

Editorial

Living Well to Reconcile with Mother Earth and Flourish outside of Capitalism. An invitation for social medicine

Estelio Barbosa Rodríguez¹; César Ernesto Abadía Barrero²

¹ Numaira, Uitoto town

² Teacher, researcher and activist, Red SaludPaz and University of Connecticut. cesar.abadia@uconn.edu

Barbosa E, Abadía CE. Living Well to Reconcile with Mother Earth and Flourish outside of Capitalism. An invitation for social medicine. Rev. Fac. Nac. Salud Pública. 2023;41(2):e353229. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.rfnsp.e353229>

Talking about *chagras*, that space integrated with nature where Amazonian indigenous people grow their food, the *numaira** Estelio, from the Uitoto people, explains that all plants and animals have the right to inhabit the *chagra* and Benefit from it; that in the *chagra*, no species is discriminated against, and that we must plant and reforest and let the *chagra* become a wooded area again; otherwise, the water will dry up.

Although the *chagra* cycle is one year and they need to chop down and burn trees in a new place to create a new *chagra* and cultivate, water sources are always protected and certain trees are respected. When a tree falls, due to natural death or when it is chopped down or is burnt, it is left to turn into stubble. Given the work of fungi and other micro and macroscopic organisms, the soil is filled with nutrients and remains moist because water accumulates in the leaves and fallen trunks, and under these.

Unlike Western agriculture, with proposals for highly productive and large-scale monoculture, and use of pesticides to control “pests,” the *chagra* is always multiple and diverse and includes edible plants, medicinal plants and other trees and plants, although called “pests”, which also fulfill their function.

Chagras never need to be watered. When the *chagra* has produced lots of fruit and food, animals come to eat and this facilitates hunting. All this works, we are told by *numaira* Estelio, within respect for nature, given that we all, including animals and plants, have the right to live and live well.

Good Living or *Living Well* has been coined as an Andean indigenous concept – *Sumaq Kawsay* for the Quechua people and *Suma Qamaña* for the Aymara peoples. Good Living has gained recognition in recent decades, given that the struggles of indigenous movements in various countries in Latin America managed to transgress the political platforms of leftist sectors and make them not only progressive, but also ecological and decolonial.

Surprisingly, in a region where colonialism imposed racist orders that initially enslaved and then denied the citizenship of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, electoral politics in several Latin American countries began to become indigenized. Unlike the historical struggles of leftist parties that proposed overthrowing capitalism or waiting for it to be exhausted as a social and economic model due to its immense contradictions, indigenous thought and practices, such as Good Living, have always insisted that it is possible to live outside this system of economic violence imposed by Western empires that always finds new ways to exploit humans and nature. And although “taking state power” continues being important to achieve rights and formulate more just and equitable policies and programs, the State itself appears as a colonial figure that does not permit multiple and diverse forms of self-government to coexist and cooperate.

Good Living seems to agree with those who question whether we still need to be governed by the State and its political class, or if it is possible to govern ourselves and implement new forms of social organization, cooperation, and territorial coexistence. For some theorists, this indigenous transgression into the world of politics, economics, and relationships with nature also encourages a post-capitalist and post-patriarchal future, thought from the land and from feminist forces anchored to Mother Earth.

* Translated as elder. For the Uitoto people, the *numaira* is the one who gathers all the indigenous wisdom and deserves the highest respect.

Several *numairas* from Amazonian peoples are quite pleased to see that the non-indigenous are approaching their knowledge and want to learn. *Numaira* Estelio warns, however, that the “white” world has always come to use and expropriate lands and knowledge because the life of the “white” is capitalist; the only thing clear to them is that they want to accumulate and, then, life becomes a competition.

The learnings in the key of ancestral thought are as simple as they are profound: “the white man discards everything that is small and it is in the value of everything, including the small, that one can live well all the time and not only when there is abundance,” emphasizes *numaira* Estelio. Although we live in a capitalist world, he has taught his daughters and sons that one can live well without becoming a capitalist. “To live well and have what you need, you need not earn a lot of money, but order in your life”.

Following the postulates of Good Living, it is suggestive to understand that based on development policies and goals, international organizations and Governments discuss thousands of ways to eliminate poverty. For the indigenous philosophy of Good Living, it is about eliminating the concentration of wealth because when someone has more than what they need, it threatens the well-being of others and affects the planet’s equilibrium. The indigenous, according to *numaira* Estelio, “only gather what we need and that way of coexisting with nature has sustained us for millennia”.

While the indigenous praxis of Good Living allows the existence of human and non-human lives to reproduce in harmony with the earth, the West, with its colonialism, extractivism, and developmentalism, has made Mother Earth suffer to such an extent that many forms of life are becoming extinct on the planet. *Numaira* Estelio points out to us, with irony and poetic and decolonial intelligence, how, from the colonial discourse, “the Indian is the one who is uncivilized”.

The planet becomes uninhabitable, not only because of the so-called “natural disasters,” but because, from an indigenous perspective, if we have treated the earth badly, it itself comes and punishes us. But, besides this, life becomes sick and becomes extinct because food and water are being contaminated, all due to the desire for profit of a few transnational companies in association with global and national political powers.

And it is in those small spaces, in each *chagra*, each plot, and each proposal of harmonious coexistence with nature that you can live well and live beautifully. And it is in this coexistence of worlds where possibilities exist of meeting and having encounters among different constructions of inhabiting the earth. Uitoto *numairas* are pleased to see new proposals and interactions, to learn about other ways of planting and learning technologies, with learning mutually, even from the West, when it proposes innovations from its scientific method that promote life.

But, aside from everything, we must ritualize life in connection with Mother Earth; and rituals can be large and multitudinous, but also daily and individual. And it is there where humans can open ourselves to the multiple senses that inhabit us, to understand ourselves as part of nature and know how to listen to it. In Good Living, humans are not the center of the universe, of existence, or reason; we are another of the many children of Mother Earth, and plants and animals are not only our relatives, but constitute us and we depend on them, just as they depend on us.

Overcoming the anthropocentrism of the West (thinking that humans are the center of the universe and what give meaning to existence on the planet) and returning to the earth seem to be the two central teachings that the West and its Westerners must follow to begin to build many Good Livings.

Declaration of funding sources

The preparation of the text had no source of funding.

Declaration of conflict of interest

It is declared that there is no conflict of interest

Declaration of responsibility

It is declared that the authors are responsible for the information declared and its veracity.

Declaration of contribution by authors

They declare that both contributed to the writing of the text



Esta obra se distribuye bajo una Licencia Creative Commons Atribución-NoComercial-CompartirIgual 4.0 Internacional
Más información: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>