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Development, Citizenship, and Everyday Appropriations of *Buen Vivir*: Ecuadorian Engagement with the Changing Rhetoric of Improvement

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The Ecuadorian state frames its development interventions in infrastructure and human capital as advances in *buen vivir* or 'good living'. This paper reports ethnographic research that draws attention to everyday appropriations of state discourses on *buen vivir* in the Amazon and Andes. Non-state actors in marginalised communities often use state discourses strategically in engagements and negotiations with state actors. We argue that uses of official versions of *buen vivir* discourse often reflect such strategic appropriations of state idioms, rather than subjective commitment to state-led development and official notions of *buen vivir*.

Keywords: *buen vivir*, development, Ecuador, governmentality, post-neoliberalism.

In Ecuador, theorisations of *buen vivir* among social movements, activists, and academics tend to refer to aspirations for a post-development society, inspired by principles of solidarity and environmentalism, as well as indigenous cosmovisions (Radcliffe, 2012; Bretón, Cortez and García, 2014). In 2014, Ecuadorian economist and politician Fander Falconí tweeted: 'I suggest that upon greeting and saying goodbye Ecuadorians say "*buen vivir*"'. As a representative of a development state, his suggestion called upon citizens to incorporate a particular, *development-oriented* conception of *buen vivir* into their everyday interrelations and subjectivities. Official state discourses on *buen vivir* describe a neoinstitutional development paradigm in which citizens enjoy expanding and modernised public goods and services. Although alternative, non-state conceptions of *buen vivir* continue to be articulated in many collective spaces, in this paper we observe that the state's discourse on *buen vivir* has been increasingly appropriated by diverse actors in marginalised communities, including local politicians, local leaders, students, farmers, and small business owners, in their engagements with the state. In our ethnographic work, we find that such diverse actors often invoke official *buen vivir* discourse in their

relations and negotiations with state actors in order to position themselves as worthy, engaged citizens.

An extensive literature exists on the anthropology of the state (Tsing, 1993; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001) and state formation in the Andes (Krupa and Nugent, 2015) and elsewhere (Abrams, 1988; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999; Migdal, 2001; Lentz, 2014) that documents relations in which people at the margins of the state appropriate state idioms. In fact, over the last two decades or so, such critical literature has often posited that the social and historical existence of the state depends on the fact that people appropriate and propagate state idioms and concepts, such as the very concept of a national scale (Mitchell, 1999). The question of why particular people appropriate state idioms in particular contexts, however, requires further consideration.

Drawing on Foucault's concept of *governmentality* – the government of populations through 'the conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1982) – Tania Li suggests that state and nongovernmental development discourses cultivate subjective commitments and '*shape* desires' (Li, 2007a: 231; original emphasis). Citing Li, Emily Yeh (2013: 290–291) writes of 'the compulsions of development […] which cultivates desires in its subjects for material improvement […]'. Several researchers have proposed that Ecuadorian state discourses on *buen vivir* might be considered a new development governmentality (Radcliffe, 2012; Viñas, 2014; Castro, 2016), through which development subjects appropriate official discourses and objectives. In Ecuador, Van Teijlingen (2016: 903) argues, 'development concepts, whether defined as buen vivir or economic growth, often provide people […] with notions on how to change for the better', adding that such discourses 'incite certain ways of thinking'. Thus, the concept of governmentality 'draws our attention to the ways in which subjects are differently formed' (Li, 2007b: 3).

Our research on official *buen vivir* development discourse in Ecuador invites caution in this regard – namely, in deducing the effects of official development discourses on desires and subjectivities. Readings of Foucault in development studies run a risk of sketching rural, poor development subjects who are shaped and re-shaped by shifting discourses. This risk runs not with the concept of governmentality itself, but rather with critical realist adaptations of it. That is, Foucault's writings on governmentality are concerned with tracing the genealogical emergence of governing rationalities and not with their actual lived, subjective effects (Rose, 1999; Lemke, 2002). Thus, O'Malley, Weir and Shearing (1997: 504) emphasise that Foucault's 'lack of attention to social relations occurs by epistemological design, not by accident'.

In relation to the ethnographic sites discussed in this paper, we turn to the social relations involved in everyday appropriations of official *buen vivir* discourse. We argue that the appropriation of this state version does not always reflect subjective commitments or desires regarding state-led development. Rather, after a decade of post-neoliberal rule, we observe rural, racialised people in marginal social positions who appropriate government discourses strategically to reposition themselves in relation to state actors as knowing citizens, capable of state critique, and worthy of recognition as political actors on local and national scales. Local leaders in particular often endeavour to consolidate their political capital and social status as qualified political intermediaries among their peers by articulating the state idiom of *buen vivir*, even as they critique the state. Ultimately, we argue, *buen vivir* emerges in everyday politics as the latest example of an incorporated practice of civic engagement, a 'durable disposition' (Bourdieu, 1990: 42) of public practice and participation.

To our knowledge, within an ever-growing literature on *buen vivir*, researchers have not analysed such everyday uses of official *buen vivir* discourse. Rather, researchers have

widely worked to elaborate the potential of *buen vivir* in the radical terms developed by social movement leaders and activists since the turn of the century – namely, as a potential challenge to economic development, a 'discursive rupture' (Bretón, Cortez and García, 2014: 15) that originates in ancestral indigenous cosmovisions (Walsh, 2015). Such accounts of *buen vivir*'s potential meanings hold that, despite the state's appropriation of *buen vivir* discourse to signify state-led modernisation and welfare, it remains a proposal 'in construction' (Radcliffe, 2012) and a radical 'transition discourse', resonant with discourses on de-growth or post-development (Escobar, 2015: 451; see also, 2011a). Proponents of a radical *buen vivir* qualify it in terms of collective rights and democratic participation, non-capitalist relations of production, fullness of life in community, harmony with nature, and a critique of economic growth (Gudynas, 2011; Radcliffe, 2012; De la Cuadra, 2015). The Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions of 2008 and 2009 mention many of these multiple dimensions, describing *buen vivir* as a normative principle through which to govern the material, as well as the social, spiritual, and ecological needs of the nation. Academics and activists have criticised these two governments regarding their subsequent representations of *buen vivir* and its implementation in policy. Whereas some Marxist researchers argue that these states have shaped *buen vivir* into a new capitalist ideology (Sánchez-Parga, 2011; Caria and Domínguez, 2016), others, more sympathetic to the possibilities of *buen vivir*, tend to measure 'differences between the discourse and policy' (Villalba, 2013: 1429) – a perceived gap between the radical potential of *buen vivir* and the praxis of reformist governments that perpetuate a *status quo*, including the exploitation of nature, anti-indigenous policies, and a familiar development narrative (Escobar, 2011b; Radcliffe, 2012; Becker, 2013; Villalba, 2013; Gudynas, 2014).

Still other commentators question the project of recovering an original, radical *buen vivir* as a measuring stick for state critique, noting that *buen vivir* has evaded clear definition since it emerged as a proposal around the year 2000 among indigenous leaders, NGOs, academics, and politicians (Bretón, Cortez and García, 2014). Gudynas (2015), one of the most visible proponents of *buen vivir* as a radical proposal, acknowledges the contested nature of *buen vivir*; however, he is not willing to disavow its potential. To untangle its various discursive manifestations, he has mapped three uses of *buen vivir* in academic debate, policy practice, and indigenous activism. First, the *generic use* of '*buen vivir*' signals a policy or practice in opposition to standard forms of development and consumerism. Second, a reform-minded, *restricted use* signals a limited critique of capitalism geared towards alternative policies, such as eco-tourism. Third, a radical, *substantive use* of *buen vivir* is a 'criticism of all forms of development at their conceptual foundations, and a consequent defense of alternatives that are both post-capitalist and post socialist' (Gudynas, 2015: 202). The generic, restricted, and substantive uses refer to *buen vivir* discourse in spheres of political debate and policy-making. They do not speak to uses in everyday relations with the state, outside spheres articulated to national politics and academic debate.

In the present paper, we pursue what may be called a fourth variant: *habituated use*. After nearly a decade of promotion, *buen vivir* has become an idiom in which citizens may evaluate the state and its promises of development. In spaces marginal to the state, we observe this usage as part of a marked tendency to appropriate such state idioms in order to make claims to citizenship, as engaged political agents. *Buen vivir* slips into vernacular usage and everyday relations with state actors as yet another way to talk about what the state does and fails to do. In pursuing this topic, we do not enter into discussions

on the contested meanings of *buen vivir* in political and academic debates. Instead, we turn to questions of the invocation and uses of *buen vivir* discourse in everyday practice.

First, we briefly review the policies that the Ecuadorian government has pursued under the banner of *buen vivir* during the rule of the current governing party, *Alianza País* (Country Alliance), led by President Rafael Correa (2007–2017) and his successor Lenín Moreno (2017–present). We demonstrate one channel through which *buen vivir* enters into everyday local politics in the case of the rural Andean parish of Cangahua, where local officials brand their initiatives as *buen vivir*. We then document the uses of *buen vivir* by non-state actors in two emblematic sites of state-led development: Playas de Cuyabeno, in the northern Amazon basin, and Quilotoa, in the central Andes. In these two places of intense state investment, people have come to invoke the official *buen vivir* as a way to position themselves as critically-minded citizens and local leaders. We close with a series of brief conclusions regarding governmentality, political subjectivity, and the multiple, relational uses of *buen vivir* discourse in contemporary Ecuador.

This research draws from two temporal scales that allow us to observe the recent appropriation of *buen vivir* discourse in comparison with a longer-running pattern in which marginalised groups have engaged in state critique through official idioms. Specifically, between 2013 and 2017, each of the three authors conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in one of the three sites mentioned in this paper. This work included semi-structured interviews with between 60 and 109 women and men of distinct ages and backgrounds in each site, as well as household demographic and economic surveys. Importantly, the paper draws on approximately six months of observation of everyday politics in each site. Although the three authors sustained distinct lines of ethnographic inquiry, nonetheless each of the projects that informs this paper reflected everyday uses of *buen vivir* in relations with the post-neoliberal state. Two of the authors simultaneously draw upon work from prior decades in *neoliberal* Ecuador that allow them to situate uses of *buen vivir* within historical patterns or habituated practices of state discourse appropriation.

Buen Vivir as a Governing Rationality

Rafael Correa came to power on a wave of anti-neoliberal protests and sentiments. Seven presidents had assumed the office of president in a single decade and none had finished their terms due to corruption or popular discontent with neoliberal reforms. When Correa took office in 2007, the very governability of the nation was in question. Correa problematised this instability in terms of the need for greater state presence in social and economic life. On taking office he set out to reconstruct the state apparatus, rearranging and expanding educational, healthcare, and welfare institutions and taking up as the call from the indigenous movement for a new constitution to replace the neoliberal constitution of 1998. Indigenous and environmental activists incorporated *buen vivir* into the new constitution, developing an entire chapter on *buen vivir*. They introduced solidarity as a guiding principle of the national economy, as well as the rights of nature to eco-systemic reproduction, among other potentially radical principles. However, Correa subsequently filtered such radical conceptions of *buen vivir* through legislation, new institutions, and presidential decrees that sought to institutionalise *buen vivir* as a mainstream development paradigm. As a doctor of development economics, Correa drew from the neoinstitutional theories of Joseph Stiglitz, Jeffrey Sachs, and Ha-Joon Chang (Webber, 2011), as well as neostructural thought from the United Nations Economic

Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Leiva, 2008; Purcell, Fernández and Martínez, 2017) to redefine the state's purpose as a provider of goods and services in the social sphere and of capital investment in the economic sphere.

Correa consolidated a political economy of expanding public goods, services, and capital investment through intensified petroleum production, amidst rising international oil prices. He argued that an economic transition away from natural resource extraction and towards a knowledge- and tourism-based economy required such extractive activities to channel rents into physical and human capital (Lu, Valdivia and Silva, 2016). In turn, Correa oversaw an oil-fuelled economic boom that facilitated free healthcare and education, the expansion of welfare payments and retirement benefits, services for people with disabilities, and a wide range of other public infrastructures, goods, and services, in effect diminishing the poverty index of basic needs from 52 percent to 36 percent (INEC, 2015). On the one hand, new infrastructures such as roads, public housing, hospitals, and schools appeared throughout the country and, on the other hand, spending increased in such areas as scholarships, teacher training, and credit for entrepreneurs.

Public infrastructure and investment have been accompanied by propaganda and the logo of the national brand, concentric circles with spiralling colours and the trademarked motto *Ecuador: ama la vida* (Ecuador: love life). The very techniques of corporate competitiveness – branding, skilled use of information, geographical saturation – have expanded state presence. Working-class families and peasant households historically at the margins of the state and state programmes have often experienced this augmented state role in the production of space and social and economic life simultaneously as assistance – the potential realisation of their rights as citizens – and intrusiveness. In this context, state discourses have readily filtered into everyday practices and daily vernacular.

Under explicitly neoliberal regimes, such filtering takes place as well. Aihwa Ong (2006: 4) explains: 'neoliberal rationality […] furnishes the concepts that inform government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness'. However, in postcolonial Ecuador we would hesitate to claim that individuals are necessarily 'induced' by the governing discourses they appropriate. As we will argue in the following ethnographic sections, state *buen vivir* discourse filters towards the margins of the state, where it often becomes appropriated as a tool for demanding recognition from state actors in relations that are shaped by deeply entrenched economic and racial structures of political exclusion.

Buen Vivir as Local Government

Beyond national propaganda media, state discourses of *buen vivir* filter from the central state into many provincial, municipal, and parish governments and come to mediate embodied interactions with state actors in everyday life. Arguably, the central government has increased its capacity to influence local governing practices and discourses following a 2010 fiscal decentralisation law. Today, local governments jockey to carry favour with central ministries to leverage more funds to complement local spending budgets. The *junta* (parish government) of Cangahua, located in the northern Andes, is no different in this regard. By 2015, the local radio station was running government advertisements with jingles promoting *buen vivir* projects in infrastructure and human

capital. That same year, for example, the *junta* inaugurated a weekly farmers' market and framed it as an expansion of *buen vivir*. Officials touted the fair on the radio as an opportunity to empower female farmers and provide consumers with healthy food, objectives aligned with the central government's National Plan of *Buen Vivir*. During the following months, vendors descended from isolated communities and expressed enthusiasm that they no longer relied on middlemen. Likewise, the *junta* has promoted access to the internet as a human capital-building component of *buen vivir,* converting the main plaza and central park into a free wifi zone. All lampposts advertise, 'technology is *buen vivir*', despite the fact that few residents have wireless electronics. Thus, in Cangahua, the *junta* has aligned its discourses and interventions – whether effective or less so – with the National Plan for *Buen Vivir*, constituting one main channel through which *buen vivir* filters into the everyday.

Although the slogan *juntos por un buen vivir* (together for a *buen vivir*) now appears on public transport, government uniforms, banners in public spaces, and other material productions sponsored by Cangahua's government, nonetheless we cannot presume what the political effects of *buen vivir* discourse might be in this context, if any. In other words, 'there is no assumption that the mere existence of a diagram of government implies either its generalised acceptance or implementation' (Rose, O'Malley and Valverde, 2006: 99). Although, like other development discourses, *buen vivir* may be intended to 'educate the desires of villagers' (Li, 2007a: 196), understanding its effects requires a closer anthropological look into how and why people engage with or appropriate a discourse in particular places and relations. In the following two case studies, we turn to the appropriations, understandings and uses of *buen vivir* among non-state actors in communities in the Amazon and Andes.

Buen Vivir Government on the Amazonian Oil Frontier

Travelling into the Amazon in Sucumbíos province, billboards read '*Buen vivir* means first-rate highways'. From one of the roads that reaches furthest into the Ecuadorian Amazon, it is still a three-hour journey downriver to the first so-called 'Millennium City' resettlement. This housing settlement was built by the Correa government as compensation for a Kichwa community in exchange for their consent to oil extraction. In late 2013, the residents of the community Playas de Cuyabeno, also known as 'Playas', left their farms along the Aguarico River for this urban-like neighbourhood of eight square blocks, which included 68 houses of steel, synthetic materials, and cement; illuminated and paved streets with sidewalks; multiple parks and soccer fields; schoolhouses; and a medical clinic and police station. Streetlamps and household appliances were powered by a 6000-gallon diesel generator. The state oil company Petroamazonas committed to maintaining the potable water system, electricity, sewage treatment, and garbage collection, until the community developed its own sources of income from state-supported tourism development to be able to pay taxes for these services.

Correa inaugurated the resettlement before television cameras, characterising it as a symbol of his *buen vivir* revolution, aimed at expanding public services to the most remote areas of the country. 'Never again a strategic project should be a sadness […] for the communities that inhabit its surroundings', Correa pronounced in the new coliseum, '[…] to the contrary, the strategic projects are a source of *buen vivir*' (Correa, 2013). He declared that the state would build 200 more Millennium Cities in the Amazon alone. In subsequent years, he featured Playas several times on his weekly television programme

as a symbol of *buen vivir*, an exemplary space in which oil production was successfully enlisted to provide services to a marginalised community.

Not all community members had been enthusiastic about leaving their farms for the resettlement, but many had struggled to ensure that the resettlement was built as a response to continuing pressures on their territories and resources from oil companies, settlers, and conservation initiatives. Urban resettlement had also come into view as a strategy of cultural and racial transformation in a region long marked by anti-indigenous sentiments and institutions. Such a modern neighbourhood, education and socialisation appeared as a practical strategy to lessen the racism and violence that had characterised indigenous experience in this region (Lyall, 2017) – that is, resettlement was a structured act, 'performed under structural necessities, under the constraint of the products of previous history' (Bourdieu, 2014: 93). The shaman in Playas, Bartolo, had led efforts to ensure that the resettlement materialised according to the state's promise, so that the community might access what he has referred to in state media as a 'dignified life'. Yet in his more intimate relations and in his home Bartolo often expresses a distinct vision of the 'good life' in terms of spiritual unity with nature and everyday life on his farm. He had pressured the state to build the resettlement not because post-neoliberal *buen vivir* had reshaped his desires, but rather because social-historical structures had rendered this struggle for urban space and socialisation a seemingly necessary or strategic one for his grandchildren.

In 2016, Mario was interviewed about the meaning of *buen vivir* in his parents' shop in Playas, where they sold shoes, clothing, and school supplies to the other families. Mario explained that *buen vivir* meant 'internet, highways, schools'. Like many other residents, he had spent countless Saturday mornings with the radio tuned to Correa's broadcast, in which he often spoke about infrastructure in terms of *buen vivir*. Similarly, school-aged children in Playas learned about state versions of *buen vivir* during weekly talks from the high school rector, Julio, who had been appointed through a connection in the ruling party. The author who conducted this research in Playas volunteered as a teacher at the school, where each Monday he observed Julio give motivational speeches to students and teachers. Julio's purpose was to inculcate a sense of responsibility for Playas' modern facilities, which, he explained, held the promise to transform young people into professionals who can 'build *patria* [fatherland] together' and sustain a modern society or, as he called it, a 'society of *buen vivir*'. He peppered his speeches with such phrases and neologisms taken directly from Correa's speeches: 'the long neoliberal night' was over, he repeated, and 'the *patria* [fatherland] is now for everyone'. Thus, in this community the phrase *buen vivir* became widely recognised as an official discourse on the construction of modern spaces and a modern society.

However, after oil prices collapsed in 2014, Petroamazonas provided less maintenance support and materials. The village's underground plastic sewage pipes began to implode. Residents jerry-rigged sewage pumps and wrapped broken electrical fuses with cigarette papers to complete circuits. Many residents began to feel increasingly anxious about the lack of jobs for them in the oil company, as well as their continued isolation from other labour markets and from their farms (Encalada-Falconí, 2016; Vallejo et al., 2016). In 2014, 90 percent of adult community members ran for local office, as residents vied for the only local jobs available. Some men began to migrate to look for jobs in regional urban centres or in oil exploration in other parts of the Amazon. Women witnessed profound transformations in their everyday lives and subsistence strategies (Cielo and Vega, 2015; Cielo, Coba and Vallejo 2016). For example, they began to trade fish, meat, favours, and goodwill for the gasoline they needed to power canoes back and

forth to farms in order to gather food from lands that were quickly disappearing into the jungle.

According to our interviewees, residents in Playas had not used *buen vivir* to describe their lives or express their ideals prior to Correa, nor had they used it to describe their muted aspirations for resettlement in 2013. However, after several years of close interactions with state actors, the phrase that the former planning minister Fander Falconí had once wished into daily discourse has become widely recognised in Playas to refer to specific state promises and, in turn, it has been appropriated by residents to level demands at state actors regarding unfulfilled promises. For example, residents have formed three tourism organisations to generate income to pay for services and food, but the Ministry of the Environment has largely prohibited them from building tourist cabins and other facilities in conservation lands around the resettlement. In 2017, Oscar, a young leader of one of these groups, explained that in the town meetings 'we always talk about *sumac kawsay (buen vivir)* […] as a lifestyle and a style of work that comes with tourism […] that's how we are proposing it to the ministry'. In monthly assemblies, residents frequently resolved to send representatives to lobby the Ministry of the Environment, framing their demands for income in terms of an unfulfilled *buen vivir*. Another young man concurred that '*buen vivir* or *sumak kawsay* is used by local leaders to present demands to the government to achieve common objectives […] because we all have rights and so the community wants our rights to be respected'. Accordingly, the community often sent letters or '*oficios*' along with groups of selected community leaders to the offices of Petroamazonas up river, the municipal capital, and ministries in Quito to make demands for maintenance and employment. Community archives reveal that in recent years, community letters to state officials have cited a host of official idioms and widely recognised state slogans, including *buen vivir* and *Ecuador ya es de todos* (Ecuador is now for everyone), as well as quotations from the constitution regarding rights to education and public services.

In community meetings, particular men tend to position themselves as formal and informal leaders through their expressions of technical and legal knowledge, as well as official discourses, demonstrating linguistic skills for engaging with state actors. As geographer Christian Lentz (2014: 9) writes, learning 'languages of rule' enables local leaders to 'navigate and negotiate […] historically-layered power relations'. In Playas, such leaders are the individuals most often selected to go on commissions to the provincial capital and to Quito to engage with state actors and present demands for resources and they are also often among the handful of men who are elected to local leadership positions.

Thus, the appropriation of official *buen vivir* discourse does not reflect an unqualified embrace of state modernisation in Playas; to the contrary, from the outset resettlement had been a compromise within highly structured social-historical conditions of diminishing natural resources, oil contamination, and, importantly, social subordination. Today, residents continue to struggle with state actors in order to sustain the Millennium City, often with mixed sentiments, acknowledging both difficult conditions *and* marginally improved status and recognition as urbanising subjects. In this context, *buen vivir* becomes a tool not for realising modernising ideals or desires – nor 'utopian fantasies', as some argue (Wilson and Bayón, 2017) – but rather for navigating already existing symbolic and material structures.

We would add that the practice of state discourse appropriation in Playas is not limited to the post-neoliberal moment. We can also signal neoliberal discourses in which community members couched their proposals to the state prior to the rise of Correa.

In 2006, community leaders developed a proposal for an indigenous oil company that would be called 'Alain Petrol', along with technical and financial advisers from Ecuador and investors from the US and Canada (Lyall and Valdivia, 2017; Wilson and Bayón, 2017). Under a neoliberal paradigm that disparaged state intervention in economic and social spheres, advisers and community leaders argued that their company offered productive efficiency. Such arguments did not reflect neoliberal subjectivities; rather, their proposal for an indigenous-owned oil company responded to anxieties in Playas and neighbouring communities that foreign oil companies would enter their territories and reproduce histories of racialised dispossession and exploitation. That is, Alain Petrol responded to 'structural necessities' (Bourdieu, 2014: 94) and was discursively framed to garner state recognition. Likewise, after over a decade of rule under *Alianza País*, the invocation of *buen vivir* is often less a mark of development subjectivities than an additional idiom that disenfranchised Ecuadorians habitually speak in relations with state actors, guided by a practical sense for navigating entrenched social structures.

Buen vivir Government of Community Tourism in the Andes

In this section, we turn to a place where state-led development has focused somewhat less on representing a *buen vivir* society of expanded public services than on representing an emblematic post-extractive industry to sustain *buen vivir* society: community tourism. In 2007, the small Andean community of Quilotoa became a focal point of the government's development programmes for two reasons. At an altitude of 3570 meters in the western cordillera of the Andes, the Quilotoa crater lake draws visitors from around the world. Perched on the rim of this spectacular crater lake, the community holds the promise of tourism-based development. Thus, it offered a space in which to prove state capacities to move the economy beyond oil extraction and towards a knowledge- and tourism-based economy. The second reason was personal to Correa. Quilotoa lies within the parish of Zumbagua, the site where Correa carried out a year of missionary service as a teenager. Correa began his presidency with an indigenous ceremony in Zumbagua; he chose the parish to build the first of six dozen modern 'Millennium' high schools he would build in the country; and he returned to the parish several times to host his Saturday morning television and radio broadcasts.

Having previously built their tourism businesses gradually through piecemeal investments, Quilotoans began to receive substantial assistance around 2010. First, an NGO partnered with the community to build a large restaurant with windows overlooking the lake and laid the foundation for a new gallery for displaying local crafts. Shortly afterwards, Correa's administration committed to three large projects that transformed Quilotoa. They rebuilt the road from Zumbahua to the lake, spent over US$350,000 to finish the artisan gallery and adjacent parking area and invested another US$170,000 in a platform from which tourists observe the lake. Still more money was allocated to hospitality training programmes, improvements in the path to the lake, and kayaks to set up a rental service run by the community. By 2015, Quilotoa had been transformed into a tidy tourist destination of solid, bright brick buildings with red tile roofs.

Carlos Vega was interviewed in 2016 in his art gallery, a small, cement-block building. He explained that *buen vivir* 'is a dignified life'. When asked what it would take to realise this ideal, he answered, 'One needs work, jobs, to be united, to work together, teenagers, grown-ups, everyone'. Another young man, Fabian Cuyo, concurred, emphasising employment and its availability within the community. Fabian had graduated

from high school and entered university, although he had had to interrupt his pursuit of a degree to work as a tourist guide, a taxi driver in Quito, and in a short-lived job with the Ministry of Justice. Fabian explained that the 'real goals of indigenous people would be to not migrate to the city, to live from one's crops, to create a proper business selling potatoes'. These two young men who have come of age under Correa, Carlos and Fabian, articulate *buen vivir* in terms of the government's promise of *buen vivir* in Quilotoa: employment and economic self-determination within the community.

When he was interviewed in 2016, César Millangalle was nearly eleven months out of his two-year term as president of the Quilotoa tourist organisation. In that period, he had worked with various government grants to upgrade the community's lakeside facilities and the trail that led from the rim to the lake and to complete a community-owned hotel. César observed, '*buen vivir* has become more projects like the community meeting house or the tourist viewing platform'. The interviewer asked, 'So you see *buen vivir* as development?' César replied: 'Exactly'.

However, he went on to clarify: 'there are a lot of problems here in the community, problems of management, problems of development […] Here there is a lot of egotism, envy, rumors. There is misspent money, competition […] This is not *buen vivir* […] We'll put a different term on this development, but let's not put *buen vivir* on it'. Almost as an afterthought, he offered an alternative definition to the state *buen uvir*: 'I see *buen vivir* as living in plenitude'. That is, similar to Bartolo in Playas, César marked a distinction between his desires for an ideal life in his community, which he associated with an alternate meaning for *buen vivir*, and a state-defined *buen vivir*, which he identified with conventional development.

As in the case of Playas, state promises of *buen vivir* in Quilotoa have fallen short. The current president of the community tourism association, Mauricio Latacunga, voiced his frustrations with official *buen vivir*. On the one hand, he could list the projects that Correa's administration had successfully developed: the tourist viewing platform, the repaired path, and the new dock for kayaks. They were manifestations of state-directed *buen vivir*, which, Mauricio explained, referred to the broad vision of development of Correa's government and its concrete spending on infrastructure in parish communities. Yet, for Mauricio, *buen vivir* had become so closely associated with government spending and unrealised promises that he associated *buen vivir* with state corruption. In particular, the phrase had come to represent the privileged employment enjoyed by government functionaries in contrast with ongoing unemployment in Quilotoa: 'In the ministries, how many people are inside those offices all day long? And the members of the National Assembly? They make $5000 a month'.

Having had substantial grants and other government support, Quilotoa's community leaders did not dismiss state *buen vivir* out of hand – that is, the *buen vivir* of a buoyant tourism industry and ample jobs. Yet, unemployment persisted, even as leaders acknowledged unprecedented material support. As in Playas, some residents and, in particular, community leaders have begun to use *buen vivir* discourse to denounce the state on its own terms. 'There is no *buen vivir*; there is no work', said Antuca Chugchilan. Antuca had most recently served as vice-president of the tourist organisation. Before that she had been president of a women's group and worked with her husband to secure equitable land distribution among community members. She was blunt about the failures of Correa's project: 'There have not been programmes of *buen vivir*', Antuca insisted. She cited as an example the township's unfulfilled plan for a sewage project for the dense complex of buildings at the centre of the tourist zone. 'They promised the project and they worked with Quilotoa's organisation, but there were no funds to do it'. She

added that her sons had difficulty finding jobs: 'People do not feel well. They are not well. There is no work'. The young man who served as the community treasurer while Antuca was vice-president was just as forceful in his criticism of Correa's capacity to fulfil *buen vivir*-as-employment. '*Buen vivir*? It is lies', he said, '[…] Correa has not fulfilled his promise'.

In Quilotoa, *buen vivir* is a symbol standing for state interventions in material infrastructures and, in turn, employment in the tourism sector. Like César, a number of people in the community are also adept at articulating an alternate definition of *buen vivir* that resonates with the intercultural aspiration for wellbeing that has so captured the imagination in political debates over the meanings and potential of the 2008 constitution. In interviews, women and men who have served as the community's organisational leaders, as well as educated, younger residents, offer visions of a communitarian *buen vivir* of living in harmony with neighbours and with nature or, as one leader posited, in 'plenitude'. This variety reflects a multiplicity of engagements with *buen vivir*. Within the heterogeneous registers of *buen vivir* discourse spoken, community leaders in particular have come to articulate critiques of the state in terms of the state's *buen vivir*. That is, they often speak in this register to refer to the failings of Correa's government to achieve old objectives of mainstream development – sewer systems, potable water, good schools and full employment.

Conclusions

One major proponent of *buen vivir*, Alberto Acosta, describes it as a still open invitation or 'opportunity to imagine other worlds' (Acosta, 2013), a 'beginning to think outside the limits of development' (Acosta in Fernández, Pardo and Salamanca, 2014: 102). In this article, we take a different tack to explore the everyday uses of *buen vivir* discourse. Inspired by the manifold uses of *buen vivir* identified by Gudynas (2015), we highlight appropriations of state discourses on *buen vivir* by non-state actors in two rural, indigenous communities as yet another kind of use, a habituated use of state engagement. We extend this empirical observation here to draw a series of conclusions regarding governmentality, political subjectivity at the margins of the state and the multiple registers of *buen vivir*.

First, development studies run the risk of converting governmentality from a methodological framework for studying the history of governing rationalities into a critical realist approach to studying how governing rationalities make history and remake subjects. Our research on *buen vivir* in Ecuador suggests that people's engagements with development discourses are not always deeply formative of subjects and their desires. Rather, official discourses can be strategic resources for marginalised actors to manoeuvre within limited spaces for political engagement.

Second, alongside appropriations of state *buen vivir*, we find that people in Playas and Quilotoa also articulate distinct conceptions of the 'good life' that resonate more closely with radicalised versions of post-development *buen vivir* that have captured imaginations among activists and academics in Ecuador and elsewhere. Yet although development interventions are often 'designed to *shape* desires and act on actions' (Li, 2007a: 231), subjects do not always act in accordance with their political desires or ideals. The desires of rural, indigenous people in Ecuador are highly circumscribed by ongoing legacies of colonial material and symbolic subordination, which often inform struggles to leverage grandiose development promises in order to marginally improve

material and social positions. The appropriation and redeployment of official idioms becomes a habitual tactic in this context to respond to the predicament of continually being cast outside the circle of citizenship and out of step with the times.

Third, this research suggests that debates on the meaning of *buen vivir* should not lose sight of the multiple ways this increasingly ubiquitous phrase is used in situated social practice. Attention to practice reveals the simultaneous existence of multiple registers and uses of *buen vivir* in distinct contexts and relations. In Quilotoa, for example, *buen vivir* might be invoked to refer to harmonious living among neighbours or a sewage pipe that has yet to be installed.

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