DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT:
STRUGGLES TO STRIKE A BALANCE

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Abstract: In the past few decades, there has been an increase in international documents and initiatives aimed at environmental preservation. While these efforts advocate for sustainability worldwide, they face criticism for attempting to reconcile two opposing ideas: development and sustainability. Post-development critics question assumptions underlying development as a Western construct, advocating for dematerialisation and degrowth. Therefore, the aim of this study is to address the tensions within the concept of sustainable development, particularly the conflict between environmental protection and capitalist imperatives. In other words, I intend to demystify the apparent harmony that the aforementioned concept establishes and examine the tension between capitalist production and the environmental protection. Moreover, I explore to what extent the notion of sustainability risks losing credibility in addressing genuine environmental and social concerns and perpetuating Western ideals rather than challenging them. I argue that the adoption of the sustainable patterns or goals by private entities serves to suppress popular demands for profound systemic changes while maintaining levels of resource exploitation necessary for development within the capitalist system. Finally, I realise that the way of treating sustainability in order to reconcile it with development leads to the instrumentalisation of the environment.

Keywords: Development. Sustainability. Environment. Sustainable development.

Resumo: Nas últimas décadas, observou-se um aumento de iniciativas e documentos internacionais voltados à preservação do meio ambiente. Embora esses esforços defendam a sustentabilidade a nível mundial, eles enfrentam críticas por causa da tentativa de conciliar duas ideias opostas: desenvolvimento e sustentabilidade. Teóricos do pós-desenvolvimento questionam os pressupostos subjacentes ao desenvolvimento como uma construção ocidental e defendem a desmaterialização e decrescimento. Portanto, este estudo objetiva abordar as tensões do conceito de desenvolvimento sustentável, particularmente o conflito entre a proteção ambiental e os imperativos capitalistas. Em outras palavras, pretende-se desmistificar a aparente harmonia que o conceito mencionado estabelece e examinar a tensão entre a produção capitalista e a proteção ambiental. Ademais, busca-se refletir em que medida o conceito de sustentabilidade corre de perder sua credibilidade para tratar dos problemas ambientais e sociais genuínos e de perpetuar ideais ocidentais em vez de desafiá-los. Argumenta-se que a adoção de padrões ou metas sustentáveis por entidades privadas tem o propósito de suprimir demandas populares por mudanças sistêmicas profundas, enquanto mantém níveis de exploração de recursos necessários para o desenvolvimento no sistema capitalista. Finalmente, percebe-se que a forma de abordar a sustentabilidade para conciliá-la com a ideia de desenvolvimento leva à instrumentalização do meio ambiente.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento. Sustentabilidade. Meio ambiente. Desenvolvimento sustentável.

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Introduction

In recent decades there has been an increase in the number of international treaties and meetings for the reduction of global pollutants, along with a multilateral commitment to environmental preservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as an augmentation in green global policies. In this regard, there is a common sense that environmental quality is not an external factor to human beings but a necessary condition for their very existence. As a result, sustainability has emerged as a megatrend (Biermann; Pattberg, 2023).

Attitudes such as the establishment of common targets and indicators formalised by the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030 marked a fresh set of measures in the new global agenda for environment and development (Okado; Kinelli, 2016, p. 111). In the same document, the signatory countries concurred with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as common objectives intended to be "the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice" (UN, 2015, n.p.). As determined by the organisation itself, sustainability is based on the intertwined triad economy, society, and environment.

Nevertheless, these achievements have not been immune to criticism. Some researchers criticise them due to the incongruity of the goals they seek to pursue, as they try to reconcile two opposing concepts: development and sustainability. For instance, development is questioned for its focus on economic growth; that is why the importance of dematerialisation and the politics of degrowth or *décroissance* is emphasised (Fournier, 2008; Latouche, 2009).

Moreover, Rist (2008) argues that development is fundamentally viewed as a Western belief or myth that presents the habits and culture that should be imitated by other countries around the world. In a similar vein, post-development researchers such as Esteva and Escobar (2017) defend that development should be understood as a discourse that not only embodies assumptions like modernisation and the appropriation of nature itself but also establishes general truths and universal standards, thereby subordinating other cultures, mainly those that

are not judged modern or developed. In this context, the cultural aspect plays a significant role in establishing these differences.

All of these theorists denounce, in some way, the failure and inconsistency of development in any expression. According to Gudynas (2011), one reason for this critique resides in the way the concept is framed, as development, in one way or another, views society and nature as separate. Environmental and social impacts are often denied or minimised, and scientific and technical optimism is promoted. The economic focus of development leads to a growing commodification of both the environment and social relations, rooted in a Western lifestyle and patterns of consumption. As a result, consumerism is reinforced, and a Western aesthetic is frequently imitated.

Conversely, sustainability aims to strike a balance between the availability of natural resources and their exploitation by society. For instance, according to the document 'Our Common Future', published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), sustainable development is defined as the ability of present generations to meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However, it is worth mentioning that, although this report criticises patterns of production and consumption within the current economic model, it fails to problematize the concept of need and how it is constructed.

This report gets particularly questionable in two specific points. First, it supports a *neomalthusian* perspective. According to the document, one of the main causes of environmental problems is the population growth and poverty (Wilson, 2017; Silva, 2012).

Second, the report contains a misguided belief that technological progress can solve these problems (Fournier, 2008; Latouche, 2003). It states that the limits to sustainable development do not reside in the current growth model, which is based on the exploitation of natural resources and consumerism, but in the limits imposed by the current technological stage. Furthermore, both technology and social organisation can be managed and enhanced to provide a new era of economic prosperity.

Therefore, this essay aims to analyse the tension that exists in the concept of sustainable development, particularly the conflict between environmental protection and the capitalist system. Hence, I wonder to what extent 'sustainability' (or sustainable development) has become an empty signifier at risk of losing credibility, given that its main

concern is the protection of the environment and the people(s) living in it. I defend that the reception of the SDGs by private entities, such as transnational corporations, has a twofold purpose. First, they contain popular manifestations and demands that fight for transformations in the system. Second, by adopting these goals, they seek to maintain the levels of resource exploitation and economic growth necessary for capitalism.

This essay is structured as follows. In the first section, I analyse the concept of development and the post-development critique. In the second section, I argue that there is an irreconcilable tension between the environment or sustainability and development in our current system because of the way we understand development. Thus, I explore to what extent 'sustainability' has also become a means of reproducing Western ideas without criticising the foundational principles of development, namely the Western consumption and production patterns. Finally, in the third section, I analyse the concepts of production, circulation, accumulation, and (ex)appropriation that underpin the capitalist system, and I reflect on how these concepts influence the preservation of the environment itself.

(Re-)thinking development as a concept

The notion of development has frequently been addressed as a crystallised concept consistent with certain characteristics, such as civilised, advanced, modern, and evolved. At the same time, it imposes general goals that all countries are assumed to want to achieve. Nevertheless, this static definition has been questioned.

Rist (2008) outlines a historical overview of the concept of development in order to demonstrate how the Western currents of thought influenced its construction and facilitated the dissemination of these ideas and ideals. Rist (2008) argues that the so-called civilised countries have historically treated development as being linked to growth — a linear, positive, continuous, and evolutionist growth.

This standpoint has become naturalized in civilized thought through scientific views of nature, which were then applied to social subjects. Put another way, natural laws in force on the development of living organisms could, by analogy, be extended to society. Therefore, development becomes a metric that helps to classify beings, populations, states, and cultures

in an extremely simplified dichotomous evaluation between developed and underdeveloped countries. By questioning the foundations of this assumption, Rist (2008) paves the way for addressing development as a social and discursive construct through other epistemologies not necessarily produced by the Global North.

Against this backdrop, Blaney and Inayatullah (2010) state that development has both a representative dimension and a constitutive factor in identities. The identity of a civilised developed country carries with it a sense of superiority that permeates the individual, social, and national spheres. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that this sense of superiority is always relational, as it presupposes the existence of a subjugated, inferior, and backward 'other' that does not stand on the same ground. This sense is, in fact, related to both economic and cultural issues.

What stands out in this contrast is the 'time' component. Temporality is used to displace a person or a people from their own history and social contexts. Blaney and Inayatullah (2010) interpret temporality as an insurmountable wall, which slots Western society to an idealized position of privilege, portrayed as a model to be either followed or emulated by other nations. However, these other nations also represent a form of 'alterity' that is constitutive of the civilised, Western self. In short, the temporal component is fundamental in keeping the 'other' constantly underdeveloped and backward; in other words, it maintains the Global South as lagging behind the Global North.

Ramalingam (2014) elucidates how civilised countries began to assist less developed countries in their development through international aid agencies and organisations. These entities aimed to provide loans and financial investments so that those countries could improve their infrastructure, as illustrated by the actions of the OECD. This shift imparts a more institutionalized character to the idea of development and introduces an increasingly technical language. This is evident in what is referred to as community development and in interventionist missions of a humanitarian nature aimed at more fragile states, often also justified in the name of human rights.

Ramalingam (2014) criticises this model because it does not cease to reproduce the asymmetries between countries and the sense of ethnic superiority of Western civilisation, which, being destined to be civilised, feels a moral duty to guide the so-called primitive

nations. These nations, due to their supposed inferiority, are seen as lacking the capacity to progress on their own.

According to Ramalingam (2014, p. 128, emphasis added):

> [d]espite the grander claims of some recent movements, development and humanitarian work is not a knowledge industry — except in the most idealistic interpretation. It is an export industry, and an exceptionally blunt, supply oriented one at that. It gathers up poverty, vulnerability, and suffering from the South, packages them for sale in the West, and exports off-the-peg solutions back in relentless waves of best-practices. (…) **To put it simply: aid agencies are dealing with a world for which their learning, strategic, organizational, and performance frameworks were not designed**.

Hence, these models fail to address both the complexity and unpredictability of the real world, as they oversimplify the problems they attempt to solve. They emphasise decision-making processes, bureaucracy, uniformity, and standardisation. Furthermore, they rely on the transparency of international institutions and organisations to address systemic problems and structural inequalities, neglecting the fact that these same institutions can either be the result of these asymmetries or perpetuate them (Ramalingam, 2014).

Finally, it is worth noting that this model disregards local knowledge produced by traditional communities. At the same time, it denies agency to people who are neither considered developed nor civilised. In fact, Zarakol (2014) argues that their agency is only recognised when they commit bad deeds in a way that deviates from the norms established by Western development ideals. In the next section, I will explore the debates on sustainability and development.

Sustainability: critical approaches to development

In the previous section, I discussed some critiques of the traditional view of development. However, in this section, I focus on a specific critique regarding environmental issues and the treatment of both nature and the peoples living in it.

It is common to observe that there is an artificial and arbitrary division between the economy and culture. This polarisation makes dialogue and cooperation between these two fields unlikely. Second, it disseminates a false belief that there are issues that are either purely

economic or simply cultural, as if they operate independently without considering the imbrications, simultaneities, and overlaps that occur in practice. Third, this division leads us to the trap of believing that it is possible to reduce the explanation of reality to strictly economic (economism) or cultural (culturalism) terms, which oversimplifies the complexity of real problems.

In this regard, both economism and culturalism are problematic, particularly in the way they address environmental issues, subordinating nature to their own anthropocentric standpoints — what I call the instrumentalisation of the environment. For instance, in economism, nature is subjugated to the logic of capitalist, productive, and industrial appropriation, such as increasing the profits of big businesses (Fraser, 2014; Oliveira, 2016).

The proponents of degrowth also criticise such economism. With slogans such as '*sortir de l'économie*' (escaping from the economy, in English)*,* their starting point is to politicise the economy, revealing it as an abstract ideal — a self-referential system of representations rather than an objective reality or a set of given facts and forces. Moreover, it involves the affirmation of values grounded in humanism and the republican ideals of democracy, equality, and solidarity (Fournier, 2012).

Fournier (2012) debunks the ideas of sustainable development and ecological modernisation. For Fournier (2012), both concepts present an optimistic view based on the use of eco-efficient technologies as reasonable and workable solutions to problems.

This critique can also be directed at international documents, such as the Brundtland Report and the SDGs, which insist on the efficacy of technological and market solutions. According to Fournier (2012), the concomitant denial that capitalist infinite growth is unsustainable can only be described as pathological. These documents do not challenge the foundational principles of development; rather, they accept them and believe it is possible to reconcile the tensions.

Thus, Western patterns of consumption and production remain non-negotiable. Central to these documents and programmes is the belief in the compatibility between consumer capitalism and ecological sustainability; indeed, this belief has become hegemonic and convenient, fuelled by faith in eco-technology (Fournier, 2012).

Likewise, Latouche (2003) proposes reframing the market in terms of the *Agora*. In this regard, markets would no longer be viewed solely as places for commodity exchange;

they would also encompass social and political functions. This is not to say that the market, as conceived, would have no economic function, but rather it would not be reduced to this function.

Proponents of degrowth argue that we should fabricate most products locally to satisfy the needs of the local population and support local financing organisations. Hence, we create small republics (Latouche, 2003). This collective engagement moves us away from the self-interested actions of the *homo economicus*.

This broadening of the economy has opened up possibilities for people to (re)imagine their economic activities in terms of voluntary contributions, mutual help, and the provision of free services, in which they routinely engage at home, in the neighbourhood, or in the broader community. Notwithstanding their accurate critique of the false dichotomy between economy and culture and their efforts to politicise the economy, issues of race, colonialism, and gender in development are neglected in their theories — as will be seen later.

Against this background, in order to destabilize the utopian and savage slot, Das (2012) uses ordinary practices, seeking to analyse the meanings and ethical purposes that are brought into social life through the pursuit of a cultural political economy. She highlights the fact that humans are both embodied beings and beings that have a life in language. Language is thus a performative and representational system — a system of signs that socially constructs reality, affects human relations in society, and influences bodies and identities.

Das (2012) defends the ideia that everyday life can be interpreted in terms of work and modernity. In the first case, there is a hierarchy of labour, jobs, and professions. Mental or intellectual work is usually more valorised than physical work. In the second case, modernity implies that some geographical areas need to be urbanised whilst others remain rural, and some people are considered more cultured than others. Therefore, modernity is depicted as an ideal that one desires, wants to achieve, and longs for attaining.

Conversely, in culturalism, the cultural dimension is set in opposition to natural space and culture is given more recognition and prestige since it is produced by humans, their minds and intellectual efforts. This form of environmental domination also disrespects nature's cycles and portrays it as a feminine construct, thus legitimizing control over it. Put another way, nature is body, portrayed by the image of the feminine, subjugated to culture, which is

the mind, the intellect, which would be in command of this body, portrayed in the light of the masculine (Lugones, 2010).

Moreover, by analogy, civilised and developed people are characterized by possessing the necessary tools and intellect to interfere with, tame and control nature. Thus, Lugones (2010) argues that during the colonisation process, 'non-modern' men became 'feminized' in the sense that they can be controlled and mobilized to enrich and expand the developmental system. In contrast, racialized colonized women are deemed unworthy of the gender category. This highlights the need for an intersectional approach that looks not only at colonized women, but also centres their voices.

This way of socially representing nature corroborates the instrumentalisation of the environment, which occurs through various forms and purposes; one example is the issue of land as property and land conflicts. As we have seen, Silva (2012) infers that in the capitalist system, land is subjected to a market-driven, productive, profitable, and utilitarian logic through which it gains value, legitimising and guaranteeing appropriations and expropriations, mainly in rural areas. This instrumentalisation of the environment in favour of progress has negative impacts on both the environment (such as reductions in fauna and flora, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and air pollution) and individuals, particularly those facing social vulnerability. This violence reflects systemic environmental racism (Silva, 2012).

It is worth noting that environmental racism is related to the exploitation of land and the exploitation of people. It is also evident when a portion of the population has agency only in the context of environmental disasters. Environmental racism designates a set of ethnic inequalities and discriminations involving the territorial issues; it distinguishes those who are wronged from those who are privileged in disputes over land, territory, and the expropriation of rural areas as well as in social and environmental rights and policies.

Examples of this phenomenon include the hundreds of *quilombola* communities engaged in a dramatic struggle to overcome the evils of racism and achieve the regularisation of land ownership where they live (Silva, 2012: 94). This term encompasses issues ranging from unequal access to drinking water and sanitation — based on race and class — to the location of factories, industries, and high-risk polluting facilities in areas inhabited by Black and Indigenous people, including state-owned companies. This leaves these groups more

susceptible to disease and exposes them to the risks of landslides and contamination (Silva, 2012).

Bringing Silva (2012) and Lugones (2010) together, it is worth noting that it is urgent to decolonise both gender and race. The way we approach the environment and its issues concerns the relationship between development and the environment, the context in which this relationship is established, and also the subject (the person, entity, or institution) that defines it. It is important to introduce new perspectives and cosmologies – namely from the Global South – that explore alternatives to development.

Tensions between capitalist production and environmental protection

There have been efforts to politicise the economy, as environmental issues cannot be understood solely in economic terms since (neo)liberalism has a significant cultural aspect and dimension, as we have seen. Henceforth, I will analyse the concepts of production, circulation, accumulation, and appropriation that underpin the capitalist system. At the same time, I argue that the market itself influences our treatment of the environment, jeopardising a sustainable perspective. In this process, both nature and humans are valued as either dependable or disposable, viewed as goods and products that serve the larger system.

Following a critical sociological approach, Polanyi (1947) analyses the problems inherent in liberal ideas and assumptions based on the alleged general laws of the market and capital, which neglect the environment. Polanyi (1947) states that the market orients society, but society — and its habits, laws, and behaviours — can also orient the market economy.

In this vein, Polanyi (1947) criticises classical and neoclassical economists for taking time and capitalist factors for granted. For instance, Hayek (1967) argues that liberal characteristics are universal, timeless, and ubiquitous, applicable to any society without considering the historical formation of each country and its domestic dynamics. For Hayek (1967), an influential Austrian-British economist best known for his defence of classical liberalism and free-market capitalism, inequality is not the main problem of this system; in many cases, it is tolerated and even considered necessary. Instead, the biggest problem is the use of public apparatus to protect the interests of a small group of people.

By criticising the so-called neutral mechanisms of the market economy and its jargon, Polanyi (1947) politicises the economy, illuminates the social construction of time, and concludes that Western civilisation must find a new way of thinking to break with the conventional definitions of man and society, as well as consumer and society, in terms of the market.

What is rather absorbing is how the so-called obsolete mentality present in this mechanism is applicable not only to goods and things but also to human beings, particularly when their bodies are objectified and subjected to the general rules of the market. Thus, the market classifies individuals as obsolete based on their attributes, capacities, and abilities to be either useful or productive within the current system. As a result, humans become commodities to be consumed. This leads to the disposability of individuals depicted as 'human-as-waste', which depersonalises their subjectivity. In summary, the market influences everyday life by determining who can be regarded as citizens and what it means to be a good and responsible citizen.

Against this backdrop, nature also becomes a product or good to be consumed, valued, and exploited. In this regard, Oliveira (2016) analyses the role of commodities in geopolitics and how the management of soybeans serves as a strategic plan to place Brazil in a more prominent position within the international system.

Oliveira (2016) examines the conflict between States, the struggle between classes, and the competition among private companies, including transnational corporations. His main argument is that agricultural commodities can serve geopolitical functions similar to those that petro-dollars have served since the 1970s, driven by agribusiness developmentalist purposes and interests.

Oliveira (2016) also demonstrates that the cultivation and expansion of soybeans in Brazil are linked to a long history of violence and appropriation of land and peoples in order to serve agribusiness and the international market. His case study focuses on the hinterlands (*sertões*), an area that has been the site of intense and diverse conflicts, including contested territories between Indigenous peoples and other rural inhabitants, as well as struggles over land, and international political tensions.

What is important to highlight in Oliveira's (2016) research is that the environment itself is 'instrumentalised'. It is viewed as a tool or means to achieve objectives, such as a

better position in the globally interconnected agro-industrial sector or a strategic role in geopolitics. Consequently, this predatory approach to natural resources undermines a logic of protection and preservation — that is, sustainability. Given this, one might wonder how to think about nature as a political subject, a subject of rights, and an end in itself.

Regarding the relationship between humans, Wilson (2017) adds to this critique the concept of race. She argues that the ideas of development, the circulation of these goods and concepts and the green revolution itself are linked to a racist discourse that reinforces violence based on racial differences.

Hence, race reinforces the dichotomous notion of developed and underdeveloped countries and serves as a means of classifying people, and discriminating against groups. Wilson (2017) seeks to understand the silences and omissions that arise when liberalism is considered in isolation from two other pivotal issues: race and capital accumulation. Wilson (2017) suggests that there is a link between colonialism, development, and capitalism.

Race, like development, is a discourse that circulates ideas, but it also has a material impact on people and their bodies. "[C]ontrary to some recent theorizing of contemporary development interventions, ideologies of race and discursive and material processes of racialization remain central to development and are embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals" (Wilson, 2017, p. 432). The same can be said of the Brundtland Report, as we have seen, and the recrudescence of the Malthusian perspective regarding the environment in these international documents, as well as the reframing of population policy in the context of the SDGs by the UN.

Concomitantly, accumulation is another important concept that reinforces the dichotomy between the idealised Western image and the so-called savage economies, which are often seen as undeveloped or less cultivated. Accumulation is a process that shapes everyday life and sustains inequalities. The degree of accumulation provides various ways of classifying individuals through labels such as civilised, uncivilised, wealthy, and destitute. In this context, capital assumes a central role (Fraser, 2014).

According to Fraser (2014), capital exhibits distinct practices and forms of accumulation in different parts of the world. However, there are dominant ideas, norms, and principles that regulate capitalism, as though there is a core (Global North) and a periphery (Global South), where the development of the Global South impedes accumulation in the

Global North. In this Marxist framework, underdevelopment is understood as a global project designed to maintain wealth in richer societies and highlights the violence inherent in capital processes. Simultaneously, as capital accumulates, there is predatory exploitation and devastation of the environment and natural resources in the name of economic prosperity and technological progress.

Concluding remarks

Sustainable development is a discourse in which ideas flow, but it also has a material impact on people's everyday lives. In this essay, I have sought to analyse how critical approaches to development address the issue of sustainability. Furthermore, I have explored some alternatives and movements that problematize the idea of sustainable development as subordinated to market logic.

In this regard, the capitalist system is awash with crises, which should be viewed as inherent to this system. Examples include the environmental crisis, the crisis of social reproduction, the migrant crisis (Wilson, 2017), and the food production crisis (Oliveira, 2016). Thus, it is important to recognise that crises create the conditions and opportunities for capitalism to be readapted and reinvented (Fraser, 2014). If the existence of an array of crises provides capitalism with the necessary subterfuge to reinvent and readapt itself, it becomes challenging to find solutions to environmental problems within the same system.

However, as demonstrated by proponents of degrowth, it is essential to disconnect the idea of development from growth, economic prosperity, and technological progress. Documents such as the Brundtland Report and the SDGs fail to challenge the Western principles that underpin this system, which is responsible for environmental degradation. The problem is that when sustainability is linked to the conventional notion of development, it becomes an empty signifier; that is, it risks losing its meaning and potential to either transform the current system or protect the planet's natural resources.

In this essay, I defended that the reception of the SDGs by private entities, such as transnational corporations, has a twofold purpose. First, it restrains popular manifestations and demands that advocate for profound transformations within the system. Second, by doing

so, these corporations aim to sustain the levels of resource exploitation and economic growth necessary for the operation of capitalism.

By discussing the concept of temporality and the notion of time, I sought to demonstrate that the idea of development is often explicitly temporal. The adoption of notions such as sustainable development for capital accumulation preserves the same temporal ordering of different societies and the same teleology as conventional thinking about development.

For instance, the concept of sustainable development that is present in international agreements and documents and even in the market itself reinforces the notion that technological progress can solve the environmental problems resulting from the industrial model established by traditional Western nations.

To sum up, this perspective puts the West as the saviour of its own problems while neglecting the importance of the role of traditional communities or indigenous peoples, who have long practiced environmental conservation. Consequently, it hinders the ability to address the challenge of sustainable development through the lens of those who possess extensive long-term knowledge about environmental preservation. This underscores the need for an international agreement that prioritises their voices and expertise.

Since I did not intend to exhaust the subject, nor did this study aim to be conclusive, I hope this research can serve as a starting point for a more in-depth discussion about the tension between development and sustainability from a critical perspective. Therefore, I realised that there are challenges that should be addressed in future research.

For example, the role of social media in sustainability debates was not theorised in this essay. How can social media contribute to sustainability and persuade States and private companies to adhere to sustainable patterns? What is their responsibility in discussions about sustainable development? These are relevant questions to be addressed in future research in order to expand reflections on this matter and demonstrate our commitment to environmental claims.

Lastly, considering the concept of sustainable development, I have also provided a perfunctory critique of the construction of 'need' within the capitalist system. In this regard, I believe this critique could be strengthened in future research. For instance, one might explore to what extent the ideas of race, gender, and decolonisation — discussed in the second and

third sections of this essay — contribute to the understanding of 'need' or the critique of how needs are constructed.

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