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Tackling Complex Inequalities and Ecuador's Buen Vivir:

Leaving No-one Behind and equality in diversity

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Abstract: Ecuador's postneoliberal policy of Buen Vivir seeks to reduce social inequality and tackle complex disadvantages associated with gender, location, race-ethnicity and other social differences. The paper analyses governmental Buen Vivir policy thinking and institutional arrangements to explore how Buen Vivir frameworks approach the constitutional commitment to equality in diversity, in light of the global Sustainable Development Goal of "Leaving No-one Behind" (LNOB). In many respects Ecuador has undertaken an array of policy efforts to tackle complex inequalities, and highlights the challenges of LNOB. Situating state Buen Vivir in Ecuador's postcolonial institutionalisation, the paper examines how colonial-modern legacies of knowledge production and governance channel state Buen Vivir policy into the reproduction of exclusionary configurations of power and difference.

Keywords: Intersectional inequalities, Policy, Postneoliberalism, Racial discrimination, Affirmative action, *sumak kawsay*.

One of Latin America's enduring features is the steep gradient of inequality in income and wealth, and associated differentials in wellbeing, life expectancy, and influence. Despite middle income status the region exhibits deep gulfs in dignity, security, opportunity and voice (Hoffman and Centeno, 2003; Gootenberg, 2010). In Latin American countries, inequality has recently declined as have levels of extreme poverty (Lopez-Calva and Lustig, 2010; Lustig, Lopez-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez, 2013; Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2014). Yet individuals and groups located at the intersection of hierarchies of gender, race-ethnicity, location and income, continue to experience multifaceted, compounded discrimination and restrictions on opportunities, livelihoods and security (Lopez-Calva and Lustig, 2010; Gideon and Molyneux, 2012; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2016). As Andean research demonstrates, intersectional disadvantages mould the ability of citizens and programme beneficiaries to gain from public policy, resulting in stubborn group-based disadvantages (Boesten, 2010; Ewig, 2011).

Compound inequalities and complex disadvantages remained stubbornly in place, generating political protests and the rise of anti-neoliberal, anti-colonial social movements and voters. Interrupting neoliberal hegemony, Ecuador and other countries experienced regime change and the election of governments that placed the state at the centre of political economic planning, to deepen citizenship rights and alleviate the harshest social, economic and environmental costs of neoliberalism (Escobar, 2010; Grugel and Riggirozzi, 2012; Goodale and Postero, 2013). 'Post-neoliberal' governments introduced measures for state control over political economy and tackle poverty, commonly by increasing social spending (Ruckert, Macdonald and Proulx, 2017). In parallel with postneoliberalism elsewhere, Ecuadorian public policy generates economic growth to release resources for redistribution (Senplades, 2009, 2013). President Rafael Correa's election led to the re-writing of the constitution, and the establishment of broad-ranging agendas in two national development plans (Acosta, 2008). Whereas the constituent assembly articulated highly diverse proposals for social and environmental justice -- claims

associated with heterogeneous de-growth, environmentalist, feminist, indigenous, popular and peasant social movements (Radcliffe, 2012) -- subsequent national planning, the creation of new ministries, and systematization of policy became associated with a narrower range of views. As discussed below, the constituent assembly's multiple agendas for alternatives to development (often infused with a decolonial emphasis), gave way to a state-centred, formalized planning agenda. In this way, the motley bottom-up visions of *buen vivir* (in lower case) were displaced - but not disarticulated -- by five year Plans for Buen Vivir. This paper focuses on whether, how and with which institutional and political consequences state-led Buen Vivir (hereafter BV in capitals) addressed compound disadvantages and intersectional inequalities. By 2009, Ecuador was formally committed to a broad rights-based regime in which "equality in diversity," social cohesion, and redistribution provided the discursive cornerstones for public policy. After a decade of Buen Vivir, the parameters of Ecuadorian approaches to complex inequalities can be evaluated in light of changes in substantive and formal citizenship in inclusive *and* exclusionary ways.

'Postneoliberal' social policy and its complex dis/continuities with neoliberal policy garner significant scholarly attention regarding effects on poverty, inequality and social differentiation (Molyneux, 2008; Gideon and Molyneux, 2012; Martínez-Franzoni, 2014). Here by contrast Ecuador's state BV is brought into conversation with global Sustainable Development Goals for poverty alleviation and human-environmental thriving. Although the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had reduced levels of extreme poverty and some inequalities, these gains were highly irregular geographically and across social groups (Kabeer, 2010; World Bank, 2013). Specifically, the MDGs left in place persistent disadvantage associated with interlocking social hierarchies (Norton *et al.*, 2014).

Addressing this limitation, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda pursues a more comprehensive target in which poverty and exclusion are to be reduced at a higher rate among disadvantaged groups. In particular, Goal 10 aims to reduce inequality within and among countries, and "by 2030, empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age,

disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status" (UN, 2015). The goal highlights discrimination, equality, voice and representation and calls for putting the last first by taking social heterogeneity into account. The SDGs' Preamble proclaims "As we embark on this collective journey [to achieving the SDGs], we pledge that no one will be left behind" (UN, 2015). The High Level Panel on post-2015 goals adopted the phrase 'leave no one behind' as shorthand for strong collective benefits. Despite echoes of military slang, the SDGs' "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) resembles the USA's 'No Child Left Behind' Act (2001) which sought to raise standards, provide measurable goals, and improve individual outcomes. In global debates around SDGs, the LNOB focus is interpreted as implicitly endorsing an intersectional approach to interlocking inequalities (Paz Arauco *et al.*, 2014; Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016). Informed by black and postcolonial feminisms, an intersectional approach highlights how social hierarchies such as gender, race, class, generation and sexuality interact to multiply disadvantages (Crenshaw, 1991). Facets of social difference remain ontologically distinct although their interaction exacerbates and qualitatively transforms the experiences of marginalization, as intersectional power is inscribed on bodies, affects social interactions, and shapes the use and meanings of space (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013). Ecuador's BV hence provides a context to examine national-level LNOB policy implementation, and the factors influencing the epistemological frameworks around intersectional inequalities. Initial analysis of LNOB highlights how policy often arises from and refers back to dominant knowledges and frameworks (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011; Fridkin, 2012). Ecuador's unique public debates, constitutional endorsement and state-centred planning around diverse interpretations of Buen Vivir permit a fine-grained specification of policy, power and knowledge. The paper argues that the reasons for BV's partial realization and its uneven engagement with LNOB goals are not merely technical; rather they are rooted in broad relationships of power and knowledge and legacies of dominant policy architectures.

The paper reflects over ten year's research in Ecuador with policymakers, diverse development professionals, and low-income rural populations, combining semi-structured interviews (with over one hundred respondents), ethnographic observation, and close analysis of policy documents, and secondary material. The paper proceeds with an overview of Ecuadorian inequalities and policy history. It then examines the institutional and policy dynamics behind the rise of state-led Buen Vivir, and its evolution over the past decade. Developing on this, the following section analyses the policy structures and discourses across a core arenas. The final section critically evaluates Ecuadorian BV policy on equality in diversity in relation to postcolonial knowledge production and exclusion.

ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES IN ECUADORIAN POLICY

Ecuador has long been characterised by profound inequalities in personal and group wellbeing, dignity and security, inequalities that frequently follow distinctions in gender, race-ethnicity, and place of residence (rural-urban; Andean highlands, Amazonia and coastal areas), class, irregular distribution of secure employment, and access to social security. Accumulations of advantages and disadvantages over centuries remain in place due to weak states, political limits on redistribution, and everyday unequal social relations. Individual and group-based inequalities are multidimensional and result in concentrations of exclusion, impoverishment and distancing from power in terms of voice, authority and rights; these issues precede and contextualize Ecuador's policy landscape prior to Buen Vivir.

Macroeconomic structures and political institutions throughout the colonial and republican periods compounded highly uneven access to resources, secure livelihoods and influence for racialized subjects whose labour contributions underpinned national income growth. Into the twentieth century, internal colonialism and regional inequalities persisted as enclave economies and extracted profits; early

oil revenues underpinned state investment in roads, health and rural education although these showed uneven coverage and quality. Social security and secure employment were reserved for a minority; those in informal work relied on familial networks and remittances. In 1999-2006, public health insurance covered only one in five Ecuadorians, while fourteen percent of rural parishes had no health personnel. Elites and governments perceived cultural and racial-ethnic diversity as obstacles to progress, and intervened to 'modernize' indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and peasant populations (Andolina, Laurie and Radcliffe, 2009). With highly segmented labour markets, female and racialized populations persistently experience impoverishment in addition to overlapping forms of discrimination. After poverty increases in the 1980s, the social neoliberal agenda sought to mitigate poverty in sub-groups including women, indigenous peoples, and low-income households through social capital improvement, microcredit, and minimal recognition (Molyneux, 2008). Such measures tackled poverty, yet simplified complex inequalities and reproduced material and non-wealth-based inequalities, including gender and racial-ethnic differences (Ordoñez *et al*, 2015; Kabeer, 2010). Although neoliberalism couched amelioration in a discourse of social "diversity," it treated diversity as technical (Ahmed, 2012), and reproduced historically-entrenched understandings of difference (Ewig, 2011; Radcliffe, 2015). In Ecuador,

'a series of institutional and quotidian strategies of negation [arose], making indigenous peoples and Afro-Ecuadorians invisible and inferior, and categorizing them as 'others' in a white-centred vision [...]. The same occurred with women [...], children, adolescents and youth, who have also been treated as second class citizens'. (Camacho, 2010: 25)

Following global norms, Ecuadorian policy tackled intersectional inequalities by separating one dimension from others, institutionalising single-issue policy (Radcliffe, 2015). The resulting policy 'silos' prioritized mono-causal explanations and solutions over intersectional interpretations of social disadvantage, making multiply-disadvantaged subgroups invisible and inappropriate interventions (Radcliffe with Pequeño, 2010).

By the twenty-first century, Ecuador demonstrated a mixed picture regarding poverty and exclusion. Dollarization and remittances contributed to poverty reduction in 2000-2006, while multidimensional poverty (index of housing conditions, water and sanitation provision; household dependency ratio, and primary education access) fell from 65 percent to 52 percent in 1998-2006 (Ordóñez *et al*, 2015). Nevertheless from 2000 to 2012, income equalization favoured cities over rural areas; coastal and Andean regions over Amazonia; men over women; and formal sector workers over informal sector labour, while indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians groups saw fewer gains than the rest (World Bank, 2015; ECLAC, 2016).

Vibrant debates around development alternatives occurred from the 1990s, culminating in Ecuador's Constituent Assembly. Diverse meanings and interpretations circulated around the paired (but not equivalent) terms of *sumak kawsay* (kichwa) and *buen vivir*. Broadly, three strands of interpretation can be identified: first, a statist alternative to neoliberalism; second, an ecological and post-development utopian strand; and third, an indigenous non-materialist assertion of alternative ontologies (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2013). Each has its advocates and transnational epistemic communities, generating the meanings, agendas and conflicts within and across strands. The statist anti-neoliberal strand underpins state-led *Buen Vivir*, discussed below. The ecological-post-development strand animates global debates around how to achieve mutual nurturing of humans and environment to create 'another form of life with a series of social, economic and environmental rights and guarantees' (Acosta, 2008: 38; Gudynas, 2011). In this approach, natural-human interdependence means that 'cultural and social homogeneity [becomes] a logical impossibility in an inevitably diverse world' (Vanhulst and Beling, 2014: 56). By contrast, indigenous-led interpretations view *buen vivir-sumak kawsay* as a response to colonial-modern power as a project for 'social equality of heterogeneous and diverse groups, against the unequalizing racial-sexual-social classification and identification of world populations' (Quijano, 2012:

53; Gudynas, 2011: 445). In sum, equality and diversity became a matter of broad concern in Ecuador, predating the SDGs.

TACKLING COMPLEX INEQUALITIES UNDER BUEN VIVIR

Proceeding from these public debates, Ecuador introduced foundational, legislative and policy measures that established principles, institutions and approaches for tackling complex inequalities. While contested in formulation and practice, state-led Buen Vivir comprises an unprecedented platform against which to evaluate the challenges and limits to national-level LNOB action.

As noted, diverse understandings of *buen vivir-sumak kawsay* were aired at the Constituent Assembly. The 2008 Constitution outlined a human rights model for development, and a regime of Buen Vivir, pledging an 'economic system that promotes equality through social and territorial redistribution of the benefits of development' (2008 Constitution, Article 276), in which 'public policies and provision of goods and services will be oriented towards making Buen Vivir and all rights effective and will be formulated on the principle of solidarity' (Article 85). Being rights based, Buen Vivir underpins programmes of social protection, political, economic and social rights, and public infrastructure (for education, health, territorial integration, and macroeconomic development). 'Rights are neither favours nor privileges....' (Senplades, 2013a: 112). Regarding equality within diversity, the constitution proclaims Ecuador to be plurinational (that is, political coexistence of nationalities and peoples in Ecuador's sovereign, unified territory) and recognizes ethnic, racial, gender, regional, sexual, dis/ability, migrant status, and generational diversity. The state is responsible for realising BV, an objective to be constructed (Acosta, 2008) which set in train institution-building and national planning.

Informed by principles of justice and redistribution, BV was to be achieved through full recognition of cultural, economic and social diversity (Radcliffe, 2012) and drawing on Amartya Sen's

capabilities approach (Acosta, 2008; Ramirez and Minteguiaga, 2010: 359). State BV emphasizes the need to recognize diversity without re-inscribing social hierarchies and the need to tackle persistent social norms that compound marginalization for groups and individuals. The National Development Secretariat Senplades (*Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo*), founded in 2007, coordinates and oversees development and Buen Vivir. Buen Vivir is defined as inseparable from the category diversity. Rene Ramirez, Senplades director from 2008 and key state intellectual, viewed Buen Vivir as post-utilitarian Rawlsian justice and a renewed social contract.

'No real disjuncture exists between policies that promote equality in redistributive terms and those that promote the recognition of cultural differences and particularities. Equality and difference are not opposing notions... this is the sense of equality in diversity.' (Ramirez, 2010: 15)

A public sphere in a shared commons would facilitate recognition and mutual understanding 'among diverse but equal subjects' (Ramirez, 2010: 61). Reflecting training in development economics, Ramirez combined Albert Hirschman, Human Development and UNDP influences (Waldmüller, 2014) in the BV objective to

'recognise diversity as a substantial part of society and as an element that contributes to Buen Vivir through intercultural learning, generation of synergies, and the possibility of learning from diverse knowledges, epistemologies, worldviews and cultural practices'. (Ramirez, 2010: 24)

Human diversity combines external and personal characteristics, requiring state action to address socio-economic development and give voice (Ramirez, 2008: 389; cf. Ahmed, 2012).

Senplades prepared two Buen Vivir National Plans (PNBV, *Plan Nacional de Buen Vivir*) for 2009-2013 and 2013-2017, each prioritizing poverty alleviation and inequality reduction. The first PNBV centred an equity objective in its extensive agenda: 'No one can live well (*vivir bien*) if others live badly' (Senplades, 2009: 10). To extend state capacity to ensure equitable change, BV planning was

accompanied by expanding policy architectures and initiatives which established new procedures, forms of redistribution, and state-citizen dynamics, with targeting measures designed by the *Ministerio Coordinador de Patrimonio Natural y Cultural* (MCPNC, Coordinating Ministry of Natural and Cultural Patrimony). Reflecting state and socialist objectives, the national BV plans prioritized a universalist instrumental approach, which differed from the objectives and priorities of other strands of buen vivir-sumak kawsay (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2013).

Although uneven and slow, changes began to be seen. Rural-urban inequalities fell slightly in 2001-10; inter-regional inequalities persisted despite poorer parishes getting greater relative improvements than others (Atlas, 2013). De-commodification of social services and rights began to displace the market as the primary source of social protection (Minteguiaga and Ubasart, 2011: 93-4). Despite reaching historic highs, social spending, remained low relative to Latin American averages; it doubled in to 8.2 percent GDP between 1990-2006 and 2011-2012, with an increase in education spending of 4.7 percent, health 1.7 percent and social welfare 1.5 percent (ANINP, 2013: 99). Between 2007 and 2012, more people were covered by social security and/or received cash transfers, while the minimum wage rose 40 percent in real terms 2007-12. However poverty and intersectional inequalities remained in place:

'Despite the improvement in living conditions [...] since 2006, Ecuador is still characterized by the persistence of great social, regional, ethnic, gender and generational inequalities'. (Camacho, 2010: 7)

Counties with the largest concentrations of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian inhabitants remain the poorest, with women experiencing disproportionate disadvantage (Camacho, 2010: 10). In 2014, two-fifths of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians were in poverty, while other groups were concentrated in the top income quintile (ECLAC, 2016).

Centring objectives of poverty eradication and equitable redistribution of resources and wealth, the first BV Plan outlined 12 strategies, 12 objectives and overhaul of territorial planning. The PNBV's first goal was to 'sponsor equality, social and territorial cohesion and integration within diversity' while boosting stronger horizontal inter- and intra-group relations through ideals of 'national identity, diverse identities, plurinationality and interculturalism' (Senplades 2009). Gesturing to indigenous buen vivir-sumak kawsay, the Plan 'builds on the demands for equality and social justice and on the recognition, valorization and dialogue of peoples and their cultures, forms of knowledge and ways of life' (Senplades, 2009: 6). It envisaged 'a unified and decentralized state in which [...] a diverse society [can] coexist peacefully while guaranteeing [...] rights' (Senplades, 2009: 25). Treating inequality as a social and economic issue, the Secretariat of Peoples, Social Movements and Citizen Participation (SPMSPC, *Secretaría de Pueblos, Movimientos Sociales y Participación Ciudadana*) proposed to mainstream ethnic-racial, gender and generational equity across state policy (Camacho, 2010). Simultaneously the MCPNC published a plan to tackle ethno-racial discrimination through affirmative action and quotas, informed in part by the United Nations' programme for 'development and cultural diversity for the reduction of poverty and social inclusion' (2008 to 2011) (Camacho, 2010: 26).

These measures influenced the second national 2013-17 BV plan, which focused on socialism, reflecting the intellectual and institutional strengthening of government actors (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014). Its priorities were 'social justice, equality, abolition of privilege, [and] society's respect for diversity and nature' (Senplades, 2013a: 16). In a rights-oriented state

'the challenge is to achieve full equality in diversity, without any [forms of] exclusion, in order to achieve a dignified life...' (Senplades, 2013a: 112)

Having operationalized BV public policies, the government also presented advances to Ecuadorian (and overseas) publics. In 2013, the National Secretariat of Buen Vivir (*Secretaría Nacional de Buen Vivir*, SNBV) acted as 'a think tank [...] for the promotion and dissemination of BV, and incubator of

methodologies' (SNBV, 2015: 29), and coordinated BV policy between state and society (SNBV, 2015). Disaggregated data's role in government policymaking underwent a step-change (Waldmüller, 2014; Cabrero, 2015). The 2016 annual investment plan reaffirmed core BV objectives of equality, equity, cohesion, social inclusion, and social-territorial equity in diversity, allocating US\$5.349bn.

While preparing the second BV Plan, Ecuador undertook a wide-ranging consultation exercise about its post-2015 goals (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD) Ecuador, 2013), becoming increasingly conscious about the international implications of its flagship programmes. Compared with the MDGs' 'human development meets results-based management' (Sumner and Tiwari, 2011: 140), BV offered an integrated rights framework and LNOB. In international policy circuits Ecuador's BV has garnered visibility as a public policy framework with LNOB-favourable structural and political elements (including constitutional change, decentralization, affirmative action, equality legislation; sector-specific action on livelihoods; coordinated economic, environmental and social policy; rights-based policy; universal policies sensitive to differences) (ECLAC, 2016). By contrast the SDGs agenda lacks proposals on mechanisms to achieve LNOB: 'All other inequalities - on the basis of age, sex, disability, ethnicity, race, origin, religion, or economic or other status -- are brushed under a single target ([SDG] 10.2) with no mention of policies or mechanisms needed to address them' (Razavi, 2016: 35). Hence while Ecuador's post-2008 framework responded primarily to *sui generis* national political dynamics, BV contains globally-relevant lessons. According to the Overseas Development Institute, Ecuador since 2007 introduced the majority of measures positively correlated with sustained socio-political action to reduce complex inequalities. Warning against expectations of a silver bullet, it argued 'A combination or sequence of these [legislative, programmatic, political] elements will be necessary to achieve a lasting improvement [in intersectional inequalities]'. (Paz Arauco *et al*, 2014: 12)

In legislation however, Ecuador did not introduce an agrarian reform, nor break from a highly extractive export economic base.

After a decade of reforms Ecuador has constructed a distinctive 'policy architecture' (Martinez-Franzoni, 2014). Moving from the pluralized Constituent Assembly with numerous – often incompatible – interpretations of *sumak kawsay-buen vivir*, into statecraft and planning entailed the construction of state-defined Buen Vivir. The BV state policies since 2007 are underpinned by major legislative and institutional reforms, backed by national planning visions and resources. However BV policy formulations, thinking and institutionalization have been designed and implemented in the context of governance histories, planners' and staff values, dominant understandings of social difference, and epistemological plurality around *buen vivir-sumak kawsay*. In this light, the next section examines an array of state BV policies to examine the framing, understandings and epistemological starting points.

POLICY CHANGE AND INTERPRETING GROUP-BASED INEQUALITIES

Ecuador seeks to actively target particular groups situated in positions of inequality and marginalization while aiming at universal provision of public services (Paz Arauco *et al*, 2014: xii). 'Universal' measures such as social security, health insurance, and conditional cash transfers continue to be crosscut materially by intersecting inequalities (Minteguiaga & Ubasart 2014: 92). Examining four axes of inequality ('high priority groups'; gender and sexuality; race and ethnicity; and location) permits analysis of how policy actors and institutional programmes understand complex inequalities and how that shapes approaches to equality in diversity. Part of ongoing research into equality in diversity policy, the discussion here provides preliminary insights into social difference in policy thinking

Policy subjects

State BV is invested in notions of capabilities, rights to equality, equity and freedom in which diversity resonates with human potential, power and recognition and not 'lack of' or passivity. BV state intellectuals critique neoliberalism's 'infinite list' of the poor, indigent, children, women, disabled and so on, arguing instead for universal values of human rights and social inclusion (Ramirez, 2008: 382). The Constitution recognizes nine social groups who should receive priority and specialized attention, among them the elderly, youth, pregnant women, children and adolescents, people with disabilities, imprisoned people, and consumers (Article 35). The first PNBV sought to overcome all forms of inequality especially those that limit access of the most vulnerable to services of health, education, nutrition, drinking water and housing (Senplades, 2009: 25). The PNBV 2013-17 identified priority groups including 'elderly people, children and adolescents, people with disabilities, mobile populations, abandoned people, and beggars' among others (Senplades, 2013a: 119).

Identifying public policy subjects in this way significantly shifts away from neoliberal formulations of individualized, self-actualizing subjects on the one hand, versus vulnerable subjects requiring external intervention.

'Diversity was converted [in previous policy] into a synonym of inequality whereby distinct social groups were marginalized from public development investment ...' (Atlas, 2013: 12).

By contrast, BV established national equality councils (*Consejos Nacionales para la Igualdad*) through which to channel resources into targeted programmes. The five equality councils are responsible for

'the formulation, mainstreaming, observance, follow-up and evaluation of public policies related to the themes of gender, ethnicity, generations, interculturalism, and related to disability and human mobility'. (Ley, 2014: 3)

While together the councils recognise a wider range of social differences than previous public policy, they tend to categorize social difference along 'single issue' lines and reproduce policy silos in which

dominant interpretations of social difference occur (Radcliffe, 2015). As a result, categories of social difference show continuities with pre-2006, despite the addition of disability and migrant status. Neither the Constitution nor National Plans mention issues of multidimensional disadvantage. Framing policy subjects in this way impedes the interpretation of disaggregated data in relation to cross-cutting intersectional social relations. Lacking interpretive frameworks to understand intersectional inequalities, BV policy continues to understand policy subjects through the lens of pre-established social categories.

Racial and ethnic inequalities

Racism is widespread and naturalized in Ecuador, resulting in unequal employment, education, everyday encounters, and voice; in a national survey, 62 percent of Ecuadorians recognized racism exists yet only ten percent admitted to being racist (ANINP, 2013: 100). Racism and racial-ethnic exclusions represent key issues for indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian activism, informing agendas of buen vivir-sumak kawsay. The Constitution reflected post-multicultural thinking and combines a politics of recognition (eg. principles of historic reparation) with redistribution (Goodale and Postero, 2007).

BV policy components to address racism include affirmative action, an equality council, and a plurinational plan (Manosalvas, 2014: 113; Walsh, 2014). On affirmative action, the first BV Plan sought to grant 12 percent of public sector jobs to indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians individuals. Despite this historic step, it remained hampered: an Observatorio team noted that affirmative action was insufficient to transform social relations of unequally distributed power (Observatorio, 2012; cf. Shah and Shneiderman, 2013). BV affirmative action in public administration staffing has not to date systematically addressed gender equity measures (Walsh, 2014: 11; ANMIG, 2014: 87). Despite this, racialized women fared better than male candidates from affirmative action studentships for Afro-Ecuadorian professional studies. While the policy language of diversity serves as shorthand for inclusion, and is often associated with race, it often downplays intersectionality (Ahmed, 2012). Thus in Ecuador, the development and

cultural diversity programme in 2008-2011 recommended the collection of statistical social information around indigenous peoples including self-identification, without measuring intersectional relations (Camacho, 2010: 76).

Affirmative action also informed Ecuador's 2012 Plurinational Plan which adopted the Durban Agenda, ILO Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Stressing cultural diversity especially in citizen participation, the Plurinational Plan aimed to 'incorporate the focus of gender and generation as well as actions for protection and guarantee in the state and in the initiatives of civil society'. (Plan, 2012: 11, 24)

However beyond this statement, the Plurinational Plan did little to specify what an intersecting approach in its action plan might entail (Hevia-Pacheco and Vergara-Camus, 2013: 27). Discrimination against racialized women was discussed in general but not linked to specific action. The plan specified neither the mechanisms nor the institutions to integrate gender and generational dimensions, and represented girl children and pregnant women as vulnerable. In this respect, the plan reproduced uncritically a longstanding dominant framing of gender issues.

Yet in other parts of BV, policymakers took forward questions of racial equality in diversity in more innovative ways. The SPMSPC policy understood gender inequalities in relation to interconnected facets of power, and called for a systematic questioning of how white-mestizo advantages work to generate indigenous and black disadvantage, and male advantages (especially when combined with class, and age) (Camacho, 2010: 73). Implicitly rejecting a silo-ed notion of high priority groups, it called for a policy overhaul throughout the policy cycle, for the systematic inclusion of gender and intercultural perspectives. Quotas and specific targeted programmes were mentioned as potentially useful mechanisms, although as yet have not been systematically introduced.

In parallel, policymakers in the nationalities equality council prepared a national agenda 'to reduce socioeconomic gaps and asymmetries, combat poverty and promote political and social inclusion'

(ANINP, 2013: 5). The agenda portrayed inequalities as relational and arising from crosscutting forms of race and sexuality:

'Racism also is present in society as the accumulation of expressions of heterophobia (distrust, fear and contempt for Other), xenophobia, and homophobia'. (ANINP, 2013: 11)

Highlighting postcolonial and racist discrimination, this agenda provided an intersectional account of inequality with racial discrimination identified as multifaceted and requiring systematic attention from public institutions (ANINP, 2013: 15). In this arena, BV thinking reflected decolonial epistemologies of *sumak kawsay-buen vivir*, suggesting these knowledges were marginalized but not completely absent from the state. This agenda moreover is particularly significant for its unusual endorsement of decolonial feminist critique, highlighting postcolonial power over 'subordinated women, especially non-white women' (ANINP, 2013:10).

Gender and sexuality

Diverse feminist and LBGTI activism infused the Constituent assembly and subsequent reform with pro-women and feminist movements leading campaigns around diverse sexualities, and unpaid, reproductive and care work (dimensions sidelined in the MDGs and previous Ecuadorian policy). Officially there is 'no Buen Vivir without women' (Zaragocín, 2017) while - legislative rights for diverse sexualities were quickly introduced (Lind, 2012; Ruckert, McDonald and Proulx, 2017). Electoral quotas and gender mainstreaming had been introduced in Ecuador from the late 1990s, legitimizing gender politics.

Inheriting this mantle, the BV Gender Equality Council sought to build on gains in legal equality for individuals, collective groups, and sectors (ANMIG, 2014: 33). According to the Council's agenda, inequalities 'are expressed in injustices, [and] limitations in the achievement of individual and collective rights' (ANMIG, 2014: 33-34). The Council's 2014-2017 agenda focused directly on BV's equality in diversity agenda, which it understood as combining sex-gender diversity and cultural diversity.

The agenda approached inequalities in terms of a technical gender analysis, thereby sidestepping critiques of metropolitan visions of women and difference (Lugones, 2012). In this sense, equality in diversity was interpreted as *gender* equality and *sexual* diversity, in which racialization, class and other inequalities were sidelined. Reflecting longer histories of tensions between urban feminist movements and racialized women, the agenda aligned itself in language, approach and thematic foci to the socialist, state-centred interpretations of BV rather than *sumak kawsay-buen vivir* thinking across civil society (Millán, 2014; Radcliffe, 2015; Zaragocín 2017).

Disadvantages of place and location

Interlocking social and spatial exclusions are integral to Latin American inequalities (Hoffman and Centeno, 2003; World Bank, 2013). State BV aims to address spatial inequality through 'territorial redistribution,' improving access to health and sanitary infrastructures, bolstering territorial integration and transport networks, and ensuring redistribution via nine planning zones (Senplades, 2013b; *Universo*, 2013). Ecuador's geographical pattern of poverty highlights the urgency of this agenda; whereas the central North region (including Quito) has 18 percent poverty, the north region has 42 percent (ECLAC, 2016: 64; World Bank, 2015). To respond to uneven development, public policies need to involve all policy sectors and regions, while all levels of government are to implement equality within diversity. Introducing new planning regions, state BV reaffirmed existing political-administrative units in COOTAD legislation on territory, autonomy and decentralisation (Lu, Valdivia and Silva, 2016), and used statistical data to pinpoint the micro-geographies of service provision and livelihood improvements.

Using a factorial principle components analysis, Senplades prepared an Atlas of Socio-Economic Inequalities of Ecuador (*Atlas de Desigualdades Socio-económicas del Ecuador*), to map the interactions between social and spatial inequalities. Census and survey data was integrated with geographical information systems and geo-referencing to reveal the depth, extent and distribution of

inequalities, so ministries can identify where public action is most required (Interviews, 2017). Focusing on rural-urban disparities at county level, the Atlas mapped changes in education, health, poverty, gender violence, use of time and care, employment and social security, child labour and mistreatment, and housing. Spatial information in turn informed the second national BV plan which gathered extensive data on local inequality patterns (Senplades, 2013a). The Atlas frames spatial disadvantage and inequality in terms of interlocking inequalities:

'the more variables [of inequality in one county], the more extreme the exclusion and the lower the position [occupied by a local population] in scaled social hierarchies'. (Atlas, 2013: 15)

While this approach acknowledged the correlation of spatial and social inequalities, the Atlas reduced them to features that lie on, rather than being integral to,) uneven development. Socio-spatial hierarchies that interlock to exacerbate inequalities cannot be fully conveyed in principle components analysis. For instance, Gini coefficients of inequality are lowest in rural areas, where most poor people are found (ECLAC, 2016: 68). State BV has established institutional bases for taking geographical inequalities into account, yet these are not understood as intrinsic to crosscutting social hierarchies. Instead, BV territorial planning stands as if 'above' social relations, and becomes a technical tool for organizing spatially-disaggregated data (eg. Senplades 2010). Planning renders territory legible (Lu, Valdivia and Silva, 2017), rather than treating territory as where 'social inequalities crystallize, connect and intersect' (ECLAC, 2016: 60).

Analysis of state Buen Vivir thinking and institutionalisation confirms that environmental and indigenous strands of buen vivir-sumak kawsay are largely marginalized. It also reveals the lack of shared meanings of 'equality in diversity' across policy, procedures and institutions. Despite BV's extensive legislative basis, Ecuador displays an unsystematic and multi-stranded response to intersectional inequalities, containing, policy innovation and policy inertia. Across selected programmes, equality in diversity goals do not get linked into intersectional interpretations, nor is diversity understood in

consistent ways. Such findings suggest that broad legislative and institutional change is necessary but insufficient in facilitating consistent LNOB policy design and generating broad policymaker buy-in. Ecuador's Constitution and planning founded an unprecedented scenario to address compound inequalities, yet state BV has achieved no consensus or overall framework by which to move forward.

BUEN VIVIR AND EQUALITY AGENDAS: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Buen Vivir's uneven advance in understanding complex intersectional inequalities raises questions about the reasons for lack of consensus and policy coherence. What factors contribute to halting progress and diverse conceptualizations of intersectional disadvantages? To deepen the analysis of socio-political-epistemological dynamics around tackling inequality, this section discusses four dimensions identified in grounded research. First, the lack of clear means of achieving BV; second, the persistence of 'silo' thinking and administration; third, dispersed political will in a hierarchical society; and fourth, persistent postcolonial policy categories and knowledge production. These four reasons for uneven engagement with LNOB cannot be identified through data disaggregation or analysis of technical aspects, as they are rooted in configurations of power and knowledge production that work against the visibility and authority of intersectional thinking.

Firstly uneven implementation of LNOB agendas relates to the lack of clear means of achieving the ambitious goals. The SDGs 'are relatively silent on the policies needed to achieve the desirable goals', as the means are 'so vague that they are practically meaningless' (Razavi, 2016: 27). The Ecuadorian case highlights further dimensions of this issue. Despite Ecuador's detailed BV regime, close analysis reveals considerable ambiguity around priorities and a tendency to turn to pre-existing thinking and techniques in policy design and process. Given a worldwide lack of precedent for LNOB policymaking, Ecuador's

reliance on established social categories and statistics is understandable. While in theory equality in diversity requires the simultaneous and synergistic mainstreaming of gender, race, generation, income, disability and location (among other) agendas (Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016: 74), such expansive policy thinking and design was not attempted in Ecuador. As my research documents, experimental initiatives to think synergistically across gender and racial-ethnic exclusion were sporadic, lacked institutional support, and were considered marginal to existing programmes (Radcliffe, 2015).

Second, silo-ed policy actively works against the emergence of intersectional approaches, explaining why a common policy frame and practical advice to policymakers are so often lacking (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011). In Ecuador, a single law established the equality councils yet each one devised independent frameworks and policies that tended - albeit unevenly - to return to pre-existing social categories in stand-alone frameworks. Whereas some councils engaged with intersectionality/equality in diversity, others perpetuated a technical rendering of 'single issue development' (Radcliffe, 2015). Policy silos are further reinforced in the Ecuadorian context by the historic tensions between indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and urban women's movements, restricting the coordination of bridging agendas. State BV has not facilitated inter-institutional learning, highlighting the politics of knowledge whereby state-centred knowledge production around social difference remains the default.

Thirdly, tackling inequalities requires political commitment from diverse actors to ensure implementation of a LNOB agenda. Global attention particularly focuses on national-level legislative and programmatic buy-in to ensure complex inequalities are addressed (Paz Arauco *et al*, 2014: 12; Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016). Although national-level elements are in place, preliminary evidence suggests state employees across BV institutions engage with and pursue equality in diversity goals in highly uneven ways. State employees, especially at street-level, refuse to cooperate with anti-racism and affirmative action measures due to a 'censorious attitude' (Observatorio, 2012: 3). My research found that local state

administrators' biased and uninformed views on gender hindered LNOB goals (Fieldnotes, 2015 and 2017). The 'gap' between specialised BV civil servants and local representatives who have to coordinate local development plans is a factor here. Over time, state BV interpretations have become distanced from civil society interpretations of *sumak kawsay-buen vivir*. The combination of a new social contract, deliberately established institutions, and progressive legislation are insufficient in themselves to guarantee programmatic and practical shifts in state-civil society interactions. In Ecuador, state-civil society relations can be conflictive, enormous epistemological diversity continues to exist, , and low-level functionaries are structurally required to pull together locally-coherent means to tackle complex inequalities without guidance from others, all themes requiring further research.

Fourth, the above factors are interrelated, I argue, through their connection to colonial-modern power as the state BV project exists in a society characterized by epistemological plurality and colonial-modern hierarchies of knowledge. State BV proclaims universalism as its primary principle which then encompasses diversity; such an ontological starting-point reasserts the state's right to decide how the universal and diversity are defined. While state BV blurs the line between redistribution and recognition, it continues to abrogate to itself the decision on where and how that distinction matters, and which recognition occurs. Post-2008 policy becomes a 'coding apparatus' in tension with heterogeneous modes of social existence (Gonzalez and Macías Vásquez, 2015: 317). Epistemological plurality includes diverse projects for learning about and challenging intersectional inequalities, breaking out dominant policy silos (Radcliffe with Pequeño, 2010). Kichwa and Tsáchila indigenous women for instance convert the daily experiences of race-gender-class-territorial exclusion into powerful critiques of policy's segregation of social categories (Radcliffe, 2015). Due to colonial-modernity's co-constitution of categories of race, gender, class and territory (Lugones, 2012), indigenous women gain insights into postcolonial intersectional hierarchies from a position outside mainstream policy thinking. Agendas that rethink intersectional power offer tools for reinvigorating public policy, although these knowledges are currently

excluded from policymaking processes due to colonial-modernity's 'perverse legacies' (Millán *et al*, 2014) and a lack of decolonial practice (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; Zaragocín, 2017). To decolonise understandings of intersectional inequalities means overturning the exclusion of subaltern knowledges (Millán, 2014), and de-linking policy from colonial-modern depoliticized, technical fixes (Roth, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

In Ecuador's state-led BV, agendas for equality within diversity have been embedded in institutional and policy objectives. Focusing on policymakers' and institutional capacity in the context of a postcolonial hierarchy of social categories, the paper has sought to analyse the spaces and limits on social inclusionary objectives by moving beyond legislative and policy shifts. Global policy debates around LNOB in sustainable development highlight necessary reforms; the Ecuadorian case further suggests that policy design and implementation face barriers to thinking outside the box of siloed policy, in part due to institutional-political tensions across state administration. Overall, creative responses to LNOB objectives highlight importance of egalitarian, horizontal and plural processes of knowledge production, and the need to delink from single social categories and siloed policy frameworks. In this sense, LNOB and state BV require fewer technical fixes than a transformative politics of knowledge production. Paying close attention to the uneven interpretations of LNOB across Ecuador's new policy spaces reveals uneven engagement in re-thinking social differences, varied interpretations of 'equality in diversity', and minimal use of intersectional frameworks .

BV is a sovereign concern for Ecuador but offers valuable lessons for global debates around 21st century sustainable development. While the Sustainable Development Goals anticipate action within fifteen years, Ecuador's decade-long experiment has proven too short a time-frame for coherent and

systematic transformative policymaking and organisation, despite being a middle-income country. Equality and diversity are not easily reconcilable (Ahmed, 2012); Ecuador's case demonstrates the intrinsic difficulty of de-linking policy from entrenched colonial-modern understandings of diversity, which impede the realisation of equality.

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