial” world. The multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not disappear with the juridical-political decolonization but people in the periphery continue to live under the same “colonial power matrix”. The world has just moved from a period of colonialism to a period of global coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2011: 14).

Consequently, also academic systems of knowledge centered in Western modernity have continued to be deeply colonial. For instance, although Postmodern and Postcolonial studies criticize Eurocentric world system, they are rooted in Western theoretical models, meaning that the critique is largely limited to European history and the history of European ideas and thus the theories represent Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2007: 451). Similarly, Dependence and World-System theories criticize modernity and modernization ideas but are built on Modernization theory. Hence these theories are located in the North while the subject to be studied are located in the South, or as Grosfoguel puts it: “they have still continued to produce knowledge from the Western man “point zero” god-eye view.” (Grosfoguel, 2011: 8)

Hence, based on these facts, Quijano among other decolonial scholars claim that in order to challenge the “coloniality of power” and accomplish true decolonialization, knowledge need to be de-colonized as well (Mignolo, 2010: 305). This epistemological decolonization means pluralizing places of knowledge or shifting the location of knowledge from the dominant epistemology to the colonized peripheries. In other words, it signifies producing knowledge *from* peripheral epistemologies rather than *about* them. Thus, decoloniality represents a critique of Eurocentrism from subalternized, silenced and devalued knowledges outside Western/modern epistemology (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Decolonial scholars consider decolonial thinking as a particular kind of critical theory and decolonial option as a specific orientation of doing. They assume that critical theory in the Marxist genealogy of thought, formulated by the Frankfurt theorist Max Horkheimer in the 1930, is also a particular kind of critical theory and not the *norm* or the *master theory* against which all other projects should be compared, measured, evaluated and judged. One of the significances of the decolonial options is to make clear that master theories and abstract universals (left, right and center) are still caught in imperial desires. Moreover, in contrast to modernity school of thought, decolonial scholars assume that history is not only linear but there are several histories, all synchronized histories, inter-connected by imperial and colonial powers (Mignolo, 2010: 2).

Although decolonial scholars count decolonial thinking as a particular kind of critical theory, Mignolo proposes that coloniality and thus decoloniality shall not be taken as a model, theory or an objective of study but instead it is necessary to detach oneself from the hegemonic and Eurocentered matrix of knowledge. The very concept of “coloniality”, Mignolo states, implies thinking de-colonially and not for example “thinking about coloniality” (Mignolo, 2010: 11). It is not proposed to map a territory to be “studied” from the perspective of sociology, economy, political science, cultural studies or postcolonial studies. Thinking decolonially means, specifically, to de-link from thinking “disciplinary” such as sociologically, economically, anthropologically etc. Thus, as a matter of fact, it can be said that the concept of decoloniality broadens the project of critical thinking rather than critical theory. As Mignolo states, decoloniality requires a different type of thinking (Walsh theorizes it as an-other-thinking, in Spanish *pensamiento otro*), a non-linear and chronological epistemological break; it requires border epistemology, a non-capitalist political economy, and a pluri-national concept of state. In other words, thinking decolonially and decolonial option are *another* thinking grounded in border epistemology rather than Greek philosophy (Ibid., 2010: 11).

Moreover, decolonialists emphasize that they do not think within the mind-frame of modernity, looking for a new instrument to replace the old ones. Such a move would use the same logic than modernity and pretend that a different universalism will be better than the one that is today hegemonic and dominant⁸ (Mignolo, 2007: 348). Decolonialist suggest that the decolonization of the mind is also essential among thinkers and doers who do not reject Western contributions to world civilizations. Decolonial thinkers merely invite to question the self-attributed legitimacy of the West, that is, its self-appointment to rule, to decide and manage the entire world. Moreover, as Mignolo explains, their aim is to show that “the forced hand of neoliberal globalization to follow just one path, the Western neoliberal path, is gone and new players are entering the game, learning and thanking the West for what they have learned” (Mignolo, 2010: 15). Thus, decoloniality proposes a “trans-modern” utopia in which the West is decentered without being destroyed or replaced by new hegemon⁹. The emergence of transmodern futures can already be witnessed. They are being enacted in two directions: de-westernization (de-centering the control of economy and authority, e.g., China, India and the South American Union) and de-colonization (the emergence of the global political society) (Mignolo, 2010: 12).

⁸ Such is the problem and limitation of, for example, Islamic fundamentalism (Mignolo, 2007).

⁹ The concept of “trans-modernity” was introduced and explored by Enrique Dussel in 1992 and it contributed significantly to the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality project (Mignolo, 2010).

Lastly, it is necessary to resemble that as inheritors of the modern colonial epistemology born in the West, people who consider themselves as Westerns need not be of European ancestry. They can be found on every continent including, for instance, Latin America. Likewise, many people living in Europe and North America represent peripheral epistemologies and perspectives and can thus be viewed as colonial subjects (Grosfoguel, 2011). However, to sum up, the roots of decolonial thinking derive from the lived experiences of colonial histories and is a response to the relation of direct, political, social, cultural and epistemic domination established by Europeans (Walsh, 2007). Decoloniality refers delinking from Eurocentrism and means working toward a vision of human life that is not structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does (Mignolo, 2010: 313). Similarly, Escobar (2010) concludes that epistemic decolonization creates the horizon to image and act towards global futures, in which the notion of a political enemy is replaced by intercultural communication, and towards an-other rationality that places life first and institutions at its service, not the other way around¹⁰.

3.3 Andean indigenous concept: Buen Vivir

“We must return to being, because colonization has made us “wanting to be”. Many of us want to be, but as of yet, we are not. We now want to return to our own path to our being”
- Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca Céspedes

Beyond the academic world, decolonial options are being presented by indigenous mobilizations as well as social movements emerging in the process of challenging the dominant regime of modern power/knowledge and defending the territories of indigenous peoples in Latin America (Mignolo 2010, 18). One good example of a model that has been developed as an expression of decolonial efforts is the concept of *Buen Vivir*, also known as *Sumak Kawsay* (in Kichwa) or *Suma Qamaña* (Aymara). Although *Buen Vivir* is rather new as a political concept, it is built on the ancestral knowledge of indigenous peoples and is considered as a culture of life which invites to assume other “knowings” and practices and foresees a return to a way of life that had been suppressed by colonization (Altmann, 2014).

Since the concept of *Buen Vivir* is deeply rooted in indigenous Andean traditions, it is not easily accessible for those who do not share them. Thus, as Thomas Fatheuer (2011) points out, it is

¹⁰ It is argued that in capitalist system institution are placed first and life second (Escobar, 2010).

important not to underestimate the concept and its considerable complexity. Similarly, Eduardo Gudynas, a leading scholar on Buen Vivir, remarks that as any complex concept, Buen Vivir does not have a simple definition. “Buen Vivir is a concept under construction that is unfolding in a wide variety of contexts and is characterized precisely by its plurality” (Gudynas, 2011: 19). The recognition of the plurality of the indigenous communities is indeed a fundamental building block of Buen Vivir (Fatheuer, 2011). However, number of scholars have used the definition below as a basic definition for the concept:

“In its most general sense, Buen Vivir denotes, organizes, and constructs a system of knowledge and living based on the communion of humans and nature and on the spatial-temporal-harmonious totality of existence. That is, on the necessary interrelation of being, knowledges, logics, and rationalities of thought, action, existence, and living. This notion is part and parcel of the cosmovision¹¹, cosmology, or philosophy of the indigenous peoples of Abya Yala” (Walsh, 2010: 18).

From Spanish to English, Buen Vivir loosely translates as “good life” or “living well”, although neither terms sit well, according to Gudynas. Both translations refer too much to Western notions of wellbeing, which is different from Buen Vivir’s view of wellbeing. “These are not equivalent at all. With Buen Vivir, the subject of wellbeing is not about the individual, but the individual in the social context of their community and in a unique environment situation” Gudynas explains in an interview with Oliver Balch (2013). Similarly, Bolivia delegation at the UN declares that for indigenous people, living well is not the same as living better (at the expense of others), as usually considered in Western cultures. Instead, living well means living within a community, completing each other (Bolivia delegation at the UN, 2010). Furthermore, a Bolivian politician and researcher Fernando Huanacuni Mamami states that the Spanish word Buen Vivir is also a poor translation for what his ancestral language expresses: “The Aymara term *Suma Qamaña* is translated as “living well” or a “full life”, that in general terms means living in harmony and equilibrium, in harmony with the cycles of Mother Earth, of the cosmos, of life and of history, and in equilibrium with all forms of existence”. Thus, “the word Buen Vivir is too short to express the essence of *Suma Qamaña*”, he explains (Huanacuni Mamami, 2010: 22). Similarly, it is important to point out that the Ecuadorian *Sumak Kawsay* is not identical with the Spanish word Buen Vivir but neither with the Bolivian *Suma Qamaña*. The

¹¹ A cosmovision is the set of knowledge and acknowledgements a person, time, or culture has about how it sees the world, an image based on the interpretation of one’s own nature and of everything that surrounds him/her. A cosmovision defines shared notions applied to all fields of life, from politics, the economy or science, even religion, morality or philosophy (Lanza, 2012).

understanding of Buen Vivir does not differ only between countries and groups, but also between people within different countries and groups. Also, even though *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña* are Buen Vivir's best-known points of reference, Buen Vivir is not limited to these. Similar worldviews are found among other indigenous peoples (Lang & Mokrani, 2013).

As seen, Buen Vivir questions the individualistic hegemonic pattern of Western/capitalist civilization. In addition, unlike modernity school of thought, which sees development as a linear process (of progress from past conditions of backwardness to better future) and stresses the duality that separates society from nature (which is seen more as “a system of resources”), Buen Vivir moves away from the mantra of progress and wealth accumulation, toward a more holistic, meaningful and practical existence of living in harmony with one another and with the natural environment (Ruttenberg, 2013: 81). In other words, Buen Vivir is not geared towards “having more” and does not see accumulation and growth, but rather a state of equilibrium as its goal (Madsen, 2016: 200). From the perspective of Buen Vivir, basic compliances with “living well” conditions include sufficient food, shelter and clothing, family security, good health and the values of strong community engagement as well as meaningful lives and easy access to a thriving natural world. That is to say, the aim of Buen Vivir is to live well within the planet's ecological limits (Bolivia Delegation at the UN, 2010). Buen Vivir as a decolonial concept thus breaks with conventional concepts in several ways in that it relies on indigenous traditions and visions of the cosmos, it breaks with traditional concepts of development and it focuses on the relationship to nature (Fatheuer, 2011).

The fact that Buen Vivir questions the western concept of wellbeing, the model is understood especially by non-indigenous intellectuals as a radical alternative to traditional western development (Ruttenberg, 2013). Yet, it is more elaborate version and more far-reaching politically and geographically than most earlier alternatives¹² (Garcia, 2012). As Huanacuni Mamami (2012) explains: “We, the original indigenous peoples, are questioning the term development and all that it implies; as for our peoples, development has meant the destruction of nature and our communities” (p.36). According to Huanacuni Mamami, for indigenous peoples the term development is thus tied to exploitation, marginalization and dependency (Huanacuni Mamami in Garcia, 2012). In addition, the supporters and creators of Buen Vivir state that the current crisis of nature and the severe effects

¹² One example of an earlier development alternative is Human Development by Amartya Sen, which means satisfying (individual) necessities and improving (individual) capacities and ensuring sustainability (well-being) (Garcia Agustin, 2015).

of climate change indicate that development has proven to be a failure. For them, development is the leading cause of global crisis and the destroyer of planet Earth (Bolivian delegation at the UN, 2010).

Moreover, Buen Vivir does not only criticize Western concept of wellbeing and growth-based development but extends so far as to entail a deeper and more comprehensive critique of Euro-modernity and modern ontology, since it is from there that the idea of progress and development emerged (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016). Thus, Buen Vivir is not only contrary to capitalist development but also goes beyond socialism. From the perspective of Buen Vivir, what matters the most for capitalism is money, making a profit. For socialism, what matters the most is man, because socialism aims to meet the increasingly growing needs of man, both spiritual and material (usually at the expense of environment)¹³. But within the framework of Buen Vivir, what matters the most is neither man or money but life (Bolivia delegation at the UN, 2010). Buen Vivir as a political alternative¹⁴ thus criticizes modernization and modern paradigms while also incorporates strong environmental and intercultural components (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016: 9).

Lastly, although the vision of Buen Vivir is to return back to a way of life that had been suppressed by colonization, Buen Vivir, like decoloniality, does not reject the Western contributions totally. Andean indigenous peoples formulated Buen Vivir in accordance with the wisdom of their forefathers, who lived in harmony with nature, did not need wealth, minerals or technology. Yet, they emphasize that it does not mean that they should not use technology if they have it. “Technology and ancestral wisdom has to be combined in connection with respect for Mother Earth” Members of a Bolivian indigenous organization CONAMAQ explain (Lanza, 2012: 3). Similarly, Alberto Acosta, Ecuadorian economist and politician, states that Buen Vivir definitely does not mean rejecting the possibility of modernising society, especially with the incorporation in the logic of Buen Vivir of many of humanity’s valuable technological advances. “More than that, one of the fundamental tasks lies in a permanent, constructive dialogue between ancestral knowledge and wisdom with the most advanced universal thinking” (Acosta, 2010: 13). Also Gudynas points out that Buen Vivir owes as much to political philosophy as it does to indigenous worldviews. “It is equally influenced by western critiques of capitalism over the last 30 years, especially from the fields of environmentalism and

¹³ Traditional leftist priority in Latin America is strengthen social rights while encouraging growth (Fatheuer, 2011).

¹⁴ The concept of political alternative is used for all proposals to change the economic, cultural and social basis of a given system (Lanza, 2012).

feminist thought.” Gudynas states. “Buen Vivir certainly does not require a return to some sort of indigenous pre-Colombian past.” He concludes (Gudynas in Balch, 2013).

All in all, Buen Vivir offers a historical grounding in the indigenous world, but also in principles that have been defended by other Western currents that have remained inferior. Buen Vivir responds to old problems such as how to overcome poverty and defeat inequality, together with other new ones, such as the loss of biodiversity and global climate change (Lanza, 2012). Above all, Buen Vivir is an effort to overcome the colonial past that has marked South American history. It is the reconstruction of indigenous identity, recovering their values or the “return to our own path” as Bolivian Foreign Minister Choquehuanca explains (Ibid., 2012: 5).

4. ANALYSIS

This chapter aims to discover how the emerged decoloniality in Latin America has influenced Ecuador's political framework. The chapter starts by giving a short overview of the situation in Ecuador regarding the indigenous populations and their social movements and then continues to analyze how and why the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir was created and how it was incorporated into Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and consequently into 2009-2013 National Development Plan. After this, the chapter moves on to analyze why the principles of Buen Vivir enshrined in the Constitution and in the National Development Plan have been difficult to apply in practice. This is done first by discussing several contradicting activities that have taken place since 2008 and then by discussing the main factors that challenge and limits the comprehensive implementation of Buen Vivir principles in Ecuador. Lastly, the chapter ends with concluding remarks, where the answers to the research question(s) are summarized.

4.1 Ecuador and the indigenous populations

The *Republica del Ecuador* is located in the North-Western part of South America, at the boundaries of Columbia and Peru, boarded on its west side by the Pacific Ocean (Joussemet, 2017). The country was colonized by Spain during the 16th century and after nearly 300 years of Spanish rule, became an independent republic in 1830 (Williamson, 1992). Today, Ecuador's population is more than 16 million people, of which about 10 percent is of European descent, a quarter belong to indigenous groups¹⁵, and the rest are of mostly mixed ethnicity (*mestizos*). Those of European descent are often engaged in administration and land ownership in the capital Quito and the surrounding Andean highlands, which is also where a large number of indigenous people live, most of which work as farmers. Guayaquil, which is the country's largest city, dominates the coastal plain and is largely populated by *mestizos* (National Geographic, 2017).

¹⁵ Ecuador has various indigenous groups of which the largest is the Andean Kichwa, who number more than 2 million. The Amazon basin is as rich in indigenous culture as the highlands and has many diverse indigenous groups such as Cofán, Huaorani and lowland Kichwa (EcuadorExplorer, 2013).

Despite rather small size, Ecuador can be divided into four vastly different regions that each has defining regional characteristics in terms of nature, culture and geographic among other things. These four regions are Galapagos, the Pacific Coast, Andean highlands (Sierra) and Oriente (Amazon). The headwaters of the Amazon basin, which makes up the eastern half of the country, is the Earth's largest and most biodiverse watershed and tropical rainforest (Jefferson, 2001). While fortunate with one of the highest biodiversity indices, Ecuador also has one of the world's highest rates of deforestation. Since the 1970s, approximately 30% of Ecuador's Amazonian forest mass has been cut down and between 1990-2010 Ecuador lost an average of 1,43% (197,600 ha) of forest cover per year (United Nations Statistics Division, 2013). Today, Amazon is among the most threatened rainforest ecosystems on planet (The Latin American Herald Tribune, 2015).

The rapidly growing deforestation rates in the 1990s were due to neoliberal policies sold to Latin American countries by the Western development agencies, which encouraged Ecuador to extract and export their natural resources, oil in particular, in order to increase economic growth and solve their foreign debt problem started in the 1980s (Gudynas, 2010: 3). Although there is some evidence to suggest that neoliberalism reduced state corruption, controlled inflation and improved access to new technologies, neoliberal policies also caused serious problematic developments (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2011). Economic restructuring for instance increased unemployment to levels that sometimes exceeded those of the so called "lost decade" of the 1980s. As a consequence, across the region the number of people living in poverty was higher by the end of the 1990s (48,3%) than in 1980 (40,5%). Moreover, neoliberalism did not fail only in economic terms but also in political regarding citizenship, inequality and local participation (Plaschke, 2015). This had a harsh impact on already discriminated and marginalized indigenous peoples, which, as seen, represent a large proportion of Ecuador's population (Lanza, 2012). In addition to increased poverty and inequality among indigenous groups, indigenous peoples suffered, and still suffer, from destroyed nature and environmental devastation, since for many indigenous communities¹⁶ nature is not merely a source of resources but home. Moreover, more than 60% of Ecuador's remaining forest cover is on indigenous land or under indigenous occupation (Butler, 2012). Also, in addition to demolished homes, the oil extraction process often results in the release of toxic drilling by-products into local rivers polluting the environment and causing diseases for the people living there. Yet, despite the fact

¹⁶ Extraction of nature and oil in particular has posed serious concerns for groups such as Cofán, Siona, Secoya, Kichwa and Huaorani tribes who live in the Amazon. Some of these Huaorani are among the few remaining indigenous peoples on Earth living in their traditional ways (Butler, 2012).

that indigenous communities have borne many of the cost of deforestation in forms of pollution and displacement, they have failed to see many benefits from neoliberal policies (Ibid., 2012).

Historically indigenous peoples in Ecuador have suffered from multiple forms of discrimination such as racial discrimination, lack of recognition and lack of linguistic and land rights (Andolina et al., 2009). As explained in the theoretical chapter, European colonialism set value to certain peoples/societies while marginalizing others. This was concretized with a system called *encomienda*, which controlled the behavior and labor of the indigenous during colonialism. Under *encomienda*, conquistadors and other leaders (*encomenderos*) received grants of a number of natives, from whom they could exact “tribute” in the form of labor or gold. The *encomenderos* were supposed to protect and Christianize/modernize the natives granted to them, but they most often used the system to effectively enslave the indigenous people and their lands (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2017). Outside of the *encomienda*, indigenous people’s labor was most commonly exploited through the *mita*, under which indigenous people were required to devote one year of their labor to some public or private Spanish concern, such as constructing a church, road, or public building. Both of these systems, *encomienda* and *mita* lasted until nearly the end of the colonial period (Hanratty, 1989). Hence, as a consequence of colonialization and centuries of discrimination, indigenous people were ranked at the bottom of the social class and still remain subordinated and marginalized due to preserving “coloniality of power”. Even today, despite major improvements, they lack equal access to education and health care services (especially bilingual), and find themselves mired in poverty and deprivation (Astudillo, 2017).

4.2 Indigenous Social Movements in Ecuador

During 1970s and 1980s Ecuador faced an “ethnic re-identification” of the indigenous in the context of a renewed indigenous movement with new emerging organizations (Quijano, 2006: 32). These new ethnic organizations were able to gain influence with the support of Catholic Church, which resulted in a change in hegemony of organizations. The change was accompanied by a shift in discourse towards an “identitarian understanding” of the indigenous people and their position in a society (Altmann, 2014: 82). Moreover, the shift towards an identitarian understanding of the indigenous people within Ecuadorian society resulted in a renewed concept of the indigenous, understood as “a population that has community of culture, past, perhaps language, and considers that it should dispose of a common or own authority as an indigenous nationality with the right for self-determination” (León 1983 in Altmann, 2014 :82). Following this concept, the new indigenous

movement started to fight for self-determination and liberation of the indigenous peoples (Altmann, 2014).

In the core of the demands of the indigenous movement, the acknowledgment of diversity and difference took the place of equality. In other words, besides fighting for self-determination the indigenous started to fight for “a citizenship with the right to difference” (Altmann, 2014: 84). The indigenous stated that one single mode of citizenship based on a uniform set of individual rights was insufficient to ensure the political incorporation of all citizens. Instead, they claimed, constitution should recognize multiple forms of citizenship, including collective forms that link individuals to the state through communities that give citizenship greater meaning and content (Van Cott, 2002). The fight of the indigenous movement was thus for a recognition as different peoples and nationalities within society and state, in the level of equality. Moreover, a change in the understanding of the land of the indigenous peasants also took place within the movement. This led to a reconceptualization of land, meaning that land was now understood not only as an economic asset, but also as cultural place (Althman, 2014).

In the following years, above mentioned ideas were integrated into a homogenous political project that pursued “The transformation of the nature of the actual power of the hegemonic Uninational State, exclusive, antidemocratic and repressive; and to build the New Humanist Plurinational Society” (Altmann, 2014: 85). The main organization of the movement pursuing the social change was The Indigenous Nationality Confederation of Ecuador¹⁷ (CONAIE), which was founded at a convention of some 500 indigenous representatives in 1986 in order to act on the national political scene in Ecuador (Altmann, 2014). CONAIE¹⁸ is the largest indigenous organization in Ecuador representing 14 indigenous groups and affiliating with an estimated 80% of indigenous organizations (Van Cott, 2002). Its political agenda includes: strengthening of a positive indigenous identity, strengthening of intercultural and bilingual education, promotion of community self-legislation, establishment of a participatory democracy with decentralized power and economic resources, and promotion of environmental sustainability. Yet, above all, CONAIE’s objective is to fight against coloniality and thus also neoliberal policies imposed by the West (the REDD Desk, 2017).

¹⁷ In Spanish: Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Altmann, 2014).

¹⁸ The CONAIE can be divided into three main regional federations: the CONFENIAE (Indigenous Nationalities from Ecuadorian Amazonia Confederation) in the Oriente, the ECUARUNARI (Quechua Nationality People from Ecuador Confederation) in the Sierra and the CONAICE (Indigenous and Black Organizations Coordination) on the Costa (Joussemet, 2017).

Indeed, in response to the disastrous neoliberal policies, or more deeply, Western concept of development, which failed to deliver sustainable societal and economical structures and increased inequality and social exclusion, CONAIE repeatedly mobilized massive indigenous uprisings throughout 1990s (Joussemet, 2017). These uprisings included strikes, demonstrations, occupations of large private lands and clogging of streets with traditional dance while making demands of the political structure via direct negotiation (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009). What followed this process was ousting of two presidents and the adoption of the 1998 Constitution which recognized Ecuador as a multicultural and multiethnic state with collective rights¹⁹ while brought CONAIE and the indigenous movement the greatest success in the history of its existence (Radcliffe, 2010). The successful insertion of indigenous rights into the Constitution was, among other reasons, attributable to growing public acceptance of indigenous rights as an urgent social and political issue (Van Cott, 2002). Moreover, although changes in the 1998 Constitution were not merely related to indigenous demands, it changed the role of indigenous people in Ecuadorian society setting the groundwork for the respect of indigenous rights that had been pursued for a long time (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009).

However, even though Ecuador's 1998 Constitution recognized collective rights and diversity as a fundamental characteristic of the nation-state, CONAIE did not manage to incorporate the term "plurinational" in the Constitution. Moreover, there was no high-level, centralized leadership to implement the new reforms (Van Cott, 2002). Hence, the Constitution was widely perceived as a set of concessions rather than as a fundamental addressing of the rights of the poor and indigenous groups. Thus, ongoing protests continued to animate Ecuadorian politics in the 2000s, uniting around demands for citizenship and development paradigms to go "beyond multiculturalism" (Radcliffe, 2011: 243).

4.3 Incorporation of Buen Vivir into Ecuador's Constitution and the Development Plan

In the year 2000 the German agency for development GTZ organized several events aimed at the discussion of cultural aspects of the fight against poverty in Latin America called National Dialog 2000 (*Diálogo Nacional 2000*). One part of this program was called *Suma Qamaña* (Buen Vivir/Good Life) and, in collaboration with Bolivian Federation of Municipal Associations, inspired a great

¹⁹ The definition of "collective rights" refers to indigenous peoples as "peoples who by self-definition are nations with ancestral roots" (Kintto, 2017).

amount of publications on indigenous ideas of “Buen Vivir/Good Life” and their different aspect that could spread through the whole country (Altmann, 2014: 85). As a result, a group of members of the intellectual Aymara elite, formed a coherent indigenous concept of Buen Vivir, which was presented as alternative to development. Such a radical questioning of Western development was possible within indigenous worldviews of Andean region since these worldviews culturally lacked concepts like development and progress (Gudynas, 2010). Before this moment, Buen Vivir concept did not form part of the historical or everyday discourse of the indigenous in Bolivia and thus can be considered as postmodern invention of the Aymara intellectuals (Ibid., 2014: 86).

In the following years, GTZ was able to spread the new concept in a series of events on the whole American continent. At that moment, according to Philipp Altmann, a professor of Central University of Ecuador, the concept of Buen Vivir was based primarily on an opposition of the Western life and a way of thinking to the indigenous alternatives. Consequently, as a part of the expansion process of the new concept, *Suma Qamaña* was adapted to the Kichwa *Sumak Kawsay* (Altmann, 2014: 86), however the translations of these two terms are not identical due to different ethnic and linguistic reflections, as explained in the theoretical chapter.

In Ecuador, Buen Vivir was first time introduced with an article written by Ecuadorian anthropologist Carlos Viteri Gualinga in 2002 (Altmann, 2014). After analyzing the indigenous vision of development in the Amazon, Viteri Gualinga, himself an Amazonian Kichwa, came to the conclusion that there is no indigenous concept of development in indigenous traditions of Amazon. Yet, according to him “there is a holistic vision about what should be the objective or the mission of all human effort, that consists of looking for and creating the material and spiritual conditions in order to construct and maintain the “good life”, which is also defined as “harmonious life” that in language such as Kichwa is defined as *alli kausai* or *sumak kawsay*” (Viteri, 2002 in Altmann, 2014: 89). Consequently, in the same year of 2002, Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta cited the concept of Buen Vivir in order to criticize the Western understanding of economic development and offered Buen Vivir as an alternative to development in which economic growth is secondary (Ibid., 2014).

Consequently, in addition to intellectuals and social actors from academia, also indigenous movements started to use the concept of Buen Vivir as an instrument to defend their territories and to mobilize more people against the country’s destructive policies. In the following year, in 2003, a local indigenous organization and Amazonian filial of CONAIE, which represents the Kichwa people of Sarayaku and fought against petroleum production in their territory, issued a text called “The book

of Sarayaku in order to defend our future²⁰”, in which a broader definition of Buen Vivir (*Sumak Kawsay*) in the context of demands for territorial autonomy and a plurinational state was developed. In this text, Buen Vivir appeared not only as a spiritual alternative to development on a general level, but also as a decisively local and concrete project (Altmann, 2014: 88).

In the coming years, the discussion around the new concept of Buen Vivir in Ecuador became quieter, until the silence was broken by the structural political change which brought a new left party, Alianza PAÍS, into the government (Altmann, 2014). In general in Latin America, a series of left or center-left governments took office around the turn of the millennium, promising an end to the neoliberal-era and more expansive approach to welfare spending. Also in Ecuador, the widespread social protests (also non-indigenous) of the twentieth century culminated in the election of center-left government which promised to decrease poverty and increase social inclusion by increasing active role of the state (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2011). Moreover, especially indigenous movements supported leftist political movements and became a natural ally with them due to their promised policies to remedy past ethnic and racial oppression and their will to throw the World Bank and other Western development agencies out of the country (Radcliffe, 2011). Consequently, indigenous groups among others elected Rafael Correa, the leader of PAÍS, as a President of Ecuador in 2006 presidential elections²¹. During his campaign, Correa depicted himself as the head of “a citizen’s revolution” against the established political parties and corrupt elites and described himself as the leader of a second independence movement dedicated to freeing Ecuador from “American imperialism” (Philip & Panizza, 2011: 89).

In the plan for the government of 2007-2011, Alianza PAÍS defined Buen Vivir as a central part of its political proposal. Therefore, the concept of Buen Vivir was also an important part of the discussions in the constituent assembly that elaborated the new Constitution for Ecuador in 2008 (Altmann, 2014). In a proposal to this assembly, CONAIE expressed its wish that the new Constitution may be a starting point “for the construction of a post-capitalist and post-colonial society, a society that promotes the “good life”, transmitted from generations to generations by our ancient taitas and mamas, a society that regains the teaching of its ancient peoples and can live in harmony with our Pachamama” (Altmann, 2014: 89). Finally, Buen Vivir was defined in the preamble and 99 articles of the 2008 Constitution as a social purpose and a responsibility of the state (Altmann, 2014). As the preamble states: “Calling upon the wisdom of all the cultures that enrich us as a society,

²⁰ Original name: Sarayak Sumak Kawsayta Nawpakma Katina Killka issued by Autonomous Territory of the Aboriginal Nation of the Kichwa People of Sarayaku (Altmann, 2014).

²¹ Rafael Correa served as a President of Ecuador from 2007 until 2017.

as heirs to social liberation struggles against all forms of domination and colonialism. [...] We decided to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature to reach “el Buen Vivir, el Sumak Kawsay” (Constitution of Ecuador, 2008).

Moreover, while the 1998 Constitution recognized Ecuador as multicultural and multi-ethnic state, the new Constitution declared Ecuador as a united plurinational state meaning that the state recognises, respects and promotes unity, equality and solidarity among all peoples and nationalities regardless of their historical, political and cultural differences²² (Walsh, 2010: 18). Plurinationalism, according to president Rafael Correa, signifies admitting that several different nationalities coexist within Ecuadorian state (Kintto, 2008). Hence, “plurinational state” as Walsh explains, required “re-found transformation of the state to overcome the monocultural national identity premised upon European norms” (Walsh, 2010: 18). Moreover, with the inclusion of historically excluded populations, plurinationalism established the groundwork for the deepening of democracy and construction of postcolonial state. According to Humberto Cholango, the head of Ecuarrunari organization, which is the biggest association within CONAIE, “the recognition of plurinationalism is one more step towards uprooting the colonial state” (Kintto, 2008).

Finally, following its constitutional adoption, Buen Vivir was taken up in Ecuador’s National Development Plan of 2009-2013. According to the Plan, “the 2008 Constitution, the social contract approved in referendum, is the main point of reference for the national planning process” (SENPLADES, 2010). Therefore, after the constitutional reform, the National Development Plan was updated according to the 2008 Constitution and received a different name to reflect the change of paradigm encompassed in the term “Good Living” (Buen Vivir). Thus, the 2007-2010 National Development Plan which was called the “Plan for the Citizen’s Revolution” was hereafter changed to be called the “2009-2013 National Plan for Good Living: Building a Plurinational and Intercultural State.”²³ (SENPLADES, 2010). The content of the 2009-2013 National Development Plan, together with the 2008 Constitution, will be elaborated in the following section.

All in all, it can be concluded that the significant constitutional reforms started in the late 1990s and resulting in the adaption of the indigenous concept into Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution and consequently in 2009-2013 National Development plan were due to an epistemic and political process

²² Ecuador is composed of 15 nationalities and 18 indigenous, afro-Ecuadorian and *montubio* (mestizo people of the countryside) groups of people (SENPLADES, 2010).

²³ In Spanish Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2009-2013.

started first with a reaction to the neoliberal policies of 1990s (which included a strong critique of classical development strategies from different social actors as well as intellectuals), and second, with the election of new left government that allowed the expression of indigenous knowledge and traditions which were oppressed and subordinated for centuries (Gudynas, 2011). In other words, the academic decolonial turn, which started with the questioning of Western hegemony and modernist paradigms among scholars from the South, was not only an epistemic project but also had political implications. The decentering of Euromodernist perspectives further strengthened indigenous social movements, which in turn contributed to the rise of new left in Ecuador. Since Correa's government was challenging the Western influence in the country and thus supporting the decolonial turn, the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir was incorporated into Ecuador's new Constitution and the National Development Plan and thus became a central part of Ecuador's post-neoliberal policy framework.

4.4 The progressive Constitution of 2008 and the National Plan for Good living

After explaining that the decolonial turn, which emerged in Latin America in the late 1990s, brought about the incorporation of ancestral indigenous knowledge in form of Buen Vivir into Ecuador's Constitution and the National Development Plan, this section elaborates the contents of the 2008 Constitution as well as the 2009-2013 National Development Plan, indicating how the principles of Buen Vivir appear in them.

Ecuador was not the only Latin American country building on its indigenous past by integrating indigenous concept into its political framework. Also in Bolivia, where indigenous peoples represent the major proportion of the total population (Lanza, 2012), Buen Vivir was incorporated into the country's Constitution in 2009. However, the concept of Buen Vivir is handled in quite different ways in these two constitutions (Gudynas, 2011). In Bolivia, Buen Vivir represents the state's basic principles and orientation, promoting a pluralistic society's ethical and moral principles. As already mentioned, it refers to the Aymara concept of *Suma Qamaña*, but also to the Guaraní ideas of the harmonious living (*ñandereko*), good life (*teko kavi*), the land without evil (*ivi maraei*) and the path to the noble life (*ghapaj ñan*), emphasizing especially the protection of Mother Earth (*Pachamama*) (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016: 9). In turn, in the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador, the conceptual framework is different in that although Buen Vivir is also referred to an indigenous concept (Kichwa concept of *Sumak Kawsay*), it is described as a set of rights, most of which can be also found in Western tradition (Gudynas, 2011). In the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador, Buen Vivir, in addition to being transversal axis, has its own chapter called "Rights of the good way of living" (*Derechos del*

Buen Vivir) that include water and food, healthy environment, culture and science, information, technology, communication, labor, social security, housing, and so on (Constitution of Ecuador 2008, Title 2, Chapter 2). These are in the same hierarchy level with another set of rights that include, among others, those of freedom, participation, protection, communities, peoples, nations and also the rights of Nature (Title 2.) Thus, while Bolivian constitution is focused on *Buen Vivir* as an ethical principle, Ecuador's constitution offers a stronger approach because the concept is conceived as a plural set of rights (Gudynas, 2011).

In addition to the incorporation of *Buen Vivir*, the 2008 Constitution became innovative also in terms of its recognition of the rights of nature (*los derechos de la naturaleza*) as mentioned above (Radcliffe, 2012). The Chapter 7, Article 71, states: "Nature or *Pachamama*²⁴, where the life is reproduced and realized, has the right to the integral respect of its existence and the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes" (Constitution of Ecuador 2008, Chapter 7). It also has the right to reparation or restorations (Article 72). According to Radcliffe (2010), the reason for granting rights to nature rest on the understanding that capitalist economy breaks human's relations with nature and reduces nature to separate item of property. By contrast, "the idea of a living Mother Earth (*Pachamama*) together with principles of deep ecology are brought together in the Constitution to remove nature from formal ownership and endow it with rights of its own" (p.245). Thus, the 2008 Constitution established a system of rights for individuals and collectives but also for nature, which challenges liberal theory's presumptions of a universal model of citizenship (Radcliffe, 2010).

Lastly, the Ecuadorian Constitution brings together the rights of Nature and *Buen Vivir* with a "Development regime", which is described in the Constitution as follows: "The Development structure is the organized, sustainable and dynamic group of economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental systems which underpin the achievement of the good way of living (*Sumak Kawsay*) (Article 275). According to Gudynas (2011), this formulation is impressive because it moves away from the classical approach where classical development strategy defines and limits economic and social life. On the contrary, the Ecuadorian approach requires that the economic, political, social, cultural and environmental areas should be organized to guarantee the *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* (Gudynas, 2011).

²⁴ *Pachamama* means Mother Earth in Kichwa (Radcliffe, 2010).

Furthermore, the Development structure includes seven objectives which are: improvement in the quality of life; a just, democratic, productive and solidarity based economic system with equal distribution of development benefits and dignified and stable employment; the promotion of participation and social monitoring including equitable representation of diverse identities in all areas of public power; the restoration and conservation of nature, and the maintenance of a sustainable environment ensuring equitable, permanent and quality access to water, air and land; the guaranteeing of national sovereignty and Latin American integration; the promotion of balanced, equitable land use planning; and the protection and promotion of cultural diversity, social memory and cultural patrimony (Constitution of Ecuador 2008, article 276). Thus, the vision put forward in the “Development regime” of the constitution is that of a new society based in equality, solidarity, fraternity, complementarity, participation, social control, equal access and responsibility. Its projection, according to Walsh (2010), is towards a new social, political, economic and nature-based type of development that takes distance from capitalism and entails a major re-orienting from within.

The strategy for the realization and application of this project is detailed in the 2009-2013 National Development Plan for Good Living, developed by the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES) and afterwards approved by the president Rafael Correa in November 2009 (Walsh, 2010). According to the Plan, “the National Development Plan for Good Living is a first step to build the National Decentralized System for Participative Planning that aims to decentralize and deconcentrate political power and decision-making and build the Plurinational and Intercultural State” (SENPLADES, 2010). The National Plan for Good Living also states that “its greatest significance lies in the conceptual rupture with the so-called Washington Consensus and the most orthodox approached to the concept of development” (Ibid., 2010), meaning that the Plan challenges the conventional and dominant idea of development. Moreover, since the reduction of deforestation is Ecuador’s national priority, the National Development Plan set a goal to reduce deforestation in Ecuador by 30% by 2030 (The REDD Desk, 2017).

The 2009-2013 National Development Plan for Good Living can be divided into nine parts. Part one presents the Plan’s formulation process, which, according to the Plan itself, was profoundly democratic and intensely participatory. Part two presents the ethical and programmatic guidelines, which underlie and guide the transformation taking place in the country. Part three discusses the change of paradigm “from development to Good Living”, and part four offers a critical diagnosis of Ecuador’s historic economic, social and political processes during the recent decades. In relation to the diagnosis, part five puts forward the transformations required to accomplish a new mode of

accumulation and re(distribution) essential for Good Living and part seven develops 12 National Objectives for Good Living, of which the last one is “to build a democratic State for Good Living (to view all 12 objectives, see Appendix). Moreover, as one of the main innovations in the 2009-2013 National Plan for Good Living, part eight contains the National Territorial Strategy which consist of a set of guidelines and is “intended as a reference to guide the creation and implementation of sectorial and territorial policies in accordance with the objectives and goals defined in the Plan” and lastly, in the final part, the National Development Plan develops resource allocation criteria through the formulation of Public Investment plan (SENPLADES, 2010). Thus, Ecuador’s 2009-2013 National Development Plan defined several objectives and established guidelines to achieve “Good Living”, but also set series of indicators to measure the progress. This took alternative approaches to development one step closer to formalization but at the same time raised a number of critical questions (Walsh, 2010).

The indigenous concept of Buen Vivir was also included in Ecuador’s 2013-2017 National Development Plan and thus still is an integral part of the country’s political framework and development planning. The integration of Buen Vivir into Ecuador’s Constitution and National Development Plan has been widely discussed by intellectuals in the world, and is, among the Constitution of Bolivia, the reason for international interest in the concept of Buen Vivir (Altman, 2014). Moreover, according to an indigenous woman Rosa Vacacela, “The National Development Plan of Ecuador represent a major conquest of policy-making, a space in which indigenous and minority voices can be heard” (Radcliffe, 2012: 246). However, the integration of Buen Vivir into the Constitution and National Development Plan does not end the discussions about its meaning, how it is to be realized, and if it can be an alternative to capitalist development (Altmann, 2014). The rest of the analysis will discuss whether, and to what extent, Buen Vivir has been realized in Ecuador and what are the major challenges limiting the realization.

4.5 Commitment to Buen Vivir and contradicting practices

Although the incorporation of an indigenous concept into Ecuador’s political framework can be considered as a significant step forward in overcoming the country’s colonial past, the concept of Buen Vivir and its implementation have also been the target of heated criticism due to several reasons. Many critics argue that the commitment to Buen Vivir and rights of nature in Ecuador is more rhetorical than substantial (Humphreys, 2017). Similarly, David Toapanta, a 24-year-old Ecuadorian Kichwa, explained in an informal interview during the fieldwork in Ecuador, that although he is

happy about the acknowledgment of Buen Vivir in the country's National Development Plan, most of the objectives for "good living" are obviously ignored. This section discusses some activities conducted by Rafael Correa's government since the introduction of Buen Vivir that contrast quite strikingly with the promises made in the 2008 Constitution and National Development Plan for Good Living. The aim of this section and the following one is to show that the principles of Buen Vivir are not successfully enforced in Ecuador. Several contradicting practices have taken place since 2008 but due to limited size of the study, only couple of cases will be discussed here.

Soon after the 2008 Constitution was ratified in a referendum, CONAIE and other indigenous confederations left President Correa's coalition government because of disagreements over several issues. CONAIE especially fault the government with selective and limited interpretations of key concepts of plurinationalism, interculturalism and indeed Buen Vivir (Radcliffe, 2012). However, most of the conflicts between the indigenous movement and the government were classes over laws that had to do with environmental questions, not too much economical or cultural ones as in previous years (Altmann, 2014). In 2010, CONAIE stated that "the government of Rafael Correa is false socialist traitor, populist, genocidal and fascist to the principles of *Sumak Kawsay*, furthermore, it covers up the colonialism of the 21st century (Ibid., 2014: 90).

The specific reasons for the break up with the government were the new law of mining and new allowance for petroleum exploitation in the Amazon, which are clearly against the rights of Buen Vivir and rights of nature described in the 2008 Constitution (Altmann, 2014; Caselli, 2011). Indeed, despite the incorporation of Buen Vivir into the National Development Plan and the Constitution, academic critics point out that Ecuador has remained highly reliant upon mineral and resource extraction for development²⁵ (Radcliffe, 2012). In other words, although the concept of Buen Vivir criticizes growth-based development and promotes living well within the planet's ecological limits, Correa's government has continued to extract natural resources in order to finance the country's social programs and to gain economic growth in postneoliberal era (Escobar, 2010). For instance, in 2013 Ecuadorian government allowed oil companies to drill oil in Yasuni national park located in East side of Ecuador, which is one of the most biodiverse places on Earth and inhabited by two of the last tribes in the world living in a voluntary isolation. This oil exploitation has been hotly disputed since 2007 when Correa's government promised to permanently keep the oil underground inexchange for around

²⁵ Ecuador's oil resources have accounted for more than half of the country's export earnings in recent years (CIA, 2017).

\$3.6 billion from the international community (Vidal, 2016). This attempt called Yasuni initiative was administered by the UN and considered as one of the world's most innovative conservation proposals. However, since after six year only \$200 million had been pledged by the international community, Correa said that he had no option but to allow drilling in order to pay for poverty relief. Thus, despite massive demonstrations and a political movement known as Yasunidos, the drilling of oil in the national park started in 2016 (Ibid., 2016).

Due to the fact that much of Ecuador's success in poverty alleviation and social programs over the past decade can be attributed to funding from publicly managed oil and mining projects, the debate around resource extraction has been controversial. Although Ecuador is neglecting some of the constitutional rights and thus conducting extractivist models of economic development which violate the "rights of nature" on daily basis, inequality in Ecuador has decreased significantly and poverty rates almost halved during the last 10 years (World Bank, 2017). Moreover, cash transfers to the poor and investments in public health care and education have increased and infrastructure, such as highways and schools, has also improved. Thus, it is obvious that Correa's postneoliberal policies have had positive impact on Ecuador. However, according to Carlos Mazabanda, the field coordinator for NGO Amazon Watch's Ecuador branch, these successes do not justify the ignoring environmental and indigenous rights enshrined in Ecuador's Constitution and the National Development Plan (Brown, 2017).

Since Correa's government has continued to neglect the constitutional mandates in order to fund the country's social programs, Ecuador has been carrying out extractive projects until this day. For instance, in March this year (2017), indigenous leaders and activist gathered in the the capital of Quito to condemn the government for its complicity in allowing international mining companies to take over indigenous territory (Brown, 2017). In this recent case a Chinese mining company called Explorcobes S.A. installed a camp in the southern province of Morona Santiago, preparing to beging construction of a large open-pit copper mine known as San Carlos-Panantza Project. According to Mongabay News, hundreds of police officers entered the region of Santiago de Panantza and evicted a small Shuar community called Nankints, claiming that the property now belonged to Explorcobes S.A. (Ibid., 2017). These practices run counter to Ecuador's Constitution which says that the state will prevent "the destruction of ecosystems and the permanent alteration of natural cycles" (Article 73), and "persons, communities, peoples and nations shall have the right to benefit from environment and the natural wealth enabling them to enjoy the good way of living" (Article 74). Due to this, the leader of Shuar group expressed his opinion about Ecuador's Constitution in an interview with

Mongabay News as follows: “The truth is that we have the best constitution in the world, but the worst constitution in its application in daily life” (Brown, 2017).

Another recent example which shows that Buen Vivir is poorly applied in Ecuador is the Correa’s government’s decision to close a Quito-based non-governmental organization Acción Ecológica, which for 30 years has sought to defend land rights and protect the Amazon from environmental deprivation (Humphreys, 2017). The order to close the NGO was due to a complaint made by the above mentioned Chinese company Explorocobres. The government accused Acción Ecológica of publishing social media posts encouraging violent protests and the disturbance of the company’s operations. As a response to the government’s order, Acción Ecológica claimed that it was upholding the principles of Buen Vivir and the rights of nature described in the 2008 Constitution (Ibid., 2017). The attempt to close the NGO sparked severe criticism from UN human rights experts and outrage from numerous civil society organizations in Latin America and elsewhere (CDCA, 2017).

Despite the involvement of civil society representatives in the constituent process, social movement initiatives have been only partially incorporated into the Constitution and National Development Plan (Radcliffe, 2012). Due to this reason, it is possible for the state to evict indigenous groups from their territory in the event of an extractive project. For instance, even though territorial rights and equitable land redistribution were one of the main agendas that indigenous groups were pushing forward in social protests, land distribution barely features in the 2008 Constitution and the National Development Plan (ibid., 2012). Rather, the Constitution promotes “*equitable land use planning*” and establishes the special administration of Amazon lands for environmental protection (Constitution of Ecuador 2008, article 276). Consequently, the 2008 Constitution and the National Development Plan contains no explicit commitment to equitable land redistribution. Thus, the state maintains for itself the ultimate sovereignty over all territory and natural resources, giving indigenous peoples greater control than they enjoyed before, but not on their terms, namely as co-nationalities within autonomous territories (Radcliffe, 2012).

In addition to above mentioned contradicting practices, Correa’s government has also been acting contrary to the water rights enshrined in the Constitution. As explained in the theoretical chapter, Buen Vivir and consequently the Constitution and Development Plan is not geared towards “having more” or in other words the actions of the state should not be primarily toward growth, as for example in EU, but toward satisfying the basic needs of life, which have been formulated as rights (Fatheuer, 2011). In the 2008 Constitution, under the “rights of the good way of living”, the first section grants

equal access to water as a human right (Constitution of Ecuador 2008). This means that the privatization of access to water should be prohibited (Fatheuer, 2011). However, in 2014, Correa's government fast-tracked a new water law, endorsing the privatization of water and permitting extractive activities in source of freshwater in the Andean highlands. The controversial law was approved by Correa's governing party without a fuss in four days, which obviously caused social protests across the country (Picq, 2014). Part of this problem is the already existing inequality in access to water. According to an indigenous leader Peter Guartambel, Ecuador's wealthiest 1% controls more than 60% of freshwater. The 2008 Constitution was hoped to bring change to this matter, but Ecuador's government is not agreeing with its own constitutional rights (ibid., 2014).

Besides, during the fieldwork in an indigenous community of San Pablito de Agualongo in 2016, it was observed that many Kichwan families still did not have access to clean water, although one of the objectives of the Constitution's Development structure is to grant "permanent and quality access to water" (Constitution of Ecuador 2008, article 276). Some wealthier families had installed their own water tanks on the roof of their houses and poorer families collected rainwater in containers placed outside, but the community did not have water provided by the state. During dry months, lack of water was a huge problem causing stress for the locals, since although it was possible to buy drinking water from supermarkets, a large amount of water was needed for cattle and agricultural activities which constitute the main source of income for many families living in the community. In addition, further privatization of water was a common talking point at dinner tables as well as community events and "*hay no agua*" (there is no water) was a usual comment exchanged between locals in street.

Moreover, during the fieldwork in Andean highlands, it was also observed that small-scale farmers, which usually tend to be native Ecuadorians, continue to suffer from neoliberal policies, despite the government's promoted postneoliberal policies. Especially local farmers who cultivate Uvilla (also known as Inca berry), which is then traded to Europe as a "super food", suffer from exploitative organization structures and are often "the losers of globalization", even though the aim of the postneoliberal strategy was to decrease inequality and reliance on primary good exports (Plaschke, 2015). In other words, the financial problems that the global export company has, still land on the shoulders of the local Uvilla farmers. Last year, in 2016, Ecuador faced a serious crisis due to plummeting oil prices in 2015, followed by a devastating earthquake in April 2016 (Schaefer, 2016). This also had an impact on Uvilla trade, which in turn caused payments of the salaries to arrive to the

farmers with such a delay that the Uvilla farmers ended up seriously indebted, making their lives even more insecure and hard.

Furthermore, as said, the 2008 Constitution declared Ecuador as plurinational and intercultural state. For this reason, the 2008 Constitution also recognize the official status of two major indigenous languages, meaning that the country now has three “intercultural languages” which are Spanish, Kichwa and Shuar (Nationalia, 2008). According to Radcliffe (2012), these two indigenous languages were made official in order to “facilitate intercultural engagement between indigenous peoples and the state” (p.247). Due to this change, many official documents are now available in Kichwa and Shuar languages and some public buildings, such as hospitals, have information signs (in addition to Spanish) also in Kichwa and/or Shuar, as observed during the fieldwork. Moreover, bilingual intercultural education is also provided around the country which works to strengthen and sustain indigenous language and culture (teleSUR, 2016). However, while evidently opening up public life to cultural heterogeneity, this change of law did not require that Spanish-speaking citizens should learn an indigenous language. The dominant status of Spanish thereby remains in place, with a concession made to non-Spanish speakers only in areas where indigenous languages are largely spoken. Thus, in reality language policy has done little to challenge the prevailing racial and social hierarchical orders created by colonialism (Radcliffe, 2012).

Lastly, although the concept of Buen Vivir has been an integral part of Ecuador’s Constitution and the National Development Plan for almost ten years, apparently not all Ecuadorians are familiar with the concept, not even native Ecuadorians. For instance, when discussed during the fieldwork with a 52-year-old indigenous woman Eva Pilca, it came out that she did not know what is the concept of Buen Vivir/*Sumak Kawsay* or at least she could not explain what it is. Eva told that she has heard of Buen Vivir in radio but thinks it is something political. Then she and her husband both added that it would be good to have more information about the concept.

Then again, when discussed with Eva Pilca’s son David Toapanta, who is also a native Ecuadorian and lives in San Pablito de Agualongo, he told that he has heard of the concept of Buen Vivir in school concluding that “the plan of Buen Vivir is spoken in school and university level because we must know our obligations as citizens” (informal interview, 2016). However, when in turn interviewing another Ecuadorian university student Andreas Estrella, who is a European descent and from a wealthy family living in Quito, he stated that they have never talked about Buen Vivir in school or university. Yet, he is familiar with the concept of Buen Vivir, because, according to him, he

constantly sees news about it in TV and Internet and has many friends talking about it. In addition, he is a family friend of Freddy Ehlers, who is in charge of Buen Vivir in Ecuador. But when asked about whether in his opinion Buen Vivir has been applied to the education in Ecuador, Andreas answered as follows:

“Actually this is interesting. When this institution was created, I was in high school. However, we never talked about it or the school never gave us concepts that they want to apply. In my university, the same thing. We never talked about the concept or the ideas, actually we criticize the whole institution el Buen Vivir. So no, the concept hasn’t been applied to our education. Or at least I can say that’s in my case because I grew in the best school and got formed in the best university and in both of them we haven’t talked about the ideas or the concept of Buen Vivir. My institutions think its absurd” (informal interview, carried out in English, 2016).

Hence, it seems that the principles of Buen Vivir have not been fully applied in the educational system of Ecuador and that especially private schools are still strongly influenced by the West and Western way of thinking. Since education is the key instrument of social change (Patil, 2012), Buen Vivir should play a bigger role in education in order to decolonialize thinking and overcome the enduring aftermath of colonialism. This rises a question, whether the current state is willing to make such a radical change.

In summary, all the above-mentioned examples show that the principles of Buen Vivir have not been successfully applied in practice. The government is clearly underlying an inclusive and progressive Constitution and the National Development Plan that propose alternatives to Western modernity, and instead is still anchored to modernizing and developmentalist models created by the West (Radcliffe, 2012; Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016). Thus, Buen Vivir appears more as a theory, functional to the state and its structures drawing positive attention internationally, but has little significance in practice (Radcliffe, 2012).

4.6 Challenges and limits of Buen Vivir

After demonstrating that Buen Vivir principles have not been successfully implemented in Ecuador, this section moves towards analyzing the challenges and limits of Buen Vivir and discusses why the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir is difficult to apply in practice. There are many challenging and limiting factors but for a reason of space only a couple will be discussed here.

First of all, as explained in the theoretical chapter, the creators and supporters of Buen Vivir question the term development and all that it implies. Also, in the origin of Buen Vivir development as a term and concept is nonexistent and thus Buen Vivir cannot be considered equivalent to development. However, as Walsh (2010), points out, in Ecuador's 2009-2013 National Development Plan, development and the concept of Buen Vivir are understood as interchangeable. Development is the realization of Buen Vivir and the realization and formation of Buen Vivir is what enables the new vision of human and social development. This signification and contradiction has raised a number of critical questions and concern and is challenging the realization of the original version of Buen Vivir (Walsh, 2010).

Moreover, as discussed before, the concept of Buen Vivir is deeply rooted in indigenous traditions and cosmologies of life, and therefore is not easily accessible for those who do not share them. However, by incorporating Buen Vivir into the Constitution and the National Development Plan and thus making the concept central in the reconstituting of the Ecuadorian state, the general populace is demanded to think and act with ancestral principles and knowledges assuming that these principles and knowledges are valid for all, although they are not (Walsh, 2010). It is obvious that in order to follow and live in accordance with the principles of Buen Vivir, it is crucial to really understand the worldview behind it.

Furthermore, due to the fact that Buen Vivir is a complex concept and not easily accessible especially for non-indigenous people, in the 2009-2013 National Development Plan and in its successor (2013-2017), it is evident that Buen Vivir has taken meaning from the alternative visions of development emerging in the Western world, for instance from the concept of Human Development created by Amartya Sen²⁶ (Walsh, 2010). Thus, while the original Buen Vivir represents border thinking and aims to de-link from Eurocentrism, in the Constitution and National Development Plan, Ecuadorian state has added many notions from the Western ideology into it. Hence, even though Gudynas (2013) earlier argued that Buen Vivir is also influenced by the Western critiques of capitalism, Walsh (2010) states that in this hybridization and adaption of Western concepts and terms, Buen Vivir appears to lose at least some of its radical force in the Constitution and National Development Plan.

²⁶ Although Amartya Sen was born in India, most of his life he has been studying and teaching in the United Kingdom and the United States (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017).

The fact that the concept of Buen Vivir is complex, constantly under construction and lacks a simple definition obviously poses a challenge for its concretization. During the field work in Ecuador, it was also observed that many indigenous people had a different understanding of the concept and, as earlier explained, some were not familiar with the concept at all despite their indigenous background. It is important to note however, that many of the indigenous people lived in accordance with indigenous lifestyles without attributing it to the existence of Buen Vivir concept. Nevertheless, as earlier mentioned, many people living in the community of San Pablito de Agualongo expressed their wish to hear more about the concept and hoped that they would have more information about their rights and obligations Buen Vivir brings in the Constitution.

Indeed, during the fieldwork it was also noticed that some indigenous, especially the ones who represent older generation, were illiterate. This led to the realization that especially those people can not even read what it says in the Constitution and thus might not be aware of the rights granted to them. Therefore, these people also might not be active in demanding those rights to be realized but instead continue to accept their subordinated position. Once again, to solve this problem, more information about the concept of Buen Vivir is needed to be spread in schools and, for instance, in community events and meetings, so that it does not appear only as “something political” or academic.

Moreover, although Buen Vivir is originated from the countryside, it should not be restricted there. Yet, today’s urban spaces are very far from dealing with the environment respectfully and with solidarity, Acosta (2017) claims. Thus, one of the biggest and most complex challenges, according to Acosta, is to conceptualize Buen Vivir for and in cities as well, not only for and in countrysides (Acosta, 2017).

Lastly, since Buen Vivir moves in a post-capitalist direction, it is common for many people to assume that Buen Vivir is a new type of socialism or that there is a socialist trend towards Buen Vivir (Gudynas, 2011). Nevertheless, in contrary to Buen Vivir, 21st century socialism of Ecuador is still anchored to European modernity and Eurocentric political thought, neglecting environmental component and interculturalism. Thus, as Gudynas (2011) argues, it is not possible to achieve Buen Vivir from the right nor the left but a move beyond both, capitalism and socialism is needed. That is to say, in order to achieve complete Buen Vivir, there need to be a total and radical break from Euro-modernity and modern ontology. However, as long as Ecuador’s economy is dependent on extracting and exporting its raw materials to the Global North, the government is not, apparently, willing to move beyond modernity and the Western idea of development. Therefore, in order to abandon

extractivism in the Global South, also the Global North should pursue post-extractivist strategies and overcome creed of economic growth, which is definitely a challenge (Acosta, 2017).

4.7 Concluding remarks

A significant shift in development thinking has occurred in the policies of popularly elected regimes of Ecuador that systematically confronts the mantra of neoliberalism as well as Western capitalism, and instead promotes alternative worldviews in order to move away from traditional concept of development (Radcliffe, 2012). This transformation in development thinking and doing stems from a deeper phenomenon started in late 1990s in Latin America and is called in an academic world as a decolonial turn. Decoloniality refers to confrontation of, and delinking from, the dominant Western epistemology and modern ontology, and is a response to the prevailing political, social, cultural and epistemic domination established by Europeans in Latin America under colonialism (Walsh, 2007). In summary, decoloniality challenges the “coloniality of power” being in place for more than 500 years and represents a critique of Eurocentrism from subalternized, silenced and devalued knowledges outside Western epistemology. Decoloniality is both, an epistemic and a political project (Grosfoguel, 2011).

One good example of a model that has been developed as an expression of decolonial efforts in Latin America is the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien (living well), also known as *Sumak Kawsay* (in Kichwa) or *Suma Qamaña* (in Aymara) (Altmann, 2014). Although Buen Vivir was formed as a coherent political concept only less than two decades ago, it is build on ancestral indigenous knowledge, values, traditions and worldviews that already existed before the arrival of the European conquistadors, but were silenced and marginalized under colonialism (ibid. 2014). The notion of Buen Vivir can thus be understood as part of the cosmovision or philosophy of the ancestral indigenous peoples of Latin America and of Andean region in particular (Gudynas, 2011).

Buen Vivir as a decolonial model questions the Western concept of wellbeing and proposes a radical alternative to Western development theory (Ruttenberg, 2013). In fact, in the original concept of Buen Vivir, the word development is nonexistent (Gudynas, 2011). However, Buen Vivir does not only criticize Western concept of wellbeing and growth-based development but extends so far as to entail a deeper and more comprehensive critique of Euro-modernity and modern ontology (Coletta & Raftopoulos, 2016). Since its creation, the concept received widespread attention, and in a short

period of time received broad social, cultural and political support (Gudynas, 2011). In Ecuador, indigenous movements have used the concept as a tool to defend their territories, gain more rights and to mobilize people against the country's neoliberal policies. Due to these massive indigenous social movements taking place since the 90s together with the rise of new left government that was advocating the decolonial turn, the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir was incorporated into Ecuador's 2008 Constitution²⁷ and consequently into 2009-2013 National Development Plan with the explicit goal of implementing policies to support the realization of Buen Vivir. In the Constitution and the Development Plan, Buen Vivir establish itself as well defined alternative not only to capitalist development, but also to the centralist nation-state with its institutionalized discrimination (Altmann, 2014). Thus, this event represented a significant step forward in overcoming the country's colonial (and capitalist) past while also drew much attention internationally.

Besides the fact that the decolonial turn brought about the incorporation of historically subalternized indigenous knowledge/worldviews in form of Buen Vivir into Ecuador's political framework, Ecuador was also made a plurinational state, meaning that the state now recognizes several different nationalities coexisting within Ecuadorian state (Kintto, 2008). The inclusion of historically excluded populations established the groundwork for the deepening of democracy and construction of poscolonial state by requiring the Ecuadorian state to overcome the monocultural national identity of the past (Walsh, 2010). In addition to this, the state now recognizes the official status of two major indigenous languages (Kichwa and Shuar), and provides bilingual intercultural education around the country (Nationalia, 2008; teleSUR, 2016). Ecuador, among Bolivia, also became one of the only countries to grant constitutional rights for nature, challenging the universal model of citizenship and the relationship between society and nature in terms of a duality (Radcliffe, 2012).

In addition to analyzing how the decolonial turn influenced Ecuador's Constitution and the National Development Plan, the thesis also aimed to show that the institutional arrangements of Buen Vivir are not without challenges and contradictions. Although the president Rafael Correa has received credit for the positive changes that have taken place in Ecuador regarding poverty, social inclusion and quality of life of all Ecuadorians (Hughes, 2015), Correa's government has continued to extract natural resources in order to finance the country's social programs and to gain economic growth. These activities contrast quite strikingly with the promises made in the 2008 Constitution and the

²⁷ Buen Vivir is defined in the preamble and 99 articles of the 2008 Constitution as a social purpose and a responsibility of the state (Altmann, 2014).

National Development Plan for Good Living and show that the principles of Buen Vivir are not comprehensively applied in practice.

Therefore, it can be argued that although Correa's administration is against neoliberal policies and Western world hegemony, fundamentally Ecuador's government is not against modernity and the Western idea of development. Thus, as Radcliffe (2012) put it, the "profound cultural shift" of Buen Vivir has not been realized at national level, as modernity and progress continue to have the same values as they did under neoliberal developmentalism (p. 247). That is to say, Correa's government's commitment to Buen Vivir and rights of nature is more rhetorical than substantial, as previously argued.

As explained in the theoretical chapter, the aim of decolonialization is to remove existing racial, political and social hierarchical orders imposed by European colonialism. However, as the government continues to interpret and prioritize certain constitutional principles over others, it serves to reproduce postcolonial racial hierarchies, difference and exclusion (Radcliffe, 2012). Hence, in practice indigenous peoples continue to be impoverished by enduring social and racial hierarchies as well as by market-based material inequalities, which was noticed during the fieldwork. Besides, the recent events such as the closure of the organization Acción Ecológica and terrorist accusations against indigenous leaders during demonstrations indicate that the authorities of subaltern perspectives remain subject to the "epistemic violence" and thus the epistemic colonization is still prevalent in Ecuador (Radcliffe, 2012: 247). Also, it can be argued that in practice the state still is a colonial state, unwilling to hand over autonomy and territorial rights to collective citizens (Ibid., 2012).

It also came to light that many Ecuadorians have a different understanding of what Buen Vivir means and some locals have not even heard of the concept. The fact that people have different understanding of the indigenous concept is not a problem per se, since Buen Vivir is characterized exactly by its plurality and diversity and thus the concept lacks a simple definition. Yet, it would be important to provide more information about Buen Vivir and the constitutional rights in general, so that the locals know what kind of changes the incorporation of the indigenous concept should bring in practice. Also, more extensive implementation of the principles of Buen Vivir into the education would not only increase awareness of Buen Vivir among locals but also contribute to a change in people's attitudes towards the social change. This in turn would facilitate the bottom up realization of Buen Vivir and its principles. However, it is understandable that the so called Ecuadorian elite, placed on

the top of the social hierarchical system who benefit from neoliberal policies and admire the West and its development models, is not supporting the deep structural change in the society since they are contented with the situation and do not want to lose their place on the top of the social class. Yet, as decolonialists suggest, the decolonization of the mind is also essential among people who do not reject Western contributions to world civilizations, in order for them to better understand the current phenomenon, to criticize Western hegemony and to change their attitudes towards indigenous groups and their needs.

Indeed, since Buen Vivir still appears more as a theory or philosophy of life in Ecuador, it is rather hard to give many concrete examples of how the incorporation of Buen Vivir into the Constitution and the National Development Plan has influenced Ecuadorians' everyday life. However, during an informal interview in San Pablito de Agualongo in Ecuador, an indigenous woman and the president of local community bank, Lusmila Reinoso, told that she has noted some positive changes in attitudes after the constitutional reforms of 2008, especially in terms of discrimination. Otherwise she stressed that she has always lived in accordance with the principles of *Sumak Kawsay*, even before it was made a political concept. For instance, since she was little, Lusmila has been participating in a traditional indigenous event called *minga*, which is still organized once a month in the community of San Pablito de Agualongo. In *minga* all the villagers gathered together to work for common good such as to construct a road, harvest crops or to repair an irrigation canal. The word *minga* comes from Kichwa language and it is, as Kitto (2008) explains, a form of collective work and a form of solidarity that clashes with the individualism of modern society. However, *minga* is still practiced mainly in the countryside among indigenous peoples so it is not something that has been spread into the cities after Buen Vivir was introduced in Ecuador.

Thus, the incorporation of Buen Vivir as set of rights in the Constitution and as guiding principles in the Development Plan may not have influenced significantly Ecuadorian's everyday life, at least yet. However, after Buen Vivir was formulated as a political concept, especially indigenous movements have been able to use the concept as a tool to challenge neoliberalism and the Western model of development as well as to defend the indigenous territories and to mobilize more people against the country's extractive policies. Then again, for some people the concept of Buen Vivir mainly represents decolonial thinking and doing which challenges the dominant regime of modern power/knowledge and Western culture, including Western idea of well-being. Buen Vivir has also attracted much attention internationally due to the fact that the concept responds to the problems of climate change and the loss of biodiversity which are currently the "hot topics" around the world.

Indeed, as Eduardo Gudynas points out, rather than see Buen Vivir as a strict blueprint for change, it is better to view it as a launch pad for fresh thinking and new perspectives “It helps us to see the limits of current development models and it allows us to dream of alternatives that until now have been difficult to fulfil” (Gudynas in interview with Balch, 2013).

Overall, the thesis shows that despite the formal political establishment of Buen Vivir principles in Ecuador, the deeper structural change on the national level is yet to come. Decolonialization of the state and social attitudes thus remain on the agenda and continue to be urgent in order to demolish the coloniality that pervades in Ecuadorian society (Radcliffe, 2012). Nevertheless, as Walsh (2010) noted, the fact that a country that has long exalted its mestizo character, favoured whitening and whiteness, and looked to the North for its development models, incorporates an indigenous model into its Constitution and the National Development Plan and makes the principles of Buen Vivir central in the reconstituting of the Ecuadorian state, is already historically significant.

5. CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to examine the rise of decoloniality in Latin America and to analyze how the decolonial turn which took place in the 1990s influenced Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and the 2009-2013 National Development Plan. The study assumed an interpretivist/constructivist approach and the research was conducted and the objective accomplished by using qualitative methods. Further in the analysis, the thesis discussed whether and to what extent the decolonial efforts in the Constitution and the National Development Plan have been implemented in practice and what are the major challenges and constraints of the implementation. In order to conduct the analysis, the thesis used decoloniality as a main theory and modernity/coloniality as sub-theories. The theoretical chapter also introduced and explained the indigenous concept of Buen Vivir, which is a decolonial option and a plural concept with two main entry points. On the one hand, Buen Vivir is a reaction to traditional Western development theory, and on the other hand, it offers an alternative to development emerging from indigenous traditions and worldviews and in this sense the concept explores possibilities beyond modernity and Eurocentric epistemology.

The research showed that the emergence of decoloniality, which refers delinking from the dominant Western epistemology and modern ontology, had political and ethical effects in Ecuador. The decolonial turn influenced Ecuador's constitutional reforms started in the late 1990s and resulted in the incorporation of indigenous worldviews in form of Buen Vivir into the 2008 Constitution and consequently into 2009-2013 National Development Plan. In other words, due to the decolonial turn in Ecuador, the new left government, that took office around the turn of the millennium with the aim of challenging neoliberal policies and Western influence in the country in general, allowed the adoption of indigenous knowledge and traditions, which have been subordinated and silenced for centuries, into Ecuador's political framework. Consequently, Ecuador was declared as a plurinational state, meaning that Ecuador now recognises, respects and promotes unity, equality and solidarity among all peoples and nationalities regardless of their historical, political and cultural differences. In addition, the state recognizes the official status of two major indigenous languages (Kichwa and Shuar), and provides bilingual intercultural education around the country. This inclusion and recognition of historically excluded populations was a significant step forward in overcoming Ecuador's colonial past.

However, the thesis also showed that despite the progressive changes in the Constitution and in the National Development Plan with a clear goal of implementing policies to support the realization of Buen Vivir, in reality Ecuador still remains a colonial state unwilling to hand over territorial rights to indigenous populations and prioritizing certain constitutional principles over others. Thus, the epistemic colonization is still prevalent in Ecuador and the true decolonization of the state remains on the agenda. Also, despite the president Correa's post-neoliberal policies, Euro-modernity and progress continue to have the same values as they did under neoliberal developmentalism as Correa's administration continues to extract natural resources in order to gain economic growth and to finance Ecuador's social programs.

Yet, when considering the fact that Ecuador has lived for more than 500 years under the influence of Western culture, favored whiteness and looked to the North for its development models, it is important to conclude that making Buen Vivir concept, which represent border epistemology and subalternized indigenous worldviews, a central part of Ecuador's post-neoliberal policy framework is already a significant act. Moreover, even though Buen Vivir appears only as a theory or philosophy of life for most of Ecuadorians, it opens possibilities for fresh thinking, helps to criticize current development models and allows to dream of alternative ones. The formation of Buen Vivir concept also implies that Ecuador, among Bolivia, is a leading country in finding radical solutions for climate change and for the fact that the Earth's limits to growth will be exceeded within the next hundred years if nothing is to be done. Above all, the incorporation of Buen Vivir principles into Ecuador's Constitution and the National Development Plan showed, as Walter Dignolo put it, that "the forced hand of neoliberal globalization to follow just one path, the Western neoliberal path, is gone and new players are entering the game".

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7. Appendix

The updated objectives of the National Plan for Good Living are:

Objective 1. To foster social and territorial equality, cohesion, and integration within diversity.

Objective 2. To maximize the citizens' capabilities and potentialities.

Objective 3. To improve the population's quality of life.

Objective 4. To guarantee the rights of nature and promote a healthy and sustainable environment.

Objective 5. To guarantee sovereignty and peace; and to promote Ecuador's strategic insertion in the world, and Latin American integration.

Objective 6. To guarantee stable, fair, and dignified work and employment in its diverse forms.

Objective 7. To build and strengthen public spaces for intercultural social interactions.

Objective 8. To build and strengthen public spaces for intercultural social interactions.

Objective 9. To affirm and strengthen national identity, diverse identities, plurinationalism, and interculturalism.

Objective 10. To guarantee rights and justice. To guarantee access to public and political participation.

Objective 11. To establish a social, fraternal and sustainable economic system.

Objective 12. To build a democratic State for Good Living.

Source: (SENPLADES, 2010)