

IS A BETTER WORLD POSSIBLE?

A CONVERSATION ON DEVELOPMENT, BOLIVIA, AND VIVIR BIEN

Ezra Tyler Weissman
April 26, 2019

Is a Better World Possible?
A Conversation on Development, Bolivia, and Vivir Bien.

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

Adviser, Leslie Offutt

Table of Contents

Episode 1: "Deconstructing Development"	2
Episode 2: "The Promise of Vivir Bien in Bolivia"	22
References Cited.....	39

EPISODE 1.

DECONSTRUCTING DEVELOPMENT

Ezra: Is a better world possible? Looking around at how things are now, I can't help but be eaten up by this question. My search for an answer led me to study in Bolivia, a small country in South America. While there, I was exposed to the brutal realities of colonization and development. I became so angry at all that had been hidden from me.

My ignorance had two sides, because I was also unaware of the immense resilience, determination, and strength of the Bolivian people. I'm continually in awe of indigenous resistance that doesn't just question whether a better world is possible -- but demands that one is. I left the country with a resolve to keep studying, so that I could bring awareness to what's happening in Bolivia in a genuine and accessible way.

This podcast is my attempt at actualizing that wish. So, listener, buckle up, because we have a lot to learn together.

Melodia INCA Chuklla plays¹

Ezra: Hello everyone, my name is Ezra Weissman. Like I said in the intro, we're going to be covering a lot today. In order to hold me accountable to accessibility, aka, not using giant words or concepts without explaining them, I've brought my friend here today. She's never studied this stuff, so she's the perfect person to teach them too. So, loyal listener listener, allow me to introduce you to a fellow urban studies major, six foot tall swede, and massachusetts native Klara kaufman

Klara: Hey guys, what's up.

Ezra: So, listener, Klara is, for all intents and purposes, a fill in for you. So, Klara, whenever you feel like you want to know more, or you have a question, go ahead and interrupt me.

Klara: Don't worry I'm used to interrupting you.

¹ sandro2004. "Melodia INCA 'chuklla". Filmed [Nov 2006] Youtube video, 06:04 [Nov 2006]

Ezra: *Laughs*. All right, so let's dive right in.

EZRA: To start with, let's explore the big idea of this project. Development. Klara, when you hear this word, what comes to mind?

KLARA: Well, i'm an urban studies major so in that context i'd say that i think development is basically how money is allocated i n order to fund various organizations and spaces in the world... and the world... and the policies that surround that.

Ezra: Solid answer. That's often the way development is understood when you use it colloquially, on a local level. For this thesis, I want to take a step back from that definition so that we can see the full picture and really understand the discourse. When I talk about Development, I'm referencing the economic models that western countries and international organizations apply and think from when dealing with problems such as poverty, hunger, under employment, violence (encountering development). At the heart of "development" is the idea of the "development gap". This gap refers to the lagging behind of underdeveloped, Third world countries in comparison to developed, first world countries.² So, basically, TL;DR, we in the rich countries have, and those in the poor countries don't, so us in the rich countries ought to help the poor countries. So, Klara, are you with me up until now? (encountering development 90)

Klara: Yeah I'm on board.

Ezra: Good. Cuz, this way of understanding the world motivates SO much of global development and actions, from campaigns to donate \$5 to feed a starving child, to larger institutional projects such as what should us as a large bank finance and give loans too.

Ezra: With any hegemonic way of thinking, it's worthwhile to explore, "why is this how we think?" That's what i want to do today with my thesis and with development. What if development, and the discourse around it, is not some neutral representation of the world based on rational, measurable truths? What if development discourse, as we know it, is just a colonial

²Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012). 43.

paradigm, a set of glasses created by the West to naturalize continued exploitation?³ That would be... in short, bad, right?

Klara: Yeah that's safe to say.

Ezra: I'm throwing around a lot of big ideas here, and I really don't like to do that without placing what I'm saying in tangible reality. So let's travel back in time a little bit, to good old 1949.

Time Travel Noise Plays⁴

Ezra: 1949. The color television is invented, Vassar's most treasured alum Meryl Streep is born, and then president of the United States Harry Truman, in his inaugural address, publically rings in the start of the "Development Era." He does this by announcing the intention and need for the United States and the Western world to, and I quote, *"embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas."* end quote.⁵

Klara: Everytime you say a quote are you going to do a voice?

Ezra: Yes is that annoying?

Klara: No I like it.

Ezra: Okay great I'll keep going, so i'll do it with little words too.

Ezra: Truman goes on to describe these "underdeveloped" areas, and let's be real here, he's talking about countries in the Global South, the global south being countries in south america,

³ Gustavo Esteva, Salvatore J. Babones, and Philipp Babczyk, *Future of Development: A Radical Manifesto*(Britsol: Policy Pr, 2013). 24-26.

⁴ All Sounds. "Time Travel Sound Effects". Filmed [Feb 2018] Youtube video, 01:37. Posted [Feb 2018]

⁵ Gilbert Rist and Patrick Camiller, *History of Development, From Western Origins to Global Faith*(Zed, 2014). 71-72

africa, sometimes asia, as places where food is inadequate, disease is rampant, and economic life is "primitive and stagnant."⁶

Ezra: Truman's painting with quite a broad brush here, you know reminder: he's talking about over two billion people in one hundred different countries.⁷ But, white elites being reductive about the global south, that's nothing new. What IS new, and what I want us to pull out from this quote, is the *language* he uses. Truman describing the majority of the world "underdeveloped," is the first time this word is used in this way, as a word that's the inverse and opposite of developed. And it's important to recognize that because it changes the meaning of what "development" is. Now, Development doesn't just refer to the natural progression of the something, the a seed to a sprout to a tree, for example. Development is a verb now, a set of actions. An underdeveloped state or country can be corrected via development, in order to catch up with developed countries⁸ Klara, how you feeling?

Klara: So basically there's a standard and the standard is a certain kind of nation state and if you don't follow that, you're not developed?

Ezra: Exactly! And the huge issue with this presentation of the world is that there's no historical context for why these areas are underdeveloped. Truman claims that his motivations to develop the world are because it's, and i'm gonna quote again, "first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people." Yeah yeah yeah, it's true, new vaccines, and medicines existed in 1949 that weren't around 1749. But, him saying that it's the "first time in history" that the "suffering of these peoples" can be helped reveals that he

⁶ Gilbert Rist and Patrick Camiller, *History of Development, From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 76.

⁷ Gustavo Esteva, Salvatore J. Babones, and Philipp Babcicky, *Future of Development: A Radical Manifesto*, 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

thinks that underdevelopment happened as some kooky circumstance cuz the other half of the world, they just decided to be dumb.⁹

Klara: Or that's what he wants people to think and really that's just like a way to make this more palatable.

Ezra: Exactly! The "suffering of these peoples" exists because, hm, the direct result of historical circumstances, namely, imperialism, colonialism, theft, slavery, genocide, you know the whole shebang. But...we'll get to that later when we use Bolivia as a case study.¹⁰

Ezra: All right Klara how you feeling.

Klara: Feeling good, feeling groovy. *Laughs*

Ezra: Wait, but how are you feeling about what i said.

Klara: I guess what I'm thinking is this is an awfully convenient narrative for someone who is the president of the United States to be using.

Ezra: Yes, it very much is. But, we're getting ahead of ourselves i have to establish all this theory first.

Ezra: Great. So, what was Truman's solution for the suffering of people living in colonized countries? Well, in his words "Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern, scientific, and technical knowledge."¹¹ Sorry if that wasn't pleasant to listen too. Klara, this idea that greater production = happiness is one that, frankly, I don't think is true, and also one that very much

⁹ Alayza Moncloa, Alejandra, Eduardo Gudynas, and Roxana Azeñas, eds. *Transiciones y alternativas al extractivismo en la región andina: una mirada desde Bolivia, Ecuador y Perú*. Lima, Perú: CEPES, Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales [u.a.], 2012.

¹⁰ Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. 25th anniversary ed. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997. 8.

¹¹ Gilbert Rist and Patrick Camiller, *History of Development, From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 75.

reflects the historical context in which Truman is speaking in. And I should return to that for a little bit because... where does Truman get off saying all this?

Ezra: Brief history reminder. 1949. A major global conflict World War 2 has ended, or recently ended.. The whole "colonizer, colonized" division that had ordered the world for hundreds of years doesn't really work anymore. Explicit colonial empires just aren't en vogue. And, I mean more seriously, colonized peoples across the globe are demanding their freedom. So, what's to be done in order the United States to stay on top economically? Just create the idea of a singular Earth, where some countries happen to be developed, and others, are underdeveloped. Given that we're all a part of one big happy family, isn't it the imperative of big older brother developed country to help out poor lil' underdeveloped country?¹² After all, lil brother doesn't understand the universally accepted truth that production is happiness. At least, that's how Truman would spin it. He's selling a dream, when in reality he's creating a nightmare: a justification for continued, colonial exploitation.¹³

Klara: I see this operating in apposition to racial dynamics too, if you think about color blindness and white saviour complexes. I see a parallel there.

Ezra: yeah, cuz kind of like the white saviour complex, which sort of creates the idea for the party that's being quote unquote "saved" that they're inferior, that, they're not playing by the correct rules because this separate entity is looking at them and saying what you are is wrong.

Ezra: Of course, Truman's not the only salesman in this history. Five years prior to his inaugural address, in 1944 the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, better known as the World Bank, is formed.¹⁴ Klara, what do you know of the World Bank?

¹² Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012). 72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 75

¹⁴ Eric Toussaint, *The World Bank: A Critical Primer*. 1st English language ed. London ; Ann Arbor, Mich: Pluto, 2008. 12.

Klara: If I had to talk about the World Bank i think I'd use pretty vague terms. My understanding is that it's a bank that's international that's run by mostly western powerful countries that decides a lot about where money is invested.

Ezra: For a vague answer that's pretty spot on. The biggest shareholders are western powers, and they do allocate loans and decide what projects should be funded.

Ezra: When I first learned of them, the image I had in my mind was that the World Bank were the Evil Lizard People that run everything. That's a pretty harsh description right off the bat, but, sorry, hot take, any cursory study of global politics reveals the following truth "World Bank supports brutal dictatorship and/or military coup in blank country." and you could fill in that blank with any of the following countries: Iran, Guatemala, Haiti, Brazil, Indonesia, Uganda, Chile, Argentina, Turkey, Kenya, Pakistan, and, the one country we'll explore more in depth, Bolivia.¹⁵ But... no one had ever actually broken down me "Why does the World Bank do this?" and "where do they come from?" I'm gonna do that now, because it's extremely relevant to development theory.

Ezra: 1941. Officials in in the US Government begins to float the idea of creating international financial institutions. They're coming off the heels of a crazy economic crash, the Great Depression, but they're also looking towards the future, For when World War 2 will be over, and they're thinking, how do we cement a level of leadership in the world for when this is all said and done.¹⁶ What better way to maintain colonial hierarchies than to reinforce pre-existing economic systems where the United States is on top. So when the World Bank starts operating five years later, the biggest shareholder in the bank is, you could probably guess...

Klara: The United States.

Ezra: Bingo! The operating ethos of the World Bank is a similar one that Truman expresses in his inaugural address. Promote actions that maximize the economy, and the economy in the ways in which we measure it and understand it, over everything else. Like Truman said, greater

¹⁵ Ibid., 7

¹⁶ Ibid, 43

production equal happiness. It's in this time, and from this way of thinking, that economic markers and measurements become just extremely important.

Klara: So what economic markers and measurements were they using.

Ezra: Okay, one example that really blew up in this time, is GDP.

KLara: Really popped off.

Ezra: Yeah, really popped off. GDP popped after WW2. But actually! Because GDP was used to gauge a country's economy, but also their overall quality of life. You've heard of this term, GDP?

KLara: Yeah I did take Intro econ, gross domestic product

Ezra: Nice, well I NRO'd intro econ so, for myself and the listeners at home, I will explain it.

Ezra: Gross domestic production is a fancy way to say the sum total monetary value of all goods, production and services added up provided in a country. because of how the World Bank has pushed it, GDP is a standard in which we measure quality of life in a country. Which honestly, sometimes just doesn't make sense.. For example, let's say I buy a pack of cigarettes. That contributes to a higher GDP. Let's say I smoke a lot of cigarettes, and then I get lung cancer.¹⁷

Klara: let's say JUULs let's make this very 2019.

Ezra: Make it 2019 okay. So let's say I buy a pack of mango JUUL pods. And I smoke all those JUUL pods. And I get some form of cancer from juuling. My doctor's visits to treat my JUUL cancer also contribute to a higher GDP. Long, drawn out deaths from disease are much preferred for the GDP than a healthy, painless one, at least, in a country like the states where go bankrupt paying for our healthcare bill.¹⁸ Beyond this critique, there's also the feminist one that

¹⁷ Gustavo Esteva, Salvatore J. Babones, and Philipp Babcicky, *Future of Development: A Radical Manifesto*, 38.

¹⁸ Ibid.,

you could probably guess. Namely, that women all over the world, global north and global south, do insane amounts of informal work, work that produces things for the home, taking care of kids, older relatives.

Klara: Work that basically is completely devalued.

Ezra: Yeah, exactly, because that work never enters the marketplace. If we use GDP to measure quality of life in a country, then what we're saying is that quote unquote informal work, aka women's work, is just not as important.¹⁹ We'll return to these critiques more in part 2, so keep them swirling around in your head.

Ezra: The biggest takeaway I want you to have is this: the markers in which we measure the world aren't objective. No measurement is. Any way in which the world is broken down into numbers reveals a subjective point of view for the person who came up with that formula.

Klara: An inherent bias.

Ezra: Exactly! All numbers have them. And for Truman, and the World Bank, that means maximizing the economy. And because they exist in positions of immense power in the world, they can naturalize their view of the world as correct and natural, through the creation of development.²⁰

Klara: HMMMMM

Ezra: I know right. I sound a little like a conspiracy theorist but all of this is very much true.

Ezra: We can see that in the literal founding documents of the World Bank. In one of their early annual reports, the same year that Harry Truman gave this speech, they directly respond to the point that he raised. Oh, and before I read the quote, just know that when they say point four programme, they're talking about what Truman said about development. *"As of the date of this report the full implications of the Point IV program, and the precise method of its*

¹⁹ Marianne A. Ferber, "The Study of Economics: A Feminist Critique." *The American Economic Review* 85, no. 2 (1995): 357-61.

²⁰ Gilbert Rist and Patrick Camiller, *History of Development, From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 75.

implementation, are not yet entirely clear. From the standpoint of the Bank, however, the program is of vital interest. The Bank's basic objectives in this field are essentially the same as those of the Point IV program."²¹

Ezra: It is so astounding that they literally say we don't know how we're gonna about doing this, but at the same time, they affirm that their basic reason in existing is this plan.

Klara: Hm, it's a paradox.

Ezra: Mhm!. So, we have the United States and newly created international financial institutions in agreement with this plan, that countries all over the world need to develop to meet the standard of first world countries.

Klara: It's very top down.

Ezra: Exactly. Very robert moses esque. *Laughs*

Ezra: I want to address maybe some skeptics listening. Thinking, where does guy get off, slandering the dream of modernity that we can all live in peace, that everyone should have access to wealth? To those people, I'm not saying that those goals and aspirations are bad. What I am saying is 1. it's naive, at best, to think that colonizing countries can come up with solutions for the colonized. and 2. Those "solutions" that were created existed to maintain colonial relationships. Development discourse led to this: The financial encouragement for global south countries to grow cash crops instead of food for local populations. the prioritization of centralized planning, to meet these arbitrary benchmarks, like GDP that we just spoke about rather than participatory approaches that prioritize the voices of native populations. The mechanization of chemicalization of agriculture, rather than a system that values local practices and the Earth. Basically, Capital intensive solutions, rather than ones focused on labor.²²

²¹ Eric Toussaint, *The World Bank: A Critical Primer*. 1st english language ed. London ; Ann Arbor, Mich: Pluto, 2008. 12.

²² Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development*. 98.

Ezra: UGH. Sad story I know. I also realize that i'm just throwing around a lot of big ideas, and if this angle is new to you, I probably sound a little nutty. So, let's ground everything i'm saying. Let's turn towards a specific global south country to see how development discourse, and the ensuing actions, played out. Travel with me 5,000 miles south, at least from Poughkeepsie, to the plurinational state of Bolivia

Melodia Inca Chuklla plays

Ezra: Ah, Bolivia. *La bella tierra de mi corazón*. Which directly translates too... I'm that white kid who went abroad to south america and never wanted to stop talking about it.

Klara: That's true I can attest to that.

Ezra: *Laughs* Beyond my own personal love for the country, the history of Bolivia, or more aptly, the history of foreign exploitation of Bolivia, provides use a useful means to apply all this theory i just threw at you.

Ezra: So, I'm gonna give you just enough historical context to understand that. This isn't going to be an overview of Bolivian history, but rather, just enough so you guys can understand how development theory fits in to that history and the long history of colonization.

Klara: Mhm.

Ezra: So, Bolivia. It's an incredibly diverse place. It has the highest per capita population of indigenous peoples, with over 50% of the population id'ing as indigenous. Over 30 languages are spoken here.²³ And geographically the country kind of looks like a triangle if you've never seen it on a map before. Three incredibly different geographic and cultural regions. There's the andean region in the north, the alti plano, or the high plains, in the south west, and the lowland, swampy region in the south east. Culturally, historically, all the other ally's, it really doesn't make sense for these three areas to be one country because they're so different. So how did this come to be?

²³ Farthing, Linda C., and Benjamin H. Kohl. *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. First edition. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014. 6.

Klara: I'm guessing it wasn't the people who lived there who decided what the borders of the country were.

Ezra: That was me snapping for Klara because she was right. The borders of Bolivia were largely decided by colonization.²⁴ For the listener at home, there's a city in the south of Bolivia that I'm pointing towards to on a map called Potosi. Prior to colonization, no one lived here. It is not a hospitable place 2.5 miles above sea level, the air is very thin, and it is freezing. But, in the middle of Potosi, is the Cerro Rico, the rich hill. Spanish colonizers described this place as a hill covered and just oozing in Silver. Within a few years of the Spanish "discovering" this place, over 200,000 people had moved there, all to facilitate the mining of silver, processing, and exportation back to Europe.²⁵

Klara: That's a lot of people

Ezra: Yeah, it went from being not populated at all, to being the most populated city in all of the Americas, for a few years. What was it that David Harvey said about cities that they come to be because they're geographic concentrations of a product? That's certainly the case when we look at Potosi

Ezra: How Bolivia is today can largely be linked back to this colonization. These three different areas came to be one country because different cities were then created to facilitate the stealing of silver. The Spanish colonized Bolivia for the ensuing 300 years. All of the infrastructure that they created, was created to meet their own needs, to help facilitate this exploitation.²⁶ The rich diversity that exists in Bolivia today can in part be contributed to the Spanish enslaving indigenous peoples from nearby areas, bringing them to Potosi, and forcing them to work in the mines for months at a time. It's estimated that over 8 million people died, just working in the mines of Potosi.

²⁴ Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. Vol. 1. Santa Cruz, Bolivia: FCP Fundación Colonia Piraí, 2011. 103.

²⁵ Ibid., 107.

²⁶ Ibid., 124

Klara: Wow, it's crazy i've never heard of this before.

Ezra: Right! Ugh! It makes me quite angry that we never learn about this. In history classes, we study how the industrial rEvolution and global capitalism expanded in the 1600, 17, and 1800s. What we don't learn is that these changes were in big part fueled by the stealing of resources from Bolivia. (and yes of course, across South America too, but a lot was from Bolivia.) In the 1600s it's estimated that over 60% of the silver circulating in the world came from the mines of potosi.²⁷

Ezra: Right, that's a number for you., The spanish ruled the area that is now Bolivia for over 300 years, explicitly. Implicitly, you know we'll get to that in a little bit. In those 300 years, they kind of imposed this extractivist economy onto the area.

Klara: What does extractivism mean?

Ezra: Extractivism is the process of taking natural resources from Earth and selling on the world market.²⁸

Klara: So is extractivism basically like the main economy is just focused on taking one resource and it's not like used locally, but rather sold on like the global scale?

Ezra: Yes exactly that's exactly it. And the profits that derive from that sort of economy rarely go back to support the populations of where the resource is from. That's definitely true in the case of Bolivia. When the only existing infrastructure, skills, etc., encouraged are related to extractivism, then of course that's what's continue to happen. For the typical Bolivian, independence from spain meant nothing, except a change of hands from who owned the mines

²⁷ Ibid., 73

²⁸ Alayza Moncloa, Alejandra, Eduardo Gudynas, and Roxana Azeñas, eds. *Transiciones y alternativas al extractivismo en la región andina: una mirada desde Bolivia, Ecuador y Perú*. Lima, Perú: CEPES, Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales [u.a.], 2012. 15.

you worked in.²⁹ This limited portrait of Bolivian history gives us just enough context to return to the development era., and the 1950s. So what's going on in Bolivia then?

Klara: Wait a second, what happened to the spanish colonizers? When did they leave?

Ezra: Umm, yeah I know I really did just jump ahead I can give you a little more context. So they got independence from Spain in the 1810s, then Bolivia was ruled by different South American countries.³⁰

Klara: Did they like, have a war for independence, or did Spain just decide to...

Ezra: They had a war for independence.

Klara: Okay.

Ezra: Ruled by various South American countries until like the 1880s, but really the transfer of government and this is why I kind of skipped it, it really didn't mean anything for the average Bolivian. It was just a new administration, a largely white administration, ruling over indigenous populations, setting up economies that benefitted the top 1% percent, or the .0001%, and not really helping out the people.³¹

Klara: mhm.

Ezra: So, thank you for that I should have given more of that context. So, the 1950s, what's going on in Bolivia then?

Klara: I have no clue, what was going on?

Ezra: Well, a rEvolution actually! The Movimiento Nacionalismo REvolucionario, the MNR from here on out, was a rEvolutionary party composed of leftists, miners, laborers, and certain factions from the military, they succeeded in overthrowing the government, distributing military

²⁹ Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. 2011. 52.

³⁰ Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. 2011. 32.

³¹ Ibid., 52

supplies and claiming power. When they came to be the government, they had very bold intentions.³²

Ezra: These goals in rhetoric are largely line with what Development Era politics claimed to want. Think back to Truman's speech... he claimed that he wanted to make the benefits of a modern, scientific society available to all peoples. Aren't those benefits a diverse economy, with schools, hospitals, etc?

Ezra: Yeah... ugh... no. That is absolutely not what happened. Development era rhetoric prioritized increased production over all. When you operate from that sort of worldview, happiness, social equity, education, healthcare, those things aren't important.. If it interferes with increased production, then it's bad for development. Thus making it justifiable to target these things and eliminate them.³³

Ezra: This is a bold claim, but I'm just gonna get into what actually transpired to validate what I'm saying.

Klara: Let's hear it.

Ezra: At the time, over 90% of Bolivia's revenue came from the sale of tin.³⁴

Klara: Are tin and silver related? Or are they just different metals.

Ezra: They're different metals. by the 1900s most of the silver had been stolen

Klara: mhm.

Ezra: Bolivia is largely a mineral derived economy. It's a very mineral rich country.

³² Stephen Zunes. "The United States and Bolivia: The Taming of a Revolution, 1952-1957." *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 5 (September 2001): 36.

³³ Thomas Field. *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

Ezra: I'm gonna repeat that figure. 90%!! That makes you very dependent on whomever is purchasing your tin. Of course, the biggest purchaser of tin was the United States.³⁵

Ezra: Tin, like any other metal, is a resource that has to be smelted in order for it to be useful for anything. Bolivia had no means to smelt this, because, no one had ever invested in the country to have that. I read through a bunch of boring US State department documents in order to write this thesis, and one of them literally states: "By building our own smelter and buying tin for many years, we have successfully discouraged Bolivians from constructing a tin smelter."³⁶

Klara: Wow.

Ezra: Right? It's a blatant acknowledgement that US economic policies preferred this immensely dependent relationship. And to what end? What did this dependent economic relationship lead to?

Klara: hm. Maybe something to do with development politics?

Ezra: Bingo! Development politics that lead to a slow, and internal, squashing of the 1952 led revolution. Yeah, things minorly improved, more more people could vote, labor conditions were a little less slavery like, the tin mines were now owned largely by Bolivians.³⁷ But, by the end of the 50s, because of the control of the economy the US had, that gave them a lot of influence in the government. And the MNR couldn't possibly balance their beliefs in the redistribution of wealth, social spending, and anti-imperialism politics with what the United States wanted, which was weaker unions, a focus on continued mining, and cuts to planned social spending. The person holding the purse strings usually wins out, and that's what happened here.³⁸

Klara: How did that end up happening exactly? How did that play out?

³⁵ Stephen Zunes. "The United States and Bolivia: The Taming of a REvolution, 1952-1957." 42.

³⁶ Ibid., 47

³⁷ Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. 2011. 152.

³⁸ Stephen Zunes. "The United States and Bolivia: The Taming of a REvolution, 1952-1957." 48.

Ezra: Well, because the United States was the main purchaser of Bolivia's tin, if they decided we're not gonna buy this from you anymore, Bolivia's economy would crash. So they started conditions, we're going to buy your metals. If you buy this metal, then you should appoint that person to the government. or you should give a speech about anti communism. Or you should arrest x amount of labor organizers, or disrupt university organizing. They started attaching all these clauses to purchasing metals.

Ezra: Checking in, does all of this make sense? Does it fit?

Ezra: Great. Okay, history reminder. Klara, what major rEvolution succeeded in 1959?

Klara: I don't think so.

Ezra: It's okay if you don't remember! Cuba! Probably the most famous revolution in Latin America, or at least famous to the United States. Castro and his comrades overthrew batista to install a communist government, ostensibly. Whether Cuba actually did that or didn't is besides the point, the mere threat of successful communism just about made the United States shit their pants.³⁹ It lead to this intense anxiety and fear that communism could succeed anywhere in Latin America, which meant the US started to push for more repressive policies, all in the name of good development.⁴⁰

Ezra: So, what this looked like in Bolivia was the creation of something called the Triangular plan. Triangular because three main groups were involved, The United States, the World Bank, and West Germany.

Klara: Interesting.

Ezra: I know right? But it was mostly the United States and the World Bank Development economists working for the now Kennedy administration identified the union prone, rebellious miners as the main obstacle to economic progress. AKA, they viewed the lefty workers as a threat to their preferred economic system. So, they devised this plan, the Triangular plan. Over

³⁹ Thomas Field. *From Development to Dictatorship*. 2018. 53.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55

the course of 10 years, \$62 million dollars was to be given to the Bolivian government. Unstated to the public were the "Accepted Points of View" clauses, which obligated the Bolivian government in to lay off over 20% of the labor force, and remove "communists" and communists" from labor positions. So anyone suspected of communism, aka anyone who had any left leaning tendencies towards social spending or things like that. ⁴¹

Ezra: So the book I drew most of this research from was written by this guy named Thomas Field, titled "From Development to Dictatorship." Reading his book,I learned a lot, but I also felt frustrated that he wasn't making the link that Development inherently is linked to these violent regimes. In other words, development didn't go away. It went exactly as it was planned too. In 1961 President Kennedy gave a speech to the united nations. where he promised that the world would now focus on a cooperative enterprise to enable all nations, however diverse in their systems or beliefs, to become "free and equal nations." In other words, a very speech to the one Truman gave Truman ten years prior.⁴² In literally that same month, Kennedy signed National Security Action 88, which ordered the training of armed forces in Latin America in controlling mobs and guerrillas. What that translated too on the ground the United States funding going towards militarized police forces and armies that suppressed union workers, leftists, and university students. When a foreign power trains the police of another country, it undermines their civilian institutions, and there's a huge human cost as well. This police force kidnapped, raped, tortured, and murdered extrajudicially. This happened in more than Bolivia, but all of Latin America.⁴³

Ezra: I could really go on and on and on with all these different examples of different things we've done in Bolivia, or any other Latin America country, but truth be told, the specifics aren't what I want you to take away from. What I want you to remember is this: Development Era Politics and Policies existed to serve those who already dominated the world. They justified

⁴¹ Ibid, 60-68.

⁴² John F. Kennedy, "Address to the United Nations General Assembly" (speech, New York, New York, September 25, 1961), John F Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

⁴³ Thomas Field. *From Development to Dictatorship*. 2018. 53, 66-69.

long standing, exploitative economic relationships, and anything that got in their way was designated as a threat that needed to be eliminated.

Klara: It just seems like rebranding of imperialism and colonialism.

Ezra: Beyond that I know threw a lot of specifics about Bolivian history at you, do you have any other questions.

Klara: No

Ezra: All right, i'm glad you don't have any other questions, listener I hope you don't either, because We're approaching the end of this episode, and I want to orient ourselves now towards how actual Bolivians handle and navigate these situations.

Ezra: So a repressive, militarized police forces and army were needed in Bolivia to execute these development politics, I mean, to put it bluntly, the Bolivian people were badass. With nothing to lose, only gain, that's a helluva motivating force to organize. The people successfully orchestrated an overthrow of the government for christ's sake just a few years prior! And even with the Triangular Plan bringing about more repression, the people continued to resist. Miners especially! They were key in all of this organizing. Throughout the repression they continued organizing illegal strikes of all sorts, and even hunger strikes that would last over a week long. During one of these hunger strikes a woman Manuela de Cejas, passed away. In her honor, a fellow worker wrote this poem,that I'm now going to read to you, which I feel captures the ethos and spirit of the Bolivian people during this time.

Ezra: "You went to the La paz hunger strikes, arriving at the door of COMIBOL, tear gas surrounded your children, launched by the agents paid by the Yankee dollar. Manuela de Cejas, valiant woman without equal, you offered your life for the working class, fighting alongside your husband against the Triangular Plan. Onward, women! Toward the liberation of people, oppressed by American capitalists, tyrants, wagers of massacres, murdering dogs. One day they will fall into a disgusting, endless, abyss"⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Ibid, 42.

Musica Andina Boliviana Volume 1

Ezra: That's it for episode one, thanks for listening y'all. If you were intrigued by this history, join us in episode 2 to see how it continues. We'll discuss how Bolivians have responded to colonization, and, in the process, have created a radical new paradigm of reality.

EPISODE 2.

THE PROMISE OF VIVIR BIEN IN BOLIVIA

Ezra: Welcome back listener, thanks for joining us again. I'm still Ezra Weissman, and I still have Klara with me. Last episode, we spoke about development discourse, and how said discourse exists to justify continued colonial economic relationships, and how that plays out in the beautiful country of Bolivia. Klara, are there any other takeaways you had from last episode that you'd want to remind the listener of now?

Klara: I'd say we just discussed how development discourse has changed since World War 2, and thinking about how that exists in relationships to colonial relations like you said.

Ezra: Totally, I appreciate you pulling out that specific shift because that's kind of when this language started to be used. So, yes, remember that too.

Ezra: What I didn't touch on last time, and what we'll explore in depth this episode, is how are Bolivians responding on the ground. People don't just lie down and take colonization, they resist it. In fact, in that resistance, new paradigms can emerge, and they have in this case, and that's what I want to explore today.

Ezra: Klara, have you heard about Vivir Bien?

Klara: Yeah, I heard you mention it a lot since coming back from abroad. I guess what I'd assume that it is Evoking a kind of right to the city discourse and a right to the good life based on access to urban amenities and services.

Ezra: Klara's grimacing you can't see that but it added to her answer. Also, klara is such an urban studies major. For the non-urbs listener, Klara just used the phrase right to the city which is a lefebvre

Klara: *Lefebvre*

Ezra: Le-FEbvre and David harvey idea that everyone deserves equitable access to the city, and we deserve to alter the city to alter ourselves. But, we're gonna get out of those paradigms today, and explore ones emerging from the Global South.

Klara: Wow that's so refreshing

Ezra: Wouldn't it be cool if we did that more in our classes? Anyway, studying Vivir Bien is actually why I chose to go abroad to Bolivia, and what I learned is why I decided to make this thesis. So, what exactly is it? What is Vivir Bien?

Ezra: Vivir Bien. In the broadest sense, is an emerging paradigm that presents as an alternative to development, focusing on what makes “the good life.” (Vivir Bien in spanish means to live well) I’m fascinated with the concept because I genuinely believe that Vivir Bien discourse lays a possible groundwork to escape the toxic development mindset we discussed last episode. Which, to review, Klara, could you give me a summary of that development mindset?

Klara: Well... we were basically talking about how development is an idea that's used to further kind of extractivist relationships and continue making as much money as possible from different places... Is that right?

Ezra: Yeah, that was pretty good. I appreciate that you pulled out the emphasis on continuing extractivist colonial relationships and also the huge emphasis on production as the end all be all to create just and good societies. But onto Vivir Bien. What is it? It's complex, fluid, nuanced, etc, so it was a kind of actually difficult for me to figure out how to explain this to someone who has never been to or studied Bolivia. But I figured the best way to do it is to look at the origins. So Let's break down. Vivir Bien comes out of 1. Indigenous cosmovision and 2. Contemporary Bolivian social movements.⁴⁵

Klara: What's cosmovisions?

Ezra: Yeah I know I really did just use that phrase which I know makes me sound like that guy, but stay with me. As we learned in the last episode, Bolivia has one of the highest indigenous

⁴⁵ JUAN TELLEZ THESIS

populations per capita in the world, with over 50% of the population identifying as indigenous.⁴⁶ That presence is felt. It's visible, walking around a typical city in Bolivia, depending on where you are in the city, at least a third of the people you'd see are dressed in traditional indigenous clothing. But it's also felt on a deeper level, in the ideas that permeate society. So, back to cosmovision, which is really just a way to say how basic nature of the cosmos, or the realms of reality, are understood by a local culture. For every indigenous group that exists in Bolivia, which there are dozens and dozens of, there exists there own set of unique cosmovisions. Within all of these cosmovisions actually, Vivir Bien as a term doesn't exist! How can that be? Klara, I know you're not fluent, but what language is "Vivir Bien"?⁴⁷

Klara: Spanish?

Ezra: Ding Ding ding! Exactly. And spanish, as we know, or, as we learned in the last episode, is a colonizer's language. Now widely spoken in Bolivia, and a lot of south america, but it originates as a colonizer's language all the same. So the articulation of Vivir Bien as an expression of indigenous cosmovision actually didn't come about until the early 2000s, when Bolivian academics and activists turned back towards their indigenous roots, or studying indigenous cultures, and wanting to ground their activism in their own culture.⁴⁸

Ezra: That makes Vivir Bien, and what it can mean and represent, very different depending on who you're talking too. What it means to a teenage farmer in a rural village is very different than what it means to an urban dweller living in an intentional vegan commune.

Klara: *Laughs*

Ezra: Those examples are so specific, btw, bc those are examples of the type of people that I met while I was abroad who are interested in Vivir Bien. But again, what exactly is Vivir Bien? What does it stand for? But there are a few grounding principles that are usually drawn out from the cosmovisions, and I'm gonna go over those now.

⁴⁶ Farthing, Linda C., and Benjamin H. Kohl. *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. 2014. 6.

⁴⁷ Eduardo Gudynas Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow. *Development*, no. 54 (2011) 442-443

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 444

Ezra: So, within development mindsets and paradigms, it's all about the bottom line, profit, the end goal, that's always the determiner if something is successful. Within a Vivir Bien paradigm, esthetic, cultural, historical, environmental, and even spiritual aspects are included when determining what makes something worth doing.⁴⁹ Now, when I tell people I'm doing this thesis, they often say something along the lines of, "oh, so, like sustainable development." And, I feel like with the little bit I just told you about Vivir Bien, you can see how it's more than that. because sustainable development at the end of the day, is still dependent on the bottom line. Try to do things a little more greenly, but, you're still going to build that new building on that swamp.⁵⁰

Klara: Wow sounds familiar

Ezra: *Laughs* Hot take. Within a Vivir Bien Paradigm, we say, screw that, let's focus on the holistic health of the environment, the social history of an area, before we begin this project. Another aspect of Vivir Bien thinking that nature is alive, nature is a part of our social world. Respecting *madre tierra*, mother Earth, then, isn't just something we do because climate change is scary and coming for us. We care for Earth because Earth is alive, and Earth has will and feelings.⁵¹ Within this Vivir Bien framework, when you're considering to frack for example, you couldn't calculate the cost of doing that without considering how that would impact and harm Earth into the actually formulas you're using to measure will this be economically viable. With this type of understanding of Earth, The relationship people then have to Earth, and other living creatures, is totally different. There's a huge emphasis on reciprocity on many levels within Vivir Bien paradigms. And reciprocity not just between human to human. But human to animal, human to Earth. We exist because Earth gives to us, so, let's give back to her. The relationship

⁴⁹ Juan Téllez. "Desarrollo y el Vivir Bien en Bolivia." Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2010, 3.

⁵⁰ Eduardo Gudynas. "Buen vivir: Germinando alternativas al desarrollo." *América Latina en Movimiento*, no. 462 (February 2011): 15-17.

⁵¹ Ibid, 18

you have with Earth is just as real as the relationship you have with, your mom, for example, because both the Earth and your mom are alive and they care about you.⁵²

Klara: Mmm.

Ezra: I know right? Because of this emphasis of reciprocity, how community is understood is different from how we understand it in the West. By that, I mean, community isn't just about people, it's about so much more. Within *Vivir Bien*, community means the natural world, the land, the Earth, the animals. In this way it's kind of a direct affront to the kind of dualism that's present in our American society, where we are considered totally separate from Earth. Where land is something we live on and buy, not something we cohabit with and live with.⁵³ By just having a *Vivir Bien* mentality... it just necessitates the total rejection of a lot of things inherent to development thinking. Namely, the idea that increased production is key to greater happiness. Remember, throwback to the first episode that's what Truman identified as the key to happiness. Now, I don't really think it is the key to happiness, but it is the key to development thinking and our economic models. *Vivir Bien* would look at that and say, well, is it? Cuz, if we consumed as much as the United States, we would need four Earths in terms of resources.⁵⁴ So, why would we listen to anything you guys have to say?

Klara: *Chuckles softly*

Ezra: What are the resources that we actually have, that the Earth can actually provide? What do we actually need to sustain ourselves, nothing more and nothing less. I guess if I had to summarize, *Vivir Bien* is a spiritual shift that then demands the restructuring of the entire economy.

⁵² Catherine Walsh. "Development as *Buen Vivir*: Institutional Arrangements and (de)Colonial Entanglements." *Development* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 17

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

Ezra: Now, I said this when introducing this episode, but Vivir Bien didn't exist in ancient indigenous societies. Activists, social movements, these people appropriated indigenous ideas, and unified them with their own activism to provide cultural grounding. That grounding is necessary because... for so long, colonizing framework, like development framework, totally discredited these knowledge systems.⁵⁵ Really think back to all the development theory stuff we got in to in the first episode? Away that thinking is naturalized as the best way to run a country, or whatever, is creating a science that you then present as objective that unilaterally supports your belief system. Like, for example, the creation of economics, or metrics like GDP.

Klara: Hm, it's all about creating a kind of normative template.

Ezra: Using those metrics, or that template, the development mentality is “objectively” the best, and because duh those metrics were made within that world view.

Klara: Nothing is objective, not even science.

Ezra: Bingo. And by Vivir Bien thinking, a thinking that prioritizes harmonious relationships, between each other, between nature, with ourselves, one that emphasizes local knowledge, that calls for societal reciprocity,... It's just truly a decolonizing process!⁵⁶ Because it offers a way to to escape this development thinking, while elevating cultural systems that have been historically REALLY oppressed and downtrodden.

Ezra: Okay, I really just threw a lot at you. Klara, how are you feeling.

Klara: Feeling pretty good excited to hear more.

Ezra: I realize a lot of what I'm saying is nebulous until I ground it, so, let's do that grounding. . how did Vivir Bien come to be given the intense colonization that we learned about in the first episode? How did this idea come to be a prominent that some schmuck like me is studying it for his senior thesis. We're gonna veer a bit into the social movements I've been mentioning to

⁵⁵ Juan Téllez. “Desarrollo y el Vivir Bien en Bolivia.” Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2010, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

learn how Vivir Bien came to be. To do that, let's return to a friend from the first episode. Do you remember the World Bank?

Klara: Ah yes, the lizard people how could I forget.

Ezra: Yes exactly the lizards of the world. Well, throughout the latter half of the 1900s and into the 00's they continued being the lizards of the world in many ways. The one we're gonna talk about is how they fund infrastructure projects in the global south. Namely, they're quick to give loans, but they usually always do it with.... *Conditions* attached.

Klara: I have a feeling this has something to do with hollowing out of government services and privatizing things.

Ezra: Mhm. urban studies has taught you well. Conditions are usually this: we'll fund your public works project, but then you guys need to lease that public project over to private mega corporation here who will squeeze every dollar out of you for profit.⁵⁷

Klara: Sounds like a recipe for success. That was sarcasm listeners, sarcasm.

Ezra: I feel like they picked up on that, I feel like I've been pretty sarcastic this whole time don't worry. I don't think anyone will think you're a fan of colonization. But anyway. That's exactly what happened in Cochabamba in 1999. Cochabamba, for the listener by the way, is a mid-sized city in Bolivia, and a city I lived in for several months when I was abroad. Anyway, cochabamba, 1999, they were pretty desperate for a new water system, and the World Bank offered them \$14 million to create a new system, but that system was to be run by the Bechtel company. Klara have you heard of bechtel?⁵⁸

Klara: Is that like Alison Bechdel of the Bechdel test?

⁵⁷ J Shultz, & M. Draper *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009. 14-17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-21.

Ezra: That would be really cool if it were, but no, they are not an organization run by the very prominent lesbian Alison Bechdel. They're the Bechtel company, and I know I've been calling the World Bank the lizards, but corporations like Bechtel are actually the reptilian overlords of Earth that I should be shaming. Bechtel is one of the largest corporations in the entire world, and they make about half their money off of feeding off of government contracts. They were the company, for example, that got one billion dollars without competing for it from Bush to rebuild Iraq after the United States destroyed Iraq.⁵⁹

Klara: Wow, war machines.

Ezra: Mhm. Yeah. And in cocha, cochabamba, the deal the World Bank cooked up was Bechtel would control the water for 40 years, and they were guaranteed to have a profit of 16% a year. And that profit was to come off the backs of families in cochabamba.⁶⁰

Klara: What do you mean by that?

Ezra: Well the water rates, the rates that they would charge people to use water, were set to be raised by 30% on middle class folx and 50% on the poorest families, rates that neither group could possibly afford.

Klara: So, basically, a public resources like water was going to be a really expensive good.

Ezra: Yep. And, hot take, but I think it's pretty evil to squeeze profits out of people who had been colonized for hundreds of year. But cochabambinos, and all Bolivians, did not stand for this. Intense, intense organizing efforts began.

Ezra: In January 2000 activists shut down Cochabamba for three days. And I mean SHUT DOWN. They barricaded the highways, shut down the airports, blocked the buses. They

⁵⁹ Ibid., 22, 24-25.

⁶⁰ J Shultz, & M. Draper *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009. 32.

unrolled a banner in one of the main city plazas that said “*El agua es nuestra, carajo!*” Which translates to, the “water is ours, fucker!”⁶¹

*Manifestación - Sonido Ambiental plays*⁶²

Ezra: Unfortunately, that three day strike didn't stop the contract, it merely got the attention of the Bolivian government. Reminder, during this time Bolivia's government is largely composed of white or mestizo folks that don't really care about the wellbeing of the people. They're insistent that the Bechtel contract, that's moving forward. And I mean, a part of me gets their cowardness, for 50 years the way things worked was is if any project needs to be done, foreigners fund it and they decide how it will go. So, what's new about this project. So to combat all the activism, the government starts carting in militarized police armed with weapons and tear gas into cocha.⁶³

Klara: Wow.

Ezra: I know, scary, and intense. I'm gonna throw a name at you now. Evo Morales. Remember him. At the time, Evo was a union organizer for the coca leaf farmers, and he's joins in with activists in Cochabamba. And with him he brings his tactics from organizing in the jungle and organizing against soldiers to organizing in the urban environment. Anyhow, a relatively minor figure in this particular story, but a big one overall, so just remember him. In March of 2000, activists held a *consulta*, or a vote, and surveyed over 50,000 people in cocha. 90% of them endorsed cancelling the Bechtel contract. By April 2000, tensions were high. With referendum support, activists were demanding the outright cancellation of this contract, but the government was pulling out all the stops to support it. And, the final battle, broke out. Activists organized

⁶¹ Ibid., 34.

⁶² Sonorizante. "Manifestación - Sonido ambiental". Filmed [Jan 2018] Youtube video, 00:44. Posted [Jan 2018]

⁶³ J Shultz, & M. Draper *Dignity and Defiance*, 2009. 37-41.

an indefinite general strike with two demands: cancel the contract, and return water to public control.⁶⁴

Klara: What do you mean by general strike?

Ezra: A general strike is when all people in la clase popular, or the working class, people who work, don't work.

Klara: So what does that include?

Ezra: It means everyone stays home from work. I can't really, I don't know if a general strike has ever happened in the United States, but this type of organizing effort is pretty common in Bolivia. Where society will come together and say no. Usually during a general strike, kind of what I spoke about earlier, you shut down a lot of infrastructure, You shut down the roads, you shut down airports, you shut down everything, until the people are given what they want. So, that's what was happening then. The government did not really like that. The president cut off power to large sections of the city, suspended all constitutional rights, and carted in hundreds of militarized police. But that didn't stop the people. Stormed plazas, maintained road blocks, refused to work. Civil society came together to stop this contract. And... miraculously, it worked. After days of hiding out in their five star hotel, Bechtel officials fled the country and called off the contract. It just makes me emotional. A city that most people have never heard of in a country that most people have never heard of had just defeated one of the largest corporations in the world, and subverted the World Bank's plan.⁶⁵

*Melodia Inca Chuklla Plays*⁶⁶

Ezra: When most people look at the water wars, as this conflict came to be called, they see it as a stand against globalization. And that's certainly true, I would also locate this as the start of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 43-47.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁶ sandro2004. "Melodia INCA 'chuklla'". Filmed [Nov 2006] Youtube video, 06:04 [Nov 2006]

the Vivir Bien political era. I think these two things go hand in hand. For the previous fifty so years, Bolivia had been kind of ruled by foreign development schemes. The nefariousness of these development schemes is that they present themselves as infallible, they're backed by fancy economic science, and that can't be questioned! But that legitimacy... that's kind of now out the window. Because people now saw that it could be defeated. is now... sort of out the window, because people now saw that it could be defeated. The impact of the water wars cannot be understated.

Ezra: I just threw a lot of very specific Cochabamba strike history at you. How are you feeling.

Klara: I'm feeling good, I'm interested in what that has to do with continued development discourse in Bolivia.

Ezra: Awesome. We'll get there by talking about a specific person that became really elevated from this story. I'm gonna call back that guy I mentioned earlier. Evo Morales? The union organizer? The water wars gave him a spotlight in the public eye, and in 2002, he ran for president. Unsuccessfully, but four years later, in 2006, he ran, and won. He ran on a Vivir Bien platform, and notably, was the first indigenous president in all of South America.⁶⁷

Ezra: Now, you and me, we hear “first indigenous president” and think, oh, that’s good, yes, we support. So I really wanna emphasize here how HUGE of a deal this is. Him being elected, along with the other social movements, were so important in elevating indigenous ideas, making indigenous folx feel empowered. Less than 60 years prior to his election, indigenous folx literally were not allowed to enter city plazas in all major Bolivian cities.⁶⁸ And now, there's an indigenous president.

Klara: I want to ask at some point what does a Vivir Bien platform even mean?

Ezra: We're getting to that. It's related to the antithesis of development thinking because of what it them elevated. It kind of threw out the legitimacy of those development schemes. The ones

⁶⁷ Farthing, Linda C., and Benjamin H. Kohl. *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. 2014. 80-92.

⁶⁸ Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. 2011. 52.

that had been represented as ultimate science, indigenous person just sit down and take this because we're the experts. This time, they said, no, we're not going to do that. The success of that led people to think maybe we should look back at our own cultures, learn from our own wisdoms, because it seems like when we come together, we can defeat you guys.⁶⁹ What did this turn into though? How did having Evo Morales as president, and the Vivir Bien ideology that he elevated, actually play out for Bolivians? Have they escaped toxic economic relationships and created a utopia? Well, stuff's complicated, so let's get in to what has actually tangibly been done. When Evo became president, he instigated the process of rewriting the constitution. A constitution, basically being, the founding legal document of the state, shares the guiding principles, it's an important document. Kind of sets the tone, in a way, for what's in public discourse. The new Bolivian constitution is one of the most progressive constitutions in the entire world, full stop. I'm going to read a bit from the pre-amble before I get into it. By the way, it's translated, so when they say the good life, they're talking about Vivir Bien "A State based on respect and equality for all, on principles of sovereignty, dignity, interdependence, solidarity, harmony, and equity in the distribution and redistribution of the social wealth, where the search for a good life predominates; based on respect for the economic, social, juridical, political and cultural pluralism of the inhabitants of this land; and on collective coexistence with access to water, work, education, health and housing for all"⁷⁰

Klara: Wow. That's so amazing.

Ezra: The Bolivian Constitution then goes on to guarantee rights for Earth, in the same way that we as humans have rights. . Human rights, there are now Earth rights. Anyhow, this constitution I think totally shifts epistemologically of what we can expect from the state! Epistemology being like the state of knowledge, and by centering knowledges that have long been discarded, they made that shift. But... how did all of this actually play out? Is Bolivia a post colonial post

⁶⁹ J Shultz, & M. Draper *Dignity and Defiance*, 2009. 48.

⁷⁰ Bolivia. Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Adopted on February 7, 2009 by Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

development utopia? That's me saying...nah. Unfortunately. No.⁷¹ I've spoken a lot so far about how the discourse was totally different, but how did things change on the ground in regards to developmentalism, capitalism, imperialism? Unfortunately, not as much as you'd expect change. Let's look at a specific example to see the tensions play out. In 2011, the government, continued this new infrastructure project in this country. They proposed to build a highway connecting two cities. In the first episode, we spoke a bit about how the infrastructure in Bolivia was largely constructed to facilitate colonization and not Bolivia's own economic trade?⁷² Well, this highway, and the other infrastructure projects they were getting up to, were meant to kind of combat that and connect these two cities in a direct way.⁷³

Klara: Whose idea was this? Is this still during the Evo Morales Presidency?

Ezra: Mhm. This is during his presidency, so it's during him and he brought on a lot of indigenous folk to his government, and they were coming up with all these plans and these ideas. The highway they wanted to construct was going to go directly through the TIPNIS region, which is legally a biodiversity hotspot, protected environmentally, and home to over 15,000 indigenous folks. This construction would significantly increase deforestation, put species at risk, and dislocate a lot of those people. So... like, wtf Evo? Why are they doing this if you have this radical constitution that incorporates Vivir Bien? What about all that rhetoric about anti-development?

Klara: And Mother Earth!

Ezra: Well, it all comes back to the Benjamins. This is kind of a pattern with the government. They deflect any criticism of themselves by saying the process of emerging out of colonization takes time, and for now, we need to work within the system that has been created and imposed

⁷¹ Catherine Walsh. "Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional Arrangements and (de)Colonial Entanglements." (March 2010): 18.

⁷² Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. 2011. 30.

⁷³ Farthing, Linda C., and Benjamin H. Kohl. *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. 130-133.

on us.⁷⁴ But, that kind of defense, as you can imagine, did not stand well with a lot of the people who lived in the TIPNIS region. They were pissed. So they organized a march of indigenous peoples, and over 2,000 of them were gonna walk from TIPNIS to la Paz, which the economic capital of Bolivia. On the walk they did not have an easy time. They faced a lot of violence from government officials. They did eventually make it to la paz, and the project was cancelled, but the whole thing left a very very sour taste in a lot of people's mouths.⁷⁵ Bolivians felt betrayed by Evo, and betrayed by this Vivir Bien ideology that was supposed to change everything. And along these lines, remember about the extractivist economy model I mentioned in the first episode?

Klara: mhm.

Ezra: Where it's just like, an economy based off of extracting resources and then exporting them to other countries and they do everything with them. Were things able to magically changed under Evo? Again, not. Evo certainly did tip the balance more towards Bolivians, at least in terms of the profits that were kept. Prior to Evo's presidency, gas companies, for example, were keeping 80% of the profits from selling natural gas in Bolivia, and like, 18% went to the state. After Evo, and his semi-nationalizing of industries, Bolivia started keeping 80% of the profits and the companies only 20%. So that was a huge windfall for the state.⁷⁶ But... if you're just shifting who controls the extractivist industries, are you really getting to the root of the problem in the way that a Vivir Bien ideology purports to? Not really. Now I mean, I'm gonna credit where credit is due, the money the Bolivian government got has gone to help a LOT of people. There have been some investments into localized projects that elevate individual populations. There are a lot I could go into, but I'll talk about one because I feel like it demonstrates both the potential of Vivir Bien, but also the limitations. So, in 2007, right after Evo was elected, they launched this program called biocultura. I guess bioculture I guess in

⁷⁴ Farthing, Linda C., and Benjamin H. Kohl. *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. 2014. 170-177

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 178

⁷⁶ Rafael Calvo Puente. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historia Crítica De Bolivia*. 2011. 139.

English. The intention of this program was to empower rural indigenous communities and improve their economic conditions, within a Vivir Bien framework.⁷⁷ But again, what does that actually mean?

Ezra: Well, in a very localized, minor example, in one village it meant supporting the creation of this communal biscuit company, because that's what the local population voted to have. There's a participatory element for this company too, because the workers owned the factory, which is pretty dope. They only used ingredients they were grown locally and a good portion of those products were sold internally, in nearby communities or in that city itself. In a country like Bolivia, with very little infrastructure to facilitate internal training, that's kind of a big deal. But does one in one village solve the major problems created by development thinking?

Klara: But what about tactile urbanism? Like, the idea that you can make small concrete changes and sort of like... acupunctures to the system and sort of see how people are dealing with problems from the ground up. And you can often scale those strategies up into something more sustainable.

Ezra: I really appreciate your inclusion of that because that's kind of Vivir Bien is working out in Bolivia. I'm going to make this point again at the end, but making these small changes to kind of work against this long 500 year history of colonization. On a level slightly larger level above individual village projects, the biocultura program works to wean dependency off of foreign aid and non-profits.⁷⁸

Klara: I know that what happens in a lot of countries in the Global South is that foreign money is given as a way to support different non-profits and NGO's, that are replacing state sanctioned projects, and it's basically hollowing out the power of the state and giving that power back to countries in the west.

⁷⁷ Weyer, Frédérique. "Implementing 'Vivir Bien': Results and Lessons from the Biocultura Programme, Bolivia." In *Alternative Pathways to Sustainable Development: Lessons from Latin America*, edited by Gilles Carbonnier, Humberto Campodónico, and Sergio Tezanos Vázquez, Brill, 2017. 128–129.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 130.

Ezra: Yo, that's exactly spot on and exactly what the biocultura program wants to work against. It wants to give money directly to the non-profits to teach people in the state how to carry out the projects they're doing. For example, there was one non-profit in a northern city that was responsible for building wells. Funding was given to that non-profit to train people in the government so that they could take over that job, and, and this is where the decolonial part comes in, money was given to indigenous researchers to figure out, how did we get water and construct these systems prior to colonization? So the water system that was then created combined these knowledges and made this new system for this city.⁷⁹

Ezra: Biocultura, it's a really cool program, but it's a very a very small part of what the Bolivian government is doing. Because... what about all the mining that's still happening? What about the damage that's being done to Earth? You can have these cool localized programs, but the overall structure of the economy is still very much the same.

Klara: Mhm. Systemic changes are really important.

Ezra: Exactly. And that's where a lot of critics of Evo and his government and Vivir Bien come in. They say he's merely appropriating an indigenous face and politics and rhetoric to continue the same old extractivist, development policies. And sure, he's more equitably redistributing the benefits, the effects on the Earth, and the underlying paradigms of development, remain the same. Critics have even come up with a word for this: neo-extractivism.⁸⁰

Klara: Wow.

Ezra: Right? It's a good term. Yeah. This is all.. bad news bears. So, what do we make of all of this? Is Vivir Bien actually radical, does it have potential? Or is it just a cover for the same old bs politics.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁸⁰ Eija Ranta. *Vivir Bien as an Alternative to Neoliberal Globalization: Can Indigenous Terminologies Decolonize the State?* Rethinking Globalizations. London ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. 43.

Klara: I guess what I have to say about all of this is... it just seems sort of... I don't know... naive? To assume that one person can change an entire way of being. Economic sensibility and ideology that was forced onto a group of people and I don't know. What do you do when this discourse is really exciting and really has so much potential is kind of usurped and taken out of context. Where do you go from there.

Ezra: I think you're raising really good questions, and as to them, I don't think it's up to you or me to answer that question. Kind of the intention I had for this thesis was to elevate this conversation that's happening in Bolivia, and it's largely going to be people in the GLocal South that are going to answer those questions. They're the ones most directly dealing with this. I just think it's really cool and we can learn from it.

Klara: What do you think we can learn from this?

Ezra: Oh, that's a good question. I guess the biggest thing that I take out of this is that other worlds are possible. And, seeing a place and learning about a place where people are trying to actualize something totally different than what has previously existed gives me hope that we in the United States can also do that. I feel like here, our political imagination is... it's very limited. When I look at a place like Bolivia, and I study Vivir Bien, it lends a legitimacy to that process of exploration.

Klara: For me, I feel like I often find myself stuck in existing paradigms and I think something that's really important when you're trying to think in a decolonial way is to open yourself up to a multiplicity of visions and a multiplicity of strategies and know that there's no right way, but, to watch and listen and learn is very very important.

Ezra: I agree entirely. On that note of watching and listening and learning, that's kind of why I didn't really come up with a conclusion for this. That conclusion is still being created in the streets of Bolivia today, right now. I guess... you and I, I guess we're at the end of the official time we're supposed to be learning. You know, we just had out four years of undergraduate and now we're supposed to do, but damn, there's so much to learn, so much to study.

Klara: And that's exciting.

Ezra: It is exciting. I think we'll keep doing it too.

Musica Andina Bolivia Volumen 1 plays

Ezra: If you've made it this far, then I figure you won't mind listening to my thank yous, of which there are many.

Thank you to Leslie Offutt for being my advisor, and to Lisa Brawley for being my step-advisor.

Thank you to Nicole Lipman for intellectually and emotionally supporting me through this process.

Thank you to henchman, Klara Kaufman.

Thank you to my producer, Lucy Rosenthal

Thanks you to my sound engineer, Miranda Amey.

Thank you to Heidi SIT Cochabamba Bolivia group for Spring 2018 for 1. creating a beautiful learning space, and 2. helping me when I came out as Ezra.

Gracias a Juana y la comunidad de Santa Rita para compartir su hogar conmigo.

Quick Thanks You's: The old Laundry Building, Baynard Bailey, express meals, testosterone, and my mom.

That's enough of my voice, so Jallala Bolivia, and, I'm out.

REFERENCES CITED

All Sounds, "Time Travel Sound Effects". Filmed [Feb 2018] Youtube video, 01:37. Posted [Feb 2018]

Alayza Moncloa, Alejandra, Eduardo Gudynas, and Roxana Azeñas, eds. *Transiciones y alternativas al extractivismo en la región andina: una mirada desde Bolivia, Ecuador y Perú*. Lima, Perú: CEPES, Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales [u.a.], 2012.

Christian Romero. "Musica Andina Boliviana Volumen 1". Filmed [Aug 2016] Youtube video, 31:44. Posted [Aug 2016]

Bolivia. Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Adopted on February 7, 2009 by Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Esteva, Gustavo, Salvatore J. Babones, and Philipp Babcicky. *Future of Development: A Radical Manifesto*. Britsol: Policy Pr, 2013.

Farthing, Linda C., and Kohl, Benjamin H. *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and Change*. First edition. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014.

Ferber, Marianne A. "The Study of Economics: A Feminist Critique." *The American Economic Review* 85, no. 2 (1995): 357-61.

Galeano, Eduardo. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. 25th anniversary ed. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997.

Gudynas, Eduardo. "Buen vivir: Germinando alternativas al desarrollo." *América Latina en Movimiento*, no. 462 (February 2011): 1–20.

Gudynas, Eduardo. Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow. *Development*, no. 54 (2011) 441-447.

Kennedy, F. John. "Address to the United Nations General Assembly" (speech, New York, New York, September 25, 1961), John F Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Live Better Media - Español. "Musica Andina Moderna Alegre Instrumental". Filmed [Feb 2017] Youtube video, 21"55. Posted [Feb 2017]

Puente, Rafael Calvo. *Recuperando La Memoria: Una Historica Crítica De Bolivia*. Vol. 1. Santa Cruz, Bolivia: FCP Fundación Colonia Pirai, 2011.

Ranta, Eija. *Vivir Bien as an Alternative to Neoliberal Globalization: Can Indigenous Terminologies Decolonize the State?* Rethinking Globalizations. London ; New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

Rist, Gilbert, and Patrick Camiller. *History of Development, The: From Western Origins to Global Faith*. Zed, 2014.

Rumba 7 - Topic. "Anillito de Oro/Cuánto Cuestas Cuánto Vales /Sombrerito Borsalino /En Oruro Bailaré". Filmed [Jun 2018] Youtube video, 10:58. Posted [Jun 2018]

sandro2004. "Melodia INCA 'chuklla'". Filmed [Nov 2006] Youtube video, 06:04 [Nov 2006]

Sonorizante. "Manifestación - Sonido ambiental". Filmed [Jan 2018] Youtube video, 00:44. Posted [Jan 2018]

Shultz, J., & Draper, M. (2009). *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009.

Téllez, Juan. "Desarrollo y el Vivir Bien en Bolivia." Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2010.

Field, Thomas. *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

Toussaint, Eric. *The World Bank: A Critical Primer*. 1st english language ed. London ; Ann Arbor, Mich: Pluto, 2008.

Walsh, Catherine. "Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional Arrangements and (de)Colonial Entanglements." *Development* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 15–21.

Weyer, Frédérique. "Implementing 'Vivir Bien': Results and Lessons from the Biocultura Programme, Bolivia." In *Alternative Pathways to Sustainable Development: Lessons from Latin America*, edited by Gilles Carbonnier, Humberto Campodónico, and Sergio Tezanos Vázquez, 128–37. Brill, 2017.

Zunes, Stephen. "The United States and Bolivia: The Taming of a REvolution, 1952-1957." *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 5 (September 2001): 33–49.