Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir, a Flying River. A Decolonial Approach to *Tinkuy* and Social Justice

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Introduction

> The unified struggle of Indigenous nationalities generates a confrontation process with broader [societal] systems that affect them. In their mission to end inequities and injustices, horizons of [good] life aspirations and desired future are formulated, in Kichwa thinking referred to as *Sumak Kawsay Tinkuy* (Inuca Lechón 2017a, 5).

> Just as the Amazon rainforest produces vapor, oxygen, water, and this wonder that is rain, which travels here by the flying rivers, the idea of *Buen-vivir* has also flown from the Andes to here (Krenak 2020, 11).

In Kichwa, the concept of *Tinkuy* (*T'hinku* in the Aymara language) can be translated to encounter, comprehended as epistemic interculturality or unity in diversity, but also to confrontation and resistance, referring to the Indigenous struggle for recognition and relations with the non-Indigenous societies (Inuca Lechón 2017a and b; Yampara Huarachi 2016). In the intellectual debates on *Buen Vivir*, Benjamín Inuca uses the conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay Tinkuy* to emphasize the confrontational as well as "communitarian, holistic, conscientious, cyclical, diverse and convivial" characteristics of the Kichwa conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay* (Inuca Lechón 2017a, 6), later translated into *Buen Vivir* (good way of living). Accordingly, as will be argued in this study, the locally conditioned comprehension and definitions of these Indigenous understandings of *Buen Vivir* vary exponentially among ethnic groups and localities, and likewise among academics involved in these debates. In this chapter, we problematize the conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*, specifically concerning the floating character of the concept in relation to the social justice dimension, as articulated in the Andean notion of *Tinkuy*. The emphasis on *Tinkuy* in our understanding of *Sumak Kawsay* thus adds the confrontational aspects of this Indigenous conception of harmonious relations among humans and with nature.

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The incorporation of the ethical-philosophical ideas of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* and *Suma Qamaña/Vivir Bien* in the Constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009) respectively, as in the National Development Plans of the two countries, represents a milestone in the recognition of Indigenous epistemic-ontological principles of life. The new constitutional settings of Ecuador and Bolivia also included the declaration of the nations as plurinational states and the recognition of the specific rights of nature, as expressed in the grievances of the Indigenous and ecologist movements. Globally, intellectuals and activists rapidly responded to these proceedings, perceived as valuable alternatives to capitalist development and an important pathway to build other worlds that are more equitable, just, and sustainable (Walsh 2010; Gudynas 2011; Acosta 2012; Kothari *et al.*, 2014; Löwy 2014; Lalander 2014; 2016; 2017; Lalander and Cuestas-Caza 2017; Chuji Gualinga, Rengifo, and Gudynas 2019; Escobar 2020, Ch. 2; Mignolo 2021). For Marxist sociologist Ronaldo Munck, *Buen Vivir* constitutes "the most significant Latin American contribution to global development theory since the dependency theory of the 1960s" (Munck 2021, 184-185).

The conceptualization of *Buen Vivir* emerged largely from political processes in Latin America as a concerted effort to break with colonial legacies, clearly expressed in the intensification of extractivism and its impacts on Indigenous communities and livelihoods. In our view, the Indigenous epistemic-ontological and political claims around *Buen Vivir* connect to decolonial theory around "coloniality," that is, the hidden and explicit structural mechanisms of socio-cultural oppression and epistemic marginalization form the pillars of the project of modernity and the "development" discourse (in terms of economic growth and progress) as portrayed in hegemonic narratives of the Global North (Quijano 2007; Mignolo 2007; 2017; 2021; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Decolonization thus facilitates the construction of epistemological alternatives that allows the affirmation of pluriversality, that is the recognition of the existence of different equally valid cultures, worldviews, and knowledge systems. Indigenous peoples play a central role in pluriversality debates, considering their epistemic-ontological systems that are at the core in the pluriversal struggle for new worlds.

How is the hierarchy between culture/ethnicity, ecologism and class-based social justice reflected in debates around *Sumak Kawsay*/*Buen Vivir*? Contemporary scholars specializing in Indigenous issues have commonly

addressed *Buen Vivir* mainly in terms of cultural and ecological values, substantially neglecting the important academic tradition that stresses the social justice approach as fundamental in the Indigenous struggle (such as Albó 2008). We emphasize the importance of clearly reinserting the class perspective in the studies on *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*, though, without ignoring its cultural and ecological dimensions. Such inclusion would help build a more suitable analytical tool for dealing with capitalist structures of domination (Le Quang and Vercoutère 2013; Löwy 2014). In the words of the great anthropologist Xavier Albó:

> We must see reality with two eyes: with the class eye, as exploited peasants, together with all the exploited; and with the ethnic eye, along with all oppressed [indigenous] nations (Albó 2008, 242).

From our decolonial position, the three interconnected dimensions—class/justice, ethnicity/culture and ecologism—must be considered for a better understanding of the aforementioned complexities of the collective identifications and discourses of Indigenous actors in their historical and contemporary struggles. Realities as well as discourses rooted in *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* should accordingly be viewed through three eyes: class, culture, and ecology.

Connecting to the flying river amidst the global (pluriversal) spreading of *Buen Vivir*, we highlight that this cultural flow and the varying and locally conditioned expressions of this Indigenous philosophy around the world are conditioned by local practical-ontological traditions. Beyond the fundamental critique of mainstream developmentalist logic of modernity, we understand the broader struggle and visions around this Indigenous philosophy as a pluriversal project in constant (re)construction (Viteri Gualinga 2002; 2003; Acosta 2012; Kothari *et al*. 2014; Altmann 2017) and characterized by fluidity (as well as elasticity) regarding its definitions (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020).

With a point of departure in previous intellectual debates and the conditions, complexities and challenges described above, the aim of this study is to examine and problematize the pluriversal vision/project/discourse of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* with a specific focus on the social justice dimension, also considering the floating character of the conceptualization. Methodologically, this text is mainly an academic conceptualization of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, specifically highlighting the component of social justice. In this sense, and to deepen the possible comprehensions of

the broad variety of interpretations and of this Amazonian-Andean conceptualization, we find it fruitful to comparatively examine the viewpoints and arguments of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous intellectuals. We argue that the debate around *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* has frequently been characterized either by more theoretical considerations and definitions of these Indigenous concepts, or through a more top-down politicized debate energized by the enactment of new constitutions. In relation to these contributions, it is crucial to include ethnographic work on and with Indigenous peoples, to consider at least a small selection of representative voices. With this in mind, this chapter draws on previous empirical research by the authors since the beginning of the Millennium. Hence, we carried out a critical re-reading of findings in our previous publications, albeit linking these ideas to the broader debates through a process of critically reading important contributions by other intellectuals in the field.[1]

Onwards, some theoretical clarifications are offered, followed by a brief background section on the conceptual challenges of *Sumak Kawsay/Suma Qamaña/Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien*, also in connection to the flying river analogy. Subsequently, we provide an analytical discussion on *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*, focusing on the social justice dimension and floatingness of the conception, mainly anchored in reflections around resistance-adaptation, particularism-universalism, and locally conditioned perspectives of indigeneity-territoriality. Examples will be provided from Bolivia and, particularly, Ecuador.

Cultural Flows Crafting the Pluriverse: A Decolonial Approach to *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*

> In the *Yachay Tinkuy* [meeting/confrontation between knowledges] that integrates the *pacha* (time, place, space, and attitude), there are cultural confrontations […] between the dominant system of national society and the State, and the resistance of peoples, between the collapse and survival of Indigenous cultures […] Paradoxically, in an oppressive and exploitative scenario, the knowledges of the Indigenous peoples of Ecuador emerge and come to life, which for hundreds of years were prohibited, denied, despised, and even sentenced to disappearance (Inuca Lechón 2017a, x).

1 Only a few of our interviews are referred to in this paper. All included interviews were carried out by Rickard Lalander.

From our decolonial reading, Indigenous struggles manifest themselves in different spaces and include different expressions of resistance and adaptation towards the colonialist structures of global capitalism (Jackson and Warren 2005). Likewise, the decolonial struggle is expressed discursively, through specific uses and concepts such as *Sumak Kawsay*, *Buen Vivir,* plurinationality, interculturality, rights of nature, etcetera. Consequently, our analytical approach is justified by the definition of *Sumak Kawsay/ Buen Vivir* as a decolonial discourse for eco-social justice since discourse also constitutes the political-ontological instrument in transformative struggles (Lalander and Merimaa 2018).

Walter Mignolo argues that, to decolonize our imaginaries, we need to dismantle the trade-offs of modernity/coloniality, and the economic and political power structures associated with imperialism/colonialism (2007, 450). However, while delinking constitutes the crucial initial step in achieving decoloniality and pluriversality, it is a gradual project that is always to varying degrees accompanied by adaptation. Therefore, the processes of delinking from the colonial matrix of power are carried out within spaces/imaginaries under construction (sites "of becoming") (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxxi-xxxiii; Lalander *et al*. 2021).

Considering the critique against dominant Eurocentric discourses and comprehensions of modernity, the contributions of Enrique Dussel (2012) on transmodernity and the decolonization of global power relations are valuable. Dussel argues that the idea of transmodernity seeks to end the incomplete decolonizing process, through its concretization at the political level. According to our reading of Dusselian transmodernity, we may grasp how Indigenous peoples for centuries have lived oppressed, enslaved, and marginalized vis-a-vis the colonial society—neither isolated nor totally absorbed. Yet, they have managed to maintain an important level of their traditions and cultural expressions, in recent times expressed, among others, in the emergence of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* (see also Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán 2015b).

For Ramón Grosfoguel (2008, 210-211), the philosophy of liberation can only be realized through a pluriversal epistemic dialogue from egalitarian positions. In this sense, pluriversality is fundamental in the decolonial transmodern logic, as well as in comprehending *Sumak Kawsay/ Buen Vivir*. The solidarity-based interrelationship between Global South and North of transmodern pluriversality may be viewed as a type of "universalization" of discourses of the South, such as *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vi-*

vir. Nonetheless, the pluriversal coexistence of "different worlds" does not imply a total abandonment of universalist values. Instead, it articulates the rejection of the universalist model that reinforces colonial power structures. From the angle of social justice, this universalism—an important dimension of the Indigenous decolonial struggle—can be seen as one of the worlds included in the pluriversal vision, albeit simultaneously as a world that partly clashes with the pluriversal logic, basing itself on a one-dimensional universality.

Floating Between Worlds: *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* as a Flying River

The Amazonian Kichwa-Sarayaku territory of the Ecuadorian province of Pastaza is broadly recognized as the intellectual cradle of *Sumak Kawsay* (Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán 2015a; Ortiz-T. 2021). Carlos Viteri Gualinga, a Kichwa-Sarayaku leader, is among the first to conceptualize and intellectualize *Sumak Kawsay* since the early 1990s. In his BA thesis in anthropology, he discussed the notion of *Sumak Kawsay* as an "alternative to development." In Kichwa cosmovision, there is no concept of development, nor are there specific notions of wealth and poverty determined by the accumulation or lack of material goods (Viteri Gualinga 2003, iii). Instead, capitalist accumulation is weighed against an alternative life in harmony with the environment (Albó and Galindo 2012, 32; see also: Walsh 2010; Gudynas 2011; Acosta 2012; Chuji Gualinga 2014; Yampara Huarachi 2016). Nonetheless, while recognizing the contributions of Viteri Gualinga, Benjamín Inuca holds that *Sumak Kawsay* (*vida hermosa*: an ideal vision of "beautiful life/full life/living well") and *Alli Kawsay* (living well in everyday life practice)—both concepts in recent times traduced to *Buen Vivir*—in the organization and struggle of the Ecuadorian Indigenous peoples date back to the mid-20th century (Inuca Lechón 2017b, 156; Lalander and Cuestas-Caza 2017).

In Bolivia, the conceptualization of *Suma Qamaña/Vivir Bien* emerged already in the late 1970s through the efforts of Aymara intellectual Simón Yampara, when he was a sociology student. In the 1970s, the "modern" Indigenous mobilization was an emerging movement eager to find its proper expression in a context marked by a class-based approach. Yampara mentions that he was inspired by Marxist theory when initiating his research on the Aymara culture that would result in his comprehension and

definition of *Suma Qamaña* as living and coexisting in integral harmony (Interview, La Paz, April 14, 2014; Yampara Huarachi 2011; 2016). In both Ecuador and Bolivia, the academic training of Indigenous leaders is key to understanding the history of Indigenous political struggle and the (re)construction of its conceptual instruments. Although Yampara began these reflections as early as the late 1970s, it was not until the late 1990s that *Suma Qamaña* was more widely intellectualized (Medina 2001; Huanacuni Mamani 2015; Yampara Huarachi 2016).

Returning to Ecuador, anthropologist Philippe Descola (1988, 415 ff.) discussed *Buen Vivir/Bien vivir,* (*shiir waras* in Achuar) among the Amazonian Achuar already in the 1980s. He mainly focused on the Achuar household level and the communitarian productive agricultural economy of self-subsistence, amidst harmonious relations with nature. Interestingly, he emphasizes the domestic and conjugal peace and harmony as being at the core of *Buen Vivir.* Also in the contemporary Andean highlands, the Kichwa people present similar epistemic-ontological comprehensions of Good Life/*Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay* (Interviews with Miguel Calapi, Cotacachi, 2022 and 2023).

Since the incorporation of *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien* into the new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, non-Indigenous intellectuals have contributed important interpretations of these conceptualizations, such as Catherine Walsh (2010), Alberto Acosta (2012) and Eduardo Gudynas (2011), with a special focus on the post-developmentalist critique of the concept of "progress." Several intellectuals, such as Acosta, believe that we need to comprehend and refer to *Buen Vivir* in plural form:

> *Buen Vivir* does not synthesize a monocultural proposal. It is a plural concept. It would be better to speak of *buenos vivires* [good ways of living] or *buenos convivires* [good models of living together], which arise especially from Indigenous communities and that contribute with new epistemes" (Acosta 2015, 12; italics by authors).

Buen Vivir has also crossed the Andean-Amazonian borders and reached other Indigenous territories. The Brazilian Indigenous and environmentalist leader Ainton Krenak alludes to the natural phenomenon known as "flying rivers" to illustrate how *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* has traveled to Brazil, as expressed in the introductory quote of the chapter (Krenak

2020, 11).[2] Krenak argues that, like a flying river, *Buen Vivir* travels to different Indigenous contexts, creating new interpretations that vary according to local epistemic-ontological perspectives (Krenak 2020, 8)[3]. Admittedly, while *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir/Suma Qamaña/Vivir Bien/Bem Viver* assumes different perspectives as it crosses cultural-territorial borders, Krenak, like many other critical scholars, reminds us that this floating concept can undergo a process of Westernization. Drastic consequences could occur in this process, should *Buen Vivir* serve the interests of capitalist development—just as flying rivers are faltering due to unsustainable human activity, putting vast portions of the continent at risk of drought. A fundamental argument has to do with the simplification in the translation of *Sumak Kawsay* into *Buen Vivir*. According to Krenak (2020, 8), in the process of translating *Sumak Kawsay* into Spanish *Buen Vivir*, and later into Portuguese (*Bem Viver*), some aspects of the Kichwa cosmovision might be lost in translation.

Regarding the "travelling" of the *Buen Vivir* conceptualization, Krenak "metaphorically" refers to the spreading of the concept. Nonetheless, as we understand Krenak he referred to the Andes as regional-geographic setting (Andean countries), and the travelling of the concept to –in his case– the (Brazilian) Amazon. Moreover, the conceptual "travelling" as used by Krenak, departs in the flying river phenomenon and how he (like us) perceives the spreading of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay.* First, we should repeat emphatically that the spreading of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir (Suma*

2 Technically speaking, "flying river" refers to the movement of large quantities of water vapor transported in the atmosphere from the Amazon Basin toward the Andes, which act as a natural barrier and redirect huge vapor masses toward the south, generating rain in vast areas of the South American continent. According to a report on the impact of climate change in the Amazon (Marengo and Souza Jr. 2018, 8), the flying river phenomenon proves the vital importance of the Amazon rainforest to both human well-being and climate equilibrium.

3 Regarding other local/regional conceptualizations that have been connected to and understood as expressions related to a broader vision of *Buen Vivir*/harmonious life we could mention: *Ñandereko* (Guaraní-Bolivia), *Tarimiat Pujustin* (Shuar-Ecuador/Peru), *Seke Sonachun* (Tsáchila-Ecuador), *Kyme Mogen* (Mapuche-Chile), *Ecological Swaraj* (India) *and Ubuntu* (Southern Africa) (See also: Huanacuni Mamani 2015; Kothari *et al*. 2014; Astudillo Banegas 2020). We should clarify, however, that we do not argue that these epistemic-ontological models are the result of the spreading (or "cultural flow") of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*. These conceptualizations may also be considered ancestral but achieved a new actuality with the expanding global attention to *Buen Vivir.* For reflections on Indigenous knowledges and traditions as alternatives to mainstream sustainable development, see also, e.g., Virtanen *et al.* (2020); Escobar (2020, Ch. 2); Mignolo (2021).

Qamaña/Vivir Bien) in the 21st century had its origin in the highlands in the Bolivian case and in the Amazonia in the Ecuadorian case, so it becomes a bit tricky if you try to simply comprehend *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* as merely a conceptual journey from one specific region to another. Genealogically, the concept has originated in both highlands, lowlands, and the Amazon. Therefore, we prefer to speak in terms of a bottom-up understanding, that is, around how the attention to one Indigenous concept in setting A inspires Indigenous groups in setting B, as they perceive that they can insert their epistemic-ontological basis in relation to *Buen Vivir*. That is, the inspiration can contribute to the revival of local epistemic-ontological systems and traditions at site B. Reconnecting to the roots, Carlos Viteri Gualinga states:

> Well, *Sumak Kawsay* was translated into *Buen-vivir* which for me is very simplistic, which sounds very simple because it lacks content. *Buen-vivir* appears as if everyone is understanding what *Buen-vivir* means in its broadest dimension. So, the *Sumak Kawsay* model is raised as a call to move forward, towards a cultural change as a society and as a State […]. There is a term that expresses it quite well; a *sustainable life*, where human culture, that is, the human being organizes activities and the economy based on a respectful interaction. I think we must understand that as an interaction both between human beings [and nature], and among human beings, would allow us an interaction based on respectful and equitable coexistence (Viteri Gualinga, interview, Quito, August 1, 2016).

Taking into consideration the symbolic meanings and codes of each culture and language, it is often risky to equate *Sumak Kawsay* and *Buen Vivir*. René Ramírez, the main editor of the National Plan for *Buen Vivir* in Ecuador, refers to the relative partial failure of this project due to the misuse of the concept, emphasizing that it "transcends the perspective of development and even well-being, under the welfarist logic of the economy" in order to "rethink the mode of redistribution and for that we need another form of economic organization" (*El Telégrafo*, October 22, 2016; cited in Lalander and Merimaa 2018, 502). To escape such misuse, we propose an understanding of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* as a flying river, that is, a floating concept conditioned by the identity traits of each Indigenous group. As such, *Buen Vivir* is a locally conditioned expression of indigeneity and territoriality (Altmann 2017; Lalander and Lembke 2020).

Indigeneity can be understood as an articulated but floating identity element linked to both the historical context and space (territoriality) (Lalander and Lembke 2018b). Thus, indigeneity and territoriality are in-

timately intertwined: the territory constitutes the ethnic-cultural identity, while the ethnic identity determines the symbolic and spiritual meaning of the territory. Territoriality is thus loaded with meaning and cultural values, that is, mountains and rivers have an importance related to the ethnic identity (Lalander and Lembke 2020). Consequently, the understanding of the territoriality-indigeneity link and the discourse of *Sumak Kawsay*/*Buen Vivir* are distinguished by their multifaceted, floating characteristics in which the values of class, ethnicity and environmentalism are expressed.

Tinkuy and the Rivers Coming Together: *Buen Vivir* as a Societal Project towards Eco-social Justice

Buen Vivir is defined variously by different competing political actors in their efforts to (re)construct identities, struggles and antagonisms, floating between different political projects seeking to determine how society ought to be structured. In fact, this elasticity even convinced the Bolivian and Ecuadorian governments that they could stick to *Buen Vivir* while simultaneously encouraging a system fundamentally based on statist extractivism (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020, 173). In our opinion, however, the problem is not that *Buen Vivir* has been relatively open regarding specific conceptual significance. Many political concepts are floating and plural, such as democracy, citizenship, sustainability, etcetera, as are the ways of viewing (and being in) the world. Likewise, we should remember that no cultures, identities, or ontologies are static. From the Indigenous perspectives, identities, worldviews, and practices change over time and depend on historical encounters with other cultures/worlds and non-Indigenous societies. In fact, just as flying rivers are vital for regulating the climate and, while considering both the openness/encounter/unifying dimension and the confrontational aspect of *Tinkuy* amidst *Buen Vivir*/*Sumak Kawsay* within the discursive epistemic-ontological battles, this conceptual fluidity may have an important function when it comes to joining apparently contradictory perspectives into a common political movement (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020, 174).

In Bolivia and Ecuador, *Buen Vivir*/*Vivir Bien* initially seemed to have the ability to unite a variety of social groups around the concept as a national vision, particularly after the incorporation of Indigenous ethical-philosophical principles in the new constitutions. However, the governments began to defect from the *Buen Vivir* project, especially in

their extractivist policies. As an immediate response, important Indigenous organizations, in turn, largely abandoned their efforts to reach out to the government (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020, 172-174). Growing tensions between Indigenous groups and the State accentuated the duality of the *Buen Vivir* concept; one more ecological-cultural interpretation and another more state-socialist (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza 2017). For some analysts, it was a polarization between universalist and particularist logics (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020). For important Indigenous political sectors, the governments had turned *Buen Vivir* into a concept equal to universalist welfare policies, thus sacrificing the ecological and spiritual dimensions of *Sumak Kawsay's* original proposal.

In State-society relations, Indigenous peoples present a mosaic of particularisms, rooted in different self-perceptions of indigeneity. We agree with those who emphasize the importance of recognizing the particularistic demands of Indigenous peoples (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020). In previous research on sustainable Indigenous gold mining in the Shuar community of Congüime of the Ecuadorian Amazon, we argued that this struggle is a process of delinking from the colonial matrix of power according to capitalist logics and, at the same time, of establishing ways to protect and strengthen cultural values through localized strategies of resistance and adaptation in a world highly conditioned by external forces (Lalander *et al*. 2021).

However, alongside local cosmological conceptualizations of *Buen Vivir*, Indigenous actors also incorporate in a universalist discourse, stressing not only human-ecological predicaments, but also the significance of intercultural social justice. For example, the response of Indigenous peoples to the state project of "progressive" extractivism is not always uniform and cohesive. While addressing environmental and cultural deterioration, it also recognizes the importance of universal redistribution as a necessity for *Buen Vivir*. Fernando Huanacuni Mamani, of the Aymara people, identifies this dilemma in countries with high poverty rates, also from the angles of state responsibility. Regarding the visions and policies of *Vivir Bien/Suma Qamaña*, considering the aspect of class and justice, with instruments to guarantee a minimum level of human dignity he concludes:

> Without dignity, we cannot talk about *Vivir Bien*. So, we still have a historical debt that has evolved into a social and economic debt (Huanacuni Mamani, interview, La Paz, April 13, 2015).

Accordingly, at the same time as the idea of *Buen Vivir* is deeply linked to the particularist struggles against the structures of ethno-cultural subordination, it also captures the universalist struggles against poverty and socio-economic inequality (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020). Therefore, it is essential to include the dimension of social justice in the understanding of *Buen Vivir* as a societal project.

The social justice-decoloniality link has been partially sidetracked in the *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* literature, in favor of interpretations that place particularistic and local concerns at the center of Indigenous discourses. In turn, the State, being formally the main agent for ensuring social justice, appears in the literature primarily as an adversary to Indigenous peoples. However, the struggle is not only directed towards the state as an adversary. The state at the same time also constitutes the arena for advancing in the practical implementation of the principles of *Buen Vivir* and pluriversality in practice, carried out by Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) actors at different levels of the state (e.g., Lalander and Lembke 2020).

In a previous article (Lalander and Lembke 2018a), an analogy inspired by the classic novel *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller (1995 [1961]) was used to analyze the contradictions in the understandings of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*. The main characters in *Catch-22* are faced with a series of situations in which they have no chance of achieving a net gain. This communicative dilemma, or double imperative, in practice implies that in situations of contradictory messages it is impossible to respond to one message (value/goal) without refuting the other. In our Indigenous *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* context, this double imperative manifests itself not only in relations between Indigenous people and the State, or between defenders of extractivism and nature respectively, but also in concrete situations in the face of the compromises between development in terms of social welfare conditions—access to health, education, infrastructure, communication technology, etc.—on the one hand, and the conservation of the environment and ethnic-cultural rights, on the other (Lalander and Lembke 2018a).

Frequently, the social justice dimension is attenuated in the understanding of Indigenous resistance, but, if the justice perspective is subordinate, particularisms are paramount—which would produce a skewed view of the complexity of indigeneity and therefore of *Sumak Kawsay*. Although Indigenous resistance is correctly seen as particularistic, this particularism

constitutes a necessary platform in a broader struggle for universal citizenship. Indigenous struggles correspond to the destructive effects of coloniality and are not limited to purely local cultural and ecological aspects. Accordingly, social justice is a vital and necessary part of *Sumak Kawsay*/*Buen Vivir* (Cuestas-Caza *et al*. 2020). Patricia Gualinga of the Amazonian Kichwa-Sarayaku people and spokesperson of the *Kawsak Sacha* (Living Jungle) project, clarifies the following:

> We disagree completely that capitalists come here with their extractive industries—destructive to the worldview of Indigenous peoples and to the environment—[despite] promising top technology in Indigenous territories […] Our goal is to maintain the Amazon intact and search for an alternative—not totally excluded from the Western world, because that's not possible, but based on our sustainability, our worldview, possibly incorporating positive things from the Western world […] without losing our vision and our essence as Indigenous peoples (Gualinga, interview, Puyo, February 11, 2015).

It is thus important not to understand the particularistic and universalistic perspectives as mutually exclusive. Struggles for the recognition of localized cultural forms of living coexist with the quest for more universalist socio-economic rights, akin to the joint autonomy-inclusion ambition as expressed in Indigenous discourses on plurinationality and interculturality. For Catherine Walsh, the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement's demands for an intercultural and plurinational society, emphasize principles of life, solidarity, dignity, equity and social justice, and challenges dominant economic, political, social, and legal structures (in Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 60-61). Or, using Inuca's words: "Collective identity plays a preponderant role with Indigenous terminology, in the search to construct its own history based on social struggle" (Inuca Lechón 2017a, 172).

Also, from the logic of resistance and adaptation it is necessary to refute the binary understanding of Indigenous peoples as trapped in a dilemma between supporting or refuting the system (Jackson and Warren 2005, 562). Following the transmodernity argument, around the world and since the dawn of colonialism, Indigenous peoples have preserved much of their culture while appropriating different aspects of the Western world, as equally highlighted by Gualinga above. This preservation of indigeneity has been based on resistance and adaptation, that is, on its constant renegotiation and reconstruction of identity and sustenance within parameters largely determined by an intrusive culture. Indigenous people's struggle is thus rooted in commitment and constant transforma-

tion (Jackson and Warren 2005, 559; Lalander and Lembke 2018b; 2020; Lalander, Lembke and Porsani 2023), as expressed in *Tinkuy's* oscillation between openness-encounter and resistance-confrontation.

Concluding Remarks

In this study, we have drawn an analogy between *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* and a natural phenomenon called "flying river." We have stressed that *Buen Vivir,* as a plural and floating concept, consists of varying perspectives according to self-perceptions of indigeneity and territoriality, a complexity rooted in both universalistic and particularistic ambitions. In our view, both the colonial matrix of power and the decolonial struggles of Indigenous peoples must be understood in their multifaceted forms and examined through holistic analytical lenses. This comprehension should include the perspectives of class/justice, culture/ethnicity, and ecologism.

While the extent of Indigenous peoples' decolonial discursive struggles includes these three dimensions, we have argued that the class perspective in terms of dignity and social justice has been relatively marginalized, particularly, as mentioned, in academic debates. Nonetheless, among Indigenous spokespersons we have emphasized that the elements of resistance and justice are indeed generally central, explicitly, or sometimes at least implicitly, in the discourses and visions of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*. This is explained and comprehended through the historical struggle as Indigenous peoples since colonial times. One conclusion, in this sense, is that *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* should not be reduced to a notion that only encapsulates ethnic-environmental concerns, but should comprise all three dimensions, thus acknowledging the interrelationship between universalism and particularism, as well as the strategic duality and oscillation of resistance and adaptation.

As flying rivers, *Buen Vivir* was born locally and continues to be (re) defined in local contexts where the decolonial struggle is expressed in innumerable ways. In recent times, *Buen Vivir* has become a vision and discourse of global scope. In a pluriversal and transmodern world, *Buen Vivir*, just like flying rivers, is vital for both human well-being and climate equilibrium. *Buen Vivir* manifests epistemologies claiming that other worlds are possible, worlds where politics of care, reciprocity, solidarity, and harmony with nature guide the political, economic, sociocultural, and scientific dimensions in the process of building other worlds, more equita-

ble, just, and more genuinely sustainable. However, in a world still largely defined by capitalist-colonial logics, achieving these ideals is far from harmonious. It is a struggle guided by *Sumak Kawsay* in its dual significance of encounter and resistance, that is, by *Tinkuy*.

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