

Preventing Apocalyptic Futures: The Need for Alternatives to Development

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2024/05/04/preventing-apocalyptic-futures-the-need-for-alternatives-to-development/>

JODIE BRADSHAW, MAY 4 2024

“There is no doubt that after decades of what has been called ‘development’, the world is in crisis – systemic, multiple, and asymmetrical; long in the making, it now extends across all continents” (Acosta et al., 2019, p. xxi). Understanding apocalypse as a revelatory state of crisis (Williams, 2011), far from anticipating a future apocalypse, many scholars sound the alarm that the apocalypse is already here. Yet, proponents of development still present it as a continual and systematic advance towards progress *vis-à-vis* individual well-being, meeting essential needs, and capacity building for durable state structures (Chang, 2010, p. 48). This conflicts greatly with the perceived failure of developmental policies to tackle “the pervasive state of misery, disease, poverty and all forms of negativity that continue to plague” ‘developing’ nation-states (Durokifa & Ijeoma, 2018, p. 355). This perception is shared by two camps of critics, both of which view the multilaterals’ form of development as actively inducing apocalyptic crises through the promotion of neoliberal and capitalist policies. While the first camp argues that an alternative form of development can prevent apocalyptic crises (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1967; Santos, 1970; Tavares & Serra, 1973), the second camp insists on the necessity for alternatives to development (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Escobar, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2006; Veltmeyer & Lau, 2020; Whitehead, 2010). It is this disaccord which the literature review addresses in the following section.

Building upon this extensive literature, this essay contends that development counterproductively gives rise to apocalyptic crises in large part because it emerges from and reproduces a hierarchical ordering of knowledge forms. This manifests in practitioners rallying behind a teleological understanding of development as a linear trajectory towards the inevitable endpoint of the ‘developed’ West. The blueprint of development which emerges from this does not account for and renders subaltern other epistemic forces and *cosmovisions*. As a result, development is ill-suited to the socio-political spaces where it is imposed and, at times, exacerbates existing problems and vulnerabilities in these localities. Diverging from this approach, this essay temporally situates this conceptualisation of development as stemming from the (de)colonial matrix of the 18th century. It is against this historical backdrop that development is understood here “as a discourse of power” (Acosta et al., 2019, p. 19), as delineated in section two.

Subsequently, section three explains why this top-down, technocratic attitude to development can result in apocalyptic crises. It does so by examining the cases of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as both exemplify the intersection between developmental policies and the risk of apocalyptic outcomes. In reaction to the adverse consequences of these cookie-cutter approaches, corrective efforts have since been made to incorporate local community knowledge into the planning and execution of development projects. Section four determines that these changes have nevertheless proven ineffectual in most cases, as inclusion has been tokenistic and without consideration of uneven power relations. These measures are, therefore, insufficient for preventing apocalyptic crises.

Following Harper and Specht (2021), section five proposes that insofar as apocalypses illuminate malfunctions in existing societal structures, they beckon social alternatives. It is here where the possibility of preventing apocalyptic futures lies. In exploring diverse social alternatives which have been put forward, this section teases out debates on whether development should be reformed via decolonisation and democratisation or replaced altogether. This essay then concludes that, above all, we cannot allow the spectre of apocalypse to stymie the imagination and enactment of

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alternative possibilities. This, first and foremost, necessitates the de-hierarchisation of epistemic forces.

Literature Review

Development-based solutions to apocalyptic crises have been underpinned by a series of successive theoretical waves since the end of World War II, all of which have been markedly influenced by theories of economic growth. One of the most prominent of these is modernisation theory, which dominated the field in the 1950s and 1960s. According to this approach, 'developing' countries should follow the pattern of Western modernisation as part of an evolutionary transition from 'traditional' societies to 'modern' forms (Lerner, 1964, 1968). From this perspective, development has the potential to prevent apocalyptic crises, but this is dependent on a social and cultural shift towards values which are amenable to the construction of a strong state and market-driven economic growth (Lipset, 1986; Stephenson, 1968). However, faith in this process dwindled as it failed to deliver on its promises of securing prosperity for 'developing' countries and instead was met with recurrent apocalyptic crises (Krøijer et al., 2021).

Ceasing to believe in the state's capacity to effectuate necessary change, many development theorists placed greater focus on the market as the driving force for development. Superseding modernisation theory as the leading paradigm was the Washington Consensus in the 1980s. This affirmed that the solution to 'developing' countries' apocalyptic problems lay in better fiscal discipline, opening their economies, managing trade relations better, and moving away from the public sector through privatisation and deregulation (Babb & Kentikelenis, 2021; Williamson, 2000). According to some scholars, these policies have not brought to fruition the desired results, with financial crises continuing to ravage (Rodrik, 2006). In turn, the Washington Consensus has likewise been increasingly called into question.

Among critics of these theoretical threads are dependency theorists. For this camp, development, conceived by modernisation theorists in particular, pushes periphery countries towards an apocalyptic present. Rejecting ahistorical readings of development as a catching-up process for 'developing' countries, dependency theorists instead locate developmental failure in the imperialistic postcolonial relations between the 'Global South' and the 'Global North' (Amin, 1973; Rodney, 2018). Through the exploitation of and surplus extraction from countries in the 'Global South', development in core countries directly produces the underdevelopment of periphery countries (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1967, 1986). For Wallerstein (1976), this is clear from the burgeoning "so-called 'gap' between the 'developed' and the 'developing' countries" (p. 344). From this point of view, development policies stemming from modernisation theory have made 'developing' countries dependent on 'developed' nation-states (Marini, 2022). Yet, dependency theorists maintain that 'true development' is possible in periphery countries, whether achieved through political revolution (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1967; Santos, 1970) or technological innovations (Tavares & Serra, 1973). It is this form of development which dependency theorists put forward to prevent apocalyptic futures.

Departing from dependency theorists, other scholars argue that it is not possible to overcome apocalyptic crises whilst working within the confines of development and that alternatives should be pursued (see Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Escobar, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2006; Veltmeyer & Lau, 2020; Whitehead, 2010). For scholars in this camp, development directly instigates apocalyptic crises because it "has promoted market logics, capitalism, and exploitative relations of power" (Sultana, 2019, p. 34). For instance, this is apparent with the perceived migrant and climate crises. From this standpoint, development intensifies the migrant crisis by supporting economic demand for 'a reserve army of surplus labour', which can sustain economies (Ahuja, 2021; Brown, 2010; De Genova, 2012; Veltmeyer & Lau, 2020). Development policies further contribute towards mass migration by exacerbating global economic inequalities through the promotion of neoliberalism, the oil economy, and imperialistic interventions (Ahuja, 2021). As these capitalist resource extraction policies are treated as critical drivers of growth, development likewise aggravates the climate crisis by incentivising environmental degradation and pushing beyond ecological limits (Acosta et al., 2019; Ahuja, 2021; Wan, 2019). Accordingly, through its growth policies, development has exacerbated the weaknesses of 'developing' nation-states, making them prone to crises. Moreover, development's role in compounding apocalyptic crises has a long history. For instance, following colonial practices of development, "for the native people of the Americas, the end of the world already happened – five centuries ago" (de Castro & Danowski, 2018, p. 192). This suggests that we "may have arrived in the apocalypse long ago" (Harper & Specht, 2021, p. 4).

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Altogether, this essay benefits from both dependency theorists' productive emphasis on the structural and postcolonial power relations at play within development and fruitful insights into development's instigation of apocalypses. This essay complements such analyses with an epistemic reading of how development can induce apocalypses.

Development as a Discourse of Power

As the above theoretical literature shows, development is an essentially contested concept. How development is defined is significant as this determines the solutions put forward for overcoming present-day and future apocalyptic crises. Here, development is understood "as a discourse of power" because it imposes a singular way of being, thereby committing epistemic violence towards alternative *cosmovisions* (Acosta et al., 2019, p. 19). This is because the multilateral grid within which development is currently practised conceives of development as an ahistorical, universalistic, politically neutral, unidirectional, linear progression from 'underdevelopment' towards Western modernity. According to this conceptualisation, the main puzzle is which stages 'underdeveloped' states with infant industries should follow to compete with more advanced nation-states which developed before them (Gerschenkron, 1962; List, 1856). Adopting an evolutionary outlook, development theorists proclaim that they have the authority to foist upon other societies the means by which they should emulate the 'West' (Ake, 1982).

As these technocratic solutions are put forward as commonsensical and pragmatic, development entails the institutionalisation of 'the order of things' and a depoliticisation of alternatives (Ferguson, 1994). Far from being apolitical, the multilaterals' understanding of development devalues knowledge forms which do not fit within its mould. Certainly, the act of determining which societies qualify as developed or not is an act of domination in its own right (Acosta et al., 2019). This is because development is measured by a culturally specific and situated yardstick, yet it is generalised as though it were universal (Lévi-Strauss, 1952). While the multilaterals may no longer explicitly evoke European civilisational superiority, they nonetheless present 'Western' social forms as the only ones which are fit for the global economic system (Davis, 2022). This is detrimental to development outcomes as it follows a one-size-fits-all logic that refuses to draw upon heterogeneous local experiences and insights. In constructing what is perceived as politically possible or not, this framework closes off avenues for tackling apocalyptic crises which may have proved effectual.

Such development discourses are able to be hegemonic because of the excision of the impact that colonialism had on contemporary forms of development (Prashad, 2008; Rodney, 2018). According to this conventional narrative, development is situated in the activities of multilateral actors such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation post-World War II, during a momentous period of decolonisation and 'modernisation'. What this account leaves out is that these institutional undertakings are preceded by a long history of development, which informs them. Contemporary forms of development are a continuation of the preoccupation with modernisation and 'civilising' efforts, which were prevalent in 18th-century colonial politics (Krøijer et al., 2021, p. 878). This is most apparent in the fact that organisations in the multilateral system "are largely controlled by former colonisers and current imperial states" (Sultana, 2019, p. 32). In the aftermath of decolonisation, previous colonial aggressors are frequently the dominant international players managing and operating inside ex-colonies on the grounds of maintaining peace and prosperity. By intervening in and restructuring newly independent nation-states and influencing their economic, political, and social policies, colonial practices continue into the postcolonial period (Durokifa & Ijeoma, 2018). Consequently, development amounts to "the reproduction of colonial power structures and Eurocentric logics" (Sultana, 2019, p. 31).

The colonial character of these power structures imbues the type of epistemic violence that these structures produce. Namely, the aforementioned process of distinguishing the 'developed' from the 'underdeveloped' involves the construction of racialised social units (Davis, 2022). With the notion of the 'West' referring more so to a racial unit than a geographical place (Rodriguez, 2018, p. 6), development discourses locate 'underdevelopment' among "the dark or backward races [who must transition] from the savage to the civilised" (Mutua, 2001, p. 213). In turn, Eurocentric perspectives and social forms are privileged above others as part of "the continuing subordination of the formerly colonised people to a Eurocentric and modernist conception of development" (Hewitson, 2013, p. 94). As a result, it is precisely those who were the victims of colonial oppression who "have their futures planned for them by

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others, or face barriers enacting their own plans” (Weber in Zapata & Bates, 2021, p. 631).

However, this is not to suggest that former colonised people are merely “pawns in the great powers’ game” (Miller, 1986, p. 42). As much as development is influenced by coloniality, it is likewise marked by decolonial currents. Development discourses arose from the intersection of a (de)colonial matrix where dominant and resistant perspectives collided. For instance, Zachariah (2005) recounts the co-constitution of development discourses in India by Indian nationalists, Gandhians, and British Indian administrators, leading to dynamic re-articulations of development across the late colonial period to the mid-20th century. This co-production can also be seen by the influence that anti-colonial movements had on the 1948 Truman Doctrine approach to development, including the foregrounding of technical progress and central planning (Whitehead, 2010, p. 178). Therefore, the structural violence of neo-colonialism does not dominate fully, as forms of agency continue to emerge from interstitial spaces. This means that the defining context from which development discourses emerge is “marked by the tension between the official end of direct colonial rule and its presence and regeneration through hegemonising neo-colonialism” (Shohat, 1992, p. 106), as well as the counter-hegemonic resistance which ensues from this.

By situating development in this history, rather than accepting contemporary forms at face value, it is possible to view the present as “one option among an infinity of possibilities [...] rather than an unquestioned necessity” (Laurian in Zapata & Bates, 2021, p. 623). This lays the groundwork for alternative ways of being in the world. Insofar as development advances a singular way forward and closes off these other possibilities, it actively pushes us towards apocalyptic futures. How this propensity manifests in the present day is examined further in the following section.

Institutional Monocropping

A false but prevalent perception in development is that everyday actors, and people experiencing poverty in particular, are incapable of problem-solving because they must expend all of their energy on meeting their basic needs (Daniel, 2022). Based upon this assumption, the dominant view is that apocalyptic crises can only be tackled by technical solutions put forward by technocrats. In the multilateral system, technocrats are frequently operating at such a high level of abstraction that important distinctions between communities become invisible. These circumstances often lead to the imposition of blueprint solutions, which can obscure on-the-ground factors that make such models incompatible with idiosyncratic localities. Evans (2004) refers to this process as ‘institutional monocropping’, describing how the presumption that technocratic solutions “transcend national circumstances and cultures” causes local experimentation and input to be disregarded (p. 30). This is detrimental to development and conducive to apocalyptic crises because it results in the homogenisation of development practices, even though solutions which work in one context may not be transferable to another.

The non-generalisability of development policies is evidenced by the technocratic approach to the implementation of the SAPs in Ghana from 1983. Following the advice of the IMF and the World Bank, Ghana underwent a process of trade liberalisation, reduction in public expenditure, and promotion of the private sector (World Bank, 1992). Despite committing wholeheartedly to the SAPs, huge disparities have emerged between rural and urban areas in terms of access to education, income, and health care, as these services have been curtailed under the SAPs (Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). The impact of this is most apparent in the acute poverty experienced by Ghanaians, 31% of whom fell below the poverty line from 1987-1992, with half of this group also falling below the ultra-poverty line (Konadu-Agyemang, 2000, p. 475). The World Bank attributes the shortcomings of the SAPs in Ghana to “[w]eakness of implementation capacity” (World Bank, 1992, p. xiv). However, the author aligns with Acosta et al.’s (2019) counter-claim that “[t]he problem lies not in lack of implementation, but in the conception of development as linear” and its top-down application (p. xxii). By not engaging with alternative local *cosmovisions*, the SAPs are one instance of broader systemic silencing, determining which “world of possibilities” are admissible and which are not (Trouillot, 2015, p. 96). In this case, the consequences were apocalyptic for the lives of many Ghanaians. This is likewise the case in other national contexts (Edigheji, 2008).

The defects of technocratic ‘institutional monocropping’ are further demonstrated by the weaknesses of the Millennium Development Goals. While considerable progress was made in some regards (UN, 2015), the MDGs were nevertheless met with disappointment as “none of the global targets were met” (Vandemoortele, 2018, pp.

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84-85). According to some scholars, not only were the MDGs unable to prevent apocalyptic crises, but they actively induced them by some metrics. For instance, Thomas Pogge argues that the MDGs' extreme poverty target "entrenches [...] the global institutional order that produces patterns of poverty in many low- and middle-income countries" (Langford et al., 2013, p. 543). Additionally, others have contended that the apocalyptic outcomes of MDGs include human rights violations and regressions in equality for "the worst off" to the point where they are "even worse off than before" (Huchzermeyer, 2013; Seymour, 2013, p. 416).

Supplementing existing evaluations of the MDGs' effectiveness (e.g., Battersby, 2017; Liverman, 2018; Satterthwaite, 2016), this essay proposes that the success of the MDGs was severely constrained by the projection of particular experiences and knowledge forms onto heterogeneous contexts with different needs. Here, development was driven by a partnership between agencies, governments, and civil society in the United Nations, with inadequate engagement with communities and bottom-up approaches to tackling apocalyptic crises. As a result, the MDGs failed "to tap into an existing powerful epistemic community that could help gather intellectual weight and political support behind the project" (Hulme & Scott, 2010, p. 301). Specifically, the MDGs were setback by (1) an excessive focus on the international community above local contexts, (2) the adoption of "a donor-centric view of development," (3) inattention to variations in national priorities, (4) the underlying "assumption that one-size-fits-all," and (5) evaluation at the aggregate level, overlooking the variable impact of the MDGs at the micro-level (Nayyar, 2012, pp. 8-9). This speaks to the need for development actors more broadly to re-evaluate "the relevance or appropriateness of donor agendas for local realities" (Ellison, 2017, p. 73), as well as which sites are considered significant for knowledge production. Acting otherwise severely hinders development's capacity to prevent apocalyptic crises.

In turn, this essay argues that, however well-intentioned, a critical pitfall of technocratic approaches is that they take agency away from local communities, who become recipients of development rather than active contributors (Chambers, 1997). Consequently, a disjuncture emerges as technocrats disregard the ways in which local communities have their own measures to ascertain problems and solutions based on their lived experiences of the unique demands of their environment. Hence, removing "authority from local officials and citizens to solve local problems that differ from one location to the next" results in development projects which are ill-equipped to confront the "many specific features of a particular dilemma" (Ostrom, 2014, p. 105 & 112). While development does not integrate local knowledge and preferences, it will inevitably push towards apocalyptic outcomes.

Incorporating Local Knowledge

Reflecting on the historic underutilisation of local knowledge in development programmes, scholars made direct appeals for the adoption of bottom-up approaches and multi-level nested integration by institutions such as the World Bank (Chambers, 1997, 2005; Gadgil, 2014; Ostrom, 2014). From this point of view, a polycentric form of decision-making involving cooperation across different levels can produce more innovative responses to impending apocalyptic crises.

This advice was followed in some instances, such as with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The idea behind the PRSPs was that grassroots participation would empower individuals to tailor pro-poor policies to their needs (McGee, 2002). This was in recognition that while local communities know about the issues they face, they often do not have the material conditions to effectuate necessary changes. Despite these ideals, the performance of the PRSPs has nevertheless been hampered, with grassroots serving a limited consultative role and major challenges emerging in fully engaging local communities (Chambers, 2013, p. 111). Furthermore, as the PRSPs are operating within a neoliberal framework (Craig & Porter, 2003), they nevertheless espouse a narrow vision of development. While multilateral actors are unwilling to sincerely reconceptualise progress in a way which considers fundamental structural transformations and alternative visions, "they are unable to promote development and can even be antidevelopmental" (Chang, 2010, p. 48). By refusing to "break open those doors of possibility enough to offer the prospect of an alternative to capitalist extraction and despoilation" (Bina & Pereira in Zapata & Bates, 2021, p. 626), engagement with local knowledge forms remains superficial. This demonstrates a recurring issue with such initiatives: 'expert' knowledge continues to be privileged above and treated as more legitimate than local knowledge, even when participatory mechanisms are employed. As these efforts do not substantially entail the de-hierarchisation of epistemic forces, they are insufficient for the prevention of apocalyptic crises.

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Another area of development where bottom-up initiatives have been pursued is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Whilst the SDGs are not merely “a revision, extension and successor of the MDGs” (Spangenberg, 2017, p. 312), they were devised with the intention of surpassing the MDGs’ template approach. In turn, the SDGs put an emphasis on countries choosing which goals are a priority for them so that ‘developing’ countries can be agentic actors rather than recipients of top-down policies (UN, 2019). As a result, the SDGs are a considerable improvement upon the MDGs, as interventions are undertaken in a more complex manner. As part of the SDGs’ commitment to social justice, bottom-up approaches to the comparison of indicators and self-reporting tools have been implemented (UN, 2019). These methods have been useful for institutionalising more inclusive and participatory mechanisms for major stakeholders (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). However, the SDGs still mobilise behind a singular cultural understanding of development, which repeats the mantra of the free market and economic growth, all the while not addressing “the pressures that have caused the situation [in ‘developing’ countries] to be problematic” (Spangenberg, 2017, p. 314). The SDGs, therefore, “remain mono-cultural, one-dimensional, overly technocratic, and are far from universal as they fail to acknowledge the stipulated alternative pluriverse” (Waldmueller, 2015, p. 294). By opposing diverse potential routes towards development, this approach prevents the uptake of other means for combatting apocalyptic crises.

Undoubtedly, there have been favourable strides towards giving a voice to everyday actors in development through participatory research tools (Chambers, 2007) and theoretical concepts such as the capabilities and the Sustainable Livelihoods frameworks (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Schlosberg, 2012; Scoones, 1998). Yet, insofar as these advances have been co-opted by actors in the multilateral system, they have thus far been unable to de-anchor epistemic violence from development. This is largely due to the disproportionate expert, discursive, institutional, and network-based power that technocrats and elite groups have in the institutional environments in which these participatory programs take place (Tichenor et al., 2021). For grassroots participation to be meaningful, it is imperative for this position of relative power to be counterbalanced. As a minimal first step, this requires making the politics of knowledge explicit in such arenas (Scoones, 2015). However, much more radical approaches are needed to make significant headway towards mitigating apocalyptic crises. This is the focal point of the following section.

The Opportunity of Apocalypse

Drawing on the etymological insights of Harper and Specht (2021), this essay concurs that rather than using ‘apocalypse’ solely as a synonym for catastrophe, we should foreground its roots in the ancient Greek term ‘unveiling’ (ἀποκαλύπτειν) (p. 4). This allows us to see the apocalypse as Slavoj Žižek does, as “a moment where the dominant structures can be seen for what they are, helping to dismantle and reconfigure society for the better” (Harper & Specht, 2021, p. 6). Following this reading, what do apocalypses unveil about the dominant structures of development? Additionally, to which epistemic forces should we turn when reconfiguring these social alternatives?

Development has proved incapable of overcoming the apocalyptic global inequalities and injustices which subject “vast populations [...] to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (see Mbembé, 2003, p. 40). At the very least, these apocalypses have unveiled the need for development to undergo a comprehensive process of decolonisation and democratisation. This means that dominant ‘Western’ actors “should relinquish their monopoly on knowledge, and take other knowledges, other perspectives, as seriously as those of the West” (Young, 2008, p. 15). Furthermore, this process involves establishing more equitable relations where marginalised voices are brought to the forefront “in rigorous and not tokenistic ways,” which address asymmetric power relations (Sultana, 2019, p. 35).

Yet, as the previous section showed, the inclusion of those who are typically left out of development often amounts to the “adverse incorporation” of individuals into neoliberal institutions (see Hickey & Du Toit, 2013) rather than the transformation of these institutions in line with diverse *cosmovisions*. As power asymmetries undermine the prospect of meaningful dialogue between the ‘North’ and the ‘South’, some scholars argue that decolonising and democratising development cannot be achieved without total “decolonisation of power relations in the modern world” (Banerjee, 2021; Grosfoguel, 2006, p. 179). The challenges this prerequisite poses introduce grave concerns about the potential to reform development so that it may avert apocalyptic crises. This suggests that apocalypses should be seen as an opportunity to envisage the types of post-development social relations we seek.

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The proposal to conceptualise alternatives to development that are fit to confront apocalyptic crises has given rise to many different approaches. A leading example is the notion of *buen vivir*, which was initially formulated in Ecuador and Bolivia (Veltmeyer & Lau, 2020). Invaluably, *buen vivir* has advanced development discourse by “highlighting the limits of the field of development, fracturing these limits and producing openings to other possible alternatives that were previously unthinkable” (Gudynas, 2020, p. 209). Put forward as an alternate paradigm to that of the dominant visions of development, capitalism, and neoliberalism, *buen vivir* calls for a re-imagining of temporality so that it is measured by “the quality of time” and “the flourishing of life” (Veltmeyer & Lau, 2020, p. 9). Rejecting universal blueprints centred on a drive for progress, *buen vivir* “defend[s] the integrity and continuity of Society– Nature” with an understanding of communities which includes human and non-human beings (Gudynas, 2020, p. 206). Given its opposition to extractivism, support for diverse value systems, and versatility, *buen vivir* appears to be a promising pathway for confronting the contemporary apocalyptic period.

Another influential post-development vision is the pluriverse. Departing from development’s imposition of a Eurocentric, singular way of being, pluriversality is a shared project “toward plural ways of making the world” (Escobar, 2018, p. 7). As with *buen vivir*, pluriversality is an essentially open and continuously evolving practice of establishing synergies between multiple ways of being and knowing (Acosta et al., 2019, p. xxxv). Where challenges arise from these efforts, pluriversality embraces them as opportunities “for constructive exchange” (Acosta et al., 2019, p. xxxv). Contrary to charges that the pluriversal project is overly relativistic, this essay maintains that “a nonrelativist understanding (and defense) of diversity and pluralism can be developed” through “epistemic cooperation” (Mohanty, 1997, p. 240). Moreover, pluriversality does espouse intrinsic values. These include “making peace with the Earth” and “linking ancestral and contemporary knowledge together in a process that will demand horizontal and respectful dialogue” (Acosta et al., 2019, p. xxix). In this way, pluriversality meets Paul Frymer’s (2016) call for a “multi-layered political project that is open to different paths and trajectories all the while being [...] [responsive to] historical acts” (p. 359). By facilitating “greater epistemic and ontological symmetry across multiplicities” (Escobar, 2008, p. 311) and opening up possibilities which have been closed by development, the pluriversal project has great potential for tackling apocalyptic crises.

Conclusion

There is a real risk that dominant narratives about apocalyptic futures can demoralise us so severely that we are reduced to a state of inaction. Merely evoking the apocalypse can become “self-fulfilling, leading to inappropriate, piecemeal development,” which is resigned to the perceived inevitability of apocalyptic futures (Harper & Specht, 2021, p. 9). In this way, the apocalypse can be understood as a discourse of power just as much as development can. Indeed, in some cases, discourses on apocalypse have been instrumentalised as a looming threat to privileged groups that they too can be subjected to the “excesses of suffering” which is typically reserved for large populations in the ‘Global South’ (De Genova, 2012, p. 501). As a result, apocalyptic narratives can be used to subdue demands for alternative social orders by assuring individuals “that their own misery is not so bad after all” compared to what it could become (De Genova, 2012, p. 501).

To the extent that development likewise represses the pursuit of social alternatives, it actively pushes us towards apocalypses. Certainly, development’s imposition of a Eurocentric, linear understanding of progress and the denial of multiple routes to modernity(ies) results in epistemicide. By drawing on the case studies of the SAPs in Ghana and the MDGs more generally, this essay showed how the technocratic, top-down approach of development practitioners reproduces a hierarchical ordering of knowledge forms, which subalternises the epistemic forces of everyday actors. Such epistemic violence is likewise prominent in the PRSPs and the SDGs despite efforts to integrate inclusive and participatory mechanisms.

This failure to reform development has been met with flourishing post-development ideation calling for plural discourses located in other cosmologies. This includes the notions of *buen vivir* and pluriversality. It remains to be seen whether either offers a successful “shortcut through dominant onto-epistemologies, colonised imaginaries, and the hitherto successful marginalisation of any real alternative to a linear idea of progress and well-being” (Bina & Pereira in Zapata & Bates, 2021, p. 627). However, we must not allow the spectre of apocalypse and the fear of uncertainty to debilitate us from constructing social alternatives, for “[u]ncertainty is the path we consciously take to

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reaching a just future” (Zapata in Zapata & Bates, 2021, p. 640).

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