

**Underneath the Veil of Transitional Energy**  
A study into the Wayuu Experience of Transitional  
Energy News Media Coverage in Colombia

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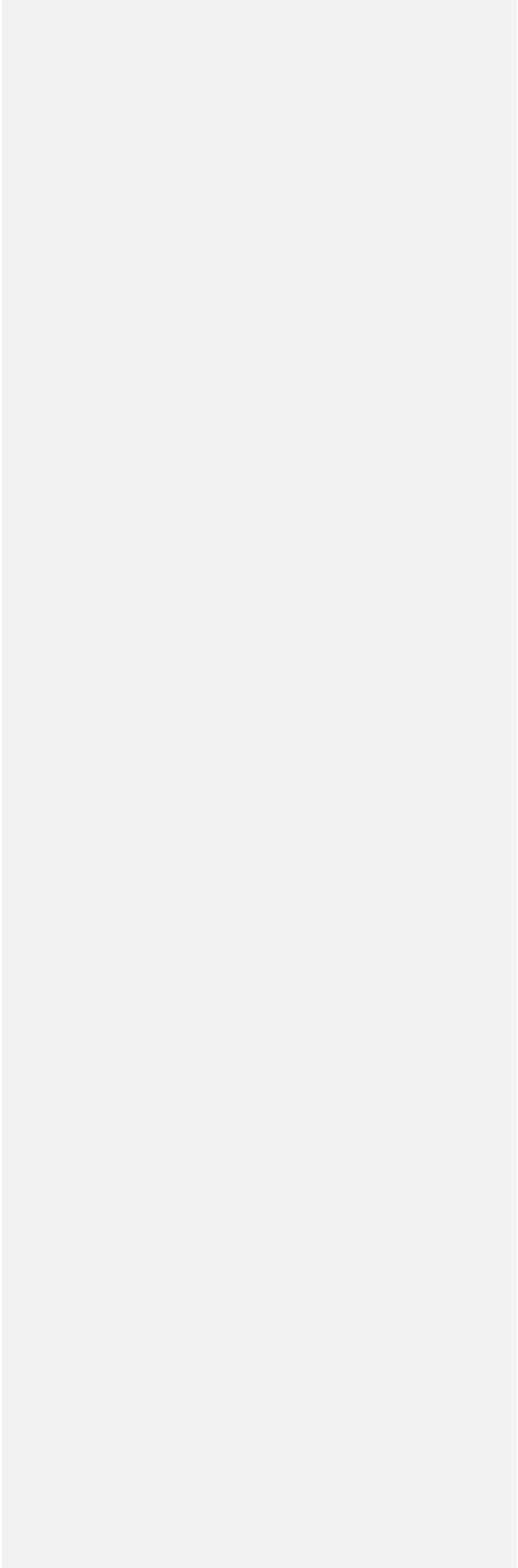
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Contenido

- 1. Introduction ..... 5
- 2. Theoretical Framework ..... 9
  - 2.1 Molding Worlds: Understanding Development Discourse ..... 9
    - 2.1.1 Discourse: ..... 9
    - 2.1.2 Development Discourse: ..... 11
    - 2.1.3 Sustainable Development and Energy Transition: ..... 14
    - 2.1.4 Challenging Development Discourse: Post-development and the good life ..... 15
  - 2.2 Communicating Discourse: News Media and Sustainable Development ..... 17
    - 2.2.1 Techno-economic coverage ..... 17
    - 2.2.2 Portrayal of Actors within the coverage ..... 18
  - 2.3 Fracturing the Structure: Agency and Reception ..... 19
- 3. Methodology: ..... 20
  - 3.1 Media Landscape ..... 22
  - 3.2 The Wayuu Community ..... 23
  - 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis ..... 24
    - 3.3.1 News Article Collection ..... 24
    - 3.3.2 In depth Interviews ..... 25
    - 3.3.4 Ethics ..... 27
  - 3.4 Thematic Analysis ..... 27
    - 3.4.1 News Media Thematic Analysis ..... 28
    - 3.4.2 Interview Thematic Analysis ..... 29
- 4. Results: ..... 29
  - 4.1 Colombian News Media Coverage of Transitional Energies through the lens of Development Discourse ..... 31
    - 4.1.1 Transitional Energies as a techno-economic element ..... 31
    - 4.1.2 Transitional Energy as a Socio-Political Element ..... 34
  - 4.2 Wayuu Experience of Transitional Energy Coverage in the context of Development Discourse ..... 39
    - 4.2.1 Hegemonic Code: ..... 40
    - 4.2.2 Negotiated Code: ..... 41
    - 4.2.3 Oppositional: ..... 43
- 5. Conclusion ..... 49
  - 5.1 Implications: ..... 51

References: ..... 54



## 1. Introduction

What the future will look like is anyone's guess. Or is it? Since its inception, development discourse has managed to establish a homogenized dominant position on what a problematic present looks like, and how a desired future should be; in doing so, it has reinforced a set of specific imaginaries as those that society should follow and another set as something that needs to be overcome: the infamous developed vs undeveloped dichotomy (Andrews 2016; Ziai, 2016). Under this logic, the future is no longer anyone's guess, it becomes something that cannot be radically imagined (Fernandez, 2017), the set of ideas under which societies can think and communicate their future is narrowed down to those that are logical within the structure of the discourse, which is heavily influenced by unequal power relations (Hall, 2013). Within this restricted understanding of what a good society looks like, many alternative world views have been excluded (Andrews, 2016; Escobar, 2014; Gudynas, 2014; Ziai, 2016) and some have had to watch their way of life disappear in name of the dominant understanding of development (Tashi, 2011).

The region of La Guajira, Colombia, and its local communities have been no strangers to this reality. More than 40 years ago coal mining companies arrived in the region with promises of a better future. The premise was simple: the amount of money generated by the economic activity was supposed to increase the quality of life for the black, indigenous and peasant local communities (Hernandez, 2018). Reality turned out to be more complex, and a clash of two worlds erupted. Scholars argue that 40 years on, coal mining, and the project of development on which it was based, increased corruption amongst the local elites, ruptured social fabrics, de-territorialized the communities, contaminated the environment, and affected their culture (Fernandez, 2017; Hernandez, 2018; Montero de Daza & Narvaez, 2008). The sentiment that development projects ignited within the local indigenous community is expressed bluntly in a letter from 1983, cited by Montero de Daza & Narvaez (2008), in which Wayuu indigenous leaderships express their dissent in a letter addressed to a Colombian institution:

*For hundreds of years our ancestral lands were saved from the invasion and devastation that alijunas (foreigners) caused in other parts of America. For more than 300 years of colonial regimen, we resisted every effort to take away our land and reduce our peoples. For the last century, the republican government left us in peace, without interfering in our lands nor affecting our lives. This situation started to change in the present century, when alijunas, through commerce and other activities, which are purely theirs, penetrated the land of our grandfathers... Today, without consulting us, alijunas start to tear apart our territory, we cannot stay quiet and let that happen without us moving a finger to protect ourselves.*

Recently, the complex relationship between the indigenous communities' views and the projects of development within their lands has begun a new chapter: energy transition. As the world moves away from fossil fuels, and new forms of energy increase in demand, the Colombian government has decided to jump into the bandwagon of sustainable energy and has identified the region of La Guajira as its epicenter (Forbes, 2021). Wind, solar and gas projects carried out in the region are projected to grow exponentially. Just in wind projects, the government plans to push the implementation of 65 projects that span over 45.000 hectares, 98% of those projects are carried out within lands of the Wayuu (Indepaz, 2019). This process of transformation of energy sources has been labeled as energy transition and is closely related, due to its focus on the environment, to a variation of development discourse: sustainable development. The government has stated that the implementation of the energy transition will allow the country to consolidate the process towards sustainable development and economic growth (Ministerio de Minas, 2021). Within sustainable development, the environment emerges as crucial point of concern that was not present in previous early notions of development discourse (Cornwall & Deborah, 2007).

This could be an example of which of what Herath (2009) argues is developments discourses' current point of maturity, under which it, after years of transformation, it can now provide the tools to be carried out under contextual and culturally sensitive ways, while also being made broader and more diverse, connecting better with reality.

On the other hand, others argue that, although development discourse logics have changed, the fundamental premises on which it is based on have not; the ideals related to colonization and dominance, which understand the world predominantly under the logics of economic factors and modernity remain at its core (Escobar, 2014; Gudynas, 2014; Ziai, 2016). This same criticism is made for sustainable discourse, which is viewed as a continuation of destructive capitalist logics positioned under a green veil of economic/technocratic solutions that fail to consider the root causes of the problem (Aliste, 2012; Bravo and Sepliarsky, 2021; Rodriguez and Govea, 2016). Under this understanding of sustainable development, the goal is to maintain the environment good enough to allow sustained economic growth (Moore & Schmitz, 1995).

The struggle for meaning around development appears to be ever-present. Within this struggle, as with any discourse, news media emerges as an important actor. News media content is shaped by the structure of the discourses within societies, which are present within the people that participate in the elaboration of the content and manifest through the specific characteristics of the message (Van Dijk, 2006). In doing so, news media emerges as an important factor in reinforcing or challenging dominant

ways of understanding the world (Stecula and Merkley, 2019), and shaping every-day civic discourses (Walker et al., 2019). This investigation dives into how traditional understandings of development discourse are expressed within the coverage of transitional energies in La Guajira, Colombia. It does so by carrying out a thematic analysis on the content of the news articles that reference energy transition in this region.

On the other hand, this investigation also seeks to understand the point the views of the local indigenous communities, many of which who have opposed development projects in the past (Fernandez, 2017; Hernandez, 2018, Montero de Daza and Narvaez, 2008). This opposition exemplifies that although a certain discourse may be dominant, it is never absolute, it can be challenged, resisted and is in an ever-present state of change as experiences and conflicting world views interact with the dominant discourse (Hall, 2013). This same logic establishes that communication through news media is not accepted entirely as the emitter intends, the produced message and meaning is interpreted under the mental map of who receives the content, which is shaped by experiences, ideologies, intentions, and many other factors (Hall, 2005; Van Dijk, 2006). Following this logic, Hall (1980) proposes three ways in which a discourse is assimilated: dominant, negotiated, or oppositional codes. This investigation studies the experience of the coverage of transitional energies by Wayuu indigenous communities using in-depth interviews while utilizing these three perspectives as the structuring element of their reception of the content. This will shed a light on how the indigenous communities experienced the content, while at the same time providing insight into the world views and values that shape their reception experience.

To carry out this investigation, the following research question is established: how do local Wayuu indigenous communities experience the coverage of energy transition projects in the context of development discourse? This main question is supported by the elaboration of 2 more specific sub questions which complementarily guide the investigation. How does development discourse manifest itself within the coverage of transitional energies? How do Wayuu communities understand the implementation of transitional energy projects within their lands?

Studying and providing knowledge on these issues is of great social relevance. The expansion of energy transition process in Colombia has just begun, out of the 65 planned projects only 1 has been opened (Indepaz, 2019; Lopez, 2022). Within the media, transitional energy projects such as wind farms or solar energy have been romanticized and positioned as a clean solution for the environmental problems of the world (Zehner, 2014). This has obscured the complexity around the implementation of transitional energy projects and characterized opposition against them as isolated, irrational and unrealistic (Leach &

Scoones, 2012). Statements and ideals that criticize these projects based on different understandings of relations with nature and cultural identity are discarded by elite actors (Leach & Scoones, 2012).

The Wayuu are no strangers to this situation, for years the story of their territory has been told by hegemonic actors, while their views remain hidden (Fernandez, 2017). This investigation rationalizes the validity of challenging transitional energy projects and sustainable development logics through the recognition of alternative ways to interpret these phenomena, especially under the conditions they are being currently carried out. Studying the complexity and rationality behind local views provides a platform from which their way of thinking can be understood and sympathized with, which in turn provides a tool against the stigmatization of that opposition and the construction of a mutual understanding that can lead to a diverse and holistic discourse around transitional energies and their implementation in Colombia.

From the academic perspective, Lyytimäki, et al. (2018) state that since the interpretation of media representations depends on the world views of the receiver, future studies on energy transition need to consider context-sensitive relations between media and other factors influencing the process. Knorr-Cetina (2007) urges that research carried out around climate change place greater importance on to the lifeworld contexts by incorporating diverse ideals into the process of knowledge creation. Guerra (2021) states that the new era in renewable energy requires a punctual analysis that focuses on the specificities of the activity without forgetting regional history nor the ontological complexity of those who inhabit the region. This investigation provides in-depth knowledge into the cultural and contextual elements that shape the understanding of indigenous communities around transitional energy projects and their experience with the news media that communicate on these projects. It is carried out from within their territory and focuses on providing knowledge of their lifeworld to enrich the available studies through a grassroots approach. As last aspect of academic relevance, it is worth noting that past studies of transitional energy coverage in the media focuses on identifying the themes within the texts (Rochyadi-Reetz, et al., 2019; Zehner, 2014), but do not relate those themes to a broader discourse as the shaping element for their findings. This investigation argues that the specific themes which are found in the coverage of transitional energies can be explained under notions of development discourse, which shapes the way in which these projects are talked about.

This investigation is structured in the following manner. First a three-part theoretical framework is presented. The first part of this theoretical framework dives into the logics, characteristics and history of development discourse, this part of the theoretical framework is utilized as the basis for identifying the development discourse logics within the news media coverage of transitional energies and for



understanding post-development perspectives of dissent towards development discourse. The second part dives into how transitional energy projects have been covered within the media around the world, which reveals specific trends towards a positive and techno-economic centered coverage that reinforces traditional understandings of development discourse. The third and last part of the theoretical framework focuses on audience reception and provides the basis for the analysis of the experience of the coverage by the Wayuu people. Following the theoretical framework, the methodology dives into the regional context of this investigation and the methods utilized for carrying it out. Next, the results, divided into 2 sections, show, and discuss, the main themes found both with the media coverage and the interviews. The news media coverage is presented under 3 main categories: transitional energies as a techno-economic element, transitional energies as an environmental element and transitional energies as a socio-cultural element. The second section of the results shows and discusses how indigenous communities interpret the discourse of development under Hall's (1980) proposed perspectives of hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional codes. Lastly, a conclusion is presented reflecting on the main findings of this investigation, its limitations, implications and ideas for future studies.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Molding Worlds: Understanding Development Discourse

#### 2.1.1 Discourse:

To study the ways in which news media covers transitional energies and how that coverage is experienced, this investigation adopts a constructionist approach regarding the role of language in the making of meaning. Constructionism challenges the notion of language as merely a tool for describing an objective reality, rather, it proposes an understanding of language as the tool through which reality is signified, understood, and acted upon by humans (Hall, 2013). In other words, language shapes realities and does not simply reflect them. According to constructionists, meanings and understandings of reality do not derive from an inherent nor objective connection between the element that is being defined and its resulting significance, rather, it is a subjective process subordinated to social norms, collective experiences and other subjective and social elements that shape how language is utilized to communicate and represent elements or phenomena within reality (Hall, 2013). One of the concepts through which this process can be understood is discourse.

According to Foucault (1972) as discussed by Hall (2013), discourse refers to a group of statements that are immersed in power relations which provide the language for representing and meaningfully talking about a topic. Within discourse, certain ideas obtain recognition as being true,

specific relationships between elements become accepted and rules that limit and guide the creation of objects, statements and topics emerge (Ziai, 2016). Discourse also produces identities by establishing a hierarchy under which different actors are perceived and, consequently, unequally positioned to meaningfully create statements (Ziai, 2016).

Although specific discourses can obtain the status of dominant by becoming the widely accepted set of statements to represent a topic, they are never considered to be stable. Discourses are constantly challenged by alternate statements and notions that arise during specific historical contexts (Hall, 2013). This diversity of discourses provides a space for agency, given that an individual can decide which discourse to adhere to and how it relates to the different elements between discourses (Ahearn, 2011). However, this agentic process is immersed in structures and is mediated by power relations which limit and shape the space for agentic action (Ahearn, 2011). This establishes dominant discourses as exclusionary, by establishing the ways in which a concept can be meaningfully talked about, it excludes other notions from that discourse (Hall, 2013, Ziai, 2016). However, as Hall (2013) states, dominant and excluded discourses should not be understood as two separate entities, they compose a complex interweaving of meanings that interact with each other and participate in a constant and never-ending struggle for the establishment of meaning and regulation of social practices.

Discourses are identified by locating the elements within society that support a strategy and a common institutional or political pattern, as stated by Cousins and Hussain (1984) and cited by Hall (2013). This investigation focuses on a specific type of dominant discourse, development discourse, which under an exclusionary logic (Ziai, 2016) managed to homogenize and structure patterns that privileged a specific way of understanding the “desired future” of humanity as superior and more valid than others (Gudynas, 2014).

More specifically, this investigation centers on how discursive elements and logics are structured around the process of energy transition in the context of sustainable development discourse. Energy transition is related to a planned, long term, structural change of how the energy demands of the world are satisfied (Lyytimäki et al., 2018). On the other hand, sustainable development discourse has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Bruntland Commission Report, 1987).” And although this definition provides an important starting point to understand the logics under which sustainable development is promoted, it does not serve to sufficiently explain the nuances, contradictions and diverse understandings that characterize the struggle for meaning around it. An attempt at this is made

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in the following sections, which focus on explaining where the discourse comes from, how it is shaped and defined, and what implications this dominant discourse has on societies.

#### 2.1.2 Development Discourse:

Development discourse can be traced back to the process of colonization, when notions of “civilized” and “uncivilized” societies arose and prominently divided the world into a hierarchical dichotomy that differentiated the European peoples from those that were being colonized (Ziai, 2016). However, as Ziai (2016) argues, the rules, institutions, motivations, and fundamentals that shape and constitute the modern language and logic of development discourse relate more closely to processes and statements that arose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite not entirely abandoning the underlying logic traced to colonialism.

During this period, notions of “developed” and “undeveloped” societies are established; the “undeveloped” are described as restrained from achieving their potential due to their financial poverty and lack of knowledge and technology (Ziai, 2016). The conditions and current state of the “undeveloped” are relegated to an archaic expression of a delayed stage that needs to be overcome (Gudynas, 2014). The reduction of the complex social, political, and economic phenomena within the “undeveloped” nations to technological and economic terms results in the establishment of a solution under the same logic (Andrews, 2016), and so, development discourse emerges.

Development then establishes itself as a proposal for the desired future for those categorized as undeveloped (Gudynas, 2014), it becomes the process to achieve what is defined as a “good society” (Ziai, 2016). Everything outside of this vision of the future based on modernization is considered “distant, uncivilized and immature” (Herath, D, 2009, p.1450). Development is defined as a linear process, without possibility of reversal (Herath, 2009), which aims at taking those “undeveloped” to a point that the “developed” have already reached, in other words, the “undeveloped” lack what the “developed” already have (Ziai, 2016). Hegemonic understandings of modernity and industrialization idealize western values and realities as the norm (Escobar, 2004). Under this logic, the “undeveloped” must make the effort to become more like the “developed” nations of Europe or the United States (Ziai, 2016). To achieve this, economic growth is presented as the quintessential element, and the market as the indispensable arena where the process of developing is to take place (Gudynas, 2014). Alcalde (1987), referencing this emerging logic, states that this understanding of development was put forward

to provide foreign economic activity within a beneficial and essential understanding in the minds of the “undeveloped.”

This economic predominance within the discourse results in what James Ferguson (1994) describes as development’s capacity to depoliticize everything it touches and establish capitalism as the norm. The described understanding of development has the capacity to reduce complex social problems into technical and economic problems that can be fixed through projects and economic intervention (Ziai, 2016). In doing so, it takes the structural and the political out of the equation and exonerates elites of any responsibility (Ziai, 2016). The path to the desired future that Gudynas (2014) references is, under the logic of development, one that must necessarily, and almost exclusively, be related to industrialization and economic growth (Rincon, 2012).

Aliste (2012), referencing Rist (2007); argues that this economic predominance in defining development reached a point within society that positioned it beyond question. Bennet (2012), referencing Escobar (1995), states that development structured a space which limited what could be said and imagined, effectively establishing development as a dominant discourse.

#### *2.1.2.1 Actors within Development Discourse*

In the context of this investigation, besides understanding the underlying economical prevalence in the definition of development, it becomes important to recognize specific characteristics that structure the way in which development discourse is communicated and perpetuated. One of the defining characteristics of development discourse is the unequal treatment of the actors involved.

On the one hand there is a specific treatment of the subjects of development, those towns, cities, nations or societies and their corresponding peoples who are perceived as “undeveloped” and require intervention; under the logic of this discourse they do not have the authority to dictate what a good society looks like, nor do they have the knowledge to conduct the necessary processes to achieve it by themselves, their ideas become subordinated; within the discourse they exist as a deviation from the norm that must be corrected (Ziai, 2016). When individuals or organizations within the “undeveloped” actively participate within the logic of the dominant discourse, they are mostly speaking as validators of the predicated deficiencies and supposed benefits that development will bring for them, and not questioning it (Ziai, 2016).

On the other, there are the “developed” actors, those who from a position of power establish the deficiencies in need of solving and predicate the universal solution (Andrews, 2016). Those in charge of carrying out that process and dictating the rules are referred to as “experts” (Ziai, 2016), another important actor within development discourse.

Experts are usually institutions, politicians or scholars that predicate from a position of superiority based on expertise (Ziai, 2016). Under development discourse, experts are credentialed as the ones who know what needs to be done for others to achieve development and how to do it (Herath, 2009). Their positioning based on expertise reaches a point where they are perceived as being more capable of identifying what the intervened people need than the people themselves, which in turn has many times justified interventions against the interests or will of the people affected by the projects (Hernandez, 2018; Ziai, 2016). An example of this is studied by Tashi (2011) who evidences how understandings of development related to urbanization, which perceived the rural lifestyle in Tibet as “backward”, “primitive” and “unstable”, justified the displacement of farmers from their ancestral homes and destroyed their means of subsistence.

Under the logics of development discourse, impacts or affectations are usually sidelined in importance, due to the notion that even if there are negative effects, in the end development will make “tomorrow better” (Cornwall & Deborah, 2007). This supports the positioning of the actors who promote development as working from a position of purity and logos that escapes questioning (Ziai, 2016), sometimes even functioning under a veil of compassionate moralism (Gudynas, 2014).

The characteristics mentioned here refer to a classical understanding of development, since then, truthful to any discourse’s ever-changing nature, the ideas surrounding development have transformed. Development has grown to include notions of participation, equity, sustainability, amongst others (Cornwall & Deborah, 2007). This evolution has led authors to state that development now functions in contextual and culturally sensitive ways that distance from its problematic original understandings (Herath, 2009). However, as Ziai (2016) and Escobar (2004) argue, the underlying economical predominance, based on technification and de-politicizing notions, has remained persistent and largely unchanged through the years. Studying the entire evolutionary process and current structure of development discourse is beyond the scope of this investigation. Rather, this investigation focuses on some of the continuities that authors have identified between traditional notions of development and sustainable development, to understand the implications of these elements in how local communities experience the coverage of transitional energy projects.

### 2.1.3 Sustainable Development and Energy Transition:

Sustainable development arises as the previous discourse reaches a point where its failure must be accepted; at that point, a diagnosis identifies the failure and the corresponding strategy to fix it begins to gain traction (Ziai, 2016). Sustainable development is that new promise that arises as the strategy to fix development at the merging point of the environment and the economy (Cornwall & Deborah, 2007). From the perspective of sustainability, traditional notions of development reach the point of failure due to the environmental impacts of industrialization and consumption based on fossil fuels (Bravo & Sepiarksy, 2021; Ziai, 2016). Under this context, the concept of energy transition emerges. As mentioned before, energy transition relates to a purposeful and broad change in the way energy needs are satisfied (Lyytimäki et al, 2018), by the replacement of conventional fuels such as oil or coal, to forms of energy that are generated and consumed with less impact to the environment, such as solar, wind, biogas and others (Baluch, Shabudin and Mohtar, 2015).

In the context of this investigation, it becomes important to highlight how the Colombian government has understood the process of energy transition. The government has defined the process of energy transition as the tool to consolidate the process towards sustainable development and economic growth (DNP, 2022). In another document, the president of Colombia, states that energy transformation will allow Colombia to prove that sustainable development is possible in this country (Ministerio de Minas y Energia, 2021). In that same document, the authors state that the impulse that the government has given to transform the sources from which energy is obtained within the country is one of the most important legacies that they will leave to the country. These few statements exemplify the strength with which the government has linked energy transition and sustainable development. In doing so, sustainable development is once again linked to growth, sustainable growth, which brings sustainable development back into the realm of economic/technocratic solutions, continuing the legacy of its discursive predecessor (Ziai, 2016).

The continuities of de-politization and economic predominance within sustainable discourse have been broadly criticized by scholars. Fornillo (2018), states that this logic has allowed sustainable development to go mainstream, while at the same time not addressing the structural causes that provoked the current state of the environment, which they argue are related to the frenetic need to increase capital. In that same sense, Rodriguez and Govea (2006) argue that the reduction of sustainability to material and economic aspects have hidden ecological and environmental crisis

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resulting from anthropocentric perspectives (Grist, 2008) that justify a depredatory attitude towards the environment and utilitarian ways of thinking without a sense of community (Rodriguez and Govea, 2006). Sustainable development under the described logic focuses on maintaining the environment good enough for sustained growth (Moore, and Schmitz, 1995), which maintains the hierarchical structure in which nature is viewed mainly as a type of capital (Rodriguez and Govea, 2006).

In addition to this, sustainable development discourse is criticized as maintaining the logic which positions knowledge and power in the hands of a few who are tasked with the leadership and ability to implement the sustainable development projects (Ziai, 2016). Bravo and Sepiarsky (2021) state that this logic is used by multinational corporations and economically dominant countries to further exploit developing nations, at the expense of local communities. In practice, sustainable development projects continue to marginalize the poorest members of society (Sneddon et al, 2006).

Other studies, however, show a different picture. Mac Arthur & Matthewman (2014) show how transitional energy projects within Maori lands have provided tools for self-determination and have positioned them in a space from which they can enrich the discussion around transitional energies based on their local knowledge and understandings of the world. Smith and Scott (2018) reinforce this notion by stating that indigenous owned renewable energy projects can disperse power in a more equitable way amongst society and can provide tools for autonomy within indigenous communities. Walker et al. (2019) while recognizing these perspectives cautions against the “danger in blindly following this course of action” (p.3), since promises on the social benefits from governments can be meaningless if economic goals are not balanced with social elements.

The existing literature allows this investigation to acknowledge various perspectives from which sustainable development discourse and the emphasis on energy transition is challenged by scholars. The existence of these tensions and ways of interpreting sustainability will be relevant for understanding the language utilized within news media to meaningfully talk about this topic, and the experience of indigenous communities when receiving this content. In the context of discourse, the existence of these tensions once again illustrates the constant struggle around meaning and understandings of what development and sustainable development is. As this investigation dives into the study of news media texts, it is vital to analyze whether these characteristics are reinforced or challenged through news media, and how this process happens.

#### 2.1.4 Challenging Development Discourse: Post-development and the good life

As was stated before, no discourse is permanently stable nor safe from being challenged and questioned (Hall, 2013). Within this understanding, notions of post-development emerge as a challenge to the rules, logics and ideals that have given basis to development discourse (Gudynas, 2014).

The premises of post-development state that there is not a universal desired future, every society must look at their own specific and contextual circumstances, resources and aspirations and define it for themselves (Bennet, 2012). By eliminating the possibility of judging societies based on universal standards put forward by experts, post-development manages to break away from development discourse (Ziai, 2016).

Within post-development ideals, the idea of the good life (*buen vivir*), emerges from within South American communities as a specific set of understandings that challenge development discourse (Gudynas, 2014).

The good life discourse revendicates the role of grassroots movements, local knowledge and popular power in the transformation of development (Escobar, 2014). Indigenous knowledge has been important in establishing the logics of this alternative discourse due to their contributions based on ideas of what constitutes a good life, which stride away from material consumption and development understood as progress (Gudynas, 2014).

Within the logics of the good life, ideal personal conditions are only achievable from within a social and ecologic community, the separation of nature and society is challenged, and economic growth as the motor for development is discarded (Gudynas, 2014). In this sense, the good life attempts to marginalize the economy as the dominant system for production, power and meaning making (Escobar, 2014). It criticizes the traditional ways of western knowledge and opens other types of knowledge and experience (Escobar, 2014). And although academic knowledge is not discarded (Escobar, 2014) the hierarchy which positions it above other forms of knowledge is confronted and discarded (Gudynas, 2014).

By marginalizing economic aspects, other elements gain importance within the hierarchy. For example, within the logics of the good life, spirituality and sensibility play a massive role, notions of rejection and discreditation of the importance of these elements are not valued, and on the contrary, spirituality and sensibility emerge as an indispensable element within the discourse (Gudynas, 2014).

According to Ziai (2016) post-development has been criticized for neglecting the positive aspects of development and romanticizing local communities. However, Ziai (2016) goes on to state that this



criticism is only relevant to a specific type of post-development that has not considered the complexities within development and post-development, but not to all the post-development texts. Within his text, Gudynas (2014) recognizes the need to go beyond essentialist and romanticizing understandings and consider superpositions of discourses such as development discourse and the good life.

## 2.2 Communicating Discourse: News Media and Sustainable Development

### 2.2.1 Techno-economic coverage

News media influence public attitudes towards the topics they communicate, they do so by choosing a set of statements that reinforce or downplay specific perspectives towards a topic, which in turn serve their interests and beliefs (Stecula & Merkley, 2019). Fiske (1994) states that news media occupies a privileged position from which it is assumed to be neutral or objective, facilitating trust and positive reception, while never truly functioning under a neutral logic.

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In the context of energy transition, Zehner (2014) shows how news media coverage tends to reinforce the status quo by promoting large scale green energy projects as the only viable solution for the planet to become sustainable. It undermines other solutions such as the reduction of consumption or the changing of habits and romanticizes green energy projects by omitting elements that go against their narrative, such as the contaminating origin of the materials necessary for these energies to function. Antal & Karhunmaa (2018) reinforce this idea when studying news coverage of the German energy transition process by stating that discussions around the process center mostly on “techno-economic, supply-oriented” elements while neglecting other key elements related to participation, democratic energy, the origin of the demand, amongst others. Rochyadi-Reetz et al. (2019) in a summarizing though categoric statement also affirm that existing media investigations show that the coverage on renewable energies is predominantly focused on economic and technological elements.

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The categories which are found in the studies of Antal & Karhunmaa (2018); Mateu & Dominguez (2019); Rochyadi-Reetz et al. (2019) and Djerf-Pierre et al. (2015) provide a basis for the thematic analysis on the news article sample. The techno-economic element as the most prominent is inline with the logics of development discourse that position economic elements as the most important element for signification (Escobar, 2014). Within the study of Mateu & Dominguez (2019) the economic framing is understood as that in which nature is viewed through an anthropocentric logic which positions it as a resource and valued under the assumption that benefits and wealth can be extracted from it. Djerf-Pierre et al. (2015) states the technical themes within the coverage are those that position

science and technological advancements as the solution for energy production today and in the future. Antal and Karhunmaa (2018) mention the tecno-economic element without providing an in-depth definition, however, since it includes both concepts in previous studies and encompasses the depoliticizing technical and economical prominence within development discourse, this category will be utilized for this study to see its prominence within Colombian news media coverage, complementing it with the definitions from the other studies.

The literature then points to a reinforcement of the notions present within development discourse that point to technical and economical solutions to complex political, economic, social and cultural phenomena. This understanding is rarely questioned, which in turn satisfies the interests of a set of power elites that benefit from these projects while undermining opposing perspectives (Zehner, 2014).

### 2.2.2 Portrayal of Actors within the coverage

Regarding the way indigenous actors are portrayed within news media in the context of green or transitional energies, Walker et al. (2019) provide a nuanced understanding based on their research of Canadian news media. On the one hand, by referencing Clark (2014) they state that when resource development is involved in the equation, indigenous communities are usually showed as opposing development and being an obstacle for jobs, in a narrative that is accompanied by neglecting important historical context and the spiritual and cultural elements in relation to the land which are fundamental for indigenous communities. However, the investigation also shows that some news outlets brought forward the problematic of leaving indigenous visions out of the coverage and structuring of green energy projects, while also portraying indigenous peoples in a “balanced” manner, without racist remarks and including historical contexts within their narration (Walker et al., 2019).

In the context of Colombia, Fernandez (2017) evidences the role media have played in prioritizing representations of the region of La Guajira that revolve around notions of humanitarian and environmental crisis, where water scarcity, lack of food and the absence of the State have resulted in the deaths of Wayuu indigenous children. This, he states, has aided the establishment of indigenous peoples in this region as lacking the capacity to survive by themselves, and presenting the region as a place full of mineral resources that need to be exploited in order to change that reality. In addition, he evidences the lack of participation of the Wayuu indigenous people within the coverage related to their territories, this has resulted in the narrative over them and their territory being told mostly from what

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Fernandez (2017) has labeled the hegemonic actors, that is, the state, the mining companies, the media and the academic elites.

Djerf-Pierre et al. (2015) when studying the actors that appeared more often within news media coverage of renewable energies found that the focus was on elite actors. Considering the importance that the hierarchical understanding of actors plays within development discourse (Ziai, 2016) and building on the study of Djerf-Pierre et al. (2015), this investigation will also utilize actors as a theme through which the material will be analyzed.

Literature on news media coverage of transitional energies then appears to reinforce characteristics that define development and sustainable development discourse through the dominant characteristics explained in the previous sections. This investigation will analyze if Colombian mainstream news media proves to be a continuation of that logic, or if it proposes new ways of covering transitional energies. For the second part of this investigation, media reception theory becomes relevant to understand the ways in which indigenous communities who are affected by these projects experience the coverage of transitional energies.

### 2.3 Fracturing the Structure: Agency and Reception

Within Foucault's discourse structure, subjects are only objects through which power and knowledge passes, subjects can never be outside of the structure as authors of power/knowledge (Hall, 2013). Ahearn (2011), discusses how social theorists have challenged this notion through the concept of agency, in an effort to balance out an over-dependence of meaning-making on abstract structures that deprive subjects of power. Ahearn (2011) states that "agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p.278). She agrees with Foucault in the sense that the subject cannot entirely escape the structure in which it is immersed, however, she differs by understanding that subjects have the capacity to challenge dominant discourses and exert power that can generate knowledge and meaning.

When analyzing the experience of local Wayuu communities towards mainstream media coverage of "green energies", it is important to keep in mind what type of reception these communities experience. Communities can undergo a process of "misunderstanding" the message portrayed by the media. These misunderstandings are usually justified by the producer by saying that the audience did not take the message as they wanted to, however, the reality can often be that the producer and audience do not share the same code, the same way of understanding things, in other words, the

receiver does not understand the world under the same dominant structures of thought as the producer, and therefore “misunderstands” the message (Hall, 1980).

This element highlights the importance of knowing and understanding the receiver's code. Van Dijk (1983), reinforces Hall's notion by stating that the structure of news is defined by the readers through the sets of expectations and cognitive elements that they have towards the discourse or topic even before engaging with the news product.

Hall (1980) proposes three ways to categorize the code of a receiver in relation to a message, through a process he labels selective reception. Under the first category, he states, the receiver shares the same dominant-hegemonic position and therefore relates positively to the message. On a second category, labeled negotiated code or position, the receiver evidences a different understanding of things than what is being portrayed, but recognizes some significance, importance or benefit in what is being shown, it might identify with some elements but challenge others. Hall (1980) proposes a third category which is labeled oppositional code, in which the receiver understands the intended message by the producer but chooses to reject it and actively challenge it due to the complete incongruence with the world views of the receiver. These three proposed categories will be the basis for organizing the themes within the interviews.

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For a complete understanding of the reception process, this investigation will dive not only into the misunderstandings, clashes, hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional reactions from the interviewees towards the content, but also into the reasoning behind it. When studying the experience of indigenous communities regarding media coverage, this investigation places similar importance both to the process of categorizing and structuring the reception of the content, but also to the understanding of the code, the structures and discourses of the interviewees that motivate specific types of reception.

### 3. Methodology:

In a few years, the region of La Guajira may not be the same as what exists today. Although only a few of the new projects have been opened, the projections are for them to grow exponentially (González & Barney, 2019). It is likely that as the projects grow, so will their influence on public debate. This provides an interesting opportunity for investigating how discourse around these projects is shaped, in the context of a fresh struggle for meaning around transitional energies in the region.

At the forefront of this struggle there are various actors, this investigation chooses to focus on two: a sector of Colombian media and the local indigenous communities who experience the projects being built on their land.

On the one hand, this investigation will study the portrayal of transitional energies on four of the most read and/or most trusted Colombian media outlets. This will allow the investigation to understand how transitional energy projects are communicated to a broad Colombian audience, many of whom may view the region of La Guajira and its indigenous communities under the logics of an “imagined community” to which they have little or no relation and therefore rely on the media to guide the formation of their imaginaries around these communities (Walker et al, 2019).

On the other hand, the Wayuu population in the context of transitional energy has been understudied, in part due to the recent nature of the implementation of the projects. Studying the experience of media coverage from the perspective of this population provides a gateway into the understanding of how media coverage of transitional energy relates with their own views, and into what values, experiences, and world views fundament their reasoning when relating to transitional energy and its media coverage. Despite the proximity and close relation with the projects, indigenous people usually find themselves being excluded from public discourse around the matter (Fernandez, 2017; Walker et al., 2019).

Both data sets will be analyzed using qualitative analysis under a mixed data collection approach. Qualitative analysis provides a flexible, systematic and summarizing manner of interpreting meaning from data (Schreier, 2014). The flexibility allows investigators to mix both top down theoretically driven and bottom-up data driven approaches to the data (Schreier, 2014). Since this investigation is looking at the content under the specific logics of development discourse, but at the same time aiming at providing local, context sensitive views, the mixture of both data driven, and theoretical approaches provides the necessary flexibility to reach complex and nuanced results. The summarizing nature also allows this investigation to focus on the information that is relevant in the context of development discourse, although all the data is reviewed to reduce the extent of bias through the investigator’s expectancies (Schreier, 2014). Lastly, qualitative analysis provides this investigation with the tools to go beyond manifest meaning and add latent context-sensitive interpretations into the investigation (Schreier, 2014).

This section starts by presenting a contextual introduction to the studied subjects. It then explains the process of data collection, sample selection and data analysis. Lastly, some considerations regarding the ethics of this investigation are presented.

### 3.1 Media Landscape

This investigation will study articles from four Colombian news outlets: El Tiempo, El Espectador, Semana and El Colombiano. These four were chosen because they classify amongst the most read and/or trustworthy news media outlets that were available on LexusNexus, the chosen database to extract data. To provide the reader with a broader contextual understanding of this study, a brief background of the Colombian media landscape and some relevant characteristics are presented.

El Tiempo is the most read online news media outlet in the country and the fifth most trusted (Newman et al., 2021). 81% of this outlet is owned by Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo, who is reported to be Colombia's richest man (Lopez, 2022). As part of his Editorial Company, he owns, or partially owns, more than 25 other media outlets, including CityTv (Reporters without Borders, 2017) which is ranked number one (together with other regional media outlets) when it comes to trustworthiness (Newman et al., 2021). It is worth noting that Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo, as owner of Corficolombiana, has significant investments in various energy and gas companies, some of which work in La Guajira, and have portrayed themselves as protagonists of energy transition in Colombia (Arcila, 2021; Semana, 2021).

The next outlet is Semana, a news magazine whose online viewership is ranked fifth within the country and seventh in terms of trustworthiness (Newman et al., 2021). This outlet is owned by Gabriel Gilinski, who is the son of Julian Gilinski, Colombia's third richest man (Lopez, 2022).

The third outlet is El Espectador, which ranks second in viewership and fourth in trustworthiness (Newman et al., 2021). This outlet is owned by the Santo Domingo family, who has 3 of its members within the top 6 richest people in Colombia (Lopez, 2022). They own 4 of the most viewed media outlets in the country (Franco, 2022).

Lastly, we have El Colombiano, an outlet that does not rank amongst the top 10 most read outlets but does appear as the 9<sup>th</sup> most trusted news outlet in the country (Newman et al., 2021). As of 2015, the family that owns this news outlet owned 16 other media companies and had significant participation within the countries' only press agency, Colprensa (Reporters without Borders, 2017).

Mendel, Castillejo & Gomez (2017) in a document published by UNESCO have stated that the concentration of media in the hand of a few individuals or conglomerates can pose a threat to freedom of expression and democracy, by threatening “the ability of the media system as a whole to reflect the variety of ideas, viewpoints and opinions that exist in society and to represent all political, cultural social groups (p.11).” According to Reporters without Borders (2017), in Colombia, 20 out of the 40 most influential news outlets belong to just 6 families and audience concentration levels are a high risk for media pluralism in the country.

Mendel, Castillejo and Gomez (2017) also highlight the threat that media concentration poses when individuals or conglomerates decide to use their power to benefit hidden economic interests. This has been supported by academic research, indicating that the role of newspapers as watchdogs can be overshadowed and impeded by the economic interests of the news media’s outlets owners (Ki Sung, 2017).

While this investigation will not dive into the influence of media ownership on the content, presenting this media context is relevant to evidence the power differentials between the selected subjects and their unbalanced influence within the logics of discourse structuring and positioning.

### 3.2 The Wayuu Community

The Wayuu are a Colombian Indigenous people who live predominantly in the department of La Guajira, situated at the northernmost point of Colombia. 97.5% of all Colombian Wayuu population live in this department (Dane, 2018). The Wayuu represent 20% of all Indigenous population in Colombia (Dane, 2019).

The Wayuu have been stated to be proud of the fact that they were never totally conquered by the Spaniards (Lopez and Vera-Rojas, 2020). The Wayuu speak Wayuunaiki, their native language and are mainly an oral culture (Lopez and Vera-Rojas, 2020). According to Colombia’s national census, 89% of Wayuus speak Wayuunaiki, while 4% understand it but do not speak it (DANE, 2019). No governmental information is available on how many of them speak Spanish, and although academics have stated that most do speak Spanish (Lennon, et al., 2019), during the process of this investigation it became evident that language is still a prominent barrier for Wayuu and Non-Wayuu relations, especially amongst the oldest members of the community.

La Guajira consists of 22 Indigenous reserves, however, one of these, denominated Indigenous Reserve of the Middle and High Guajira, concentrates 98% of their reserve extension, 1.067.505

hectares (Romero, et al., 2019). It is here where most transitional energy projects are being built (Gonzalez & Barney, 2022).

Other relevant cultural characteristics for this investigation are the importance of burials and dreams within the Wayuu culture. Burials and cemeteries are highly respected and commemorated (Lopez and Vera-Rojas, 2020). On the other hand, Wayuu are a highly oneiric culture. For them, dreams do not represent an individual experience, nor do they arise from personal circumstances, dreams are the connecting point between the physical world and another world where they connect with the dead and their spirits (Lopez and Vera-Rojas, 2020). Dreams are understood as having practical impacts on everyday life, in that sense both worlds and the role of dreams within the community are intricately intertwined (Lopez and Vera-Rojas, 2020).

It is within this society, which has been very briefly summarized here with no intent of describing the complexity of the Wayuu culture entirely, that many of the transitional energy projects are projected to be built.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

As has been mentioned, this investigation utilized two different sets of information, however, they were both analyzed utilizing thematic analysis, a type of qualitative analysis. This research was designed as follows. First, the news media data was collected utilizing keywords. The total number of results was revised and filtered. The filtered selection then went a process of a second revision in which the relation of the content to the studied theoretical framework was verified and a broad set of topics to be used as the basis for the interviews was selected. With these topics in mind, the structure of the interview was devised and a sample from within the articles was selected to be presented to the interviewees. After the completion of the interviews the data collection process was finished. Here both data sets were coded and analyzed using the method of thematic analysis. After the completion of both coding trees the results section was written. Each data set results were analyzed independently and then contrasted. The specificities, considerations and further detailing of this process is explained in the following subsections.

#### 3.3.1 News Article Collection

The first tranche of data were the news articles, gathered utilizing LexisNexis as the access point to the media outlets. This tool allowed unrestricted access to the outlets within this database, overcoming the challenge of collecting media articles in the presence of paywalls. Since this investigation focuses on the implementation of transitional energies, which has gained traction under



the current government and has been related with development in official documents (Ministerio de Minas y Energia, 2021; DNP, 2022), it was decided to filter the information to only include articles after the possession of the current government, which was on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August of 2018.

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The chosen terms for this investigation were “transitional energy” and “La Guajira”, this narrow term search allowed the investigation to focus on the relevant region, while including a variety of projects that the government has placed under the tag of transitional energy such as gas, wind and solar (Ministerio de Minas y Energia, 2021). Under these parameters, a total of 54 results were yielded by the search. The articles were collected on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April of 2022, meaning the data range for the collection of information is between the 8<sup>th</sup> of August of 2018 and the 15<sup>th</sup> of April of 2022. For the study of this information only textual elements were considered, no visuals were studied for this analysis.

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The 54 resulting articles were then reviewed and filtered based on their pertinence. A first factor in the selection of the articles was discarding those that appeared to be built from the same press release due to the repetition of the exact same ideas only with slight variations in the order of the presented information and minor differences in the redaction. Only 1 of those remained within the investigation. Geographical relevance was also a criterion. Some articles only slightly mentioned La Guajira and projects within this region while focusing on the implementation of projects within other regions. These were also discarded since this investigation relates to the context of Wayuu communities in La Guajira. Lastly, opinion pieces were discarded due to not being subject to the expectancy of neutrality that Fiske (1994) mentions. The sample was made up of (\*) articles from El Tiempo, (\*) articles from El Espectador, (\*) articles from Semana and (\*) articles from El Colombiano.

The sample of 26 articles was reviewed before carrying out the interviews to help structure the thematics and guiding questions. Based on the theoretical framework, 3 articles were chosen to be presented to the interviewees to help their ability to describe their experience with the articles. The sample of 3 articles was chosen due to their clear representation of elements that were identified in the theory, mainly, development and transitional energy as beneficial under economical and technical terms, the absence of positions questioning transitional energy impacts and the use of experts to talk about transitional energies. The selected sample for this investigation is presented in the annex in its original language (Spanish) and in a translated version revised by the investigator.

### 3.3.2 In depth Interviews

The second part of the investigation which involved speaking to the Wayuu people was conducted using in-depth interviews. In depth interviews are defined as a conversation between two or more people that build upon intimacy and trust to obtain deep information with a specific purpose

(Johnson, 2001; Brennen, 2017). Johnson (2001) also states that this method is suitable for matters concerning lived experiences, values, ideology, and cultural knowledge, all of which are of relevance for this investigation. In-depth interviews strive to go beyond common-sense understandings to analyze based on the limits of experience and perception (Brennen, 2017). As this investigation aims to push the boundaries of hegemonic development discourse and understanding it from a distinct cultural and life-experience perspective, going beyond common-sense (hegemonic) understandings becomes a fundamental task.

Interviews were carried out under a largely unstructured logic. Brennen (2017) argues that unstructured interviews based around flexible, open-ended questions and topics allow for the understanding of feelings, emotions and experiences from within the complex worlds of those who are being interviewed. Silverwood (2014) also notes how this style of interviewing allows for the respondent to answer the questions freely and with no time restraints when referencing their social world, while at the same time giving the flexibility for the person to respond in their own words. In accordance with this type of structuring, a list of topics was developed and a few open-ended guiding questions, however, to encourage natural conversation, questions were broad and changed based on the answers and interests of the specific interviewee (Brennen, 2017). After the initial question, the sample of media articles was presented. This, according to Brennen (2017) provides a spark that can be useful for in depth discussion and situating important events. The broad topic/question list was structured as follows:

- 1) General perception of transitional energy projects being carried out in La Guajira
  - a. What are your opinions on the transitional energy projects that are being carried out in La Guajira?
- 2) General reaction towards the coverage of energy transition
  - a. After reviewing the articles, what general comments would you have on the texts that you have just read?
- 3) These two general guiding questions were asked to every participant, from there on out specific theory/response driven questions that would allow in-depth understandings of experiences related to the rules and characteristics of development discourse and the coverage of transitional energies were asked. A complete set of questions is provided in the annex.

The interviews in were carried out within the community of each participant, this created a suitable environment for the interviewees to discuss intimately and with confidence, a characteristic

that Sanchez (2014) argues grants validity and accuracy, due to its ability to reduce asymmetry between the interviewer and interviewee.

The criterion for participating in this study was for the interviewee to recognize themselves as Wayuu and to recognize themselves as being impacted by transitional energy projects and considering that they have enough information and knowledge of the issue in order to conduct an interview on the topic. A total of 6 interviews with people who met these criteria were conducted.

#### 3.3.4 Ethics

Following the Methodological Guidelines provided by the EUR, and the notions of informed concept put forward by Babbie (2011) the following investigation will guarantee that the interviewees have full understanding of the nature of the study and the risks involved, as well as the conditions of their participation, which includes the ability to withdraw from their participation at any point. These were stated in a consent form that every participant within the study signed.

Considering the troublesome nature of the context in which transitional energy projects are being implemented within the region, security measures were taken to make sure that the interviews were not accessed by anyone else except the interviewer. Interviews were recorded and transferred to a password-protected hard drive that was kept hidden during the interview process. On top of that, all interviews have been transcribed under anonymous identities and any information revealing the identity or specific location of the interviewees has been erased. The transcripts have been also password protected to avoid any unwanted access into the contents.

#### 3.4 Thematic Analysis

As mentioned, a thematic analysis was carried out on both data sets. Thematic analysis allows for focus to be placed amongst a particular theme within data sets and provide an in-depth study of it, rather than a general account or summary of all the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since this investigation seeks to understand transitional energies and the experience of indigenous communities specifically in the context of development discourse, focusing on the elements that fall within this theme was the most suitable approach for the study.

On the other hand, Braun & Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis allows for patterns within the data to be revealed, analyzed, and reported on. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, discourse operates within a set of rules and patterns that can identify and characterize it, therefore, thematic analysis allows for development discourse to be related to a data set (and vice versa) and studied through the patterns that emerge within the information. This, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), covers the constructionist aspect of thematic analysis, in which the method is utilized as a way

**Commented [RM8]:** How many interviewees were recruited – inputs on the exact sample size – needs to be provided.  
What was the approach of the interview – questions, process while conducting the interview, ethics, operationalization through theory, etc.

of studying how certain discourses that are present in society can be utilized to explain why certain meanings, statements and realities are present in a set of information.

The analysis was carried out utilizing the steps put forward by Braun & Clarke (2006). Both data sets followed the same steps but carried different theoretical contexts. The process for each data set is described here independently.

#### 3.4.1 News Media Thematic Analysis

For the news media data set a mixed theory driven and data driven approach was utilized. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, previous studies and development discourse theory highlight the importance of the technological and economic element within coverage of energy projects (Antal & Karhunmaa, 2018; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2015; Mateu & Dominguez, 2019; Rochyadi-Reetz et al., 2019). Djerf-Perre et al. (2015) also study the prominence of actors within the studies. Antal & Karhunmaa (2018) also mention the lack of prevalence of environmental themes within the coverage they studied. Taking this into consideration and how it relates to development discourse, the study chose to establish 3 initial theory-based categories: transitional energies as a techno-economic elements, transitional energies as an environmental element and actors.

With this category in mind, the data was reviewed and initially coded by highlighting aspects that were deemed relevant to this investigation, labeling them with a summarizing code and assigning them to these initial categories if possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After this initial review the data showed that mentions, although scarce, the subtheme of socio-political elements needed to be included due to its relevance for the theoretical discussion around development discourse. As the different actors are also conceived as a part of these socio-political relations, the extracts related to their portrayal were positioned under this theme.

When reviewing the environmental theme, it was deemed that the aspects related to the environment were also understood under a mainly economic and technological lens, therefore, this theme was deleted and the information from it was located as a subtheme under the broader techno-economic element.

Subthemes were within the structure to provide a clearer understanding of the data, which was deemed too broad and diverse within the initial theory driven theme structure, these new subthemes were structured through a data-driven approach. The codebook with the complete structure is annexed.

### 3.4.2 Interview Thematic Analysis

For the second part of this investigation, the interviews, the analytic interest on development is maintained, however, to better organize the data that describes the experience of communities in relation to the discourse, Hall's (1980) proposed categories for selective reception are utilized as the organizing element. In this sense, the first category, hegemonic-dominant approach, relates to statements that do not challenge hegemonic development discourse in any way. The second, negotiated approach, is utilized to categorize those elements that although in line with the general idea of development, provide some local nuance, contradiction, or friction with the discourse. The last category, oppositional approach, is utilized to group together elements that completely oppose the logics of development discourse and sometimes even actively challenge it.

Once again, the theoretical structure of themes is deemed too broad to organize the data. Data driven subthemes are created to provide a clearer and more in-depth understanding of the information. Within these subthemes there are some elements that overlap with each other, selection characteristics were developed to be able to organize the data. One of the subthemes within the oppositional code was transitional energies as revictimization. This included mentions of the impacts of transitional energies, which is another subtheme, however, the difference resides in the relation that the interviewees make between the impacts and past projects of development carried out in the region. If this relation was made as part of the statement, the extract is placed within the revictimization subtheme. The code tree resulting from this process is annexed.

On the other hand, considering that for the study of interviews the extracts and coded elements were phrases, sentences or paragraphs from within the interview with a unifying idea, it is necessary to explain that statements placed in the hegemonic theme do not necessarily indicate a hegemonic data item, which in this case would be the interview. Therefore, although hegemonic extracts were identified, no data item was deemed hegemonic in its entirety, this will be further discussed as part of the conclusion.

## 4. Results:

The results of this investigation evidence strong connections between the media coverage of transitional energy in Colombia and development discourse, as well as with previous studies on the coverage of these energies. This affinity is expressed through the predominance of a technical and economic focus on transitional energies, the presence of the environmental element in terms of

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scientific solutions to environmental problems, the lack of coverage on the socio-cultural complexity of transitional energy projects and the treatment of the different actors within the coverage.

On the other hand, the experience of Wayuu interviewees to the coverage and the discourse is diverse, but it does portray a tendency towards negotiated and oppositional approaches to the content and the discourse. Statements that hegemonically revindicate the economic and financial opportunity that transitional energy represents are present within their responses, however, these notions are nuanced by the interviewees amid opposition to the local conditions and notions of how these projects are applied in “reality.” On the other hand, while coverage of transitional energies in news media rarely mentions impacts on local communities, the interviewees constantly refer to these impacts and do so through a wide variety of perspectives that revolve around environmental, cultural and relational elements, amongst others. This reference to the impacts and the ways in which the resources are carried out are constantly related to the way other development projects have been implemented in the past, reinforcing the need to understand transitional energies in a broader historical context of the region.

Interviewees challenge the roles that are assigned to them within the coverage and the broader discourse by expressing revindicating their participation and leadership within the construction of the desired reality for their territories. They also challenge the portrayal of other actors within the coverage such as that of companies, the government and the media itself. The set of negotiated and oppositional understandings, as well as the scarcer hegemonic understandings, appear to evidence a potential for transitional energy projects and narratives around them to be positively assimilated within Wayuu indigenous communities but only through a radical change in the perspectives, attitudes and logics under which they are being currently implemented and talked about.

The results sections is established in the following manner: first the results from the thematic analysis performed on the media articles will be presented, with a subsection dedicated to the main themes and their most prominent subthemes complemented with the respective theoretical insights. Then, the interview results are analyzed. Once again, the main themes are presented starting with hegemonic, then negotiated, and finally oppositional codes. Within this second section, the themes present within their answers are contrasted and discussed with the media findings, providing insights on the relation between narratives and the experience of the interviewees with the coverage.

## 4.1 Colombian News Media Coverage of Transitional Energies through the lens of Development Discourse

The most prominent theme within Colombian news coverage proved to be the techno-economic element, reinforcing findings of previous studies on the matter (Antal & Karhunmaa, 2018; Djerf-Pierre et al., 2018; Rochyadi-Reets et al., 2019). Under this logic, diverse elements are viewed mainly under an economic and technological lens. There is a great focus placed on the economic benefits of these projects, mainly jobs and substantial foreign investment in the region. The positive tone is carried on when the environmental aspect is mentioned, which is centered on emission reduction. Lastly, the analysis shows that socio-cultural understandings of transitional energies impacts are largely absent, within this category the discussion centers on how the different actors within the energy transition process are portrayed and how that role relates to the theory on development discourse.

### 4.1.1 Transitional Energies as a techno-economic element

Within the coverage, techno-economic elements manifest on various fronts. The first worth highlighting is the understanding of the land and nature under economic terms. The region of La Guajira is positioned as full of natural richness waiting to be exploited under the energy transition, in a way, providing a justification for exploitation of natural goods (such as wind or solar light) that had not been taken advantage of before (Bravo and Sepiarsky, 2021). The anthropocentric understanding of nature as capital to be taken advantage of, which is integral to development discourse (Bravo and Sepiarsky, 2021; Rodriguez and Govea, 2006; Ziai, 2016), is prevalent within the media coverage.

The idea of La Guajira as the epicenter for the energy transition process emerges based on its natural qualities. It is worth noting that those who get to define those values and assign the region as the epicenter do so from a position of power, as shown in this extract, which comes from a quote made by a high-ranking government official: *the Guajira Region is the epicenter of energy transition in Colombia because the region has a world class wind regimen, expressed the Minister of Mines and Energy, Diego Mesa Puyo (source)*. In other examples the notion of expert appears within the content. *Experts coincide in the energy potential of Colombia. The Caribbean region, for example, has a high vocation to produce gas. Projects like the well of the Orca, in La Guajira, display the opportunities that the most environmentally friendly fossil fuel provides for the country.* Both the minister and the unnamed experts within these extracts are entitled to make truth claims on the objects of development

(Ziai, 2016; Moore and Schmitz, 1995). In other articles, these claims are made by representatives from the companies. Never are local Wayuu communities making truth claims that define their region. Other extracts amplify this idea by highlighting other natural aspects such as the region's solar luminosity, geographical positioning, amongst others.

Technical and economic predominance within the data is also manifested through the constant repetition of the generation capacity of these projects and the amount of money that was invested in them. 14 out of the 26 articles (53%) refer to either of these notions. When referring to generation capacity there is constantly a strong focus on growth, understood under economic terms as "growth in the sense of an increased production of goods and services to be exchanged over the market in the formal economy (Ziai, 2016, p.202)." In this sense, not only is the generation capacity of these projects mentioned, but it is constantly highlighted in terms of how much it has grown, and how much it can continue to grow. *In 2031 in the Wayuu territory of the high and mid Guajira there will be 37 parks, with more than 2200 aerogenerators producing 5500 HW for the national interconnection system. If this trend is continued and the interconnection is adapted, it could reach 16GW by 2050.*

The concept of economic growth is at the core of development discourse, it is viewed as the quintessential element of development which allows the other factors within the discourse to be achieved (Andrews, et al., 2013). In this sense, and under the logic portrayed in the articles, this growth is viewed as a positive thing, and the expansion of these projects within the region carries a positive connotation.

This growth in capacity is constantly accompanied by statements regarding the millionaire investments in the region that the projects will bring. Nuance on how these investments will be utilized or who they will benefit are largely absent. This element appears to relate to the promise that economic growth and investment will naturally lead to improved conditions for the population (Ziai, 2016).

The positive techno-economic element is also highlighted through aspects statements related to the creation of jobs. These jobs are not described in depth as to their characteristics (educational level, salaries, duration, requirements, etc.) and only in one news article there was a specific mention to the number of jobs that would be given to the local indigenous communities, the extract from this article stated that: *over 50 jobs for the locals were created for 3 indigenous communities, Lanshalia, Tarauasaru and Mushalarian.* Other technical or economic benefits less prominently expressed within the coverage



included reduced energy prices for the consumer, access to energy by the local population and a more resilient energy system.

When carrying out studies on the framing of renewable energies, Djerf-Pierre et al. (2018) also highlight the prominence of economic frames within the coverage, however, transitional energies are talked about both through their potential economic benefits and their costs and impacts, presenting a more nuanced idea than the one in the Colombia media, which focuses on the perceived positive impacts.

This positive coverage of energy transition is in line with the findings of Rochyadi-Reets et al (2019). In their study Rochyadi-Reets et al (2019) state that positive elements are portrayed by each outlet through the process of “picking aspects and linking them to particular domestic visions of a good society (p.999).” It could be argued that by doing so, the outlets within their study are making the effort to adapt transitional energies into the more local understandings of development, considering that Ziai (2016) heavily relates development to the process in which what defines a good society and what the steps to get there are established. On the other hand, Colombian coverage presents an overtly simplified and broad notion of economic benefits based mainly on job generation and foreign investment, which was contested by the local community, as will be shown in the second subsection.

The positive tone of the coverage is carried on into the theme of the environment in the context of climate change. Within this subtheme, transitional energies are highlighted through their capacity to reduce emissions when generating electricity. In some extracts an effort is made to simplify the technical terms of energy generation emissions into analogies that are more easily understood. This can be viewed as an excessive, overemphasized description that attempts over-persuasion, a practice that Machin & Myer (2012) label overlexicalization. This is exemplified in the following extract: *this means a reduction in emissions of more than 128,000 tons of CO2 per year or the planting of almost 700,000 trees*. According to Machin & Myer (2012), overlexicalization can show problematic or ideologically contested statements. The comparison made by the extract shows a problematic equivalence of nature and technology. It leans towards an understanding that the recovery of nature, exemplified by the planting of trees, can be replaced or at least equated to that of pushing forward transitional energy projects. This problematic equivalence of nature and technology can be understood as a reinforcing statement of climate change as fixable through technology while sidelining the importance of natural restoration.

This reinforces the findings of Zehner (2014) who identifies green energy coverage as overdependent on CO2 reduction and states that these energies have emerged as a spectacle that allow people to avoid their own responsibility in the decline of the environment. By portraying green energies as carbon-free, he states, they help overcome the problematic of CO2 emission and take the attention away from the aspect of growth, consumption and population which would otherwise crumble hegemonic development understandings that society can and should always grow (Ziai, 2016). In the same sense, when criticizing sustainable development, Rodriguez and Govea (2006), have stated that this logic pretends to demonstrate that under sustainable development there is a not so harmful effect on the environment, which allows consumption habits to persist and the understanding of natural resources as commodities to continue, now under an even greater backing, due to their infinite (renewable) understanding. The highlighting of the environmental element under technological terms leads to the positioning of this subtheme under the broader transitional energy as a techno-economic element theme.

#### 4.1.2 Transitional Energy as a Socio-Political Element

##### 4.1.2.1 Socio-cultural impacts

Only two articles mentions cultural or social impacts of transitional energy projects on the local indigenous community. Although these extracts are placed under the socio-cultural due to its direct mention of socio-political impacts, the economic logics are once again dominant within the overall meaning of the statement. *Another important point is that the recognition of the ethnic rights of the community are recognized. "Previous and informed consent must allow the establishment of the value of each component, including payments for the use of the land, payments for compensation of environmental damages, payment for compensation of cultural impacts considered apart, retribution for participating in society" the document reads.* The presence of development discourse as economic imperialism as defined by Fine (2009) is shown in the sense that cultural, environmental, and social participation within society become elements that enter the market, in the sense that they can be paid for, and to which a price can be assigned if previous and informed consent is given. This reinforces the notion of Gudynas (2014) who states that development discourse expands the commodification of the environment and social relations by expanding the elements and relations that can be managed through the market and placing prices and property rights on them (Gudynas, 2014). "The recognition of the ethnic rights of the community" is reduced to their "right" to be paid for the damages.

The article continues to reinforce economic imperialist logic by stating that: *Indepaz has stated that the inhabitants will not be affected because they are having an agreement made with them for 60 years so that they are compensated.* This statement shows a contradiction in the sense that it starts off by saying that inhabitants will not be affected, but then goes on to say that they need to be compensated, implying that some type of damage has been done. However, under the logic of dominant development discourse the sense of contradiction fades: if the company pays for its damages, no overall damage has been done, and therefore inhabitants can be considered as not being affected. This logic only makes sense under a structure in which economic gains are positioned above all else, and under an assumption that people are always thinking of increasing their monetary gains (Bennet, 2012), which is true under development discourse (Ziai, 2016).

Carrying on with the overall positive coverage of transitional energies, media articles also make unspecified mentions of the benefit towards social development. However, exactly what social development is and what it entails is not defined nor mentioned. *Gas, both natural and LPG, has generated a revolution in the consumption of energies and has impuled investment and social development.*

The World Bank (2011) has indicated that wind turbines do not exist in a social vacuum, and that they cannot be separated from the social and cultural surroundings in which they are to function. Coverage of transitional energies within Colombian news media tends to reinforce the notion that they are, due to the lack of in-depth coverage and the connotations provided into socio-cultural aspects.

#### 4.1.2.2 Actors

##### 4.1.2.2.1 The local community

The portrayal of indigenous communities presents a strict dichotomy. On one hand, communities are portrayed as supporting projects and understanding their importance. On the other, they are stated to be an obstacle to the projects. This mention as an obstacle is sometimes not made directly, the criticism is mostly made towards the legal process which dictates that indigenous communities must be sufficiently informed of any project carried out in their land and consulted about their desire and acceptance of it before any actions can be taken within their territories. An example of this is found in the following extract: *Obviously, we must bear in mind that this date will depend on whether they manage to do all the consultations on time and have the environmental license, which is the bottleneck.* Other articles follow the same logic stating: *The growth of energy can be achieved in La Guajira if it is possible to build an environment where making investments is feasible, and that is what*

*we are trying to build together. We must talk to 225 communities. We are doing well with 199, there are some with whom we have had bad luck, others who may have advisers who are not the most constructive, but we are committed to dialogue with everyone and to seek that La Guajira be part of a future that it deserves.*

Both extracts exemplify how “consultations,” meaning the dialogue process with the communities over the projects, are the obstacle to overcome to manage the implementation of the projects. In one, this process is described as the “bottleneck”, and in the other, it is that which is standing in the way of making investments in the region feasible and impeding the growth of energy in La Guajira. The opposition from the communities is reduced to a matter of “bad luck” and lack of a constructive approach from the advisors. Throughout the sample there is no mention of valid claims against the projects nor any ideas on what the opposition is about, its fundamentals, reasonings or considerations.

This reinforces notions which are found within the investigation of Walker et al. (2019) in which they state that when resource extraction is within the picture of the news coverage, indigenous communities are often shown as being an obstacle for the economic benefits that they are said to bring. At the same time, the authors of the news article ignore the historical, spiritual, and cultural context and relation of the population to their lands (Walker et al., 2019).

The other side of this dichotomy is presented when communities are shown as supporting projects, to do so, the articles sometimes recur to an oversimplified logic such as the one that is stated in the following extract: *The first wind farm in 17 years in the history of Colombia is delivered; it is also done with the unconditional support of the (indigenous) communities, with their support.* The claim of unconditional support from the indigenous communities proves to be, at least, an oversimplification of the local understandings, as will be evidenced in the following results section. Another article refers to the support of most of the communities stating the following: *there are some (communities), most of them very good, with which fantastic agreements have been achieved.*

It is worth noting how those communities with which agreements are achieved are categorized as “good,” implying that any community that does not agree to the project can be understood as a “bad” community. In doing so, they establish what Machin and Myer (2012) label a structural opposition, which assigns a positive set of related values to a group that is mentioned and another to those who are stated as their opposites. Under this logic, not agreeing with the projects associates you

with a set of related concepts around what being “bad” is, which in the context of development discourse can relate to “backward” or “primitive” (Tashi, 2011), amongst others.

#### 4.1.2.2.2 Elite Actors

For this investigation, elite actors relate to the definition of experts, who Ziai (2016) defines as those that from a position of power have greater influence over the establishment of truth claims within the discourse. When referring to elite actors within coverage of renewable energies, Djerf-Pierre et al. (2015) refer to industry representatives or organizations, politicians, government agencies and experts as some of the examples that make up this category. Within this investigation, the main identified elite actors that are talked about are the government, the companies and foreign “developed” countries. Within this subsection the companies and the government are discussed more in depth, considering that the portrayal of these two actors incited the strongest response from the interviewees.

##### *The government*

When referring to the government, the focus is placed on its role as opening the way for the development projects to be implemented and for the investments to arrive. In this way, the government is positioned as an actor that needs to side with the interests of the companies in overcoming obstacles. This is in line with the role that government plays within understandings of development discourse in neoliberal economies, which Moore and Schmitz (1995) describe as a change from pre-neoliberal logics in which the government is no longer the one that brings development, but still participates in the process by opening the way to market freedom. The following extracts exemplify this logic: *for this reason, it is necessary that the state take the necessary measures of companionship to speed up these billionaire investments*. Other articles, on the same topic state: *at the same time, the GEB, who has until now carried out 125 protocolizations of previous consult, out of a total of 212, believes that if the minister of interior commits itself to solve the unrest within the territory, all agreements could be reached towards July 2022 and the EIA could be delivered to Colectora Cuestecitas in August*.

##### *The Companies*

Within the coverage, companies are one of the actors that are mentioned the most. Many of the articles revolve around the opening, implementation or planning of a specific project, within that coverage, the company is usually highlighted. Often, the cited sources are representatives from those

companies. Implicitly, this appears to position companies as the main actor within energy transition, other articles take a more direct approach: *The oil, mining and gas companies are going to be the protagonists of the country's energy transition, since they are the ones that can propose, innovate and generate alternatives, as well as materialize the projects aimed at this objective, so they must see themselves as leaders of this transformation.*"

The notion of leaders of the transformation establishes a hierarchy in which the companies are assigned a position above the other actors. This position is assigned to them by arguing that they hold the tools necessary to make the projects a reality. It could be argued that the communities as owners of the land and inhabitants of the territories in which these projects are being planned have a claim to leadership within this process, however, this perspective is not positioned as part of the coverage.

This positioning of the companies reinforces notions put forward by Bravo & Sepiarsky (2021) who state that sustainable development discourse and transitional energy projects carry on notions of traditional development discourse in the sense that elite actors such as global corporations and dominant countries have the knowledge, technology and financial capacity to make the projects happen, while the local territory in which the projects are implemented are understood as positive lands for investment. This logic establishes the dependence of the local on the powerful external actors to achieve development (Bravo and Sepiarsky, 2021).

Companies are also portrayed in a positive light through their commitment to the environment, as exemplified by this extract: *In addition, "it becomes a great step for the company Air-e in its commitment to the environment, mitigation of climate change and its contribution to the energy transition with cleaner energy sources in the country."* The person stating this quote is a representative of Air-E.

This representation of companies as actors with positive interests who act in benefit of the planet can be viewed as a tool that enhances an understanding within development discourse in which those who promote development are understood to be working from a position of purity and reasoning that escapes being put into doubt (Ziai, 2016). As will be evident in the second results section, this position of reasoning and purity is challenged by the Wayuu interviewees.

As a closing element for the treatment of actors it is worth stating how they are all positively portrayed only when they act and are represented in ways that allow for the projects of development to be implemented. The government as opening the way for the projects, the companies as the leaders of

change and the communities as supporting the projects are all positioned under positive notions. On the other hand, the only “bad” actor within the coverage are the communities that oppose the projects, as is argued previously following logics of structural opposition.

The study of actors within this investigation also reinforces the findings of Djerf-Pierre et al. (2015) who state that when an opinion amongst elite is consensual, news media will convey the consensus of the elite while also focusing on elite actors within their coverage and exclude citizen voices. The consensus of the positivity of transitional energy implementation in amongst elite actors within the Colombian news coverage is evidenced through the aligned statements made by foreign countries, company representatives, government officials and state agencies, who all support in one way or another the implementation of these projects.

#### 4.2 Wayuu Experience of Transitional Energy Coverage in the context of Development Discourse

Analyzing the perspectives of the Wayuu interviewees provides a significantly different panorama than that portrayed within the news media coverage of transitional energies. The social vacuum which is mentioned before as a defining element of media coverage is replaced by an abundance of cultural, spiritual, contextual and, also, economic elements that provide the basis for their experience with coverage of transitional energies.

Most views challenge notions on economic imperialism, in the sense that spiritual or social elements overshadow the economic matters within their understandings, which in turn challenges the widely uncontested positivity found within the media coverage. Other statements do reinforce hegemonic notions of economic imperialism; however, these are challenged by all interviewees at some point during their interviews. For example, even when talking about energy transition under economic terms, interviewees state that the economic benefit will be for others, but not for them. In that sense, they highlight that what is left for them is mostly a set of impacts on their territory. These impacts include spiritual, environmental, cultural and social elements, amongst others.

The Wayuu interviewees also challenge the portrayal and roles of the different actors, both within the logic of the coverage and the broader structure of development discourse. On the one hand, they revindicate their role within the construction of their desired future, and on the other, they provide skeptical and confrontational statements towards the way elite actors are understood.

Overall, the experience of the Wayuu interviewees to the coverage is understood either under negotiated or oppositional codes. In part, this result can be explained by relating the local views under a logic of a post-development discourse, which radically challenges the basis of traditional development discourse.

#### 4.2.1 Hegemonic Code:

Hegemonic notions of development discourse permeate the text of the interviews, especially through the way in which they refer to the economic aspect. The main identified subtheme, economic predominance, positions the economic aspect as the key for solving many multidimensional problems. The extracts identify the economic investment by the companies as a positive opportunity that the communities need. The logics of development discourse within these statements are reinforced and not contested.

Take this extract for example: *at this moment there is a great opportunity to be able to generate development, as I was telling you a while ago, the issue is that if these resources are not really used to generate a response to your multiple needs or deficiencies, then it means that you were not prepared to face this project.*

This extract identifies the economic resources produced by energy transition projects as the solution to the multiple needs or deficiencies of the region. It also presents an element in which the interviewee states that those who do not manage to respond to the needs with the resources are at fault because they were not prepared. When referring to authoritarian notions of development discourse, Ziai (2016), by citing Frank (1997, p. 263) writes that within the logics of this discourse “what is done to people by those more powerful than themselves is their fate, their potential, their fault.” With his statement, this interviewee appears to reinforce this authoritarian notion while discarding the power differentials that influence who can benefit off these projects (Ziai, 2016).

When asked to expand on what deficiencies the projects could solve, the interviewee complemented the answer with the following extracts: *I suddenly see it as a great opportunity to precisely meet the obligation that the Colombian State has, to guarantee us a minimum in terms of housing and basic sanitation, which is why I consider this to be the great opportunity that the Wayuu people have in order to improve their quality of life, because there are going to be considerable resources that can be invested in this type of need. I see it as a great opportunity, that is why I say that the project is good.*



This extract shows how monetary gain is positioned as the tool for solving the lack of state presence and improving basic sanitary needs. However, this economic understanding is once again an example of the de-politicizing nature of development discourse, which ends up transforming social problems into technical problems that can be fixed through projects, taking out the structural and political notions of those problematics, and therefore exonerating elites from any responsibility (Ziai, 2016). In this example, no demand is made to the Colombian state to comply with its duty, it is viewed as something that can be replaced by receiving resources. The de-politicizing nature of this statement proves to be especially true in Colombia where, for example, guaranteeing decent living conditions is understood as a right under article 51 of the Political Constitution of Colombia (1991).

Extracts within this same line of thinking are expressed by other interviewees. Aspects such as water access, education, health services, amongst others are referred to as aspects that can be achieved through economic means thanks to the money that the energy transition projects will bring.

With the findings from this section this investigation does not intend to undermine the validity of their claims, establishing whether economic means can provide access to their desired improvements is beyond the scope of this investigation. Also, this investigation does not wish to undermine the efforts and solutions that local communities scramble for amid very complex living conditions. However, this segment does draw attention to the characteristic within development discourse understandings which through depoliticizing notions tend to liberate elite actors of any responsibility in establishing the complex condition in the first place and provide an excuse to shy away from participating in their solution (Ziai, 2016).

#### 4.2.2 Negotiated Code:

Within the negotiated understanding of the coverage and development discourse there are 3 main subthemes that arise. The first, and most prominent subtheme is “transitional energies as beneficial for others but not them.” Under this theme there is an acceptance of development as something positive and desired for a group of people, however, the criticism arises when the projects of development, in this case transitional energy projects, are seen as not leaving any of those benefits for the local population. When referring to what is left for the local population, answers usually go beyond the sense of economic imperialism and the elements refer to cultural, environmental and social problems.

Take for example, the following extract: *what these articles speak of is greater investment. But for whom? They are not talking about how they are going to have resources to invest in the people, the*

*Wayuu people themselves, no, here a response is being given precisely to a need of the Government or the country, which is that they have to suffice the energy deficit that the country has. And how are we going to do it? Implementing the projects on the Wayuu people. And what are we going to give the people? Problems. What those problems are will be discussed later as part of another subtheme.*

This extract gains importance when it is considered that the same interviewee making this statement was one of the main providers of hegemonic statements which positioned the money provided by the projects as a solution to the multiple needs of the people. This appears to show a disconnection between the perceptions of what transitional energy projects could potentially signify for them and how they are currently being implemented and talked about in the media. These feelings are backed by other interviewees, one of them who states that: *we can say that although wind energy or energy with solar panels could change the life of the Wayuu for the better, to achieve what we want, what we yearn for so much that could be the good life for us, the reality is very far from what we really envision what we really want or what we really expect them to do for us.*

The logic then shifts from the identification of an opportunity to a criticism based on a perceived reality of what is happening on the ground. These types of statements are also found under conditional terms which state that if transitional energies worked differently then they could maybe represent something positive for the region, this was identified as another subtheme. The focus of the coverage on elite actors and macro understandings of multimillion investments are also a motive for criticism. The interviewees express discomfort at the lack of mention of local conditions, changes, proposals and considerations.

On the other hand, in the first extract the interviewee highlights the millionaire investments as a necessity of the government and the country that will leave only problems for the local people. This focus is recognized explicitly within the media by other interviewees: *and within those articles we can see, for example, in the news, the other two articles, I focus more on how they view their projects, how they look at all that development that they generate for them, because it is for their pocket, and for us it generates a cultural, social, environmental and spiritual rupture.*

Once again there is a differentiation between the elite actors and the locals. It is worth noting that while the benefits are understood under purely economic terms, “money for their pockets”, the problematics are multidimensional. This incongruence will be a constant characteristic throughout their experience of the coverage.

Another subtheme is transitional energies as something to adapt to. This theme provides a sense of inevitability to energy transition projects. Notions such as “the price to pay” for the projects arise, however, those prices to pay are stated as something that can be overcome. Another logic within these statements is that due to the inevitability of the projects, they must seek to take as much as they can from them. This is bluntly expressed by an interviewee who relates transitional energy projects to cancer. Within the logic, economic terms once again appear as dominant, however, this is expressed as the only alternative that is given to them, and not something that they autonomously desire.

*I have always touched on an example, which is cancer. As a person, they call you, listen, there are a thousand billion pesos here, but you must allow yourself to be injected with this cancer, you have two options, live 5 days, 1 year, or 10 years, but you are going to have 10 billion pesos to leave this to his children, to his wife, you ask what options I have... none. He must let himself be injected with cancer and that is what is happening with the projects, here we have no alternative to choose the cancer, they are already putting it in, but with the difference that he now has his cancer, but he will still die poor, because here there is no chance of anything. It would be different if they gave you alternatives to choose from, but if you don't have alternatives, your alternative is to receive the cancer anyway, but you will receive 10 thousand billion pesos that will be given to your generation for thousands and thousands of years. Finally, I must die, as a traditional authority I am 60 years old, it is not much that I have left, then okay, let's receive what they are giving us to be invested within the territories.*

This statement indicates an acknowledgement of power structures and a submission, to an extent, to the wide gap between the local communities and the powerful actors pushing the projects. Within this submission the monetary element is the only thing that these projects can offer as compensation for the harm caused, forcing the communities to move within the specter of economic imperialism (Fine, 2009).

As will be shown in the following subsection, this power differential is widely challenged by interviewees who revindicate a stronger participation, fight against impositions, express the importance of their independence and criticize the role of the media as aiding the expansionist intentions of the projects.

#### 4.2.3 Oppositional:

The oppositional elements are the most diverse and prominent elements within the statements put forward by the Wayuu people. Within their oppositions, there are elements that challenge the

fundamental aspects of development discourse. The economic aspect is displaced, the role of the actors within discourse is challenged, and the negative effects are highlighted.

#### 4.2.3.1 Challenging Positivity

One main logic under which some of the interviewees challenge energy transition is by understanding it as revictimization. While Colombian media tends to neglect the historical and cultural context within which transitional energy projects are being implemented, reinforcing other studies on the matter (Walker et al., 2019), the interviewees speak broadly about this context and the implications for their culture. In this sense, energy transition is understood as a continuation of the logic, impacts and ways of acting that have accompanied development projects implemented within their lands in the past.

*I think we are getting worse every day. Why? Because in the first place we are running out of territory, a fight that we have waged for years with the Cerrejón company over the issue of coal mining, the issue of the dam, the issue of palm crops, and then now this again, you are bringing this in.*

By positioning transitional energy as something that is more of the same, they challenge the notion of a transition in the sense of change, and establish energy transition as an expansion of a certain type of projects that they have deemed as unwanted. In this sense, the notion of growth as something desired is challenged. Within the understandings of this interviewee, the expansion and growth of these projects is something that needs to be rejected.

Other interviewees express similar ideas while focusing on different aspects of the affectations of the projects: *I reiterate that for us these projects such as Cerrejón or what Chevron was at the time, as many projects are doing right now, it is our extermination, because our territories are no longer sacred, it is now an open market, open to whoever, in fact you enter here and you see hundreds of high-end vehicles trafficking in our ancestral territories, animals are carried away, and anyone who tries to stand up to it is repressed.*

While development discourse pushes for the commodification of elements (Bravo & Sepiarsky, 2021; Gudynas, 2014), here the interview negatively reflects of the role that turning the region into an open market has had on his territory. As evidenced in the first result subsection, the Colombian media coverage reinforces the notion of La Guajira as an open market full of natural resources to be exploited, and while within the coverage that is seen as an opportunity and carries positive a connotation, the

interviewee challenges this understanding by positioning the sacredness of his territory above its condition as a marketplace.

This is in line with the premises of post-development understandings of the good life. Within this alternative discourse to development, spiritual aspects are revendedicated as an indispensable element within the establishment of a desired future (Gudynas, 2014). By revindicating spirituality, Wayuu interviewees challenge dominant development ideals of productivity and efficiency that state that cultural non-productive elements must be discarded in the face of growth and market forces (Santos, 2004).

As part of the next theme, which focuses on the negative effects of transitional energies, the interviewees continue to challenge the valuation scale of development discourse that positions the economic above the rest. When criticizing the medias focus on large investments, an interviewee stated the following: *because for us the main thing is the spiritual and if we are going to talk about those supposed developments, what is the use of talking about so many millions of pesos if they are ending us spiritually, culturally, what is the use?*

Besides the spiritual and the cultural, they state that the implementation of the projects has brought conflict amongst families in ways they had not seen before. They argue that the implementation of the projects has incentivized families to fight amongst themselves to see who gets the economic benefit out of the project. This proves to be a an example of how the notion of economic gain as resulting in beneficial opportunities is an oversimplified statement that does not account for the problems that can be caused by unmanaged economic growth (Herath, 2009).

A statement that exemplifies the complex, interwoven understandings of the world that shape the reasoning behind the experience of the coverage for the Wayuu interviewees, refers to these social tensions by stating that: *it is sad because here we are affecting mother earth, it is like saying I have my mother and I am fighting with my brother here only for the house that she has and that every day is affecting the feeling of that mother. It's the same with our Mother Earth.* Under the same logic, other interviewees express how the construction of the projects near the cemeteries causes the spirits to act against their communities. These statements reflect the understanding that types of impacts cannot be isolated from one another, and how an impact in one aspect ends up affecting other elements in life and therefore constituting multidimensional affectations that, they argue, are not considered by those who come from outside their territories.

Zehner (2014) states that mentions of the impacts of transitional energies are not present within the media because they do not fit the romanticized ideals of these energies and are therefore discarded. Within the interviewee responses we see the opposite, romanticized portrayals of purely beneficial energy transition coverage do not fit in the mind of the interviewees who claim to experience a completely different reality with these projects. And although the benefits are not entirely discarded or unrecognized, the conditions under which the projects are being implemented and their impacts on essential elements that the Wayuu highly value make them a conflicting element within their territories.

#### 4.2.3.2 Challenging Actors:

##### 4.2.3.2.1 Challenging Local Role:

The interviews share a strong sense of revindication for the participation of the local community as an indispensable element of a positive implementation of the projects. *So what does one think with these projects? Even if they paint them very nicely, even if they talk about there being opportunities, there won't be opportunities, those opportunities won't exist because what opportunity will they see if, to begin with, there isn't even a name of a conglomerate of Wayuu indigenous group that will be a partner or that they will guarantee, education, health and all that?* The coverage is then experienced through a sense of skepticism due to the lack of local participation and involvement both in the media text but also in the elaboration of the projects.

In a similar sense, the interviewees oppose the overemphasis on elite actors and the lack of mention about them: *and something that seemed also striking to me is the issue of how each of the investors is listed or named and the question is, and where are the owners of the territory? Could it be that they are going to be partners in these wind energy megaprojects? Nowhere did I see that.*

Within this opposition, they make the claim of being partners and participating within the projects. When establishing that wind energy projects can be beneficial to indigenous peoples. Smith & Scott (2018) claim that indigenous participation and ownership of energy transition projects are key in order to achieve the claimed social benefits. It also reinforces the idea that transitional energy projects have the potential to be beneficial for indigenous communities if the ways in which they are implemented are changed.

##### 4.2.3.2.2 Challenging Elite Actor Role:

When referring to elite actors, interviewees also expressed their reactions in oppositional terms. One of the subthemes for these oppositional elements was that of experts being disconnected from

local perspectives. Not only did locals revindicate the local knowledge, the constantly challenged the notion of experts due to their lack of understanding of what goes on within their territory.

One interviewee labeled both the media and the people carrying out the projects as doing their jobs “from a desk in Bogota”, an analogy that summarizes their view of the disconnection. The media is also understood as being working for those that “work only from their desk”: *it's even disgraceful, it's like the media only say what the desk people say or formulate, but why don't they go to the territories and see what's happening. To be able to say that in La Guajira they are generating I don't know how many jobs, that the Guajira is going to position itself through wind energy. In other words, before talking about La Guajira, why don't they go and ask? Is it true that La Guajira is being favored by the parks that are being built? Is it true that the Wayuu agree with those that are being built?* In line with this understanding, another interviewee describes this disconnection by stating: *those are the articles that they put out and they don't really know what is happening within the territory.*

While development discourse has historically highlighted the role of experts, who are viewed as having the knowledge necessary to implement development (Ziai, 2016), here the Wayuu question this logic and invite those experts to make the effort and go into their territories in order to really understand what is going on.

By challenging expert knowledge and revindicating their own knowledges and capacity to intervene within the process is in accordance with post-development discourse of the good life, which positions local knowledges at the same level as the academic. In doing so, they are capsizing the criteria under which development discourse ranks different actors as unequally placed to create valid statements within the struggle for meaning around a discourse (Ziai, 2016).

Interviewees also challenge the portrayal of the companies and the government as part of their experience of the coverage. As seen before, both actors are seen as a positive force within the pushing of development, the bettering of society and environmental protection within the Colombian news coverage. The interpretation of the interviewees towards them is different.

*Well, the companies, the great Superman or the great saviors within the communities to end the needs of the communities by generating jobs, practically La Guajira in the articles is going to be the best. And then, these companies that they call the great Supermans, and in reality, that is when the disease arrived. Within the territory, we say, the disease arrived, because that is what they are, a disease for our territories. And it is not a disease that brings you a single consequence, but rather several. It is a disease*

*that is slowly killing you. These are the companies that arrive in the territory, these companies are shown as great, as great alternatives or great development for our department. But it is not like that, for us it is not development, for us it is destruction, for us it is, I go back and say, a disease that arrives, one more disease that reaches our mother earth.*

The negative understanding, revolving around an emotion of disgrace, is complemented when talking about the role of the government within this ordeal. The role of the government as a facilitator of the investments, which is present within the media is accepted by some of the interviewees, however, it is not taken in with a positive tone, on the contrary, the fact that the government is sided with the companies generates feelings of unjust treatment towards them, even stating that it is the government who pushes for the undermining of Wayuu interests within the region. An interviewee stated it like this: *The government and all the entities in charge of guaranteeing that the rights in the territories are not violated, they will always support the one who comes to invest because it will favor them, they will never be on the side of the one who owns the territory.*

The criticism is then made to the government due to their focus on financial matters and the understanding of the government as corrupt, another characteristic that is popular within the interviews. In this sense, not only is the government viewed as unjust for siding with the companies, but the reasoning behind that attitude is also interpreted as being born from a position of corruption and material interest, with no regard for the conditions of the local population, an interviewee did not shy away from labeling the government “stupid” due to their lack of analytical capabilities which could not go beyond material interest.

As a closing statement towards oppositional elements, it is worth noting that through one element or another, all the interviewees interpreted the coverage as being against their interest. Even those who recognized the positive aspects of energy transition criticize the coverage due to the lack of local understandings and the emphasis on elite actors and understandings. The oppositional stance towards the coverage also stems from a rejection of the valuation of the economic above all else, within the world views of the Wayuu, spiritual, social, and environmental aspects overshadow the importance of the economic. This is made even worse when the economic benefit is perceived as unreachable, due to the benefit being directed towards others but not them.

They challenge the media coverage as being written from a position of privilege with complete disregard for the local conditions. In doing so, they revendicate the importance of local perspectives and



express their desire for participation and recognition within the projects, demanding that their expertise and knowledge be recognized within the structuring of their desired futures. In many ways, as will be discussed in the conclusion, these understandings challenge the fundamental logics of development discourse and position new forms of understanding the world as the pillar for defining what a good society looks like and how it can be achieved (Ziai, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion

Through this investigation media articles were analyzed in order to establish how development discourse manifests within the coverage. By building off previous studies and contextualizing them within the logics of development discourse, this investigation shows that many of the rules and characteristics that shape traditional discourse are present within the media coverage, even though now presented under a sustainable variation that highlights environmental aspects. The coverage of transitional energies by Colombian news media reinforces the hierarchical positioning of elite actors who are positioned as those in control of defining how the energy transition process will be carried out. On the other hand, local communities are labeled according to their positioning towards these projects and shown as those who either accept or oppose the projects, without any mention of them having the capacity or intention to intervene, define or shape what the energy transition will look like and how it must be implemented within their territories.

Development discourse within the coverage manages to reduce environmental, cultural and societal issues to techno-economic terms, reinforcing notion of economic imperialism which define development discourse. Through this simplified logic, the projects are understood as universally positive, and the elements standing in its way as viewed as obstacles that must be overcome in order to pave the way for the perceived benefits that will reach the region.

On the other hand, when looking at how the Wayuu interviewees perceive the implementation of transitional energies on their land, the perspectives shift from a dominance of positivity to a heavily challenged sense of skepticism. The overall sensation varies depending on each interviewee, but all of them have important considerations against these projects. Some oppose the projects entirely, and view the path into a desired future through the removal of multinational presence in the region. Others recognize the potential benefits of these projects which could aid the profound unmet needs of the Wayuu. But in the end they frame with which they interpret the projects is the same, and

incompatible with development discourse. The economic way of meaning making does not make sense on its own. The economic is immersed in considerations of the spiritual, the social, the cultural, the environmental and the transformation of the understanding of the role of the different actors involved. Overall, the current implementation of the projects satisfies no one, and the only way that the projects will reach the positivity that they are supposed to have is through the transformation of the way they are carried out by taking into account the local values and ranking systems for the different elements impacted by the projects.

As a summarizing note, interviewees mainly interpret the projects as an opportunity that has not been fulfilled due to the ways in which the actors are carrying out the process, and the disrespect that has been assigned to their local understandings, which are not taken into account when executing the process, resulting in impacts to their spirituality, their culture, the environment, their health and other aspects. And although some believe that it is possible for that to change and for transitional energy to be an opportunity for the region, others are most pessimistic and understand that as a *modus operandi* of these projects which will not change, leading them to position themselves under a purely oppositional code.

The main research question can now be answered. The experience of the coverage of transitional energy by the Wayuu proves to be one of almost entire disconnection. Even for those that revindicate positive notions within the overall idea of energy transition in la guajira, the coverage proves to be too disconnected from reality. The role of the media is understood to be as one that is made to guide the recognition of energy transition in a positive way for the benefit of elite actors while neglecting the conditions from within the territory. The distancing with which the professionals communicate and the set of values they pregonate, which this investigation arguments are based on understandings of development discourse, proves to be too much to allow an positive understanding by the Wayuu. There fore,even though the understandings of transitional energies can reach the level of negotiation, when looking at the coverage, understandings are purely oppositional. This leads to feelings of indignity and frustration by the readers, who recognize the focus on the elite and con onlyu dare to dream what it would look like if it were different. However, rather than aiding the process into a trasntional energy process that could be mor ebeneficial for them, the media, and the different actors who communicate within it, is seen as playing a role in undermining the Wayuu and reinforcing the status quo. The status quo not only of the actors but of the ways of understanding the world.

## 5.1 Implications:

From the theoretical perspective, this investigation proposes to critically analyze the coverage of transitional energies as guided by the structure of development discourse. In this sense, while many investigations identify patterns within the coverage of renewable, transitional or green energies, they do not actively take into account a constructionist approach that seeks to identify the discourses that shape that understanding of transitional energy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This investigation establishes a strong correlation between the traditional logics of development discourse and the coverage of transitional energies in Colombia, in turn making the argument for the continuity of some of the most criticized elements of this discourse into its sustainable variant. By establishing discourses as the starting point for thematic analysis around transitional energy it is possible to analyze what the common strategic pattern is within the data and what interests it entails (Hall, 2013). Understanding the coverage under the logics of discourse also sheds light on the need to examine the exclusionary logics of dominant discourses and the need to study those alternative understandings. In order to gain further holistic understandings of the subject that is being discussed, in this case transitional energies. This study reinforces findings of previous studies regarding the way in which transitional energy is covered around the world. This highlights a dominant worldwide tendency that backs the idea of a dominant discourse guiding the coverage.

- “total conception” of ideology, I intend to consider not just one energy technology, or even the field of energy, but an entire network of belief. This conception presses us to think beyond simple considerations of just scientific data, or just economics, or just new energy technologies, or just environmental constraints or just any single part of the broader systems of energy production and use (Hughes, 1987). Rather, we may consider the relationships, communications, and shared beliefs between the various actors. Zehner 2014

From another perspective, this investigation follows the indications for further research that Lyytimäki, et al. (2018), Girst (2008) and Guerra (2021) state in the sense of highlighting context, local understandings, world views and local ontological complexities of the inhabitants within the study. This provided an element that allows transitional energies to go beyond macro understandings which relate it to global challenges such as climate change and focus on the local implications of those most affected by the projects. In doing so, the complexity of the implementation of these projects comes to light as they are immersed in spiritual, social, cultural, amongst other elements that nuance their understandings. In this sense, both academia and media professionals can benefit from this line of work in the sense that their work can become less exclusionary and elite oriented, in turn aiding the implementation of a just energy transition process in the world.

On the other hand, this investigation reinforces notions that discourses should not be understood as excluded and dominant, and rather as an interwoven complexity that is forever in a struggle of meaning Hall 2013. This once again aides the understanding of the diversity within studied populations and reinforces the understanding of Latin American communities as hybrid entities that have been permeated by various discourses and should not be interpreted neither as separated from the world nor totally traditional communities. In the same sense, this understanding strengthens the notion that even opposing discourses such as the good life are permeated by dominant discourses and should be studied through this interwoven complexity (gudynas, 2014).

#### Limitations:

An important limitation within this study proved to be the studying of a culture in which different elements such as spirituality and the environment, social relations and spirituality, social relations and the environment and so on are seen as a strongly knitted intertwined web by the Wayuu community that is connected in ways that are not properly understood by western views of the world, especially modernity (Gudynas, 2014). The challenge was applying a western method of analysis such as thematic analysis that seeks to separate elements into categories that are portrayed apart from each other and in which overlap is seen as a negative aspect.

On the other hand, another limitation for this study was the complex security and trust issues that are dictating the implementation of transitional energies in La Guajira. This allowed interviews only to be obtained through mutual contacts of people who were all in some way opposing the implementation of these projects. It was difficult to find other points of view because people would not speak freely about this topic and had to truly establish relations of trust in order to be able to communicate. This might have led to the establishment of a study that reinforces oppositional views, which is definitely a limitation, but does not undermine the validity of the study considering that qualitative studies are not meant to be representative of the views of an entire population. In that same note, the language barrier also proved to be a limiting aspect of the sample.

As a last limiting aspect it is worth mentioning that the investigator does not belong to the wayuu people and therefore could only understand their world view as far as the interviewees allowed it. And while the interviews shared many interesting insights and in-depth interviews allowed for deep understandings, there is still a distance that does not allow the complete understanding of the experience of the media from the position as an outsider of their community.

Limited understanding of development.

#### Indications for Future research:

Future research could benefit from continuing the line of study that this study proposes but from different perspectives. For example, the consensus of elites could be further studied by carrying out comparative studies on company, government and news media communication outlets to see the different relationships between them and if they reinforce a unified message that could point to an hegemonic understanding and strengthen the case for consensual elite that is pushing its benefits.

In this same line quantitative studies could further investigate the relationship between the elite media ownership of Colombian news media and the effect of the content in the context of transitional energies. Considering the implications that media concentration and elite ownership can have on the media this could help prove to be another element through which the specific frames found within the coverage can be explained. Quantitative could be more beneficial due to its representative capabilities and the possibility of comparing those media owned by people with interests in transitional energies and those not.

On the other hand, through the grassroots approach proposed by this study. Future research could study in depth how indigenous media challenge the dominant discourse through their own media channels. This could provide insight on themes and more precise ways in which the Wayuu, or any other indigenous community in the context of transitional energies is communicating their approaches to

transitional energy. Studies in this field could help enrich indigenous initiatives and reduce power differentials between the different media outlets.

#### Societal Implications:

As mentioned in this investigation, hegemonic discourses are exclusionary and position alternative discourses in a position of disadvantage in which, to many, these views do not make sense and are not valid. Sustainable discourse has an even stronger case towards its exclusionary value because due to its environmental element it is perceived as something that nobody could oppose. It is viewed as a positive change that needs to happen for the good of the planet. This has made it so that those who oppose it are viewed under the wrong eyes. In practice, what this does in society is marginalize voices of opposition. This investigation has shed a light on the reasoning, understandings and world views of the Wayuu which can help different understandings to come together and understand the validity of that opposition. In doing so, this investigation might help society avoid stigmatizing actions and oppressive action towards those that oppose what might appear unopposable. By positioning this investigation within the local it revalidates the recognition of difference, the understanding of it and the establishment of dialogue understanding those differences. This investigation prompts society to lift common sense veils over things and look at them critically, in order to understand their full complexity and question who those understandings of common sense favor and how minorities or people from a power position of disadvantage are affected by the beliefs of something as common sense or unopposable.

Finally, this investigation is also an invitation for professionals within the media field to consider these complexities when carrying out their labor. The recognition of the criticism made by the Wayu must be taken seriously, but so must their invitation to go into their territories and establish connections that allows these hidden narratives to complement their coverage and be fairer in their interpretations of transitional energies.

Challenge western hegemony: There is (still) a “Western hegemony” in the production of knowledge despite the fact that most of the research is focused on analysing development challenges in the so-called “developing” countries.

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