EcoSImies of care: a proposal for decolonizing 'sustainable development'

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on questions of power, colonialism and capitalist relations in order to understand and disrupt the dominant discourse and project of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I analyse the mainstream sustainable development conceptual framework (WB 2012; UN 2015; UNDP 2016) and argue that it has become profoundly problematic, even seriously unthinkable, to do good work under the current 'development' framework, with its modernist and extractivist premises of bounded individualism and human exceptionalism. There is urgent need for new discourses and modes of representation that shift resource-related debates to open platforms for engaged, decolonized, and decentralized public discourse. Drawing on feminist, indigenous, decolonial art and critical environmentalist knowledges, I propose here an 'ecoSImies of care' as a way to think beyond the dead end of sustainable development green capitalism and resurrect a 'limit to growth' and sustainability of life discourse and practices. In this sense, ecoSImies of care open a radical way of imagining the economy and economics as multiple, inter-eco-dependent, polyvocal, and as bringing together social-political insights in a contextual and situated manner.

1. Introduction

The 2012 Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) adopted *The Future We Want* declaration on Sustainable Development and Green Economy and set the basis for the current global development Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the current global "plan of action for people, planet and prosperity" (UN 2015, 5) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (hereafter Agenda 2030), the SDGs "will stimulate action over the next fifteen years" (5). Meeting the SDGs will cost the estimated $3 trillion a year (*The Economist* 2015), and will focus on critical issues such as the protection of the planet "from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations" (UN 2015, 5).

The Rio+20 conference opened with a video titled "Welcome to the Anthropocene." The British-accented, female android voiceover in the video invites the audience to reflect on the "relentless pressure" humanity inflicted on the planet now that "we have entered the Anthropocene," and that we should have confidence that "our creativity, energy, and industry

offer hope."[1] Yet the Kari-Oca II Declaration,[2] agreed in Rio in parallel with the UNCSD Rio+20 meeting and signed by over five hundred grassroots Indigenous Peoples, states:

We see the goals of UNCSD Rio+20, the 'Green Economy', and its premise that the world can only 'save' nature by commodifying its life-giving and life-sustaining capacities as a continuation of the co-lonialism that Indigenous Peoples and our Mother Earth have faced and resisted for 520 years.[3]

In this context, the present article asks: Why is it suddenly necessary (again) to specify that development has to be sustainable? What, exactly, is to be sustained in sustainable development? Is 'development' the only answer to thinking about sustainability and climate change? While the dominant sustainable development narratives and project (hereafter 'sustainable development') have ecological, economic, and social aspects, I argue that their basis remains deeply modernist, extractivist, and capitalogenic. If we are to speak about a more-than-human world, it will not suffice to build a cultural and social vocabulary through a human-centric development discourse that views the Earth primarily as a provision or sphere of human perceptions, experience, and control. The assumption in 'sustainable development' that everything we encounter is a resource for human consumption and production must be challenged, as this capitalogenic vision has led directly to countless environmental and social disasters. The text that follows takes a decolonial approach seen as a political, anti-colonial sensibility and a suit of practices and theoretical approaches that seek to disrupt and contrast hegemonic western ways of knowing, writing and seeing the world. Timothy Mitchell (2002, 3) observed that the idea of 'economy' has remained curiously unexplored by scholars in contrast with other categories like class, gender, nation and culture. In order to open up a radical way of imagining economy and Economics – as multiple, polyvocal, and as bringing together social political economic insights in a contextual manner – I draw upon feminist, indigenous, decolonial art and environmentalist knowledges and suggest the notion of 'ecoSImies of care'. I owe the 'ecoSImies' term, in its Spanish version (ecoSImia), to Miguel Guaira Colapy, a Cotacachi indigenous leader who suggested it as an analytical category to contain subaltern knowledges. I formulate here ecoSImies as 'ecoSImies of care' to question an economy based on accumulation by appropriation and dispossession (ecoNOmies) and to radically situate 'taking care of life' at the very centre of economy and Economics (ecoSImies of care).

In the next section, I explore the historical concept of sustainable development and analyse its similarities with the Anthropocene. Section 2 centres on questions of power, colonialism, and capitalist relations in order to analyse the integrated sustainable development multidimensional framework..I argue that 'sustainable development' tells a capitalogenic story that climaxes with a modernist framework based on human-centric individualism, extractivism, and privatisation. In Section 3, I invoke ecoSImies of care to show the radical affirmation that all humans are already inter-eco-dependent. Here, I also suggest three ethical criteria of

contemporary economies for the sustainability of life. In Section 4, I conclude by rejecting hope as a political strategy and taking a critical position that enables us to recast economic endeavours in light of the twenty-first-century crises.

It is not about carbon…

'Sustainable development' is not a new buzzword in the development discourse (hereafter 'development').[4] The current 'sustainable development' idea is derived mostly from the 1987 Brundtland Report by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as *Our Common Future*. Prominently defined in the Brundtland Report, 'sustainable development' is still mainly referred to as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN 1987, 43; UN 2015). It "requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire" (UN 1987, 44; UN 2015). In the Brundtland Report as well as the Rio+20 *The Future We Want* document and its subsequent Agenda 2030, there is an intent to reconcile Economics with Ecology (understood as separate disciplines) in order to protect the environment from pollution, deforestation, the greenhouse effect, climate change and, at the same time, to ensure the pursuit of economic growth that was – and still is – considered a condition for general happiness and development.

The Rio+20 document foregrounds climate change as an inevitable and urgent global challenge with long-term implications for the sustainable development of all countries (UNDP 2012a). In this regard, the current Agenda 2030 states in the Sustainable Development Goal 13: to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts and aims to mobilize $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible (UNDP 2012a). SDG 13 commits to combat climate change to ensure a 'sustainable development' path mainly to 'developing countries' and argues that climate change "is an issue that requires solutions that need to be coordinated at the international level and it requires international cooperation to help developing countries move toward a low-carbon economy."[5] Yet climate change and 'sustainable development' is not about carbon, but about our interrelated global economic power system (Klein 2014) and economic thinking stretched over histories of colonialism, industrializations, and globalizations.

The discipline of Economics has an unmistakable allure and authority in 'development' and its imagination as part of western modernity,[6] which stems from its self-presentation as a rational science supported by empirically tested methods and professional management techniques. This means that implementing 'sustainable development' projects and programmes in the so-called 'developing countries' embodies not only the institutional and fi-

nancial power of its proponents (e.g. the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the upgrading of living standards, and the modernization of the productive apparatus, but also the cultural weight and discursive authority of Economics. That is, 'sustainable development' contains specific ideas, practices, and forms of knowledge as its essential components, since development "entails a learning process" (Zein-Elabdin 2003, 31). In this sense, the notion of 'development' has functioned discursively since post-World War II as a regulated space that has ultimately provided the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and justification for political intervention in postcolonial and non-western societies (Escobar 1995). This means that 'development' has organized what it means to be poor or wealthy, just or unjust, with or without 'development', and has classified, in this way, certain subjectivities and knowledges as ontologically and epistemologically inferior. Thus, it is not surprising that 'development', dominated by the discourse of Economics, is seen to be closely associated with colonialism. In this regard Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela (2004) maintain that

[e]conomics is epistemologically comfortable with the notion of colonialism and imperial domination […It] can thus be soundly characterized as a colonial discourse grounded in exclusion and erasure of the unfamiliar. (2-3)

In other words, 'development' is premised by the belief that some people of the world are 'developed' while others are 'underdeveloped/developing' making domination possible through a series of 'deficits' and a catalogue of 'needs'.

In this context, it is worth noting the similarities between the concept of 'sustainable development' and the Anthropocene – a narrative widely deployed within Euro-Austro-USA academic environmental studies and politics that invokes a pan-human species responsibility for the current climate crisis – and the parallels between the problems that 'sustainable development' and the Anthropocene pose and encounter. The Anthropocene and 'sustainable development' stories have surfaced together at the height and expansion of neoliberalism, when climate action has been relegated to 'adaptation' and capital has corrupted the autonomy, discourse and activist charge of the mainstream environmental movement, turning it into an ally of private wealth. From the 'Welcome to the Anthropocene' Rio+20 keynote video to the current United Nations Environment Programme "Stories from the Anthropocene,"[7] the Anthropocene in 'sustainable development' turns out to be a view 'from nowhere' that tends towards normalizing the story of human exceptionalism, colonialism, and planetary decline, leading not to better stories imagining more liveable presents and more liveable futures but often, instead, more of the same Anthropos – i.e. 'man' as the supreme exception capable of fashioning his world and his own autonomous self.

Activists from environmental justice, climate justice, and indigenous organizations do not invoke the 'new' Anthropocene's rhetoric of humans as destroyers or masters of nature.

Rather, these groups provide examples of socially and ecologically sustainable communities. Natureculture[8] histories are not homogeneous and the story of the rise of modernity and climate change is rooted in social and economic injustice as much as in the exploitation of non-human nature (Haraway 2016) and in the histor(ies) of colonial violence and appropriations. There is, therefore, a *specific type* of 'man' connected to a particular culture (i.e. the logocentric *homo economicus*) that is destroying the planet.

The Anthropocene portrayed in 'sustainable development' helpfully poses the question of the Nature/Society dualism, but cannot resolve that dualism since it accepts its self-definition – as a marker abstracted from the web of life. Thus, the Anthropocene story in 'sustainable development' is unlikely to guide us helpfully towards sustainability. Instead, I find the notion of Capitalocene (Moore 2016; Haraway 2016) useful insofar as it better describes the modernist rhetoric of 'sustainable development' and suggests a new synthesis beyond the nature/society dualism and the practice of 'human exceptionalism'. In this regard, Capitalocene is figured as a critical zone rather than one grand mess that includes all of humanity. It is, therefore, an argument about *thinking* the ecological crisis (Moore 2016) rather than an argument about geological history – although of course the two are related. Rethinking capitalism in the web of life as suggested by Donna Haraway (2016) and Jason W. Moore (2016) locates the current crisis of climate and environmental change in our planet beyond human species-being. As pointed out by Jason W. Moore (2016),

Capitalocene does not stand for capitalism as an economic and social system. […] Rather, the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature – as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology. (6)

Thus, understanding development as a colonial discourse in the Capitalocene, exercising power through an articulation of racial or cultural difference, rather than as an analysis that begins with undifferentiated humanity and a culturally neutral path of an economy, becomes crucial to locate climate change and the transformation of the environment in the twenty-first century. In this sense, 'sustainable development' needs to be situated not merely in relation to fossil fuels, but within complex and interrelated processes of global-scale economic-political organizations stretched over histories of enclosures, colonialisms, patriarchy, industrializations, and globalizations.

2. The unsustainable 'sustainable development' framework

The mantra of 'development' that 'growth is good' has been repeated so many times that it has the feeling of common sense. Again, the 'new' Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development directs us towards endless Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth based on extraction and consumption. For example, Target 17.19 of the SDG says only that 'development' will, by 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable

development that complement GDP (UN 2015). Yet over the last sixty years under the 'growth is better' narratives, more natural resources have been raided by (some) humans than in all previous centuries together (Arns et al. 2015). Large-scale mining is penetrating ever deeper layers, multinational land grabs are advancing to remote corners, and the race is on for the division of the seabed and the resources in it (Klein 2014). This frantic rhythm of 'progress' has spurred images of crisis and doom while firing up the competitive rush for new frontiers. Why must the sole measure of progress be growth and measured in price? Who benefits from this single story? There are plenty of non-growth options and stories to be told, all of which have been ignored in the SDGs and Agenda 2030. In this regard, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (2015), UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, claims that

[a]s they stand now, the SDGs are a step backwards from these achievements [global recognition of Indigenous Peoples rights]. Indigenous Peoples have been all but erased from the development agenda. Include us, so that we can protect our traditions and territories for our children and protect the planet's biodiversity for all the world's children. Don't leave us behind.

Yet, to date, Indigenous Peoples are still not included and indigenous and community lands remain unprotected and vulnerable to extractivist economic activities – that is, the intensive exploitation of natural resources from where the economy is organised in a dependent way – such as land grabbing from more powerful entities like governments, corporations and 'development'. In 2016, for example, approximately twice as many such land deals were found to be 'in operation' as in 2013 and up to 59 percent of these deals cover communal lands claimed by Indigenous Peoples and communities. Yet these settler 'development' projects are funded, promoted, and supported by 'development' agencies such as the World Bank, which has played a pivotal role in funding land deals to the tune of more than $8 billion over the past decade (Oxfam 2012).

In what follows, I critically analyse the UN 'sustainable development' multidimensional approach – environmental, economic and social – and propose elements of analysis and critique. I argue that what is actually sustained in 'sustainable development' is the economic exploitation and appropriation of humans and nature, as well as unsustainable and extractivist modern, industrial economies. In order to highlight the already existing worldviews and platforms of life-enhancing political strategies, I provide throughout this section examples of communities and projects that support sustainable liveable presents and futures. This may help development economists and analysts to retrieve plural valorisations people have about the environment and nature. It may also improve our understanding of contemporary economic endeavours in support of a just and democratic transition toward renewable energy, local economies, and socially and ecologically sustainable communities.

The Environmental Dimension: Nature as Capital

One of the key dimensions of the 'sustainable development' integrated framework is the environmental one and it mainly refers to the 'natural capital' approach (UNDP 2016; WB 2012). 'Natural capital' refers to the environmental assets of a country, especially for 'developing countries', and comprises natural resource stocks, land, and ecosystems. As the WB (2012) and UNDP (2016) state, accounting for natural capital leads to better economic decisions about development priorities and investments. Yet the natural capital approach clearly resonates with a colonialist/extractivist economy. History tells us that extractivist economies have led to widespread poverty, increased inequality and inequity, promoted different kinds of violence to people and nature, caused recurrent economic crises, destroyed other economies and social networks, consolidated 'rent-seeking' mentalities, and seriously damaged the environment for future generations. Natural capital stands for a new 'development' method of intervention in the environment, with nature reframed as "a specific type of capital, which needs to be measured, conserved, produced, and even accumulated" (Kenis and Lievens 2015, 8). In this approach, nature comes to stand for a collection of tradable ecosystem services and durable goods used in production as infrastructure or equipment or price that are "mobilized to defend productivity gains, minimize costs of capital expansion, and stave off crises of reproduction" (Lohmann 2016, 4). Thus, in this approach, nature is objectified and its value is reduced to a unique value of scale: price.

Price generates the illusion that monetary measurements offer a good indicator of the value that derives from other scales to better decisions for sustainable development. Yet economic estimation is one of multiple forms of evaluating nature. Not only does measuring nature minimize the different values of nature to technical instrumentalization; it also removes any possibility of public dialogue about its valorisations. Different answers that people give about the importance of a natural area or nature for its ecological richness, the beauty of its landscapes, cosmovisions or sacred places, are reduced or removed in this dimension to the same scale of expression: price. In 'sustainable development' nature should be valued economically if we are to protect it globally.

If nature is measured in price, then the protection of the environment is a form of investment. The biological diversity of ecosystems is not valuable because each form of life is an end-in-itself embedded in communities of mutual support, but only valued as a source of 'ecosystem services' for 'development'. In this dimension, ecological cycles, such as water or the regeneration of the soil, have become 'services' that can enter the market through 'sustainable development'. Here the criteria of efficiency and economic profit are imposed, and ecological, cultural, religious, sacred, or aesthetic values are left behind. When we discuss the *value* of nature, we advance to an ethical place even if 'development' does not recognize it. Thus, when price is the only measure to allocate value without an ethical discussion, this estimation is anthropocentric and capitalogenic.

As many ecologists and Indigenous People around the world have been saying for many years, human presence is neither necessary nor indispensable to maintain ecologic sustainability (Gudynas 2004; Haraway 2016). In other words, the ecologic dimension of sustainability is a property of ecosystems and not of human beings. Yet, by introducing nature to the market, 'sustainable development' disarticulates and removes the concept of nature and replaces it by capital, services, products, or resources. As argued by Jason W. Moore, "the genius of capitalism […] has been to treat nature as 'free gift' […] to make the whole of nature work on the cheap" (2016, 112). If ecosystems are (ab)used to the point of collapse, then all life in the planetary community is diminished (Klein 2014). To admit and embrace that ecocide entails an all-encompassing diminishment would already be a break with 'sustainable development'.

The process of assigning prices in the natural capital dimension is not innocent or neutral, but reflects a rationality based on aspects such as maximization of benefits, the utilitarian use of resources and consumerism. Individual consumerism presents itself as a problem for sustainable development. Consumption is the end of the economic chain and 'sustainable development' supports this vision through consumerist campaigns in environmental issues or promoting recycled products such in the UN *The Lazy Persons Guide to Saving the World*.[9] Yet, can we shop to end environmental degradation? As argued by Kapoor (2008), consumerist campaigns are all ideological attempts to remove from reality the dimension of capital. In other words, a way to purify life and try to get rid of capital and its inherent dangers and inconveniences.

Through the provision of policy advice and the development and implementation of programmes, ecological or biodiversity management in 'sustainable development' is emphasized in terms of technical management, where the development experts are the decision-makers (WB 2012) that help demonstrate sound biodiversity management practices on-the-ground and build capacity to sustain them (UNDP 2012b). It is assumed that development experts offer the best possibilities in elaborating sustainable strategies. Development experts, including and/or in partnership with mostly Northern-based environmental NGOs, are helping, for example, to identify new environmental areas for commodification in 'developing countries'. NGOs such as Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and the Jane Goodall Institute are feeding a substantial global demand for nature-related photographs, films, and commodities (Kapoor 2008). They are helping to transform Africa's natural capital (forests, wildlife, landscapes) into symbolic capital and money, thus incorporating nature and wildlife into a broader capitalist system. In so doing, 'sustainable development' and its environmental dimension are preparing the ground for greater extractivist activities. Their growing presence in Africa has resulted in their ability to influence and lobby governments, not simply on conservation issues, but on broader policy-making related to wildlife and land management, environment and eco-tourism (including

hotel and resort real estate development) (Kapoor 2008). Nor is this practice limited to the non-human. Natural capital is easily translated as cheap labour as 'a means of development', for example in the trillion dollar industry of tourism, where nature-based tourism is one of the main tourist practices, that in turn naturalizes the inequality forced upon those living in the global South,[10] especially women and people of colour.

Paradoxically, in this dimension, it is possible to lose natural capital as long as it is substituted for another capital associated with human capital (social or economic) to assure that 'quality of life' is not reduced (see UNDP 2016). Yet the assumption that substitution is almost perfect between nature and human capital is a serious distortion of reality (Daly 1994). In fact, while human capital could bring financial resources in sustainable development projects/programmes such as agroforestry, it cannot help, for example, to accelerate the growth of trees. This purely capitalist imagination about sustainability as the idea of maintaining a stock of capital, traps nature into the exterminism of the Capitalocene. Thus, 'sustainability' in this dimension does not sustain nature nor life.

One way to problematize the natural capital approach both discursively and with reference to its representational sovereignty over reality in 'sustainable development' is to question the so-called primacy of 'economic value' over political, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, non-material values. In the 'sustainable development' capitalogenic approach, there is no space to dispute what has value or what is understood as wealth. Natural capital is about competency rather than mutual support. Economic valorisation and the market could be important contributions to sustainable strategies but they are insufficient on their own. Thus, it is key to raise the all-important question of 'the value of the value' from multiple locations and sites of lived realities. When nature is considered a subject, hence independent from human assessment, it emerges as a plural category that can be evaluated by means of different indicators. This plurality of nature ends 'development' epistemicide and ecocide. Yet different approaches to nature are incommensurability (not incompatibility) due to the plurality of values in front of nature. Measurements to nature will be always incomplete. In that sense, capital could be used as one of the indicators amongst many others so its application is limited.

Many world visions and practices are currently extending community and art beyond human species, positioning nature as a subject of rights in its own terms. For example, in January 2013, on behalf of the rights of nature, a coalition formed by various indigenous and rights advocacy organizations filed a lawsuit against the Ecuadorian state for violating the constitutional law by allowing large-scale mining exploitation to enter the Cordillera del Condor in western Amazonia, one of the world's most important biological refuges and currently under pressure due to the dramatic expansion of large-scale extraction activities. The Amazon people of Sarayaku won the trial and argued for the centrality of the 'Living Forest' in their community's cosmology, modes of being, and ecological survival. Although in indige-

nous cosmovisions nature has never required such rights, simply because it is part of a larger whole, intercultural dialogues about different valorisations of nature (see Biemann and Tavares 2015) have led to more just and ethical agreements.

The Economic Dimension: Inclusive Green Economy

The economic dimension in 'sustainable development' refers to an inclusive green economy. Inclusive green economy is one of the 'sustainable development' keywords in the current Agenda 2030. Little by little, ecological meanings of 'sustainable development' have been usurped, so that sustainable development has become virtually synonymous with sustained economic growth or, in more warmly persuasive fashion, inclusive green growth. As stated by WB 2012 "inclusive-green growth is *the* pathway to sustainable development" (2) (see also UNDP 2016). 'Inclusive' and 'green' are fulsomely positive adjectives, which promise an entirely different way of doing business. Where 'sustainable' rings rather grey and technical, 'green' is vivid; where 'development' is restricted to the 'developing countries' and can seem abstract and subjective, 'growth' is global in scope and sounds solid. This entails a series of technological, managerial, and behavioural changes, in particular to build in principles and parameters of 'sustainability' and 'inclusion' into production, consumption, and trade while maintaining high rates of economic growth as the key driver of 'development'.

The 'green' in this approach is based on the premise that if a value for nature's goods and services can be set, this would provide enough motivation for the private sector to shift to cleaner energy sources, pollute less, and basically start investing in green technologies and business models. In so doing, it identifies a use-value for nature, which is a product of human labour as well as the satisfaction of a human need, along with an exchange value that comes from selling an environmentally conscious commodity or service. Here, environmental degradation and climate change not only pave the way for the privatization of public assets and common pool resources, but also offer entirely new market opportunities. That is to say, on the one hand, "in our age of global ecological crisis" capitalism profits from the "destruction of the planet" (Foster et al. 2010, 71-72); on the other, the "growth of natural scarcity is seen as a golden opportunity in which to further privatize the world's commons" (Foster et al. 2010, 70) and accumulate capital. Yet, why is growth the only answer? It is now clear that green capitalism – including 'development' initiatives such as carbon taxes, dematerializing the economy, cap-and-trade schemes, debt-for-nature swaps, market-based green design, hybrid cars and biogas – has completely failed (Klein 2014; Haraway 2016). With increased devastation to land and water and uncontrolled growth in greenhouses gases, green capitalism or inclusive-green growth has only brought us closer to an irreversible ecocatastrophe (Arns et al. 2015). However, inclusive green growth insists that environmental sustainability is reliant upon the market system and the advancement of the new technologies of geoengi-

neering and nuclear renewal energy (see UN 2015). In this economic dimension, development's hope for the world lies with an eco-industrial revolution sparked by technological innovation and directed by the signals of the market as the 'new' magic elixir for continuous growth. Technology can undoubtedly help in some cases to reduce inequalities, but today there is no hope that technology can maintain the current highly consumptive system in a time of natural resource depletion (Klein 2007, 2014). Enchanting the object with 'greens' and 'inclusions', 'sustainable development' bypasses, once again, the historical, economic, and imperial legacies of 'development' that create categories of objects and people as needed, desired, valuable, or disposable, removing the possibility of recognizing the racialized and gendered platform of the Capitalocene. In other words, 'development' techno-utopia masks the chronic problems of our time and hides the culprits who are responsible for gaming the system in their favour.

The 'inclusive' side in the green growth dimension refers to all segments of the population to contribute to and benefit from economic growth in an environmental sustainable manner. As stated by the World Bank, inclusive-green growth

aims to operationalize sustainable development by reconciling developing countries' urgent need for rapid growth and poverty alleviation with the need to avoid irreversible and costly environmental damage. As such, efforts to foster inclusive-green growth must focus on what is required in the next five to 10 years to sustain robust growth, while avoiding locking economies into unsustainable patterns, preventing irreversible environmental damage, and reducing the potential for regret. (WB 2012, 2)

Here it is believed that 'developing countries' cannot have good environmental management because they are 'poor'. It is assumed, therefore, that there is a positive relationship between economic growth and environmental quality and that some economic wealth is indispensable for environmental management. Yet Indigenous Peoples, social movements, environmentalists and feminist economists along with many existing studies and reports have demonstrated that when the income per capita increases, some environmental impacts also increase, such as solid waste, emissions of CO_2 in the atmosphere or the accumulation of very toxic substances such as cadmium or nickel (Gudynas 2004). In other words, with more economic growth the environment is deteriorated for long term or accumulative impacts (Klein 2014).

The universal 'we' and 'us' embodied in the 'sustainable development' discourse obscure the extensive scholarship on diverse human histories and resilient naturecultures (Haraway 2014) that are imagining and producing innovative approaches to climate mitigation, adaptation, and sustainability. Sustainability does not necessarily imply having direct property over natural resources, but demands an adequate ecological and social regulation of its management. This concept does not require a state, collective, 'development experts' or market property over nature as natural capital and inclusive-green growth approaches, but imposes conditions of responsible use over the environment. This approximation is similar to some Andean approaches (Gudynas 2004) where there is no private property over the land,

but the community adjudicates certain rights of use.

The Social Dimension: Poverty Eradication

The social dimension in the 'sustainable development' framework refers to poverty eradication. According to this approach, we need economic growth even at the expense of irreversible ecological catastrophe in order to cope with inequality and poverty. Yet with the economic growth acquired until now and fiercely promoted with the previous UN-Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), we should have made some significant progress in this direction. Instead, in most societies inequality grows alongside their growing economies. Thus, the dominant narrative that 'things are getting better' and that, if we keep doing things the way we have been and the global economy keeps growing, we can end global poverty by 2030 must be challenged. Instead, we need to claim the fact that poverty is created by hundreds of years of history and inequality, perpetuated by colonialism, slavery, racism, and resource theft.

'Development' has failed to discern its own complicity in the very 'poverty' and pollution they seek to eradicate. In fact, 'sustainable development' often rationalizes the latter, making business itself the solution to poverty eradication or environmentalism. By so doing, 'development' masks and purifies corporate ills, acting as a countermeasure to socioeconomic and nature exploitation. Powerful economic groups not only consume more natural resources but they can also 'buy' better quality environmental conditions. These groups live in cleaner neighbourhoods or countries away from pollution and consume food of higher quality. As Naomi Klein (2007) points out, with environmental harms and changes in climate adversely affecting the poor, we face a

collective future of disaster apartheid in which survival is determined by who can afford to pay for escape. Perhaps part of the reason why so many of our elites, both political and corporate, are so sanguine about climate change is that they are confident they will be able to buy their way out of the worst of it. (530)

The SDGs do discuss reducing inequality. However, their prescription is technocratic, obscure and wholly incommensurate to the sustainability of life. In an Open Letter to the UN regarding the SDGs, several thinkers, artists, activist, peasants, workers, students, spiritualists – called The Rules Community – signed and argued that

[t]he SDGs claim they can eradicate poverty in all its forms by 2030. But they rely primarily on global economic growth to achieve this tremendous task. If such growth resembles that seen in recent decades, it will take 100 years for poverty to disappear, not the 15 years the SDGs promise. And even if this were possible in a shorter timescale, we would need to increase the size of the global economy by a factor of 12, which, in addition to making our planet uninhabitable, will obliterate any gains against poverty.[11]

For example, target 10.1 of the SDG states that by 2030 they will "progressively achieve and

sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average" (UNDP 2015, 25). As already argued by the Rules Community, this commitment allows inequality to grow without limit until 2029, so long as it then begins to be reduced. The SDGs thus fail to endorse the only means that can achieve their stated goal of ending poverty. In effect, by not tackling the roots of impoverishment, 'sustainable development' promotes imperial and environmental racism and perpetuates severe poverty, leaving this fundamental problem to future generations. If 'sustainable development' is really preoccupied with poverty, the first question that should be posed is: how is poverty created? Then a different story will be told.

Drawing upon feminist, indigenous, artistic, and critical environmentalist knowledge politics, in the next section I suggest to think the economy under ecoSImies of care. EcoSImies of care go beyond moral disposition and reflect on 'value' in a language other than that of the systemic/structural *fait accompli,* raising the question of 'the value of the value' in the economy. By understanding sustainability beyond the automatically assumed 'sustainable development', ecoSImies of care open windows to taking seriously the sustainability of life.

3. EcoSImies of care

> It matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts.
> Donna Haraway (2016)

Despite the recent ascendency of the 'sustainable development' story, communities, peoples and social movements around the world are co-producing new narrative, political, and art tools for mobilizing, organizing, and "dancing a new world into being" (Klein 2013, 1). Creating generative, receptive politics and coalitions means casting our lives with some and not others. As the planet heats up and as intra-human and interspecies divergences speed up, we need worlds that world worlds, to "make a much hotter compost pile for still possible pasts, presents, and futures" (Haraway 2016, 57). As Haraway (2016) has argued, it matters what thoughts, knowledge, or stories are marshalled to theorize and transform a profoundly damaged world. Words matter in producing particular kinds of politics and new economic imaginaries. In this context, I propose ecoSImies of care to question the 'economic man' as the basic unit of analysis and force the epistemological and ontological pluralization of economies. I owe the ecoSImy/ies term in its Spanish version (ecoSimia/as) to Miguel Guaira Calapy, a Cotacachi indigenous leader (Ecuador) who suggested 'ecoSimias' as a term, an analytical category and a potential tool to imagine and think subaltern knowledge. Its meaning is related to a popular etymology that assumes ecoNOmy as the negation of what is mine and/or what is ours (Gudynas 2004), making clear that not just capitalism but all ecoNOmy is a way of accumulation by dispossession. In this sense, ecoSImies are about processes of (re)appropriation from the global South – as well as many and significant vital exchanges

through multiple forms of cooperation that are situated and contextual – which dialogue through difference, singularity and heterogeneity (Gudynas 2004).

Formulating ecoSImies as ecoSImies of care may help to grapple with the question of sustainability. EcoSImies of care open a communitarian dimension of autonomy and collective self-organization that expands the alternatives for thinking about the politics of care. It shows the radical affirmation that we, all humans, are already interdependent and eco-dependent, and situates 'taking care of life' at the very centre of the economy and Economics. This means we need to take care of life together, since life is always life in common and we must inhabit a living environment. By taking seriously this radical affirmation of our lives, economy and Economics only makes sense from the sustainability of life (i.e. taking care of our vulnerabilities, managing inter-eco-dependence, inhabiting a living surrounding, and understanding land as a place where beings live in a respectful way), which is in direct antagonism with the capitalogenic 'sustainable development' ideal where life is under attack (ecoN-Omy). Here I find the notion of 'cuidadanía' – a pun created by the Spanish feminist collective *Precarias a la Deriva* on the Spanish words 'ciudadanía' (citizenship) and 'cuidados' (cares) – inspiring. 'Cuidadania' is a new form of recognizing ourselves as subjects that place care, non-human and human desires-needs-wants at the centre of our societies and communities as opposed to the notion of citizenship that centres around capitalist markets.

There are several things, however, that ecoSImies of care do not mean. First, they do not refer to ideological, gender, ethnic, racial plurality; nor does it refer to the incorporation or inclusion of marked differences into a multiculturally 'better' Economics. Second, they are not an issue of reporting differences amongst contexts (i.e. 'case studies') that present people facing similar 'economic' situations and behaving more or less the same – thus, confirming already defined (western) universals and 'development' as the only game in town. Third, ecoSImies do not mean indigenous. EcoSImies of care are about the sustainability of life knowing that in each notion of ecoSImy there is a notion of well-being. Thus, the ecoSImies of care proposal aims at transforming the concept from one that conceives economics/'development' as power disputes within a singular world (ecoNOmies) to another one that includes the possibility of adversarial relations among worlds (ecoSImies of care). In that sense, ecoSImies of care is the reconfiguration of the political as a decolonial reaction to the violence of the expansionist, universalist logic of 'sustainable development'. EcoSImies of care are about the re-existence and resistance of currently devalued and removed economies in 'development'. In other words, to account for economic difference affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devaluated global South – that is, diverse modes of social organization with diverse forms of subjectification that enunciate fundamentally different, yet always entangled, worlds.

In ecoSImies of care, sustainability does not equal slowness and durability; it tells the story of how everything we do around the world is interconnected here and now. For exam-

ple, how the western lifestyle, known to have an effect on climate change (Klein 2014), also has an impact on herdsmen in the Sahel (see Biemann 2015). A way of thinking about sustainability, then, is to generate images that do not exhaust the possibilities of others by fixing them in a place when their potential for a fuller life is likely to be realized in a distant country. Thus, ecoSImies of care question the very meaning of wealth: what has value in this common place where we all live and die? Situated notions of value such as *el Sumak Kawsay* or *el buen vivir* in Ecuador, *Suma Qamaña* in Bolivia, *Ubuntu* in South Africa or *Vida digna* in Spain are epistemologies capable of inspiring another way of being and being in the world, contributing to the global debate about environmental sustainability and climate change.

In this framework, ecoSImies of care are less of a critical tool than an attitude reflecting contemporary awareness of how we live our lives and how to die well. Drawing on feminism, ecoSImies of care are at once a critique of the force of the 'economic man', contesting everything that seems self-evident, unified, present, and inescapable in what counts as human, while also being the imagination of something that would no longer be 'man' as such but still not some pure feminine outside (for the pure feminine was always part of the logic of man).

As follows, I suggest three workable ethical criteria of contemporary ecoSImies:

Biocentric approach

A biocentric approach recognizes that life shall prevail over production or trading relations and reproduction of goods at the cost of the regeneration of life. Under this criterion, for example, economic strategies that exploit the generative powers of women, people of colour, Indigenous Peoples, animals, plants, genes, and cells, or support countries in exporting food when that same country suffers from malnutrition, are enacting violence and attacking life. Thinking the ecoSImy under this principle helps us to shift away from the singular goal of material affluence that rejects and attacks life and allows us to decentre capitalist markets to enunciate the diverse existing ecoSImies of care (beyond markets, the state, households).

Uncertainty

Economics has been trying to control and remove uncertainty through equilibrium formulations for coordinating atomistic agent behaviour. Yet we live in a world marked by the fundamental unknowability of the future. Uncertainty is intrinsic to the environment and human beings, and thus to the economy. Environmental systems and humans have non-linear relations and they are not necessarily in equilibrium. They are uncertain and can be chaotic and messy. Yet uncertainty should not be a negative aspect that prevents 'objectivity'. Uncertainty is an inaudible attribute and for this reason pushes us to go in-depth into public discussions and intercultural dialogues about multiple estimations, values, and perceptions.

Commitment

'Development' helps to produce a generous and benevolent national community or western identity, building unity and pride. Yet "benevolent first-world appropriation and reinscription of the Third World as an Other" (Spivak 1988) does not want to encounter the global South in its own terms but for other, usually global, Northern purposes. Yet, how to live together in a way that living is worthy and just for all? I suggest here, first of all, commitment. To further understand the nature of commitment I may use Amartya Sen's (1977) interesting distinction between sympathy and commitment. If I am disturbed by the idea of others being poor, following Sen's argument, this is a case of sympathy. If, on the other hand, this idea does not make me personally uncomfortable or distressed, but still makes me think there is something deeply wrong with it, it is a case of commitment. Following this definition, commitment is not primarily or chiefly motivated by individualized sentiments of, for example, 'how to feel good about poverty.'[12] In other words, commitment does not radiate from the individualized emotional self and does not aim at satisfying ongoing emotional aspirations of development's 'feeling good' agendas and goals. Commitment is the willingness to let ourselves be committed, to be put in a commitment for an unforeseen problem that challenges us. Commitment, thus, is not resolved in a declaration of intentions or set of goals but it sets in motion a difficult process. Commitment rips us from what we are or what we believed to be (Garcés 2013) and incorporates us into a space that we do not control at all. We are involved in a situation, a dialogue, that exceeds us and that demands, finally, that we take a position. Taking a position is not just taking sides (for or against) or making a judgment (I like, I do not like). It is to have to invent an answer that we do not have and that, whatever it is, it will not leave us equal. Taking position is to attend the incompleteness of all knowledge, the infinite richness of ecoSImic imaginaries, and beginning to heal what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) calls: the colonial wound. That is, a commitment to ways of knowing from the perspectives of those who have systematically suffered the injustices, dominations and oppressions caused by colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

4. Final remarks

According to the tenets of the current dominant sustainable development discourse and project, nature should be valued economically if we are to protect it globally. Yet why is economic estimation the only option presented in 'sustainable development' to value nature? This article has considered the current global development Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and has analysed 'sustainable development' discourse and its key dimensions: environmental (natural capital), economic (inclusive-green economy) and social (poverty eradication). I have argued that 'sustainable development' haunts a totalizing modernity story with capitalism as its universal telos, and that it hinders the possibility of accessing the critical

insights of those who have been 'left behind', colonized, or bulldozed over in the Capital-ocene.

At the same time, there is urgent need to think what a life worth living is and how to live and die well as mortal critters, in a moment when the edges of the human are in question under the Capitalocene. The UN jointly with other 'development' actors claim that the global Agenda 2030 on sustainable development offers "hope in a world beset by crisis" (UN News Centre 2016). Yet, if 'sustainable development' solely attempts to 'culturalize' the 'develop-ment' discourse regarding the physical and chemical transformations our planet is undergo-ing, it fails to address a deeper problem and contributes, in this way, to modernity's perma-nent war on the biosphere. Rather than looking hopefully to a day when these tensions are resolved either in a final moment of posthuman vanquishing of 'man' or the technological triumph of human survival, I reject hope as a political strategy. Relying upon hope would be to resurrect the presumption that 'economic man' as the fundamental unit is thinkable, which, as Haraway's states, makes doing good work impossible.

Rejecting hope as a way of grappling with the notion of sustainability, I propose eco-SImies of care to question the 'value of the value' in the economy and Economics and as a commitment for the re-existence and resistance of currently devalued economies in 'sustain-able development'. In this sense, ecoSImies of care is an effort to continue building an eco-nomically just world, made of equitable and ethical future social organizations in light of twen-ty-first-century crises.

Notes

[1] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTk11idmTUA.
[2] The Kari-Oca II declaration is a sacred document that encompasses Indigenous Peoples struggles worldwide.
[3] See http://www.ienearth.org/kari-oca-2-declaration/.
[4] The dominant representations and institutional practices that structure the relationships between west and non-west.
[5] See http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change-2/.
[6] A social vision that includes a liberal-democratic nation-state, an industrial capitalist economy and a series of specific institutions of public life and 'civil society', requiring a particular mode of interaction between individuals, individual and state and individual and society.
[7] See http://staging.unep.org/newscentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=27059&ArticleID=36079.
[8] I use here natureculture as a synthesis of nature and culture that recognizes their inseparability in ecological relatioships that are both biophysically and socially formed (see Haraway 2014 and 2016 or any of Haraway's work)
[9] See http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/takeaction/.
[10] I am using 'global South' as a metaphor of the systemic and unjust human suffering caused by global capitalism and colonialism (Santos 2014) as well as patriarchy and all their satellite oppres-sions.
[11] See https://therules.org/petition/sdg-open-letter/.
[12] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JpqCvAalag.

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