

Modernities and decolonialities in *Buen Vivir*: *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña* as liminal gnosis against the colonialities in Bolivia and Ecuador

Panel: Resistance Movements and Decolonial Strategies in Latin America (WI33)

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Abstract

Buen Vivir is the Spanish translation to an Andean indigenous idea (*Sumak Kawsay* in Kichwa, *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara) that was transformed into an element to reshape the State and the Development in Bolivia and Ecuador in the 2000s during the administrations of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. The research in this paper aims to present how this idea was used as an alternative to Development (or an alternative Development model) since the adoption of plurinational constitutions in both countries. Theoretically, the comprehensive effort is made through decolonial lenses, especially with the nested concepts of modernity-coloniality-decoloniality. Particularly, there is an interest to shed light on the differences between the indigenous cosmologies and the Morales and Correa political ideologies. These differences reflect distinct political agendas and can be identified during the 2010s when observed the behavior of indigenous social movements as opposed or aligned to these administrations. Besides the use of official documents and the specific literature in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, semi-structured interviews were conducted in both countries. I hope that this study may help to understand how different ontologies interact from a pluriversal logic, generating dialogues and contradictions as certain groups seek to voice their anti-colonial political agendas.

Keywords: Development; Postcolonialism; Sustainable Development; Ecuador; Latin America; Bolivia; Developing Countries.

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Introduction

The decolonial triad modernity-coloniality-decoloniality is a very interesting form to achieve an understanding regarding movements in Latin American countries, from the perception of the problems caused by colonial processes of domination to very different forms of resistance against these issues. In the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, the interesting case of the use of the concept of *Vivir Bien* and *Buen Vivir*¹ as translations of indigenous ideas such as *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña* allow us to understand how these countries look for alternatives for the improvement of life going beyond the most traditional, western-style debates between capitalism and socialism. Both Evo Morales

¹ Living Well or Good Living, in a free translation to English.

(2006-2019) and Rafael Correa (2007-2017) had administrations that put evidence in these words as a way to promote something new, different, plurinational, connected from their indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, the relations between indigenous social movements and these presidents show that this use happened surrounded by controversies, especially in cases like the TIPNIS in Bolivia and the Yasuní-ITT in Ecuador.

The question that leads this research is: What are the possibilities and limitations of the concept of *Buen Vivir* as an alternative based on indigenous cosmologies for the decolonization of development policies in Bolivia and Ecuador? The main argument is that *Buen Vivir* was used as a strategy outside the discourse of modernity to deal with the issue of the peripheral insertion in the capitalist system in these countries. However, epistemicides are fundamental to the maintenance of the myth of modernity. Therefore, there is a contradiction between using a non-modern element to save modernity. This attempt will lead us to an ontological impossibility, provoking conflicts between indigenous and developmental perspectives that manage to advance politically in the translation of these concepts into a modern grammar of redistributive policies.

The decolonial triad is an analytical point of departure. Modernity as the myth that sustains western colonial ideology and legitimizes its practices, coloniality as the hidden side of this myth, composed of physical and epistemic violence through multiple forms of control and domination, and decoloniality as the reaction of resistance of individuals and groups that were and continue being oppressed by colonialities (Mignolo, 2010; Quijano, 2005). But the quilombola leader Antônio Bispo dos Santos, (2015) aka Nego Bispo, will criticize this perspective because of the lack of original reference for resistance. According to him, the decolonial turn is a movement of dissatisfaction from Latin American intellectual elites and the counter-colonial resistance is their form of resistance, from the peoples and their cosmologies. That is, counter-colonial are the indigenous worldviews, the quilombola ancestry. Decolonial are the creations that are inspired by them, but that move ontologically towards the State, to the West and, therefore, become modern. Modern, no longer as a unique myth, but modern within the Eisenstadtian perspective of multiple modernities from diverse cultural programs (Eisenstadt, 2000).

My attempt here in thinking from an attempt to cultivate a pluriversal IR comes from this dialogue between decolonial authors and counter-colonial resistances. Considering that I'm engaging with Quechua and Aymara worldviews, the work of Silvia

Rivera Cusicanqui will be of huge importance as well to put the idea of *ch'ixi* as a form to understand these connections between different peoples that create something new from the *taypi*. This choice is a way to understand complementarity and changes from the perspective of an Aymara cosmovision. The following sections will elaborate on some of the findings in my doctoral research from these theoretical references. The first section will discuss the understanding of modernity as a myth and how it shaped a relevant part of the history of Bolivia and Ecuador. The second section will focus on the Andean cosmologies (particularly the *Quechumara* one) as the source of counter-colonial resistances of these peoples against the colonialities. The third section will focus on the concept of *Buen Vivir* and its variations from different translations and uses. Finally, the last section will bring some thoughts in an attempt to understand the use of *Buen Vivir* as an alternative to the idea of development from a *ch'ixi* epistemology.

The myth of modernities in Bolivian and Ecuadorian development histories

Modernity is a polysemic concept. One of the factors that directly influence this multiplicity of understandings is Geography. As Baban (2017) argues, modernity followed different trajectories in the West and outside it. That is, while in the West it was a process of transformation of traditional societies within Western culture, outside the West such a term does not refer to an internal process, but above all external, top-down imposed by authoritarian regimes. Similar between the two processes, the identification of modernity as something opposite and better to what is old, traditional, and static evidenced, promoting an understanding of time as something linear, evolving towards change and progress (BABAN, 2017).

However, the historical process of modernization and globalization itself leads to a great diversity that challenges this conception of modernity, showing it as a phenomenon that manifests itself in different ways, questioning the very conception of time, space, agency, and progress. It is from this criticism that new interpretations arise such as that of Eisenstadt (2000) through the concept of multiple modernities as a process of constitution and continuous reconstitution of cultural programs or Bauman (2011) with the concept of liquid modernity as an era of melting institutions that were solid and rigid in modern society. And it is also from these experiences of modernity that the dichotomy

between the universal and the particular is broken since modernity begins to have local expressions of a global phenomenon (BABAN, 2017).

There is an important relationship between three concepts that cannot be ignored: progress, time, and modernity. According to Nisbet (1998), the idea of progress is based on the conception that humanity has advanced in the past, having departed from a primitive situation and that it will continue to advance in the future. In this perspective, time flows in a unilinear way, from the past to the future, from a worse scenario to a better one, and, thus, it is a natural process, gradual and inevitable (NISBET, 1998, p. 20).

The relationship between progress and time, therefore, is fundamental in the constitution of the first element of a hierarchy of human experience, of the superiority of what comes from the future to the detriment of what was in the past. Such a view, if today very questioned from postmodern reflections, shaped a considerable part of the thought of modernity and development. When the first Europeans met the first indigenous peoples, they both lived at the same time. However, the interpretation that European navigators such as Columbus, Vespucci, and Cabral will attribute to the peoples they encountered was to attribute a value of inferiority by making an analogy of the way of life they encountered with the ways of life of their ancestors. In this sense, I am aligned with Dussel's understanding of modernity, not as a historical time, but as a myth, in which Europe comes to understand itself as universal, as opposed to other peoples who will be covered up as "Other" (Dussel, 1992).

This view of modernity as a fallacy somewhat resembles the argument of Samir Amin (1976) with his critique of Eurocentrism as an ideology of development that will structure the entire process of European capitalist expansion, as well as referring to Gunder Frank (1998) who presents a historical view of the global economy that shows that Europe was not an economic center, but almost an appendix to a dynamic centered on Asia, in particular China. Thus, the naturalness with which we are faced with positive elements arising from the progress of humanity from the West is, in fact, an ideological construction that hides the contribution of other peoples and makes it peaceful that the West has appropriated and assumed as its own which was developed by people on other continents.

It was this civilizational form of modernity that guided many of the discourses of Bolivian and Ecuadorian political leaders throughout the last two centuries of history. For simplification purposes, and based on the reading of books about the History of Bolivia and Ecuador (Mora, 2008; Gisbert, Mesa, and Gisbert, 2016) I suggest a common division

of the history of development in both countries into three periods: The *Criollo* period (1825-1953 in Bolivia, 1830-1964 in Ecuador), the Mestizo period (1953-2006 in Bolivia, 1964-2006 in Ecuador) and the Plurinational period (2006-2019 in Bolivia and 2006-2017 in Ecuador).

The *Criollo* period arises with the political independence of the respective Spanish colonies, which are now ruled by the local elites of Spanish descendants. It is a context marked by the alternation in the power of liberals and conservatives. Indigenous peoples are seen as a hindrance to the country's modernization process. The word progress was more used than the word development. This period ends with the strengthening of indigenous uprisings.

The *Mestizo* period begins with the approval of agrarian reform laws that arise from popular mobilizations of indigenous and mestizos. Internationally, the concept of development is in vogue and these countries begin to think of strategies in this sense, either to promote the economic growth of the country, thinking of a developmental action by the State and, in a second moment, will deal with a neoliberal action of the State, which will act to empty its reach. This period also ends with the strengthening of indigenous uprisings.

The *Plurinational* period begins with the approval of Constituent Assemblies, in the context of the election of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. The new constitutions will give recognition to indigenous peoples and nationalities as never before seen. There is the first moment of the economic bonanza that enables redistributive policies, followed by the second moment of the international crisis from lower Chinese demand of primary products. Despite criticism from indigenous movements to these governments for making more developmental than actually plurinational policies, the governments that have given the face of this historic moment fall to more conservative groups in Bolivia in the context of the Pititas Revolution /Coup d'état against Evo Morales and Ecuador with the election of Lenin Moreno and his pro-liberal ideological spin. The end date of this period does not mean that it is over, but it is the end of the time frame of this research.

Cultivating the pluriversal from Quechumara cosmovision

The focus of this section will be on the identification of important elements of Quechua and Aymara (or Quechumara, considering that many aspects are shared among

these peoples) that will sustain concepts as *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña*. Katy Machoa² highlighted that when we talk about political ontologies of indigenous peoples and nationalities, we are not talking about cultural diversity, as it is also possible to see in Blaser (2012), since "culture" refers to a synonym for folklore, that is, something that differs especially in form, which would not be related to economic, social or justice issues. All the following information regarding the Quechua and Aymara cosmovision have to be seen from this point of view of recognition in a pluriversal logic, as one of the many worlds possible.

The point of departure is the idea of *Pacha*. Often the reading made of *Pacha* is as if it were the translation of "earth", as in the translation of *Pachamama* as "Mother Earth". However, this translation is simplistic because it creates a false equivalence between the terms. Mamani López³ explained that *Pacha* is a complete concept, which integrates both Nature, which would be a feminine dimension, and the cosmos, which would be the masculine part of the whole. According to Kowii (2017), the word *Pacha* refers to time (from a temporal point of view) and culture (from an identity point of view), and space as if it were a womb, which welcomes the population that, in turn, identifies itself with this space. Kowii also points out that *Pacha*, from a spiritual point of view, refers to the vision of space understood in three parts: *Hanan Pacha* (upper world), *Kay Pacha* (world of the present), and *Uku Pacha* (inner, underground world). As Kowii explains,

In this view, *kaypacha* is the place of articulation of *Hanan Pacha* and *Uku Pacha*, with which some principles of the Andean world are evidenced, such as complementarity, balance, that is, the harmonization of spaces; it also expresses the meaning of concrete and the abstract; concrete is life, the real and abstract world, the universe, the cosmos, the spiritual world. (KOWII, 2017, p. 31, our translation)

Mamani López said in the interview that *la tierra es nuestra vida* (the earth is our life, our translation), being the place where it is born that nourishes both with food and cultural identity. In this sense, the life of the earth is mixed with the very life of the individual, since there would be no existence of this individual without that land, that mother. Hence the idea of a maternal relationship, with a *Pacha* who is a mother (*Pachamama*) but that will also have a paternal dimension, which is less spoken. The

² Interview held on February 14, 2020.

³ Interview held on January 21, 2020

kinship relations will be present in all the reality: the cornfields have a mother (*saramama*), the rivers have a mother (*yacumama*), the lakes have a mother (*Mamacocha*) and *Pacha* has *Pachamama* (VÁSQUEZ, 1998, p. 92).

Finally, It is important to note that there is not One indigenous view on the land, which could be associated with *Pacha*. As Katy Machoa recalls in the interview, there is a diversity of views and understandings about the land and the territory, and this diversity is captured from the recognition of the multiple possible political ontologies. She points out that in Ecuador 14 nationalities and 18 indigenous peoples are recognized, 11 of which are nationalities in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Then, the ideal way of understanding the topic would be to be able to know from each one what is meant by land and earth, or more appropriately, what is meant by time-space. That is, what is meant by land will derive, for each people and/or nationality, from their worldview and their language. In this sense, Machoa explains *that Pacha* comes from the kichwa worldview, but that even though it has variations between these peoples, there is also a lot of proximity between their understandings, including compared to the Quechuas of Peru and Bolivia.

Cancio Mamani López (2011), speaking of the marriage of Indigenous Quechua and Aymara peoples, highlights how fundamental is the element of complementarity *between chacha* and *warmi*, that is, between male and female. However, it is not a binary notion of gender like a Western, Christian perspective on gender, but rather a recognition of male and female elements that coexist in everything.

We lost this vital value of complementarity in the colony, that is, they took away the strength of femininity, because for our worldview every individual, every animal, every plant, everything is female and male, even the mind is male-female. *We are Ch'ulla*⁴ and we must claim female strength in all its dimensions (LÓPEZ, 2011, p. 79, our translation)

In addition to this complementarity between *male (chacha)* and *female (warmi)*, the idea of complementarity also involves the *Taypi*:

Colonization also made us neglect our trivalent conception; this means that each male or female individual, each plant, each animal, and everything is composed of three elements: male, female, and *taypi* (center or neutral). For example, a man contains more masculine, less feminine, *and taypi* is the one who makes these two forces live in permanent equilibrium. The woman has more femininity, less masculinity and *taypi* is the axis of balance. (LÓPEZ, 2011, p. 79, our translation)

⁴ *Ch'ulla* can be translated as disparate, uneven, odd (PAIRUMANI, 2015)

López concludes, then, that colonialism, with its gender coloniality, has removed the feminine force of indigenous peoples, both physically and spiritually, but not their *Chuyma*⁵:

The Chuyma phenomenon is an invisible female-male force that lives in the Aymara-Quechua being; this energy called Chuyma could be translated as awareness of life or conscious attitude of conscious vitality. Our Chuyma was born with the *Wiñaymarka*, the eternal people, so we would say that our Chuyma has a finite and infinite experience and wisdom; consequently, the almost 500 years of colonialism are nothing. But where will our Chuyma be? Is it in our blood? Will it be in our eyes? What part of our body will our Chuyma be in? The novelty is that they have not discovered and therefore have not been able to defeat our Chuyma. That's our self-esteem and synergy. (LÓPEZ, 2011, p. 117-118, our translation)

As Vásquez (1998) explains, there is no understanding of something that is asexual Andean cosmologies, that is, *that is neither warmi nor chacha*. On the contrary, everything is masculine and feminine, like animals, mountains, stars, water. It is important to highlight that the understanding of asexual that Vásquez puts is in the sense of being a denial of the sexes, and the concept of *Taypi* is the encounter between the sexes, that is, the complementarity, which demands the presence of both.

Vásquez (1998), in a chapter dedicated to presenting the *ayllu*, while referring to the concept as a community of relatives, also recalls that it is a very elastic notion, which cannot be reduced to the average understanding of a common social organization. Cusicanqui (2018a) presents in the glossary of his book the *ayllu* as

Caste, lineage. Unit of the broad territorial demographic wing, which brings together several lineages and networks united by bonds of consanguinity, affinity, and territory, as well as a series of symbolic references. It is the basic cell of Andean social organization and consists of several segmented levels. (CUSICANQUI, 2018a, p. 324, our translation)

That is, *ayllu* involves relationships from a geographical space, but without fixed physical boundaries (the *ayllu* may be a set of other *ayllus* from the same region). The activities in *ayllu* are the result of the interactions between the *runas* (human community), the *huacas* (community of deities), and the *sallqa* (natural communities), in a deep atmosphere of fraternal equivalence between them (VASQUEZ, 1998). It is the non-imposition of the human on nature in this interaction that will allow the regeneration of

⁵ Cusicanqui (2018a) refers to the *Chuyma* as the upper bowel, including the heart, liver and lungs.

the *ayllu*. In this relationship, as was seen with the idea of complementarity, there is no opposition between these three communities, but an interconnection typical of Andean ontologies: "The *runa* is also nature and deity and can present itself in these forms in certain circumstances, in a presentation that is not representation, but an exposition of itself, revealing the form that corresponds to the circumstances" (VÁSQUEZ, 1998, p. 90, our translation).

Kinship relationships within a territory form this social unit, the *ayllu*, but kinship here is understood from a broad manner. These are relatives with and without inbreeding, but also other people with whom people can refer to them as father/mother, uncle/aunt, and brother/sister, in addition to spiritual kinship from the compatriot. Vásquez points out that the notion of kinship is not limited to humans, but also extends to the *chakra*, which can be understood as the space of agriculture, and in a more particular sense, as a scene of nutrition and flowering of all forms of life. "The peasant considers the potatoes of his *chakra* as his daughters, and when they are newly incorporated they are called daughters-in-law" (VÁSQUEZ, 1998, p. 91, our translation). Thus, the *ayllu* is lived as the group of *runa* relatives, *chakra* relatives, *sallqa* relatives, and *huacas relatives*, all living in the same "house", the *Pacha*, which protects them (VÁSQUEZ, 1998). This notion of *ayllu* is fundamental to understand the non-separation between humans and the nature of indigenous worldviews, particularly the Andean Quechua-Aymara.

The *ayllu*, in this sense, could be translated as a community, as a village, as a family, but any of these translations would have the difficulty of taking into account the scope of *ayllu* and its kinship dynamics. Being related, in this context, is a relationship of affection: it means being someone close, with whom one lives in harmony, protecting and being protected, such as potatoes and quinoa, which grow without the plagues affecting them (VÁSQUEZ, 1998). It is very interesting to note that the example that Vásquez brings, at a time in the text in which he discusses the dimension of affection in *ayllu*, are of relatives *sallqa*, not *runa*. To think that a vegetable has affection is something outside the notion of affection that we are familiar with from a Westernized culture (i.e. Latin American, urban big city), but something that makes sense from the moment one understands the Quechumara cosmological assumptions.

From this logic of kinship in *ayllu*, it is not possible to have someone alone or orphan, since care is not the responsibility only of the parents, but of the *ayllu* as a whole. As Montoya explains, the biological father does not have the same importance in the Andean world compared to the West, since the mother's brother (uncle) or grandfather

has this relationship of affection from the oldest to the younger, which ends up leading to an understanding of greater importance of social paternity than of biological paternity (MONTROYA apud VÁSQUEZ, 1998). This relationship, as stated before, is not limited to the human community, so *Pachamama* is the mother not only of the earth but also of the people who have with it a relationship of motherhood.

To think about the productive dimension of the *ayllu* it is fundamental to understand the idea of regeneration. According to Vásquez (1998), life in *ayllu* is regenerated cyclically, that is, experiment with time with cyclical renewals and recreations that generate different forms of life.

In the Andean Pacha, everything is regenerated, everything comes back, everything returns to the rhythms and cadences of nature. It is a matter of a return (*muuyuy* in Quechua), constant re-creation – a continual renovation of the cycles of life. Regeneration is not generating something from nothing again, rather it is the emergence of new forms of life already contained in the existing ones, a making visible which results from the united participation of the communities of the *runas*, of the *sallqa* and of the *huacas*. (VÁSQUEZ, 1998, p. 96).

From this logic of regeneration, the cycles of *runes*, *sallqa*, and *huacas* are synchronized and in symbiosis. This is an important difference when compared to the modern production system, in which the human interferes in nature to produce goods, without looking into this process in the way nature will regenerate. Not by chance, the concept of development, which replaced the concept of progress in the twentieth century, had to receive the adjective "sustainable" in recent decades, still suffering from great resistance to being able to effectively implement new forms of production and consumption.

As Vásquez (2018) explains, this understanding of the human as part of a pan-natural world leads to the development of an annual cycle (*wata*) that allows time for life forms in nature to reproduce and diversify. The author again highlights the contrast of this dynamic, which generates greater diversity when compared to modern agricultural production that decreases the diversity of nature by prioritizing specific products with greater commercial value, planted intensively and by large tracts of land.⁶

This form of cultivation, tied to a cyclical understanding of time, makes sense of a notion of progress, just as there is no form of hierarchy between levels of civilization,

⁶ Vandana Shiva (2003) notes that these monoculture farming practices are a reflection of a monoculture of the mind, in which there is no room for diversity.

which would place ancestors as less civilized and descendants as more civilized. It is not a question of not understanding that there is change, but this change is not understood from markers of a hierarchy of human experience; instead, it comes by regeneration that allows new forms of life. *Muyuy*, in this context, is the change that allows the planning of work by the certainty of the return and every moment of the annual cycle, of *wata* (VÁSQUEZ, 2018).

The cultivation, concerned with this dimension of complementarity, will be reflected by the side of consumption in food with *ajayu*, ancestral wisdom from Tiwanaku. According to the glossary organized by Cusicanqui (2018a), *ajayu* is spirit, soul. Mamani López (2019) defines *ajayu* as inner energy, which is present in *kurmi-colored* foods, that is, the colors of the rainbow. Feeding with *ajayu* concentrates on three elements that constitute a unity: the physical/biological, the mental, and the spiritual. As Mamani López explains, the physicist/biological refers to organic and ecological foods (without interventions of insecticides and chemical fertilizers), with all its potentiality, that is, its *ajayu*. This food is recognized as being alive and cannot be reduced to objects or merchandise only by its use and exchange value. The mental refers to the order and balance of thought and feeling, in doing and in existence. Finally, the spiritual is the mental balance and awareness of coherent beliefs and attitudes about life, family, society, God, and nature (LÓPEZ, 2019). Thus, the fundamental dimension of consumption from Andean cosmology, and more particularly from the Tiwanaku heritage, is the permanent search for a balanced, integral, and systemic life of each of human beings, within *Pacha* (LÓPEZ, 2019).

In talking about systemic life, Mamani López (2019) is precisely rescuing the dimension of a life organization from the *ayllu*, in which the notion of the Other comes from another form of otherness. In a conventional systemic view (i.e., western) each unit/individual is understood separately from each other, being able to establish relationships from contact, which generates, therefore, the system. In the Andean systemic view that organizes the *ayllu*, there is no other outside of the I, but rather there is a system of relationships in which everyone is intertwined and is co-responsible for the balance of the community.

Buen Vivir, Vivir Bien, Sumak Kawsay, Suma Qamaña: plethora of terms to the same idea?

The simplest and more literal way to understand concepts such as *Sumak Kawsay*, *Suma Qamaña*, *Buen Vivir*, and *Vivir Bien* is by translating to English as Living Well, or Well Living. However, there are many problems in terms of translation. This section aims to understand the multiple forms of *Buen Vivir*, not simply as a conceptual definition of departure for research, but as the possible analysis after having made this dive into the political possibilities from the cosmologies of indigenous peoples and nationalities.

Álvarez (2016) elaborated a framework synthesizing some of the main theoretical elements of *Buen Vivir* concerning the idea of development, as can be seen below:

TABLE 1: Main theoretical aspects of *Buen Vivir*

Dimensions	Features
Development design	It dematerializes the idea of well-being, centrality of nature, austerity, and use of local resources (GUDYNAS, 2004, 2009, 2011a; UNCETA, 2010). Another way of life, collective and harmonious coexistence with nature (HUANACUNI, 2010)
Conception of underdevelopment	There is no underdevelopment. <i>Llaki Kawsay</i> (<i>mal vivir</i> , or poorly living) resulting from the distancing of personal qualities and social values that should govern the lives of indigenous peoples. People suffer from maldevelopment (TORTOSA, 2011; ACOSTA, 2009b; 2010)
The key variable of other development	Identity, the search for indigenous culture (ancestral traditions). Multifactorial: traditional knowledge and local techniques; diversity of organizational forms of production; cultural identity; nature enjoys rights (ESCOBAR, 2010)
Political strategy for other development	Direct participation and self-management (ACOSTA 2009a, 2009b, 2010; ESCOBAR, 2010)
Process for another development	The reinvention of indigenous worldviews. Changes in the priorities of the economy; living without misery (ACOSTA, 2009b, 2010)

Source: Adapted from Álvarez (2016)

In his explication, Álvarez (2016) recalls that the concept of *Buen Vivir* emerges as a theoretical and political proposal of social transformation, from the 1990s on, but does not place exactly when it occurred. However, Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán (2015) more accurately identify two first moments that disclose the *Buen Vivir*: first in 1986, when the French anthropologist Philippe Descola published *La Nature domestique: Symbolisme et praxis dans l'écologie des Achuar*, a work in which he presents the concept of *shuir waras* of the Achuar peoples. As he explains,

The efficiency of an economic system depends not so much on the amount of wealth it generates, but on its ability to meet the objectives assigned to it. In societies where production is mainly oriented towards usage values, these objectives are culturally limited and without alternatives. Thus, for the Achuar, the main purpose of good use of nature is not the infinite accumulation of objects of consumption, but the obtaining of a state of equilibrium that they define as "well live" (*shuir waras*). (DESCOLA, 1986, p. 380, our translation)

The concept of *Sumak Kawsay* is something different from the concepts presented earlier and even unknown by many kichwas indigenous peoples until the occasion of its incorporation into the Ecuadorian Constitution (CUBILLO-GUEVARA, HIDALGO-CAPITÁN, 2015). That is, despite being a concept that arises from Quechua, it is a new way of thinking about life. The Aymara version is also little known, but found in some ancestral rituals, as in marriage, in which the vows to the couple are made with the expression *wawanaka sumaki qamasipjata*, whose translation (which I do from Spanish, not Aymara) is "you, as a new couple, will live and party with all members of family and nature" (YAMPARA apud CUBILLO-GUEVARA, HIDALGO-CAPITÁN, 2015, p. 305)

At the interview, Alberto Acosta recalled the possibility of thinking, rather than *Buen Vivir*, in *buenos convivires* (something that can be roughly translated as good ways of life, instead of a one form of well living), in the plural rather than the singular, to show that it is not a unique and homogeneous concept, but that it is different from each indigenous people, but with common elements such as the centrality in the collectivity, the awareness of being part of nature (a natural community) and a spirituality based on relations of respect, trust and reciprocity between human and non-human beings.

The difficulties in theoretically understanding the *Buen Vivir* are, among other issues, caused by the fact pointed out by Acosta in the interview that it is a way of conceiving reality outside the epistemology of traditional academy. Therefore, as he

explained, to be considered an academic theme, *Buen Vivir* had to be "domesticated", becoming the subject of articles published in scientific journals, which he considers foolishness that evidence the lack of ability of the university to establish bridges and open doors to enhance contact between this knowledge and the conventional knowledge.

So the situation is that there are these cosmologies that originate these terms (Sumak Kawsay, Suma Qamaña), even if they are a novelty for these peoples and the translated forms of them into Spanish to amplify their range, bringing topics regarding the politics of development to relate them. Now we will focus on the perceptions regarding the use of these ideas by the administrations of Correa and Morales in Ecuador and Bolivia.

In the interview I conducted with Alberto Acosta, he pointed out that *Buen Vivir* was used by Rafael Correa government as an attractive concept, which allowed him to oxygenate the political debate, but that he never heard real care to understand its meaning. And on this meaning, Acosta said that it is not a proposal of a political party, but of the indigenous world, a world that was not understood by Western civilization, being thrown to the periphery of the periphery. He points out that *Buen Vivir*, above all, is about experiences, more than concepts or theories.

Acosta also said Correa's government did not misinterpret, nor did it misunderstand the concept of *Buen Vivir*, but manipulated the term by emptying its content. He defined this process as *vampirización del Buen Vivir* (vampirization of *Buen Vivir*), "taking the blood" of the concept. It's this vampirization, according to him, which allows it to transform the concept of *Buen Vivir*, from an alternative to development that questions the capitalist and modern model of production, that does not accept extractivist practices for development, reducing the idea to one of several possible adjectives to try to give survival to the idea of development, as it has happened so many times (social development, economic, global, local, with gender equality, ethnic, transformative, sustainable and endogenous are the examples he cited).

In the interview with Katy Machoa, she says that the Ecuadorian government when referring to *Sumak Kawsay*, takes a signifier (the word, the spelling) but not its signified (put by the indigenous peoples). It is in this disconnection between signifier and signified that Machoa identifies a clash in the control of the territory between economic

practices of indigenous peoples (such as chocolate production, handicrafts, and guayusa)⁷ with others coming from outside such as mining, which ends these other possibilities.

She notes, in this context, that Correa's government in Ecuador begins with more radical practices, but that it is moving towards the repression of indigenous peoples, as in the 2015 mobilizations against Constitutional Amendments that would allow, among other things, Rafael Correa to run once again for presidential re-election in the 2017 elections.

Referring to the Bolivian case, I heard also a hard critique from the indigenous politician and opposer to Evo Morales, Rafael Quispe⁸. He stated that the concept of *Suma Qamaña*, although it has been translated as *Vivir Bien* into Spanish, does not mean this, but rather live in harmony with nature. The inaccurate translation, he argues, leads to an understanding that living well is consuming well, eating well, dressing well. And he, who was an indigenous political leadership opposed to Evo Morales, denounces that in this government there was a distortion of the *Suma Qamaña*, in which living well becomes, among others, a disrespect to the TIPNIS (Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory) by insisting on the construction of a jungle highway in this indigenous territory, to unite the departments of Cochabamba and Beni (MIRANDA, 2017)

Something positive identified in the analysis, especially from the interview with Cancio Mamani López, was the perception that economic policy during Evo Morales administration, mainly thanks to the then Minister of Economy and current President Luis Arce Catacora, was marked by the ability to generate greater stability, growth, and promotion of redistributive policies. The result is noticeable when observing the percentage of the population below the poverty lines: when considering the \$1.90 line (value corrected by purchasing parity power as of 2011 as the reference year), 8% of the Bolivian population was in extreme poverty in 2006, falling to 1.7% in 2018; considering the value of \$3.20, the improvement went from 13.8% in 2006 to 4.1% in 2018; finally, when considering the value of \$ 5.50, the improvement went from 24.2% in 2006 to 9.2% in 2018 (WORLD BANK, 2021).

Other topics close to the issue of *Buen Vivir* were referred to in the process of research and interviews. For example, Katy Machoa recalls that the relationship between

⁷ The guayusa is a pamazon landes (*Guayusa Ilex*), whose leaves are Used for drinks with stimulating properties for containing caffeine And a lot of Antioxidants. It is considered sacred and has been consumed for over a thousand years by Indigenous Amazonian peoples, such as the kichwa and the shuar of Ecuador (GIMENEZ, 2019)

⁸ Interview held on January 21, 2020.

the State and extractive companies is something violent for indigenous peoples who inhabit territories of commercial interest. An example of this dynamic is the case she remembered of the militarization of the Shuar territory. A press release from CONAIE (2016) presents this complaint: in November 2016, the Armed Forces attacked the *shuar* population of Nankints on the San Carlos Bridge with more than 1,000 military personnel, by land and air, injuring and arresting members of local communities. This attack came after a process of government consultations with the Nankints community that was interrupted by a violent eviction of shuares families followed by the invasion of the territory by the Chinese company Explocobres SA, EXSA (CONAIE, 2016).

On extractivism, Acosta was quite direct: getting out of extractivist logic is the only possible way to avoid the destruction of indigenous communities' cultures and nature. It is not a vision on the environmental issue that believes that humanity would suddenly disappear, but which understands that environmental problems will be increasing, with increasing conflicts that will make life more difficult for human beings on the planet. Acosta highlights two elements to overcome extractivism: first, it is necessary to understand that it is not extractivism that will promote development, because "development is a ghost, it does not exist, there are no developed countries and undeveloped countries". Second, it is necessary to understand that extractivism is not overcome with more extractivism.

As Acosta explains, it is the crisis of neoliberalism in Ecuador that makes room for the indigenous movement to show its strength, going from being an object of politics to going on to being a subject of politics, with its worldview (from the German *Weltanschauung*). And his ideas, in a second moment, are assumed by white/mixed-race groups, such as Correa's, which leads to the operationalization of *Buen Vivir* at the state level. He recalled in the interview that, to have a post-capitalist horizon, it is necessary to study the matrices of capitalism and highlight, in addition to the exploitation of the human being by capital, also the exploitation of nature, patriarchy, and coloniality.

From the experience of Rafael Correa's leftist government, coupled with other experiences such as Bolivia's with Evo Morales and Brazil with Lula and Dilma Rousseff, Acosta said that progressive Latin American governments were still stuck with the idea of progress and development, so that they modernized capitalism in their respective countries rather than transforming productive matrices and promoting effective agrarian reform. He concludes that it is not enough for the left to consider itself socialist, but it must also be an ecologist, feminist, decolonial and democratic, to promote a biocentric

rather than anthropocentric vision, recognizing that all these struggles are, in essence, the same struggle to overcome capitalism.

Understandings from a ch'ixi epistemology

One possible conclusion is that the *Buen Vivir*, as a constitutional element of the Plurinational State, is decolonial, but it is not counter-colonial. It is a modern concept, considering that it is included as an element of the grammar of modern institutions such as State, Development, Progress, Constitution. That is, *Buen Vivir* is the modern expression, which is part of the Andean indigenous worldviews, but which breaks with them as it transitions to this other ontological dimension, this other world, of the International, of methodological nationalism.

Having now identified the differences at the epistemological level, it is possible to think of a theoretical way of differentiating the two concepts: by decolonial, I understand that movement of overcoming colonialities from a colonial epistemology, although critical to colonialism. As a counter-colonial, I understand that movement of overcoming colonialities from epistemologies of those who are being explored by the colonial project, whether they are indigenous peoples, quilombolas, African peoples, Black Diaspora, among others. There is neither in one case nor in another an appeal for something more essential, purer. They're both half-breeds. But only the counter-colonial is *ch'ixi*. Here is, thus, the meeting between the thought of Nego Bispo with the thought of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who seek so as well as academic intellectuality to overcome colonialities, but who possess the *Chuyma*, this invisible force that can not be destroyed by colonialism and which is unreachable by those outsiders.

Cusicanqui (2018a) states that the idea of a *taypi* could be manifested as a zone of malaise and uncertainty, of epistemic discomfort, between pride and shame. However, she is tasked with a way out of this situation through Guamán Poma de Ayala and the representation he makes in *drawing uturunku*,⁹ which she identifies as a *ch'ixi figure*.

⁹*Uturunku* means jaguar, and can also be translated as youGre. Other possible spellings Are *otoronqo* And *Otorongo*.

FIGURE 1: El sexto capitán, Otorongo Achachi Apo Camac Inga/ Andesuyo.

Otorongo



Source: Ayala (1980a, p. 111)

In this image, Guamán Poma of Ayala represents the sixth captain Otorongo Achachi by the *ukurunku* form, i.e. like this painted-skinned tiger, spotted (*ch'ixi*). In explaining the drawing, Poma de Ayala says that this captain was the son ¹⁰of Inga Roca with a *chuncho* ¹¹Indian and, therefore, the Incas called him *Otorongo Achachi Amaro Inga*, referencing the mixture between distinct groups of indigenous peoples (AYALA, 1980a, p. 114). It is from this idea that Cusicanqui will think the *taypi* from the idea of *ch'ixi*:

It will only be possible to overcome this moral double if we transform the malaise that oppresses us and make a gesture of *ch'ixi* reappropriation of the

¹⁰ Inca Roca was the sixth the Inca, having reigned from 1350 to 1380 approximately (GISBERT, MESA, GISBERT, 2016).

¹¹ *Ch'unch'u* is the generic name of the originating inhabitants who do not speak Andean languages (CUSICANQUI, 2018a)

deep historical legacy that these relations, agonists and dynamics, imprint in our contemporaneity. So perhaps we can face the aporias of the present with the very weapons of anti-conquest rhetoric. Because you can't with silver greed like now; it's spoiling and dying at once. (CUSICANQUI, 2018a, p. 279, our translation).

That is, the idea of mixing was already present in the Andean world through concepts such as *taypi*, *ch'ixi*, *uturunku*. Cusicanqui's contribution is made to interpret the postcolonial mestizo from these lenses, rather than maintaining Western concepts that end up promoting maintenance of Eurocentric ideas that are reproduced even by the indigenous and mixed-race themselves.

Hence, towards a more conclusive analysis, the provocation arises: What are the possibilities and limits of thinking about *Buen Vivir* through a decolonial logic and, on the other hand, of being thinking through a counter-colonial *ch'ixi* logic? It is worth remembering that in both cases, it is about recognizing that the concept of *Buen Vivir* is the result of different influences.

If thought from a decolonial logic, it is possible to think of *Buen Vivir* as a possible way of articulating elements of the ways of life of the Andean and Amazonian indigenous peoples within a project of development of modernity. That is, it is the synthesis between the modern and indigenous way of life, generating a new trans-modern possibility. Its contradictions do not necessarily indicate that it is a false concept but reinforce its condition of synthesis, inherently contradictory. In this way it becomes a possible utopia, which finds a local, indigenous, non-Western reference, to promote a new way of thinking about public policies for development. Not by chance, *Buen Vivir* ends up becoming a slogan that captivates part of political militancy and progressive academic intellectuality, fueling hopes for an updated form of alternative socialism and being used in political campaigns in other countries, including by non-indigenous political leaders.¹²

On the other hand, thinking about *Buen Vivir* as *ch'ixi* shows the fact that it comes from several different peoples, whether indigenous or those that arise from the colonial experience, such as the very idea of Bolivian and Ecuadorian nationality. However, this mixture must be *taypi*, that is, there must be harmony in complementarity between the parties. Thus, this mixture reveals the great dissatisfaction of the various indigenous and *mestizos*, either individually or through organizations and political movements, who realize that the governments of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa ended up giving an

¹² An example is Áurea Carolina, currently federal deputy in Brazil, which has used in its election campaigns the concept of *Bem Viver* in its portuguese translation.

excessive emphasis on a modern logic of development, particularly in cases such as TIPNIS and Yasuní-ITT. Therefore, if it does not have *taypi*, but reflects a developmental predominance, *Buen Vivir* fails as a *ch'ixi* possibility to deal with the challenges of plurinational existence.

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