Vivir Bien Policy in Post-Pandemic Bolivia: From Convivial Living to the Narrative of Economic Growth and Extractivism

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Introduction

The first wave of so-called pink tide governments, such as those led by Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, introduced new public policy orientations in Latin America. Responding to the demands of popular protest movements against decades of free market policies and neoliberal privatizations (Gonzales 2019), they focused on egalitarianism and redistribution, as well as an enhanced role for the state (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). As international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had forcefully conditioned previous neoliberal policies, many left-wing governments emphasized national sovereignty in deciding on their own policy priorities. In Bolivia and Ecuador, both of which have large and diverse Indigenous populations, new policy orientations drawing on the country's own priorities gained inspiration—and foundation—from the Indigenous peoples' cultures, philosophies of life, and historical struggles for inclusion and self-determination.

Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien [good living/living well] policies, enshrined in Ecuador's constitution in 2008 and in the Bolivian constitution in 2009, referenced living well in conditions of ecological and communitarian harmony, as characterized by Indigenous peoples' convivial living with others and the earth, as well as their struggles for territorial autonomy and plurinationalism (Chuji Gualinga, Rengifo, and Gudynas 2019; Cuestas-Caza 2021; Farah and Vasapollo 2011; Ranta 2020). In the late 1980s, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de Ecuador (CONAIE) had launched a powerful political movement in Ecuador for the recognition of Indigenous lands and the construction of the plurinational and intercultural state, a new concept that also started to circulate amongst Bolivian Indigenous movements over the next few decades (Yashar 2005, 179).

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During the early 2000s, the largest Indigenous movements in Bolivia allied with major peasant unions in the so-called "Pacto de Unidad" (Unity Pact), which, as an Indigenous-peasant alliance, was a historical political articulation that pushed for constitutional reform and plurinationalism (Makaran and López 2019, 90-91). In fact, *Buen Vivir* policies in Ecuador and *Vivir Bien* policies in Bolivia were Spanish translations of multiple Indigenous terminologies, particularly *Sumak Kawsay* [living well] in Ecuador and *Suma Qamaña* [living well] as well as *Ñandereko* [harmonious life] in Bolivia that the Kichwa, Aymara, Guaraní, and other Indigenous nationalities used to describe their ancestral and ecologically sustainable ways of living. Thus, in the eyes of Indigenous movements, the state policy processes opted for their own ways of conceptualizing and practicing plural politics, beyond modernist Western political categories (Patzi Paco 2013). This "pluriversal politics," to use Arturo Escobar's famous term, represented a notable distancing from Weberian conceptualization of state policy as a technical and law-binding bureaucratic instrument to seeing it through the lenses of "a multiplicity of worlds and ways of worlding life" (2020, 26).

To date, there has been a wide-ranging scholarly debate and critique of *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien* policies. While these Indigenous and left-wing policies discursively challenged economic growth agendas and appropriation of nature for economic profit, experiences concerning their tangible implementation has indicated serious controversies between idealist discourses and real-life practices (Postero 2017; Ranta 2018a). The continuation of modernist developmentalism and violent extractivism, which challenge the halting of climate change and the protection of the Mother Earth, has been critically discussed (Fabricant 2013; Radcliffe 2012). The literature has demonstrated that, in practice, Latin American left-wing politics of the first pink tide drew heavily on an export-led growth model, which was complemented with state-led policies of social inclusion and welfare (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). The much-needed social policies were funded with revenues from the extraction of natural resources, and their popularity amidst the electorate further encouraged the extractivist expansion. In contrast to the dominating role of transnational corporations in neoliberal times, the role of the state became stronger in natural resource governance, and the presence of new geopolitical allies such as China, Brazil, India and Venezuela became more evident (Gudynas 2015). In many parts of Latin America, including Bolivia, the accelerated global resource boom has led

to serious conflicts on Indigenous lands and territories, as well as ecologically fragile areas and protected national parks. Thus, there has been criticism that despite *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien* policies, state colonialities and violence to Indigenous peoples have continued, and, at times, they have even intensified (Altmann 2020; Choque Mamani 2014; Rivera Cusicanqui 2015). These situations have raised concerns about the violence of bureaucratic power and the nature of democracy in Bolivia (Ranta 2018b; Zegada *et al*. 2021).

In this chapter, we critically examine the discursive use of the concept of *Vivir Bien* as a state policy in post-pandemic Bolivia, which also corresponds to the controversial end of Evo Morales' long-term presidency (2006-2019).[1] We focus primarily on analyzing the conceptual framings and contradictions of *Vivir Bien*, as displayed in Bolivia's latest Economic and Social Development Plan 2021-2025 (PDES) called "Rebuilding the Economy for Living Well, Towards Industrialization with Import Substitution" ("Reconstruyendo la economía para Vivir Bien, hacia la industrialización con sustitución de importaciones"). Then we complement the content analysis with insights from interviews with public servants, academic scholars, and Indigenous activists, among others, conducted in 2020 and 2022 in the cities of La Paz, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and El Alto.[2] The chapter starts with an analytical section that describes the key societal and civilizational challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to

1 In 2019, Bolivia experienced a severe political crisis, and a forced change of government after major electoral protests (Claros and Díaz 2022; Zegada *et al*. 2021). As *Vivir Bien* was not part of the interim government's (2019-2020) agendas, we will not focus on its policies in this chapter.

2 The data for this chapter was collected during three periods of fieldwork, and as a collaboration between Ranta and López-Flores. During the first fieldwork period in February/March 2020, Ranta conducted 16 interviews with activists, scholars, members of popular movements and NGOs, as well as former state officials, ministers, and parliamentarians, particularly on the themes of democracy, policy, and politics. The second period of fieldwork, conducted by López-Flores in February/March 2022, produced 20 interviews with representatives of Indigenous organizations, state officials, and non-governmental actors (NGOs and academic scholars). The interview themes included: 1) civil society and citizenship in Bolivia; 2) Indigenous peoples, *Vivir Bien*, autonomy and raciality in Bolivia; and 3) perspectives and imaginaries of the future in Bolivia. During the third fieldwork period in November/December 2022, Ranta conducted eight interviews with Indigenous activists. The interviewees were selected through snowball sampling. While the *Vivir Bien* policy was not the main theme of these interviews, it was frequently brought up by the interviewees. While Ranta has written much of this chapter, both authors participated equally in the data collection and analysis.

the scholarly and activist discussions, as well as national and transnational policy-making agendas. We then move to the analysis of the policy content, followed by a section with interview excerpts, and finally, conclusions.

Rethinking Development in Post-Pandemic Times

Rethinking development for the post-pandemic world is among the more foundational questions of our times. The COVID-19 pandemic with all its horrors, destructions, and violence has provided humankind with an unprecedented prospect to rethink and restructure its future pathways. The pandemic has exposed how indispensable it is for social, political and economic systems to pay closer attention to intimate interdependencies and conviviality of human and more-than-human entities of our living world. Scholars increasingly argue that humanity's destruction of biodiversity creates the conditions for new globally spreading viruses such as COVID-19 (Han 2020; Svampa and Viale 2020). Capitalist economic development, such as road building, mining, hunting and logging, together with rapid urbanization and population growth, disrupt fragile ecosystems bringing people into closer contact with animal species and possible zoonotic diseases that result from environmental change (Vidal 2020). There is a clear signposting that in times of climate emergency, ecocide and pandemics (Gills and Morgan 2019), the current development convention that emphasizes the economic growth paradigm and the expansion of global capitalism has become unsustainable. Climate change, accelerated by the Anthropocene and global capitalism, constitutes an important issue in the accumulation of the socio-ecological crisis with its irreversible effects on the human and more-than-human relationality. Consequently, new paradigmatic openings are needed, if we want to mitigate the negative societal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to avoid future pandemics. We suggest that ideally, the *Vivir Bien* paradigm could be perceived in this light, as it entails various ecological and communitarian qualities with which the challenges of the planetary crisis—climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss—could be met.

However, in the current global economic crisis, which preceded but was significantly exaggerated by the pandemic, the economic growth narrative seems to be regaining centrality among politicians and government officials worldwide, including in countries such as Bolivia. As a result of the economic collapse during the pandemic, many Latin American states

have revived the discourse of the need for economic growth, with a special focus on the intensification of unsustainable extractivism of non-renewable natural resources, such as oil and gas, as well as a high-scale export agriculture (López Flores and Ranta 2024). This follows a worldwide trend to perceive unsustainable extractivism of natural resources as the principal means for post-pandemic recovery. While there is a pressing need to respond to calls for redistribution, poverty reduction and saving lives, the revival and speeding up of "economistic" development has been met with controversy, creating multiple local tensions and conflicts in terms of policy orientations and desirable futures. Throughout Latin America, the planetary and socio-ecological crisis is closely associated with the proliferation of extractive projects and exploitation of natural resources through agribusiness, mega-mining, production of energy from fossil sources, mega-dams and land grabbing, among other activities. Those processes have a strong impact in vulnerable ecosystems and on local populations, particularly in communities with a rural base that are ancestrally based in the territory, as is the case of a large part of the Indigenous peoples and peasant communities of the subcontinent (Blaser 2013; Cadena 2015).

In Latin America, unifying regional factors are the high rates of income inequalities (whose historical roots go back to colonial times), unequal land tenure, and owning of productive assets, as well as neo-colonial continuities in international trade and the world economy. During the 1980s and 1990s inequalities deepened sharply in Latin America with harsh neoliberal structural adjustment programs and the withering away of state regulation of the economy and public services. During the Latin American pink tide of the 2000s, inequalities have narrowed slightly (ECLAC 2014). The deep structural inequalities laid the conditions for very high vulnerability, when the COVID-pandemic hit the region. There were record numbers of pandemic cases and deaths in Latin America. Mortality was very high in those countries which have high levels of poverty and extreme poverty, as well as wide informal and precarious labor markets (Cid and Marinho 2022). The ECLAC estimated a 27-year setback in the levels of extreme poverty for 2021, with 86 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean suffering from this backlash. However, extreme poverty due to the pandemic has not affected all people equally, but there has been a greater increase in extreme poverty in rural areas, amidst children and adolescents, as well as Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants (ECLAC 2022). In addition to losing jobs and income, and risking

health and lives, people have suffered from sharp drops in educational opportunities, as well as considerable digital divides that became evident when online schooling became a necessity. In most parts of Latin America, including Bolivia, schools closed for a lengthy period, which affected students in multiple ways (Veintie *et al*. 2022). In moments of multiple crisis (health, economy, schooling), the fragility of many Latin American states became obvious. State interventions in times of multiple demands and needs were insufficient, causing resentment and doubt towards politicians and other decision-makers (Veintie *et al*. 2022). As a response to state weaknesses, many civil society groups and activists stood up, setting up soup kitchens, producing hygiene products and providing information in times of insecurity (Tabbush and Friedman 2020, 635).

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Bolivia in March 2020, and the government closed schools and borders quickly, and ordered a national lockdown (Hummel *et al*. 2021). In total, more than 22 000 people have died from the disease, and a disproportionate number of them live in Bolivia's poorest departments. The mortality rate was the highest at the end of 2021, but during 2022 the rate decreased, although the number of cases increased significantly. The impact of vaccinations started to show, even if the vaccination pace has been slow. By early 2023, approximately 64 % of the population has taken at least one dose. In our interviews conducted in 2022, it became evident that several populational segments were skeptical about vaccinations. This included some Indigenous groups, and there were several reasons for the vaccine resistance, but as has been pointed out in other parts of the world, the reasons tend to relate to brutal experiences of colonialism and inhumane health experiments directed at Indigenous peoples in the past (Cherofsky and Juárez López 2021). Some Aymara leaders declared publicly that due to their lifestyle, diet and relationship with nature, the Aymara are healthier than the rest of the population, and therefore there is less risk of them becoming infected (Interview November 23, 2022). Some religious sectors, such as evangelical churches, also opposed vaccination (Molina 2022).

The pandemic coincided with one of the deepest political crises in Bolivia's political history (Claros and Díaz 2022; Zegada *et al*. 2021). The country had an interim government that came into power in a chaotic situation in November 2019, when President Evo Morales went into exile in Mexico with his closest political allies after having led the country for 14 years. Contrary to the constitution, Morales had run for presidency for

the fourth time in the autumn 2019 elections. Suspicions of election fraud led to resistance, and especially middle-class citizens and young people mobilized and protested in the streets (Zegada *et al.* 2021). The situation quickly escalated, and the presidency was assumed by a right-wing member of the Senate, Jeanine Áñez, under unclear circumstances. The interim government carried out human rights violations and massacres, and the country quickly became polarized (Calle Laime 2020; Macusaya 2020). In autumn 2020, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party, led by Morales, returned to power under the leadership of President Luis Arce, who led the drafting of the new policy framework, in which *Vivir Bien* is present once again, as will be discussed in the next section.

Vivir Bien in the Economic and Social Development Plan 2021-2025

The notion of *Vivir Bien* was first launched as Bolivian state policy in 2006 during Evo Morales' first government.[3] Even if the concept as such is often perceived as representing an alternative to the concept of development (Gudynas 2011), it became the backbone of the national development plan called "Bolivia digna, soberana, productiva y democrática para Vivir Bien" (2006-2011). Anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism, as well as Indigenous peoples' issues and ecological concerns, stood out as the document's key policy discourses. It demonstrated how "the MAS discursively linked neoliberalism to colonialism and […] located its alternative project within Indigenous customs and potentials" (Postero 2013, 33). However, much of the radical edge withered away in the subsequent policy document: "Rumbo a una Bolivia líder" 2010-2015. It was devoid of references to Indigenous cosmologies or Indigenous rights, and instead it emphasized economic growth and state-led industrialization. During that period, Morales' regime increasingly started to clash with environmental activists and territorially based Indigenous groups over resource extraction, hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation, hydroelectric projects and other infrastructure building on Indigenous territories, national parks, and protected areas (Laing 2015; Makaran and Lopez 2019; Rivera Cusicanqui 2015).

3 Ranta has previously conducted ethnographic research on the principles and bureaucratic applications of *Vivir Bien* policy during Evo Morales' first regime for the purpose of a doctoral dissertation (Ranta 2014).

After that, the 2016-2020 "Economic and Social Development Plan within the Comprehensive Development Framework for Living Well" ("Plan de desarrollo económico y social en el marco del desarrollo integral para Vivir Bien") was launched, revitalizing the discourse on *Vivir Bien*, which was said to comprise elements such as the critique of modernity and capitalism, diversity of knowledge, cosmological harmony, and balanced relationships between humans, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

The 2019-2020 interim government tried to get rid of many of the ideas and policies of the previous government, and its attitude towards Indigenous peoples was hostile, as they were collectively perceived to be MAS proponents, even if the real-life circumstances were much more complex (Macusaya 2020). However, with the presidency of Luis Arce and vice presidency of David Choquehuanca, an Aymara professional and Morales' long-term minister for Foreign Affairs, the notion of *Vivir Bien* was once again introduced to the title of the current "Economic and Social Development Plan 2021-2025." It is a five-year plan, which formulates part of the long-term planning framework called the "Patriotic Agenda" (2015). According to many of those we interviewed, Choquehuanca had initially proposed the concept of *Vivir Bien* as Bolivia's policy principle, and he is widely perceived as the key government protagonist behind the philosophy. His background is in Andean Indigenous organizations that had gained inspiration from such groups as Movimiento Universitario Julian Apaza (MUJA), Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA), and Centro Andina de Desarrollo Agropecuario (CADA). These groups promoted Indigenous scholarship and locally based epistemologies, including the notion of *Suma Qamaña*, which was theorized by Aymara scholars such as Simón Yampara and Mario Torrez (Burman 2017, 156). Indigenous epistemologies served in the process of defending Indigenous self-determination and reconstructing Aymara territories called *ayllus*, which eventually led into the founding of the major Andean Indigenous movement Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ). However, *Vivir Bien* also gained popularity amidst non-Indigenous development professionals and environmentalists and was ultimately co-opted by the MAS political party as a legitimation for its international image as an "Indigenous government" (Burman 2017, 159-160). This issue has been severely criticized by many Indigenous scholars (Mancilla, Cuti, and Vargas 2021; Patzi Paco 2013).

According to the introduction of the national development plan, it is striving for "a world without inequality and poverty; a society oriented

to Living Well in balance and harmony with Mother Earth" (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo 2021, 3). Thus, the notion of *Vivir Bien* is vividly present as a discursive tool from the early pages of the plan. It is conceptually connected to convivial living with Mother Earth. Furthermore, the introduction of the plan emphasizes the constitutional nature of *Vivir Bien* as Bolivia's state policy:

> The Political Constitution of the State assumes and promotes Living Well [*Vivir Bien*] as the strategic horizon for the Plurinational State of Bolivia; [it is] an alternative paradigm to capitalism and to the modernity, and it derives from the worldviews of the Indigenous, native, and peasant nations and peoples, as well as intercultural and Afro-Bolivian communities. It is to be constructed in collective, complementary and supportive ways in the context of interculturality. [*Vivir Bien*] means living in complementarity, harmony and balance with the Mother Earth and societies; [living] in equity and solidarity; and eliminating inequalities and domination mechanisms (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo 2021, 3).

As can be seen, the notion *Vivir Bien* is not defined as the present societal condition, but rather as an ideal future horizon in which a new kind of society, economy, and human-nature-relations would prevail. The model for that orientation is said to derive from the worldviews of Bolivia's many nations and peoples, including Indigenous people, peasants, and Afro-Bolivians. Indigenous identities in Bolivia are historically complex. According to the National Census in 2012, 41 % of the Bolivian population over the age of 15 self-identifies as being of Indigenous origin. The Aymaras (40.6 %) and the Quechuas (49.5 %), who reside predominantly in the Andean mountains and valleys, comprise the vast majority of Indigenous peoples. In total, there are thirty-six recognized Indigenous peoples, mostly small nationalities that reside in the Amazonian area. In the Bolivian context, the term Indigenous (*indígena*) refers to these latter groups; *originario* (native) to those highland Aymaras and Quechuas who reside in traditional *ayllus*; and the concept of peasants (*campesino*) dates to the Bolivian revolution (1952) after which all rural Indigenous peoples were labelled as peasants and organized into state-led peasant unions. Intercultural groups are peasant migrants, mainly coca-growers, who have migrated to the Amazonian region from the Andean mountains. While the national development plan emphasizes harmony amongst peoples, there are differing interests and unequal societal positionings between majority and minority Indigenous groups; between peasants and Indigenous/natives; as well as between migrants ("interculturals") and minority Indigenous

groups in the lowlands (Ranta 2023). Many differences relate to landownership, land use, and territorial relations, as well as self-determination.

After an introduction, the development plan is divided into ten main thematic areas. The first four focus entirely on reconstructing the economy through such issues as macroeconomic stability, import substitution industrialization, promotion of agricultural exports, development of tourism, and the industrialization of natural resources (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo 2021, 75). The other pillars relate to education, health, justice, environment, foreign affairs, and culture. Bolivia enjoyed high levels of economic growth for a long time, and the importance of economic growth is also emphasized in the introduction to the development plan, even if it could be considered to be antithetical to *Vivir Bien* thinking. The introduction emphasizes that poverty has decreased significantly in Bolivia in the period before the pandemic because of economic growth. However, Bolivia's foreign exchange reserves already started to decline towards the end of Morales' presidency, and they are almost half of what they were before the pandemic. So, even if the pages 72-74 of the development plan emphasize Indigenous epistemologies, decolonization, depatriarcalization, and plural wisdoms, worldviews and collective lifestyles of Indigenous peoples, much of the plan focuses on reviving the economy.

From the perspectives of the environment and Indigenous peoples' territorial self-determination, the focus on industrialization and extractivism is alarming. The high world market prices of natural resources promoted Bolivia's steady economic growth during Morales' presidency. However, the expansion of resource exploration and exploitation and other modernizing projects related to them, such as road building, also raised fierce resistance from both ecologists and Indigenous communities, who suffered from the pollution and loss of their territories (Laing 2015; Makaran and Lopez 2019; Rivera Cusicanqui 2015). Despite the unsustainable nature of extractivism, the national development plan continues to emphasize "the deepening of the process of industrialization of natural resources." Raising concerns about greenwashing, the plan states that the government aims to "promote the prospecting, exploration and sustainable exploitation of natural resources with care for the environment in harmony with Mother Earth" (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo 2021, 101). While renewable energies are mentioned, the emphasis is on traditional non-renewables, such as natural gas and oil, as well as lithium and mining. This also contradicts the aims of thematic area number 8, which focuses on environmental

protection and declares that the government of Bolivia will enhance "a sustainable and balanced environment in harmony with Mother Earth." According to the text, its aim is to promote mitigation, adaptation and monitoring actions for climate change, with effective response measures to its impacts in harmony and balance with Mother Earth. However, it is notable that many of the tasks in this section focus on the defense of the rights of Mother Earth internationally and regionally, rather than inside Bolivia (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo 2021, 163-166). Bolivia's international profile as an environmentally friendly Indigenous state becomes all the clearer as the country's international relations are said to focus on "globally leading the construction of the civilizational horizon of living well," as well as promoting "the exercise of the rights of Indigenous peoples and their application in subregional, regional and/or multilateral contexts." Additionally, Bolivia will support processes of "decolonization from the peoples in order to create Plurinational States" (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo 2021, 169-172). Thus, it appears as if Bolivia is promoting environmental, climate, and Indigenous agendas abroad while inside the country economic growth and extractivism appear to be the main strategies in reducing poverty and speeding up national development processes, particularly in conditions of post-pandemic economic recess and development backlash. This dual approach creates many contradictions and disagreements, as will be described below through the analysis of interview excerpts.

Whose Interests Prevail?

The difficult economic situation and the backlash of development that many countries have suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic surely explain much of the contradictions between the rhetoric of *Vivir Bien* and the revival of the economic growth paradigm, which is detrimental to the environment and Indigenous territorial rights. In an interview with one of the directors of Vice Presidency, which is where the paradigm of *Vivir Bien* is particularly prominent, multilayered discrepancies both in terms of the content of *Vivir Bien* and between diverse political factions were clearly notable. First, the director, who belongs to the MAS party and is part of the group that pushes *Vivir Bien* forward as a state policy, suggested us that according to them, "there is no environmental awareness [in Bolivia] because that comes from Europe where this awareness has emerged." They

continued to explain that they perceive environmental problems primarily as concerns of other countries. According to them, the popular and territorial resistance against extractivism that has been ongoing in different parts of Bolivia for more than 10 years now is not so much about the environmental protection or the mitigation of climate change. Instead,

> [Indigenous] organizations negotiate from very different perspectives […] the cultural vision is very important, that it is their worldview, it is their territory, their respect, that is the vision they have […] that is where the conflict [between the government and the social movements] is (Interview February 17, 2022).

They also downplayed the environmental and ecological aspects of the conflict at the Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure (TIPNIS), which since 2011 has become an internationally known example of the ambivalences and violent hostilities of the Bolivian government towards its minority Indigenous groups who live in fragile Amazonian ecologies. In the TIPNIS case, the government aimed to build a highway across the protected Indigenous territory, to assign gas and oil concessions and explorations, and to facilitate coca-growing activities in the region. It was fiercely resisted by several segments of the population, but the director perceived the resistance actions in the light of the political opposition rather than as a genuine concern for the environment and Indigenous territories. They said: "The TIPNIS [case] was a way of confronting Evo Morales with anger and rage more than anything else, it was not a conscious and coherent environmental defense" (Interview February 17, 2022).

Curiously, despite having defended the government position against environmental activists and Indigenous movements, the director noted that inside the government there are two opposing tendencies in terms of the principles through which the country's future vision should be perceived; whether the horizon should be *Vivir Bien* or industrialization. According to them, the newest national development plan has a very strong focus on the industrialization, which is why "we as Vice Presidency were totally against it […] because living well had been set aside, which for us seemed contrary to the vision of the state" (Interview February 17, 2022). They admitted that the last few years had been tough economically and socially due to the pandemic and political changes, including societal polarizations. The contradictions in orienting the development path of the country had become more visible, as explained in the following quotation:

> Now we are in the stage of re-activating the economy and meeting a huge number of needs that have been created. The needs have doubled compared to these fourteen previous years and that implies entering a much harder terrain. So, it seems to me that the current PDES is trying to find that answer in an industrial development that the president [Arce] has called import substitution, which is the old position of the 1950s […] This marks a course of where one can go and obviously living well as a discourse is somehow the horizon, but how is that going to be harmonized? […] Personally, I notice greater tension this year and in this new management between what living well implies as a different vision of development and a different way of building life and what a more conventional model of development implied in industrialization would mean. I have been in government for twelve years, it is the first time that I have seen a very strong tension, very clear, very evident, so strong that it has been reflected in the PDES and if it were not for the explicit intervention of the Vice Presidency, perhaps some visions would have been left out (Interview February 17, 2022).

Nevertheless, even if the tensions between different approaches have grown enormously in post-pandemic situation, many of them were already present before, and they have been documented in many investigations in Bolivia and elsewhere (Altmann 2020; Cuestas-Caza 2021; Radcliffe 2012; Ranta 2018a). From the perspective of politicians and state officials, the question might have been about the struggle between diverse interests and political power, but from the perspective of territorial Indigenous movements, such as the CONAMAQ which we briefly mentioned earlier, the question about *Vivir Bien* versus growth narrative and extractivism was an existential and ontological issue, as described by one of the leading members of the CONAMAQ orgánica:[4]

> Living well is for us harmony with Mother Earth, but for [the MAS], they have managed living well in a different way. But living well for us is to be with Mother Earth, and it is to be in harmony with Pachamama. Without that, there would be no living well. The ancestors have always been with Mother Earth, with Pachamama, always giving offerings. And that is living well for us, because she is a mother, right? The earth is what we know, that is why it is living well with Mother Earth, and we employ harmony. But [the government] has handled [*Vivir Bien*] differently (Interview March 4, 2020).

4 There are two strands of the CONAMAQ. The original one called the CONAMAQ orgánica, and the pro-government CONAMAQ. The strands separated in the aftermath of the TIPNIS conflict, when the government took over those Indigenous organizations that had resisted its extractivist plans.

Economic growth narrative and extractivist policies destroy fragile living environments and disrupt Indigenous peoples' territorially based worldviews and ontological relationships with land.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined *Vivir Bien* policy in post-pandemic Bolivia. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an enormous global health crisis, which at the same time has been a crisis of global economy, social equality, and global justice. The economic collapse and the backlash of development, which still continues, has led to the re-emergence of the narrative of economic growth, which is presented as a solution to questions of poverty reduction and narrowing down inequalities. It has been the poorest of the poor who have suffered most of the health problems and economic consequences of the pandemic. However, if destructive extractivism is presented as a quick way to the recovery of the economy, it is most likely that the most vulnerable populations, particularly Indigenous peoples, will continue to suffer even more. Instead of emphasizing the narrative of economic growth and extractivism convivial ways of living should be embraced, and cherished.

Ideally, the notion of *Vivir Bien* has much to offer for national policies, with its ecological and communitarian stances. However, the profound civilizational criticism that it importantly provides against growth paradigms seems to be constantly pushed aside in the real-life practice of politics, even if academic scholars, activists, and some politicians continue promoting it. Despite the criticisms, many *Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien* policies are still in effect in Latin America, and they continue to inspire social movements, environmentalists, and activist groups in different parts of the region and beyond. This includes political leaders, such as Colombia's first left-wing President Gustavo Petro and the Vice President Francia Márquez, who is an award-winning environmental activist and Afro-Colombian rights advocate. In 2022, they launched state policies under the notions of *Buen Vivir* and *Vivir Sabroso*, which references both Indigenous philosophies and traditional community organizing and convivial land relations of Afro-Colombians (Caicedo Sarralde 2023). Therefore, it is important to continue critically reflecting upon Latin American policy orientations and the complexities of their regional and national operating environment in times of multiple socio-ecological crisis, which is at once an economic

crisis, a political crisis, a crisis of climate, pollution and biodiversity, and energy and food crisis—all in the context of post-pandemic challenges.

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