Alternative Paradigms of Development in State Politics and Policy Making in the Global South: An Introduction

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The global recognition of local/indigenous alternatives

In many parts of the Global South, locally rooted, indigenous – or indigenised – cultural conceptualisations have become key denominators in state politics and policy-making processes. This is an interesting fact in itself, since many of these alternative concepts arising from grassroots social movements, indigenous activists and radical decolonization scholars articulate a fundamental criticism at existing state structures, at the dominant economic systems, and at the notion of development. In all their multiplicity, they articulate profound questioning of continuities of coloniality and global capitalism.

The attempt to draw on local cultural traditions and indigenous practices as source of resistance has a long history. It was practiced by colonised peoples in their struggle against their colonisers and colonial exploitation. In Latin America, the struggle of indigenous people against Spanish colonial rule and – after independence – against domestic elites of Spanish decent is well documented (Mamani Rámirez, 2012; Ranta, 2014). In different parts of Africa and Asia, decolonization processes and independence movements drew their political rhetoric on locally rooted concepts, such as *ujamaa* in Tanzania and *harambee* in Kenya. The Indian independence movement built on the local concept of *swaraj* (self-rule). The reference to *ubuntu* played a decisive role in the post-Apartheid reconciliation process in South Africa in which it was used to build up a sense of common postcolonial identity, belonging and sovereignty. In the 1990s and 2000s, indigenous or indigenised types of organising in Latin America unfolded a specific dynamism and served as political and strategic resource for movements against neo-liberal state policies (Zibechi, 2010; Ranta, 2018). Some of these movements managed to form a political project, take over state power in electoral processes and – through comprehensive institutional reform – succeeded in enshrining concepts like *buen vivir/vivir bien* in state constitutions. In Latin America, Bolivia and Ecuador could use the political and geostrategic space which opened with the so called Left Turn and took up a most ambitious project. They were not only embarking to a fundamental transition of the national economies, but – through concrete projects like the Yasuní initiative in Ecuador or Bolivia's refusal to agree to insufficient climate targets in Cancún in 2010 – both countries provoked repercussions beyond their national or continental boundaries, challenged international governance structures, and became points of reference for global social movements in their search for alternatives to growth- and corporate-driven, neo-liberal globalisation.

Local and indigenous alternative concepts became even more prominent in the wake of the current global crises, which peaked in 2008 as a financial and economic crises, but which is more adequately described as an ongoing multiple crisis. Under the impression of a convergence and mutual augmentation of several crises – an ecological crisis in form of climate related disasters and environmental degradation, an economic crisis, a crisis of social reproduction and political representation – the need for fundamental alternatives became a commonplace and local, indigenous paradigms were broadly discussed. In the wake of the debate on the Sustainable Development Goals, the concept of sustainability received global recognition and – at least discursively – was increasingly linked to local and indigenous alternative discourses (Escobar, 2011, Vanhulst and Beling, 2014). The government of Thailand, for example, used its chairmanship of the G77 in 2016 to promote a South-South dialogue on local and indigenous alternative development concepts, with the idea that the Thai Buddhist-inspired concept of *sufficiency economy* – together with other alternative concepts – was a tool to achieve the SDGs (Inter Press Service, 2016; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

Despite of the recent official recognition and despite of the official commitment of the G77 to a South-South dialogue, however, radical local and indigenous alternatives have largely stayed local. They have not converged into a comprehensive political ideology or development programme and there is no integrating international organisation which would compare to, for example, to the Liberal or Socialist International.

Deepening global crisis

Even worse: as it seems, political processes which used to be dubbed as Left Turn in Latin America are reversed in many countries. In those countries, where *buen vivir/vivir bien* was strongest – Bolivia and Ecuador – lighthouse projects like the Yasuní Initiative have been cancelled and under the pressure of falling prices for raw material, governments are increasingly relying on extractivism to create state income which is needed for social programmes. In many countries, ambitious post-extractivist visions seem to have been sacrificed in favor of more conventional neo-extractivist developmental projects (Brand, Dietz and Lang, 2016; Gudynas, 2016; McNeish, 2013; Ranta, 2017; Acosta 2013). The role of South-South cooperation – especially China – has been instrumental in intensifying the exploration and exports of natural resources. Indigenous lands and territories and ecologically fragile areas are suffering most from the impacts of progressivist neo-extractivism and state-led developmentalism. Politically, concepts such as *buen vivir* or *vivir bien* are being used to legitimize governmental policies, to silence criticism and to narrow spaces for civil society. Consequently, Radcliffe (2015, 861) has suggested that the introduction of *buen vivir/vivir bien* to state politics has not been able to produce meaningful political-economic transformations in terms of challenging growth-based development thinking and practice. Countries propagating postdevelopment policies are caught

in complicated articulations with the "real-politik of postcolonial states" (Ibid.: 861), inscribed with deeply ingrained inequalities and little room to manoeuvre in the global political economy.

Outside Latin America, this tendency can also be observed. In Asia, a strong commitment to alternative concepts can be found in Mongolia, with its constitutional support of *pastoral nomadism* as strategy not only to deal with the effects of climate change but also as means to overcome carbon-based unsustainable mode of economy (Stolpe, 2015; Gertel, 2015). In Thailand, the notion of *sufficiency economy* draws on Buddhist concepts of moderation, a critique of consumerism and harmony with nature. In Bhutan, state support for the concept of *Gross National Happiness* goes even further: all laws and state policies are being cross-checked for their compatibility to the Gross National Happiness, to the extent that Bhutan decided against membership to the WTO because it would undermine principles of GNH (Ura, Alkire amd Zangmo, 2012; Wangdi, 2010). Yet, in Thailand and Mongolia, the official commitment to non-growth-centered paradigms is overshadowed by the Chinese Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) (Schaffar 2018) – a mega-infrastructure project, which may count as the largest infrastructure project in the history of humankind and dwarfs all previous development plans including the Marshall Plan. It owes its attractiveness to the promise of new growth, through better connectivity, bigger markets and more consumption (Hoering, 2018). BRI, which thrills contemporary development imaginaries is very much the opposite of a local and indigenous concept and there are signs that, in its present shape, will be leading to a second great acceleration (Institute of Social Ecology, Will et al., 2015) – a new cycle of aggressive exploitation of natural resources with the potential to lead to a fatal aggravation of the current crisis. In Thailand, the critique can be pushed even further. While the present military government aspires to link up to the new Chinese high-speed train network, it uses the concept of *sufficiency economy* to preach modesty to the poor population and silence all political opposition (Schaffar and Ziai 2018).

Towards a critical analysis of local/indigenous alternatives

Obviously the general global recognition of the need of radical alternatives on the discursive level coincides with the direct opposite on the level concrete politics: accelerated growth-oriented mega-infrastructure programmes, oftentimes implemented in authoritarian ways. How can we explain the problems indigenous local alternatives encoutered?
One line of analysis regards the rise of indigenous alternatives in Latin America as dialectic processes. Crises – colonial assault, neo-liberal globalization – leads to grave social and economic problems, but also induces/triggers local resistance and a renaissance of indigenous consciousness. As these movements are getting stronger, they manage to take over the state, but – through various processes of incorporation and cooption – inevitably get compromised. The sociology of organisations (Michels, 1911) provides us with strong concepts how such cooption

results from structural conditions of state bureaucratic organisations. Along these lines, Beling et al. (2018) points to the fact that the development industry has successfully incorporated and compromised other strands of criticism: the debate of the limits of growth was reconciled with growth-led development concepts via the notion of sustainability, radical criticism at economy-centered development concepts were incorporated into the mainstream discourse through the notion of Human Development (Beling et al., 2018). Are indigenous and local radical alternatives then simply the next turn of the cycle?

The urgency of the global crisis – the fact that humanity is facing existential threats – sets the stage where a simple return to business-as-usual is impossible. Devastating effects of the present growth-led economic paradigm are the limits which make it impossible to overcome the present crisis by kicking off a new growth cycle. Against this background, it is clear that there are profound changes ahead of us – a transition towards fundamentally different economic, social, political systems, a transitions which is likely to be of Polanyian scale, which will happen "by design or by desaster" (Reißig, 2011). This also puts the academic endeavor to study local indigenous alternatives into a new light, and forces us to re-consider the methodological and theoretical foundations of our work – including a critical consideration of our position as researchers.

This special issue discusses histories, discourses and practices of alternative paradigms of development in state politics and policy-making processes in the Global South. It focuses on cultural politics within state formation processes, including governmental discourses and such governing tools as legislation, policies, state programs, and projects. Furthermore, it presents case studies of social movement strategies vis-à-vis state-imposed cultural projects. Through multidisciplinary scholarship, the special issue sheds light on why and how have cultural conceptualisations become major denominators in state politics and policy making in many parts of the global South. Furthermore, it examines how these cultural notions are defined conceptually and discursively and how they are portrayed in legislation, policies and/or political rhetoric of the state.

In her contribution on 'State Governance and Micropractices of Power in the Process of Decolonizing the State in Bolivia', Eija Ranta focuses on bureaucratic routines and analyses contested processes of implementation on the way to overcome colonial state structures through the new orientation at *vivir bien* principles. Wolfram Schaffar in his article on 'Alternative Development Concepts and Their Political Embedding: The Case of Sufficiency Economy in Thailand' analyses how the concept of sufficiency economy was coopted by Thai elites and turned into a tool of oppression. Alexandra Heis addresses the same process in her contribution on 'Strategic Alliances or What Alternative? The *Bia Kud Chum* and Community Culture in Thailand'. She zooms in to a specific project and analyses how a radical local alternative was contained through repression and cooption into a state project. In her contribution on 'The

Common Destiny Framework, Citizenship and Customary Governance in Kanaky/New Caledonia' Cadey Korson analyses the construction of a discursive frame which opens opportunities for a decolonisation of new Caladonia, but also sets limits to possible imaginaries. Stephan Peter Sonnenberg & Dema Lham address the establishment of a law school in Bhutan as a case study how state building is being planned in a country with a strong commitment to its local alternative concepts of Gross National Happines. In their contribution 'But Seriously Now … Lawyers as Agents of Happiness? The Role of the Law, Lawmakers, and Lawyers in the Realization of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness' they analyse the potential but also the challenges of imagining legal institutions as change agents. The discourse on environmentalism is in the centre of Rickard Lalander & Maija Merimaa's article on 'The Discursive Paradox of Environmental Conflict: Between Ecologism and Economism in Ecuador'. They address the contestation between different interpretations of ecologism and environmentalism in public discourse as part of the contested policy making porcesses in Ecuarod under the Correa government.

What all contributions connects is that they are focusing on state politics and policies, asking what kind of political goals are promoted through cultural concepts and what kind of political purposes do indigenised notions legitimise. Ultimately, the articles investigate how alternative development paradigms are used in bureaucratic practices of the state, and what kinds of contestations and power struggles emerge around them between and amidst the state and social movements. Addressing transformation processes of the state, the articles also touch on an eminent issue for future research: The global transformation not only happens under the impact of and as reaction to an ecological and economic crisis. It happens in times when more and more countries shift towards authoritarian modes of governance and democracy is under pressure. The examples of state transformation and decolonialisation which are under examination in this special issue also shed light on the fragility of these processes and the need of inclusive and democratic procedures.

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