

How to Listen to *Pachamama's Testimonio*: Lessons from Indigenous Voices

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We're in Times of Change. . . of Pachakuti. Facing this great. . . Global Crisis, the Western world is concerned; it knows not what to do. Questioning itself, it searches for alternative models and life-ways because its values are in crisis. . . . The exaggerated and unlimited industrialization of Western models of accumulation, now expressed in extreme liberalization and absolute market supremacy, pushes us to economic disaster, and to accelerated destruction of natural equilibria and our planet. These models are discredited; they are not solutions to preserve the planet, life, or the human species, and cannot solve this global crisis because they augment the ecological debt, threaten the survival of living beings and the planet's subsistence and overwhelm the renewal of natural resources given the pace of overconsumption. Hence, the West wants to find out the proposal of the aboriginal Indigenous nations. They want to learn the values of the Indigenous world: the Culture of Life. They're anxious to understand our forms of organization; they want to know how the Indigenous have guaranteed equilibrium. . . and live in harmony with nature. Thus, when they study their doctorates, they go to Norte Potosí in search of societal models where the West hasn't yet arrived. When we lay out our proposals for . . . the Culture of Life, the culture of dialogue, they're left without arguments; they say: this should be the proposal, they now value what we are.¹

—*El Vivir Bien como respuesta a la Crisis Global (129-31)*

Introduction

This article analyzes the collective, open-access, and modifiable publication *El Vivir Bien como respuesta a la Crisis Global* ('Living Well as a Response to the Global Crisis'; henceforth *El Vivir Bien*). It explores this document as a posthumanist *testimonio* or *ecotestimonio* intending to give voice to the biotic community of the Andes. First published in 2009, *El Vivir Bien* was written in Spanish by Quechua and Aymara organizations of Bolivia and

presented in early 2010 by the Indigenous-led Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues during its International Expert Group Meeting on “Development with Culture and Identity.”

El Vivir Bien is a web-accessible document that targets global ecological, financial, and social crises from the perspective of Indigenous knowledges. This document exemplifies the worldwide reemergence of Indigenous voices confronting the global ecological crisis and its environmental injustices through the revitalization of Indigenous worldviews and practices. Texts such as *El Vivir Bien* have been crucial in raising awareness about the importance of Indigenous perspectives in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis. In operating as a political manifesto, *El Vivir Bien* helped gather transnational momentum for the historic 2010 World Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (WPCCC) that took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The “Peoples’ Agreement,” which marked the conclusion of the WPCCC, reflects the influence of ideas previously articulated in texts like *El Vivir Bien*. The WPCCC’s “Peoples’ Agreement” reads:

Humanity confronts a great dilemma: to continue on the path of capitalism, depredation, and death, or . . . choose the path of harmony with nature and respect for life. It is imperative that we forge a new system that restores harmony with nature and . . . equity among human beings. We propose . . . the recovery, revalorization, and strengthening of the knowledge, wisdom, and ancestral practices of Indigenous Peoples, which are affirmed in the thought and practices of “Living Well” [which entails] recognizing Mother Earth as a living being with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship. . . . [W]e must recognize Mother Earth . . . as the source of life. (n. pag.)

El Vivir Bien, which has had an undeniable impact in shaping debates as important as those of the WPCCC, is a great point of departure to explore what it means to revitalize Indigenous knowledges and practices in the contemporary context of global ecological crisis. Here, we emphasize how *El Vivir Bien* can be read not only as an Indigenous political manifesto, but as an *ecotestimonio* conveying, among many timely lessons, the Indigenous teaching that humans must listen carefully to the non-human world to learn from *Pachamama* (the living Earth) how to interrelate as humans *and* with non-humans who must collaborate in ensuring the continuing vitality of the *ayllu*, or community of life. If humans listen carefully to *Pachamama*’s testimony, as Indigenous voices urge, doubt must be cast upon the viability of ideas celebrated by hegemonic Western modern discourses like “development,” “progress,” or “economic growth.”

Instead, Indigenous voices invite us to rethink the place, functions, and responsibilities of humans as members of the web of life.

Ecotestimonio in the Anthropocene

Until recently, social injustices and environmental issues were not frequently connected in cultural and literary studies. However, the last decade has seen a rapidly emerging debate on environmental humanities, supported by a recent global turn in ecocriticism, allowing fruitful dialogues between ecocritical theory and postcolonial studies (Heise 636-39; Chakrabarty 1-15). Ecocriticism and environmental humanities are thus moving beyond dominant Euro-American environmentalisms, stemming from Northern epistemologies, towards more inclusive global critical approaches including Southern perspectives, forming what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “ecology of knowledges” (“Beyond Abyssal Thinking,” 1-33). This allows “learning from the South through an epistemology of the South” (11). Several interdisciplinary approaches to pressing socio-environmental problems are now exposing the correlations among economic growth, extreme inequality, and environmental degradation. New concepts emerging from these approaches, like Rob Nixon’s “slow violence” or Stacy Alaimo’s “trans-corporeality,” invite us to rethink violence, injustice, health, causality, consumerism, and ethical responsibility in complex, ecological, and posthumanist ways that challenge unsustainable but hegemonic epistemological dichotomies (e.g., human/non-human, society/nature, economy/ecology). In this Anthropocene epoch of accelerating climate change, when the risks and effects of environmental degradation are disproportionately distributed among the most vulnerable communities, it becomes irrelevant or misleading to address social justice without targeting environmental injustice. We must urge attention to non-human agency to understand the violence and injustice perpetuated by the hubristic, colonial, and anthropocentric logic that unleashed, and is still perpetuating, such violence. As Jane Bennett might argue, to envision and practice a coherent and viable political ecology, we must heed the political agency of “things.”

How is this ongoing, massive transformation of the humanities in the midst of two unprecedented global crises—“the environmental and inequality crises” (Nixon, n. pag.)—affecting the critical study of *testimonio*? Let us depart from a basic definition of *testimonio* as a narrative “in which speaking subjects who present themselves as somehow ‘ordinary’ represent a personal experience of injustice . . . with the goal of inducing readers to participate in a project of social justice” (Nance 7). Let us expand Kimberly Nance’s question of whether or not—and if so, how—testimonial narratives can promote justice. Our reformulated question would read thus: can testimonial narratives promote *socio-environmental*

justice, epistemological diversity, and posthumanist ethics? To address this question in relation to the ecotestimonial document we are studying here, we must, as Louise Detwiler and Janis Breckenridge suggest, push the boundaries of Latin American testimony towards narratives that overcome the traditional modes of the subgenre to include, for instance, posthumanist testimonies (testimonies that strive to include the voice of the more-than-human community; 1-6). We thus concur with Detwiler in deploying an ecocritical approach to testimonial narratives that can be seen as *ecotestimonios* (223-24). Such narratives may replace the traditional *testimonio* individual eyewitness (*testigo*) telling a trauma narrative from a human perspective with nonhuman biotic witnesses telling terra-trauma narratives and de-centering anthropocentric thinking (Detwiler 221-34).

Let us explore how *El Vivir Bien* can be interpreted as a posthumanist *testimonio* or *ecotestimonio* pushing beyond the limits of anthropocentric thinking about justice, while articulating a discourse from the Global South that challenges the dominant assumptions of hegemonic Northern epistemologies. Some examples include the rejection of individualist conceptions of knowledge, the deployment of “we-oriented” communal narration (including the “voice” of the more-than-human), a cyclical understanding of time, an alternative historical view of the ecological crisis and its correlation to colonial injustice (focusing on environmental justice and North-South asymmetries), a critique of techno-optimism, and the articulation of viable alternatives and solutions from Indigenous philosophies.

The document’s collective narration via the first-person plural (“we”), tied to the fact that it does not identify any individual author, writer, editor, contributor or publisher, clearly enacts the critique that Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) are “legal artifacts for the capitalist economy” (Escobar and Pardo 295). By favoring privatization, bio-piracy, and market-oriented practices, IPRs diminish and exterminate non-market-oriented communitarian rights and traditional knowledge that support cultural diversity and biodiversity in the Global South, as noted by many contributors to the volume *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. The introduction of *El Vivir Bien* overtly states that the text is a communal creation belonging to everyone, and as such can be reproduced, disseminated, or modified at will. It adds: “El conocimiento sólo crece si se comparte” (6) ‘Knowledge can only grow if shared.’ This aligns with Andean Indigenous understandings of culture and creativity as something impossible outside the community in which it emerges and inseparable from its environmental context. The atomistic individualized conception of IPRs as private, stemming from the liberal political and economic philosophy dominating Western thinking, overlooks the interrelations of communities and environments that allow the fiction of the independent individual to exist. Looking at it from outside these hubristic Western perspectives, it makes more sense to collaborate

than to compete and to share than to accumulate. Confronting the commodification, appropriation, and restriction of knowledge promoted by IPRs, this *ecotestimonio* freely and generously shares communal and ancestral knowledge. If heeded, this wisdom can help solve the multiple crises generated precisely by the global imposition of the dominant Western logic that promotes IPRs.

El Vivir Bien recognizes the agency and relevance of the human communities from the South and their epistemological diversity; moreover, it shows the importance of the more-than-human community. There are several instances where the narration identifies and melds with the biotic community and non-human world: “nuestra voz es la de los nevados que pierden sus ponchos blancos” (27) ‘our voice is the voice of the snow-capped mountains losing their white *ponchos*’; “Somos nosotros mismos piedras andantes de agua” (46) ‘We are walking rocks of water’ (46); “todo está vivo y consciente” (132) ‘all is living and conscious’; “somos parte integral de un único organismo gigantesco” (133) ‘we are an integral part of a single gigantic organism.’ This kind of narrative also embraces other temporal scales beyond the limitations of human history, like geological and evolutionary time (Big History). Elsewhere the narration listens to *Pachamama* to try to decode its messages: “En relación con nuestra madre tierra aprendimos a leer . . . aprendimos a interpretar el sonido” (135) ‘In relation with our Mother Earth we learned to read . . . to interpret sound’; “No hablamos de justicia social, porque cuando hablamos de justicia, estamos hablando solamente de las personas, y eso es excluyente” (164) ‘We do not speak of social justice, because when we speak of justice, we speak only of human persons, and that is exclusionary.’

The text also contains countless denunciations of an economic way of thinking that commodifies everything and depletes the biotic community. These abundant terra-trauma narratives are explicitly interrelated with human trauma narratives, since they translate not only into massive ecocide, but also environmental injustices among humans. While the rapid depletion of Earth’s living systems results, as the document notes, from Western modes of thinking and acting (e.g., capital accumulation, economic growth, rapid urbanization, industrialization, over-consumption), its negative social consequences are disproportionately felt in the Global South generally and in Bolivia particularly: “98% de las víctimas de los desastres naturales de los últimos veinte años (1985-2005) vivía en los países del Sur” (26) ‘98% of natural disaster victims of the last twenty years (1985-2005) lived in the Global South’; “Los niños recién nacidos en países del Norte consumen entre 40 y 70 veces más agua que los nacidos en el Sur” (37) ‘newborns in the Global North consume between 40 and 70 times more water than newborns in the South.’

The main responsibility of this global ecological crisis should not be equally attributed to the human population as a whole, but to Northern regions and Southern elites: “ese 20% de la población mundial más enriquecida que consume el 86% de los recursos naturales del mundo . . . Basando su crecimiento económico en el derroche de los recursos del planeta y el saqueo de los recursos de los pueblos del Sur” (32) ‘The wealthiest 20% of the global population consumes 86% of the Earth’s natural resources . . . basing their economic growth on the wasteful overconsumption of the planet’s resources and the plunder of the resources of the peoples of the South.’ Therefore, it is critical to expose these asymmetries to understand the colonial mechanisms perpetuating and reproducing environmental injustice.

In “The Great Acceleration and the Great Divergence: Vulnerability in the Anthropocene,” Rob Nixon questions how the grand narrative of the Anthropocene has developed, since “telling a story one way as opposed to another can have profound imaginative, ethical, and political consequences” (n. pag.). Nixon accepts that humans are an extraordinary biogeochemical force that is rapidly transforming the Earth system in very disturbing and dangerous ways. However, Nixon argues that the grand narrative of the Anthropocene tends to ignore that, in the context of the human collective agency the term implies, we must talk about “unequal human agency, unequal human impacts, and unequal human vulnerabilities” (n. pag.):

The species-centered Anthropocene meme has arisen in the twenty-first century, a period in which most societies have experienced a deepening schism between the *überraich* and the *ultrapoor*. In terms of the history of ideas, what does it mean that the Anthropocene as a grand explanatory species story has taken hold during a plutocratic age? How can we counter the centripetal force of that dominant story with centrifugal stories that acknowledge immense disparities in human agency, impacts, and vulnerability? (n. pag.)

We propose that *ecotestimonios* like *El Vivir Bien* serve, precisely, as counter-narratives emphasizing the centrifugal stories omitted by the dominant discourse. While the “Anthropocene” resituates humans at the center of the story, posthumanist *testimonios* correctively decenter Western anthropocentric discourses, highlighting both non-human agency and the asymmetrical power relations in human epistemologies.

We must cautiously analyze the Anthropocene narrative as it develops from hegemonic Western academic contexts and focuses on the disproportionate power of humans as a collective agency. Western techno-optimism and its hubristic transhumanist impulses can interpret this superpower as justification for

further domination, control, and manipulation of nature (e.g., climate geoengineering). The huge blind spot of this position is that the Anthropocene also indicates that our collective agency produces uncontrollable unintended consequences and can unleash non-human agencies far more powerful than humans. In a recent book, Jean-Pierre Dupuy analyzes the dangers of nanotechnologies and biotechnologies and warns that, in the context of “the ongoing desacralization (or disenchantment) of the world that epitomizes modernity” (xvi), “the principal danger facing humanity . . . is the temptation of pride. In abandoning ourselves to scientific optimism, counting on technology to rescue us from the . . . impasse into which it has led us, we . . . risk . . . producing monsters that will devour us” (29-30). In fact, a recent study by Samuel Alexander shows that techno-efficiency improvements cannot reduce humans’ environmental impact if they are generated in the context of a system based on economic growth; instead, they significantly reinforce ecological degradation. For technological innovation to help solve pressing socio-environmental problems, it must emerge “within a new economic paradigm based on ‘sufficiency’ rather than ‘limitless growth’” (n. pag.). *El Vivir Bien* concurs as it exposes the low EROI (Energy Return on Investment) of industrial agriculture and the many pernicious effects of applying Western technologies and industrial logics to the food system (115). This *ecotestimonio* makes explicit the necessity to abandon Western myths of efficiency and techno-optimism to move towards a post-growth society: “Debemos abandonar tanto la adicción al productivismo como la fe en la economía del crecimiento, del progreso y del desarrollo . . . olvidando los mitos de su eficiencia . . . Asimismo, debemos contener el optimismo tecnológico y perder nuestra adicción a soluciones técnicas de gran escala” (152) ‘We must abandon both the addiction to productivism and the faith in the economy of growth, progress, and development . . . forgetting its efficiency myths . . . we must contain techno-optimism and lose our addiction to large-scale technical solutions.’ Northern countries need to reduce superfluous consumption to stop depleting the Earth and expropriating the ecological services of other regions: “les toca reducir a la décima parte su consumo de energía y materiales, liberando así espacio ambiental para que podamos vivir decentemente los seres humanos del Sur, como también los demás seres vivos de la naturaleza” (152-53) ‘[Northern countries] are responsible for reducing their consumption of energy and materials to a tenth of their current consumption; this will liberate environmental space for all to live decently, including the humans from the South and all the other living beings of nature.’

El Vivir Bien convincingly articulates a critique of the dominant globalizing economic model coming from classical, neoclassical, and neoliberal economic theory, and of the hubristic and pathological logics supporting it (10, 32-33, 40-41, 51-52, 70-71, 74, 83, 85, 87, 97-99, 102-06, 148, 152-54, 192).

Neoliberal globalization restlessly reproduces its model based on constant debt-driven economic growth and the incorporation of everything into the market economy. The supporters of this model claim that by expanding and globalizing their logic, all the human population will enjoy the quality of life of the North—taking for granted that it is universally desirable—which is based on superfluous consumerism and gross waste of energy and materials. However, that is biophysically impossible: if all regions develop following the Global North’s model of consumerism, we will need the ecological services of several planets (*El Vivir Bien* 36). This *ecotestimonio*, along with many recent theories and counter-hegemonic movements worldwide based on environmental justice, ecological economics, and socio-political ecology (e.g., degrowth, postdevelopment, ecofeminism, ecosocialism, slow movement, Indigenous environmental networks, postextractivism), challenge the illogical “logic” of constant economic growth within a limited biosphere. By analyzing the global neoliberal economy in terms of material and energetic transformations that accelerate entropy and decrease biological and epistemological diversity, *El Vivir Bien* views cultural consumerism, Western development, and constant economic growth as a deadly ideology that confuses and equates wealth creation with environmental degradation and social fragmentation. Therefore, when neoclassical and neoliberal economists talk about generating wealth, what they really mean is destroying the real wealth generated by ecosystems and ancestral cultures and benefiting from it (Latouche 65; Martínez-Alier 350). Perpetuating colonial inertias and redesigning neocolonial structures, the North is imposing its suicidal model globally and is still not willing to listen to other human epistemologies, let alone non-human voices. *El Vivir Bien* notes, “para el Norte hay un sólo modelo de desarrollo, el suyo . . . Quieren imponernos la idea de que el Norte es quien tiene que enseñar y el Sur quien tiene que aprender” (79) ‘for the North there is only one development model: its own . . . They want to impose on us the idea that the North is the one that teaches and the South must learn.’ The current multi-crisis scenario suggests that the model globally imposed by the North is socially undesirable and ecologically unviable. Therefore, the time has come for the North to learn from the South before is too late. For a reader unfamiliar with Andean Indigenous cosmoexperience, the message of *El Vivir Bien* cannot be fully comprehended as an *ecotestimonio* without understanding certain aspects of the “pachasophy.” The second part of this essay explains these key concepts.

Pachakuti and *El Vivir Bien*: Indigenous Alternatives to Anthropocene Crisis

How can we listen to *Pachamama’s testimonio* through the Indigenous voices in *El Vivir Bien*? To understand, we must first “learn to listen,” as Carlos Lenkersdorf writes, in accordance with the Indigenous experience of the world

and cosmos. This specifically Indigenous experience in its heterogeneity—henceforth “Indigeneity”—enables a sensibility in relation to *Pachamama* that underpins the praxis of *Vivir Bien*.

Ignacio Ortiz-Castro explains that more than a “worldview,” Indigenous understandings of the world are not only “cosmological” but “cosmoexperiential” (ix). Such “cosmoexperiences” are beautifully articulated by Indigenous philosophers from Abya Yala ‘the Americas,’ like Fernando Huanacuni-Mamani, Simón Yampara, Greg Cajete, Melitón Bautista-Cruz, Viola Cordova, Marilyn Notah-Verney, and Oscar Angayuqaq-Kawagley, among others. Indigeneity embodies both a sensibility *and* a way of thinking, a *senti-pensar* ‘feeling-thinking.’ It also implies a life-way that proceeds from the acknowledgement of our existential rootedness, co-extensiveness, and interdependency with(in) the relational fabric that constitutes the Cosmos, the Galaxy, Mother Earth, the land, and all that lives, as well as our co-responsibility in the maintenance and renewal of their vital cycles. From this cosmoexperience emerges what Lenkersdorf calls a peculiarly receptive Indigenous sense of “cosmovision” and “cosmolisting” (see also Huanacuni-Mamani and van Kessel).

Just as each Indigenous culture across Abya-Yala and the world (Cajete; Grim; Stewart-Harawira 75-77) has its own cosmoexperience, this cosmoexperience has Andean manifestations. Andean Indigeneity is well conveyed by the notion of “pacha-experience” (van Kessel 18) and its implied “pachasophy” (Estermann *Filosofía Andina* 165); both of these notions are based on the concept of “pacha” which will be explained below. Exploring these will enable us to comprehend the “Indigenous cosmopolitics” (de la Cadena 334) of *Vivir Bien*—a concept better understood in the Aymara *suma qamaña* or the Quechua *sumak kawsay*. Andean philosopher Huanacuni-Mamani explains that *suma qamaña* entails living in a way that fosters relations of conviviality with all forms of existence. Beyond just ‘living well,’ *suma qamaña* implies fostering the plenitude and vitality of all life by living cooperatively in equilibrated harmony—or *ayni* (in Aymara)—with the cycles of Mother Earth (*Pachamama*), the cosmos (*Pacha*), and history, and in balance with and respecting all forms of existence. *Suma qamaña* demands that we acknowledge and partake of an ethical communality with all that surrounds us, both human and non-human. As Huanacuni-Mamani emphasizes, here “[l]o más importante no es el hombre ni el dinero, lo más importante es la armonía con la naturaleza y la vida” (n. pag.) ‘[w]hat is most important is neither man nor money, but harmony within nature and life.’

According to Huanacuni-Mamani, the praxis of *suma qamaña* can help save humanity. This praxis of living well foment a simpler life, reducing the addiction to consumerism, and fostering an equilibrated production of goods in sync with ecological cycles. Moreover, to live well is to enact a non-

anthropocentric form of community based on bio-social harmony and complementarity. This proceeds from Indigenous communalism which is based on collective sharing, cyclical rotation of responsibilities, and reciprocal complementarity. Indigenous Living Well, as Huanacuni-Mamani asserts, can defend nature, because here life and humanity are understood as integral constituents of the biosphere. But notice that “el Vivir Bien no es lo mismo que el vivir mejor, el vivir mejor es a costa del otro” (Huanacuni-Mamani n.pag.) ‘Living Well is not the same as Living Better, because living better is at the expense of others,’ which is the premise of the hegemonic obsession with competitiveness, based on privileging self-regard. This misguided approach entails living better than human *and* non-human others. In the desire to Live Better it becomes tempting to exploit and to strive to outdo others, to get *a-head* of others, which is the basis of unbridled ‘capitalism’ (from the Latin root *cap-*, referring to the head); thus, “vivir mejor es egoísmo, desinterés por los demás, individualism . . . lucro” (Huanacuni-Mamani n.pag.) ” ‘living better is egotism, disinterest for others, individualism . . . profit.’ “Se produce una profunda competencia y se concentra la riqueza en pocas manos” (Huanacuni-Mamani n. pag.) ‘A profound competition is produced, and wealth becomes concentrated in few hands.’

The pachasophy of *suma qamaña* underpins the testimonial Indigenous critique of the global crisis developed in *El Vivir Bien*. *El Vivir Bien* contends that we are in a major transition period, a *pachakuti* (129-31). *Pachakuti* embeds two tropes: *kuti* and *pacha*. *Kuti* entails a major renewal, inversion, revolution, recycling or cyclical transition—of the world, of values, history, Earth, the Galaxy, and even the cosmos/universe. The idea of *Pacha* will be unpacked with more detail in the next paragraph. *El Vivir Bien* claims that in this *pachakuti* we will “return to become again part of the Galaxy,” the Earth, and the cosmos (132):

En este Pachakuti, dejaremos el camino de destrucción por el que avanza el mundo . . . para dar comienzo a una nueva era, un nuevo Sol. Entramos en un camino que abra nuestra conciencia y . . . mente para volver a ser parte de todo lo que existe, encontrarnos entre todas y todos, con la tierra y la naturaleza entera, con nuestro sol, con la galaxia y con todo el universo. Todos los seres humanos comprenderemos que todo está vivo y consciente, que somos parte de este todo y que podemos existir en una nueva era de luz y armonía, donde el reino mineral, vegetal, animal y toda la materia esparcida por el universo a todas las escalas desde un átomo hasta una galaxia, son seres vivos con una conciencia del Vivir Bien. (132)

In this Pachakuti we’ll leave behind the destructive path the world is on A new era commences: a new Sun. We enter a path that opens our

conscience and . . . mind to be again part of all that exists, finding ourselves among all, with the earth and the whole of nature, with our sun, our galaxy and . . . all the universe. All humans will understand that all is alive and conscious, that we are part of this whole and can flourish in a new era of light and harmony, where the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms and all matter dispersed throughout the universe at all scales from an atom to a galaxy are living beings with the consciousness of Living Well.

Javier Medina explains this (re)comprehension: “Un campo unificado organiza todo el cosmos del cual, ¡jojo!, somos parte . . . el Campo unificado es poder organizador infinito. Puede cumplir innumerables tareas al mismo tiempo. . .” (*Suma Qamaña* 179) ‘A unified field organizes the whole cosmos, of which—pay attention!—we’re part . . . [This] unified field is an infinite organizational power concomitantly fulfilling innumerable correlated tasks.’ This (re)comprehension that we are part of a living whole is crucial to understand the *pacha*.

Contrary to mainstream Western interpretations of the *pacha*, the term does not primarily or exclusively refer to Mother Earth, for which the specific term *pachamama* is reserved. *Pacha* is broader, entailing an experience of all that exists. Hermeneutically, *pacha* conveys the notion of a living cosmos in constant cyclical renewal where all is coextensively interwoven by relational processes of reciprocal interdependence tied together by the polymorphous transformation of cosmic energy. This energy is not lifeless energy; it is living spirit, whether experienced as latent and dispersed or manifest as pooled “matterized” energy. We can better understand this by listening to Indigenous voices and to those who have reflected on the *pacha*. Indigenous Andean philosopher Virgilio Roel, for instance, offers a “pachasophical” reflection that combines past, present, and future in a way that integrates all matter throughout history:

Todo lo que existe es parte de . . . o procede de Pacha. El pasado ha generado el presente, (y por tanto, también es presente), del mismo modo que el presente va formando el futuro, (por tanto, también es futuro). . . Pacha unifica el pasado con el presente y el futuro. Asimismo, los muertos que en su momento fueron gestados por Pacha, vuelven a ella y en su seno retornan a la vida (y por tanto no mueren). Así, Pacha contiene el germen de todos los seres que nacerán en el futuro, al mismo tiempo que protege y cuida a los vivos. (in Pacheco Farfán 70)

All that exists is part of . . . or proceeds from Pacha. The past . . . generated the present (and therefore, it is also present); similarly, the present unfolds forming the future (and therefore it is also future). . .

Pacha [cyclically] integrates the past with the present and . . . future. Similarly, the dead who were in their moment gestated by Pacha, return to her and in her womb return to life (and thus, do not die). So Pacha contains the seed of all beings born in the future, just as she cares lovingly for the existing beings.

Roel's understanding of *pacha* effectively collapses the Western linear conception of time, re-inscribing instead the Indigenous "spatiotemporal" conception as simply the cyclical renewal of energy in ever-continuing polymorphous transformation.

Huanacuni-Mamani importantly complements our interpretation of *pacha*. He explains that, similar to other Indigenous Abya-Yalan traditions, in the Andean cosmivision there are always two forces. *Pacha* entails the fertile union of any two complementary forces; *pa-* comes from *paya*, meaning "two," while *cha* comes from *chama* meaning "force." These two forces converge (*pa-cha*) to produce a gestative complementary uni-duality that engenders the process of life, and reproduces/renews all forms of existence. *Pacha* can refer to any instance where the encounter among diverse forces enacts a gestative uniduality. These gestative unidualities interrelate through an equilibrated complementarity that Andeans sometimes refer to as *ayni*. All forms of existence emanate from complementary encounters among different forces, enabling bridges, or *chakanas*, and converging at meeting points, or *taypis*, such as the encounter between cosmic and telluric forces that enacts the sphere of life, the biosphere. *Pacha*, as the (re)generative convergence of any two forces, requires the enactment of a cosmic normativity wherein only equilibrated, complementary and reciprocal relationships (*ayni*) can gestate the 'spiritual vitality' (*Pacha-Qama*) and 'materialized/matterized energy' (*Pach'ama*) that moves life.

Pacha is thus a multidimensional trope with coherently interrelated significations and implications broadly referring to the cyclically renewed encounter among complementary forces from which emanates the energy, life, vitality, and spirit that creates, constitutes, and recreates all that exists. *Pacha* entails concrete experiential understandings, practices, and life-ways. *El Vivir Bien* states: to 'Save the planet and humanity' we must 'Propel the *Vivir Bien*' (*suma qamaña/suma kawsay*) which implies, among other proposals, (a) the 'awakening of communal energy' and (b) the nurturing of 'production as a function of life' (3). We examine these two proposals in turn.

The Awakening of Communal Energy

To read *El Vivir Bien* as an *ecotestimonio* it is crucial to understand that the notion of community from a pachasophical perspective is a posthumanist one

that refers not only to the human community, but rather to the biotic community of everything that exists.

The renewal and nurturing of plentiful life/vitality/energy (*suma qamaña*) requires the fostering of communal energy. This practice has its parallels among Indigenous peoples across Abya-Yala and the planet. In the Andes, “communal energy” entails the *qamaña* (or *kawsay*) which can mean ‘energy,’ ‘vitality,’ ‘life-energy/life-spirit,’ etc. Additionally, to grasp the “communal,” we must also understand the Andean *ayllu*.

Insightful Andean philosophers/scholars, like Yampara and Estermann, note that after understanding *Pacha*, we must interpret *Pacha-Qama*: the specific form of life, energy, and vitality emanating from the (re)creative encounter among (uni)dualities of complementary forces. *Qama* connotes the Andean understanding that all is animated, vitalized, living. *Qama* is the root of *qamaña*, as in *suma qamaña*. Javier Medina discusses the work of Aymara philosopher Mario Torrez to explain that the *qama(ña)*, which entails all spatio-temporal energy and vitality, is something living, constituted and inhabited by living forms. From within an Indigenous worldview, not only are the underground, ground, water, air, and mountains alive, but also the spatiotemporalities where latent spiritual beings dwell are alive. Traditional Indigenous peoples conceive of all beings/forms as existentially interconnected through convivial relationships of sharing and mutual nurturing which include humans within a continuum of life that constitutes the non-anthropocentric community (*Las Dos Bolivias* 59). So when *El Vivir Bien* urges the ‘awakening of communal energy,’ this ‘energy’ implies the complex underlying Indigenous Andean notion of the *qamaña*. This *qamaña* entails a web of life embedding the human but intertwining a much broader community of living biomes and ecosystems, interwoven relationally through socio-ecological cycles of energy in transformation such as the nutrient, hydrological, and other biospheric-metabolic cycles that vitalize the living body of Mother Earth. This sensibility constitutes the non-anthropocentric basis of Indigenous communality. Hence, awakening the communal energy means (re)awakening/renewing the energy that emanates from the complementary encounter among the highly diverse social-and-ecological forces constituting the networked continuum of life in harmonious equilibrium or *ayni*.

For the Aymara philosopher/scholar Simón Yampara, *suma qamaña* entails “vivir bien en armonía con los . . . miembros de la naturaleza y con uno mismo” (142) ‘living well in harmony with all . . . members of nature and with oneself’; “los pueblos aymara-qhichwa, no sólo se limitan al crecimiento material y con ello, al bienestar. Van más allá. Se preocupan de . . . los mundos vegetal, animal, lítico y territorial” (79) ‘Indigenous Andeans do not focus exclusively on material growth or welfare, but are also concerned with the plant, animal, lithic and territorial worlds.’ Huanacuni-Mamani explains that Indigenous nations

conceive the community as a structure of life, constituted by all forms of existence, and not a human-centric or exclusively human social structure. Personhood is recognized in the non-human as in the human. Indigenous communality does not erase the uniqueness of each person—whether human or non-human.

Indigenous Andean communality can be best explored through the *ayllu*. *Ayllu* is a non-anthropocentric form of local community based on the *qamaña* as an infrastructure of socio-bio-eco-cosmic interdependence where reciprocal labor among humans and with nature leads to the overall nurturing of vitality for the community as a whole. The deterioration or disappearance of any member or species degrades the whole community of life. This is because “somos hijos de la Madre Tierra y del cosmos (Pachaqaman Pachamaman wawapatanwa)” (Huanacuni Mamani n.pag.) ‘we are [all] offspring of Mother Earth and the cosmos (*Pachaqaman Pachamaman wawapatanwa*).’

The Nurturing of Production as a Function of Life

Extrapolating from the *ayllu* as ‘communal energy’ enacted in solidary collective praxis, we can better understand what *El Vivir Bien* intends by urging readers to nurture and propel a way of ‘production as a function of life’ (3). *El Vivir Bien* proposes to restructure the world’s political economy from an Indigenous understanding of how the economy should work as a function of life:

Aprendiendo de la naturaleza y de su funcionamiento, podemos sugerir estos principios . . . para . . . una economía en equilibrio con la madre naturaleza: (1) Reinsertarnos dentro los límites de la capacidad del planeta Tierra de sostenernos, usando el sol como fuente principal de energía; (2) Cerrar los ciclos de materiales y no transportarlos demasiado lejos; (3) Respetar el equilibrio entre las múltiples variedades de especies, evitando los organismos transgénicos y contaminantes . . . de forma sencilla . . . Podemos vivir más despacio conforme el tiempo cíclico, entrar en una fase de desaceleración para tener tiempo para la vida, para preservar, restaurar y cuidar a la Madre Tierra, igual como cuidamos las plantas y frutales . . . y también para establecer relaciones personales con todos los seres de la naturaleza . . . Partamos de la experiencia de nuestras comunidades indígenas originarias, donde: alcanzamos un Vivir Bien, intercambiando lo que producimos entre nuestras tierras en diferentes alturas, y entre nuestras comunidades y sociedades a nivel nacional, continental y mundial. (154, 159)

Learning from nature and its functioning we . . . suggest the following . . . principles for . . . an economy in equilibrium with Mother Nature: (1) to reinsert humanity within the limits of Earth's carrying capacity, drawing on the Sun as principal source of energy; (2) to close all material cycles and not transport them for excessively long distances; (3) to respect the equilibrium among the multiple varieties of species . . . We can live simpler . . . and slower in accordance with cyclical time, and enter a phase of deceleration to have time for life, to procure, restore, and nurture Mother Earth, just as we should nurture plants and fruits . . . and to have time to foster personal relations with all beings of nature. [To build this authentically cosmopolitical economy] [w]e can proceed from the experience of our aboriginal Indigenous communities from which we can achieve Living Well by exchanging what we produce among our lands in different altitudes and among our communities and societies at national, continental, and global levels.

Again, we need to understand this proposal in the context of the pachasophy. Thus, it becomes obvious that, from an Andean Indigenous cosmoexperience, what Westerners see as “economy” is not just a human matter, but a posthumanist entanglement that affects the biotic community as a whole. Having this in mind is crucial to comprehend the critique of *El Vivir Bien* to global capitalism as an *ecotestimonio*, rather than a traditional testimony focusing on social injustices.

Huanacuni-Mamani explains that *suma qamaña* “economically” entails organizing, fomenting, and generating complementary relations of reciprocity among humans and with the rest of life, extending also to Mother Earth—that is, the all-encompassing non-anthropocentric community of life. In this context, for Indigenous communities, “toda relación económica no es con el fin de acumular el capital por el capital, sino . . . para preservar . . . una relación de equilibrio con toda forma de existencia y de armonía con los ciclos de la Madre Tierra” (n. pag.) ‘economic relations are fostered not to accumulate capital for capital’s sake, but . . . to maintain a balanced relationship with all of life and harmony with Mother Earth’s cycles.’ This Indigenous way of enacting economic relations challenges and contests the dominant Western economics. In critiquing Western anthropocentrism, the Andeanist philosopher of Swiss origin Josef Estermann writes that for Indigenous peoples “el ser humano no es dueño, sino cuidador y facilitador de la vida. Por lo tanto, la ‘venta’ del sustento de la vida (agua, territorio, gas, minerales, biodiversidad, etc.) es una declaración de guerra para las poblaciones originarias” ‘the human is not the owner, but the caretaker, the fosterer of life. Therefore, “selling” the sustenance of life (water, territory, gas, minerals, biodiversity, etc.) is a declaration of war for Indigenous populations.’

For Indigenous peoples,

no puede ser que un puñado de señores se adueñe del fundamento de la vida que tiene carácter sagrado para las y los andinos/as (Pachamama). La economía es “ecosofía,” es decir: sabiduría para manejar la casa común de todas y todos, para el bienestar y la “buena vida” (. . . *suma qamaña*) de plantas, animales y seres humanos. (*Si el Sur fuera el Norte* 161)

it cannot be allowed that a handful of overlords appropriate the fountain of life, Pachamama, which has sacred character for Andean women and men. The economy should instead be “ecosophy”; that is, wisdom to manage the common home of all, fostering wellbeing and “living well” in plenitude (. . . *suma qamaña*) for all flora and fauna, including humans.

Juan van Kessel’s discussions of Andean thought contain especially valuable insights on Indigenous ecosophical economics. He explains that Andean economic thought extends from biological life as “valor meta-económico” (6) ‘meta-economic value.’ Thus, for Andeans all activity—economic, social, religious, artistic, labor-related, domestic, festive, agricultural, educational, etc.—emerges from within the pacha-experience and is primarily dedicated to nurturing life. The central economic value here is life in all its forms. In sum, the purpose of economic activity is not to increase or accumulate capital and power, nor to serve narrow human interests; instead the “economía de crianza” ‘economy of nurturance’ must accord with an overarching bio-cosmic normativity within which humans must foster the “vida dulce, armoniosa, vigorosa” ‘sweet, harmonious, vigorous life’ (*suma qamaña*) of the non-anthropocentric community with a view to achieve an ever-greater socio-ecological and cosmic harmony (*La Economía Andina de Crianza* 16).

In this *Suma Qamaña*, the human life-form cannot stand separate or above other forms and beings; this human life-form is but a transitory manifestation of pooled energy-spirit whose role is to fulfill unique but not superior functions. That which is—transitorily—manifested as “human” is thus cosmo-politically and bio-ecologically *equal* in status to all other forms given that all forms are but spatiotemporal effects of spirit-energy flows in cyclical polymorphous transformation—whether this be “pooled”/matterized or “dispersed”/latent energy-spirit. There are hence no hierarchies in the Indigenous cosmoexperience; there are only complementary responsibilities and transitory roles in the nurturing of the cyclical transformation of energy into ever-changing forms. In such a complementary, cyclical, and bio-cosmic economy, benefits cannot be circumscribed to social-human agents/structures. Instead, the “human economy” must operate as a sub-constituent of the broader structure of life, beyond the

human. This Andean economy of nurturance seeks organic integration within a unique model of demands and necessities, where opportunities and reciprocities are offered by bio-eco-cosmic cycles, all considered together as the same vitality emanating from within the *pacha*, shared by every-body and living as an organic mega-body woven out of the dynamic interlacing of fibers of reciprocal solidarity moving together in a concert of rhythmic vitality.

Conclusion

Viewed as an *ecotestimonio*, *El Vivir Bien* provides counter-hegemonic discourses that promote socio-environmental justice, epistemological diversity, and posthumanist ethics. It intends to help the readers to decolonize their dominant imaginary based on a globalizing Western epistemology that favors economic growth for its own sake, superfluous consumerism, and a very narrow notion of individualism. *El Vivir Bien* exposes the epistemological root causes of the global crisis and proposes alternatives coming from Andean Indigenous knowledges and experiences. As this *ecotestimonio* shows us, we must abandon the Western epistemological fictions that artificially and radically separate individuals from their communities, humans from their biotic webs, societies from their ecosystems, or economies from their ecological context. These ideologies of disconnection and fragmentation ignore not only most of the Indigenous sciences of the planet, but also the Western insights of the twentieth century (e.g., ecology, thermodynamics, systems theory, quantum physics, and Earth system science). By doing so, they are rapidly transgressing ecological planetary boundaries, causing a global socio-environmental crisis of giant dimensions. As William E. Connolly might put it, neoliberal fantasies disregard the fragility of things and, as a result, deplete everything. The Indigenous voices of *El Vivir Bien* make visible that orthodox economics are really uneconomical, since its logic destroys the sources of all wealth, health, and wellbeing: the biotic community itself.

El Vivir Bien urges us to embrace a different epistemology based on our socio-ecological radical interdependency, a non-anthropocentric conception of communality in which the main focus is the biotic community, or *ayllu*, and a posthumanist ethics of care that respects all forms of existence. A new (cosmo)political energy could unleash a most-needed global change to deal with the current pressing social and ecological crises exacerbated by neoliberal globalization. However, in order to overcome these epochal challenges we not only need more *ecotestimonios* from Indigenous voices but, more importantly, we need to learn how to listen to them so as to enable the emergence of a more just and equilibrated era for all, humans and more-than-humans.

Notes

1. All translations from documents in Spanish are ours. The original epigraph reads: “Estamos en tiempos de cambio. . . de Pachakuti. . . Frente a esta gran disyuntiva y la perspectiva preocupante de la naciente Crisis Global, el mundo occidental está preocupado, no sabe qué hacer. Se está cuestionando y anda en busca de modelos y formas de vida alternativas pues sus valores están en crisis . . . la exagerada e ilimitada industrialización de los modelos de acumulación occidentales, ahora expresada en la liberalización comercial a ultranza y supremacía absoluta del mercado, que caminan hacia el desastre económico y la destrucción del equilibrio natural acelerada del equilibrio natural y nuestro planeta, se han vuelto absolutamente desacreditados de ser una solución para preservar el planeta, la vida y la propia especie humana ni podrán solucionar esta crisis global, porque aumenta la deuda ecológica y amenaza la sobrevivencia de los seres vivos y la subsistencia del planeta al no dejar los recursos naturales renovarse al ritmo con el que se consumen. El mismo desmoronamiento de estos modelos y sus amenazas a la vida y el planeta deshabilitan la opción de hacer valer su continuación o encontrar caminos que prometan más de lo mismo. Por ello, quieren saber cuál es la propuesta de la nación indígena originaria. Necesitan conocer los valores del mundo indígena, de la Cultura de la Vida. Están ansiosos de entender nuestras formas de organización, quieren saber cómo los indígenas hemos garantizado el equilibrio . . . en armonía con la naturaleza. Por eso, cuando hacen sus doctorados, van al Norte Potosí en busca de modelos de sociedad, donde no ha llegado el occidente todavía. Cuando les planteamos nuestra propuesta . . . la Cultura de la Vida, la cultura del diálogo, se quedan sin argumentos, dicen que esto es la propuesta, valoran lo que somos nosotros.”

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