

HARM REDUCTION MEETS BUEN VIVIR

Towards a Decolonial Collective and Integral Governance in Drug Policy

LEVINSON H. NIÑO-LEAL

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN NETWORK OF PEOPLE
WHO USE DRUGS



Disclaimer:

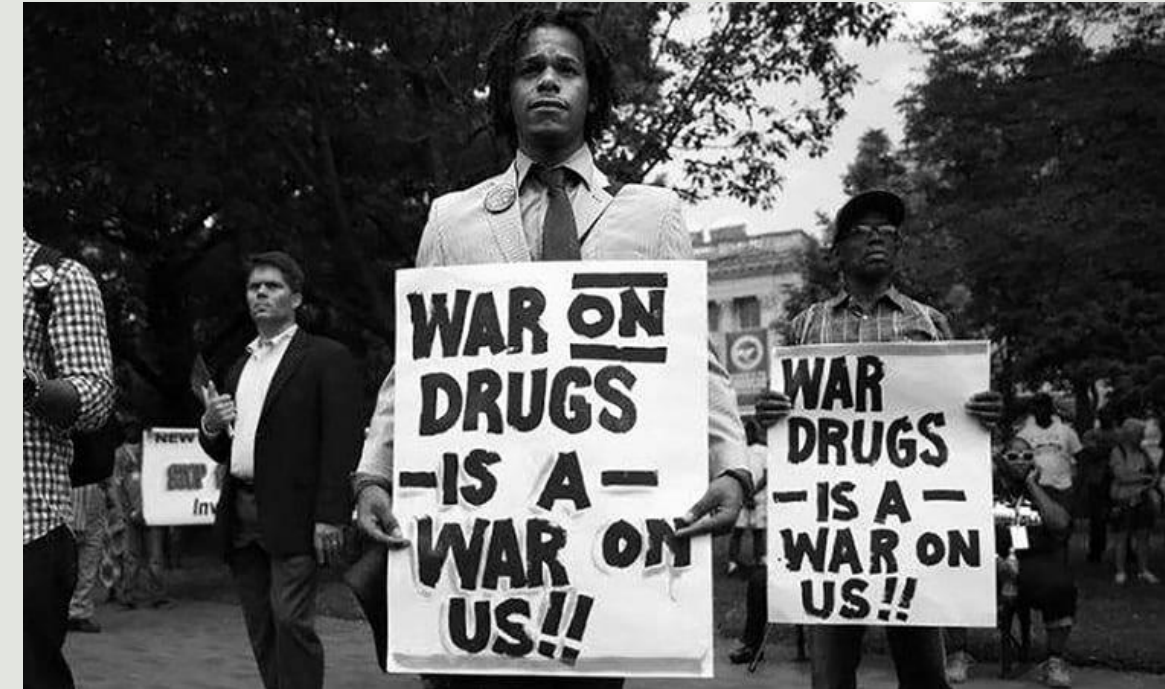
- Non-extractivist research perspective
- No usurpation of the representativeness of communities and individuals
- Respect, admiration, non-romanticization
- Knowledge broker - Facilitator



Context: The War on Drugs

- "It is not a war on drugs—it is a war on people:
- Racism, colonialism, and social control
- A war on nature:
- How can a plant be illegal? Absurd, isn't it?
- A war on diversity:
- A war against alternative ways of knowing
- **The War on Drugs as governance; war as politics (Jarrett Zigon)**

Biopolitical control
Militarization of everyday life
Geopolitics



Toward a New Governance Paradigm

What kind of relationships do we want to cultivate:

Between ourselves, and between ourselves and "drugs"?

(Understanding "drugs" not just as psychoactive substances, but as plants, animals, ecosystems, technologies, and the knowledge systems surrounding them.)

A transformative drug policy must aim for radically different governance, where harm reduction moves beyond palliative measures to dismantle the power structures that create harm.

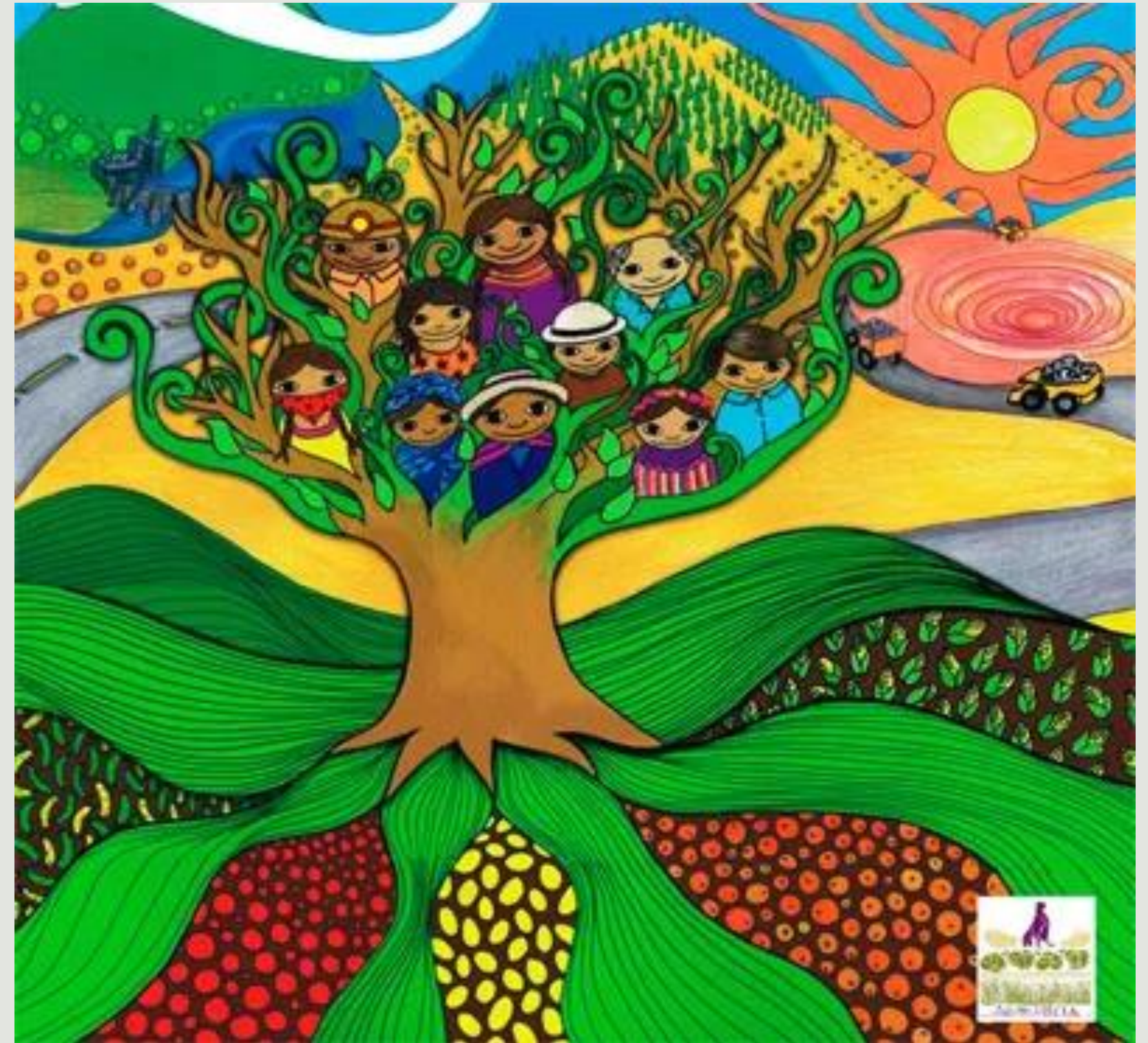
Otherwise, we merely perpetuate a system of systematic violence.



BUEN VIVIR

Buen Vivir (*Living Well*) is a compilation of Indigenous epistemologies and practices that prioritizes harmony with nature, community well-being, and collective rights over economic growth.

Indigenous Epistemologies of Harmony: Sumak Kawsay (Quechuan Andes); Ubuntu (Africa): "I am because we are" : Noke Kániri (Amazon)



Buen Vivir main elements:

🌐 **Relational Ontology:** Rejects human-nature duality; views all life as interconnected (humans as part of nature, not rulers).

Beyond Eurocentric Modern Binaries: Challenges Western divides (culture/nature, mind/body, subject/object, individual/community, rationality/emotion, Science/ tradition with more holistic plural perspectives

🔄 **Reciprocity as Law:** non transactional but relational interactions

Resistance to:

Epistemicide (erasure of Indigenous and other non-institutionalized, non- scientific ways of knowledge)

Capitalist/state co-optation of "sustainability"

🏛️ **Structural Alternatives:**

Proposes governance models rooted in territorial autonomy (e.g., community mingas over state policies).



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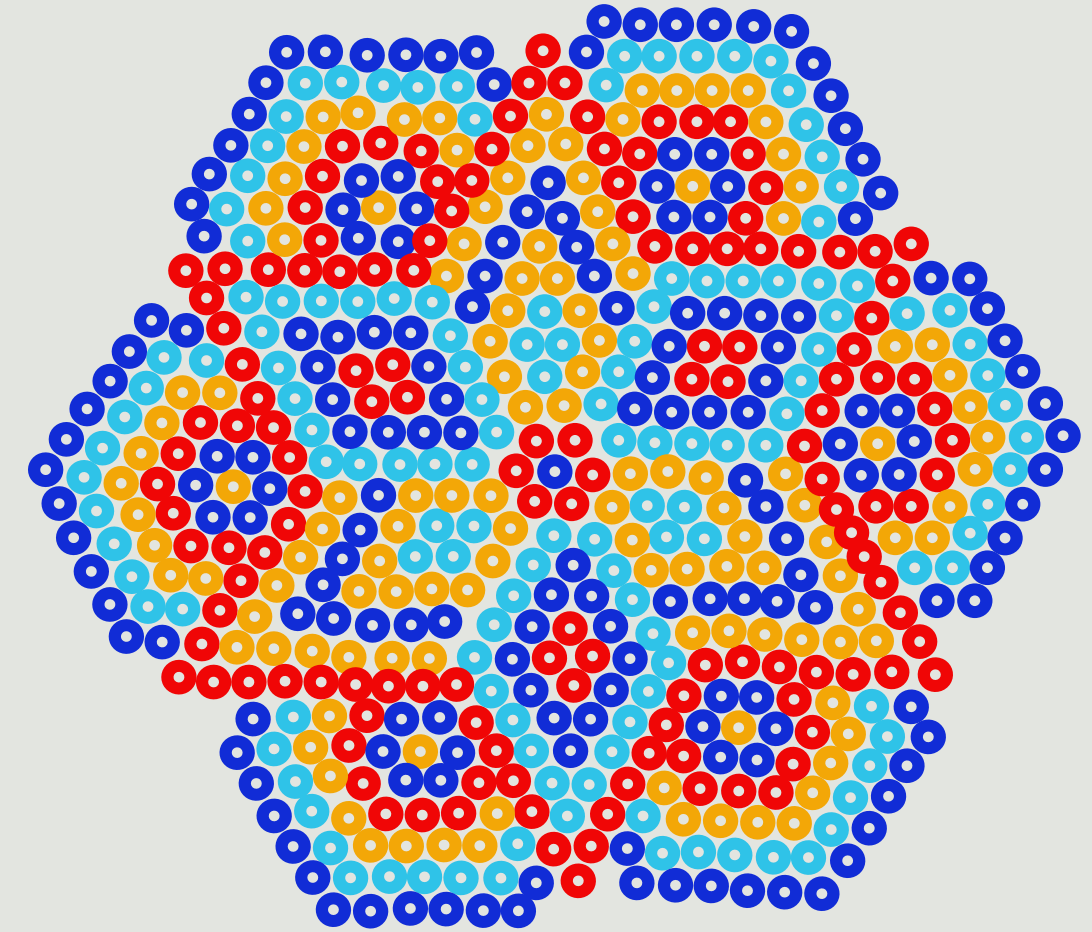
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HARM REDUCTION ISSUES

Critique	Explanation	Buen Vivir and Latin American Perspectives possibilities
◆ Individualistic Focus	Prioritizes individual behavior change (e.g., "safe use") while neglecting systemic drivers of harm (racism, poverty, colonial legacies).	Individuality is an illusion. We are part of a complex universe. A call for diversity
◆ Medicalization of Social Issues	Reduces drug policy to a public health, biomedical problem (pharmacological reductionism), obscuring structural violence (e.g., criminalization, racial profiling).	Life as complex interconnections. Drug use and its impact have to be understood from an interdisciplinary, inter-epistemological/ontological approach. We are not biological beings living in a vacuum. Standardization and de-territorialization of harm
◆ Epistemic Extractivism	Borrows Indigenous/social and other non-credential knowledges (e.g., ritual plant use) without crediting or reciprocating with communities. Focus on scientificism and positivism.	Other evidence-based approaches. Other Epistemologies. Need for a real dialogue, not inclusion into a hegemonic matrix. <i>Sentipensar</i> ; recognize this is a false duality.

◆ Palliative Band-Aid	Manages symptoms (e.g., overdose prevention) but perpetuates root causes (toxic drug supply, profit-driven pharma).	Buen Vivir challenge structures of power that create harm. The only real HR is being anticapitalist. We have to advance to real transformation in the meantime.
◆ Depoliticization	Positions HR as "neutral," ignoring its unequal implementation (e.g., white access to safe injection vs. police targeting Black users). Adaptable to different regimes.	HR sometimes forgot its counter-hegemonic and even anarchist roots. Buen Vivir challenges the so-called technical perspective with utopia and real goals to change.
◆ Industrialization / Commodification	We are living in “risk societies, where the risk could be a commodity, and a way to open door to social control. HR for only some populations and contexts. Neoliberal co-optation	Well-being is priceless. It has to prevail among other perspectives. It is important to consider economy, but it has not to dominate the HR framework.
Human Centered Approach	Human rights and human well being as a flag.	However, even some ecological approaches are still using nature as a human stage. Don't forget that we are co-created. Environmental impacts of drug use: ex. Cannabis regulation problems

FINAL INSIGHTS

How to analyze critically analyze drug policy and WoD and open doors to include different epistemological perspectives into harm reduction

1. Who is still excluded?
2. What new controls emerge?
3. Where is the resistance?

Re – think new form of governance

Challenge the option of a single possibility: The dictatorship of a single reality

Open real diverse epistemic dialogue: The outcomes could be infinite

HR has to connect to other social struggles

What is true, is that real change must be collective



**THANK YOU SO
MUCH!!**

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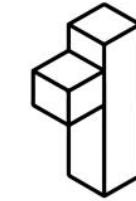


Fig. 01

