

## Buen vivir and re-existences in northern Mato Grosso: fragments of biocentered life perspectives

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**Abstract:** This essay aims to analyze biocentered perspectives expressed by individuals who reveal ruptures in colonization processes mediated by the interference of the agribusiness productive model in northern Mato Grosso. Data were drawn from collective narrative interviews conducted with twelve participants. The findings indicate that, in the face of the destruction of nature experienced in the territory, participants perceive the perspectives of Good Living as possibilities for producing re-existences reconciled with nature.

**Keywords:** Good Living; agribusiness; territory; ethics.

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## **Bem viver e reexistências no norte mato-grossense: fragmentos de perspectivas de vida biocentradas**

**Resumo:** Este ensaio objetiva analisar as perspectivas biocentradas apresentadas por indivíduos, que evidenciam rupturas nos processos de colonização mediados pela interferência do modelo produtivo do agronegócio no norte do Mato Grosso. Foram utilizados dados de entrevistas narrativas coletivas com doze participantes. Identifica-se que diante da destruição da natureza vivenciada no território, os participantes veem nas perspectivas do bem viver, possibilidades de produzir reexistências conciliadas com a natureza.

**Palavras-chave:** Bem viver; agronegócio; território; ética.

## **Buen vivir y reexistencias en el norte de Mato Grosso: fragmentos de perspectivas de vida biocentradas**

**Resumen:** Este ensayo tiene como objetivo analizar las perspectivas biocentradas presentadas por individuos que evidencian rupturas en los procesos de colonización mediadas por la interferencia del modelo productivo del agronegocio en el norte de Mato Grosso. Se utilizaron datos provenientes de entrevistas narrativas colectivas realizadas con doce participantes. Se identifica que, frente a la destrucción de la naturaleza vivida en el territorio, los participantes reconocen en las perspectivas del Buen Vivir posibilidades de producir reexistencias conciliadas con la naturaleza.

**Palabras clave:** Buen Vivir; agronegocio; territorio; ética.

## Background

**B**razil stands out as the country that uses the most pesticides in agricultural production worldwide, with the state of Mato Grosso being the highest consumer among the federative units (BOMBARDI and CHANGOE, 2022; Pignati et al., 2017). This consumption pattern is intrinsically associated with the agribusiness production model, which entails the intensive use of agricultural inputs, including pesticides and fertilizers, applied through aerial, mechanized, or manual spraying (PIGNATI *et al.*, 2007; 2014). According to Pignati, Oliveira, and Silva (2014: 4670):

The agribusiness production process, which is summarized in the stages of deforestation, the timber industry, livestock farming, agriculture, transportation, silage, agroindustry, seed production, and the manufacture of inputs (fuels, pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and limestone), generates multiple risk situations across the various environments of this production chain. These risks go beyond workers' health, encompassing the environment, food, water, and the health of families living on farms or in urban areas.

In the Brazilian context, the high level of pesticide use throughout the agribusiness production chain results in adverse environmental impacts grounded in a specific logic of economic development. Oliveira, Beserra, and Pignati (2021: 57) propose classifying all spraying processes employed in this sector as a form of rural chemical pollution, arguing that there is no “margin for the non-occurrence of pollution in spraying”. According to studies by Pignati *et al.* (2007) and Oliveira, Beserra, and Pignati (2021), spraying activities—particularly aerial applications—generate contamination clouds that can travel several kilometers, ultimately affecting regions, populations, flora, fauna, and water bodies far from the application site. This process promotes systemic drift within aquatic and atmospheric ecosystems.

Within this scenario, the literature documents the presence of pesticide residues in rainwater, groundwater, and surface water, as well as in fish, in municipalities in the state of Mato Grosso (OLIVEIRA, BESERRA, and PIGNATI, 2021: 155). Furthermore, these authors identified that “the presence of pesticides in more than 50% of rain samples demonstrated the relevance of the atmospheric pathway for pesticide dispersion, which subsequently returned to soils and surface and groundwater”. This entire process of pesticide use in commodity production, resulting in large-scale dispersion and contamination, has been identified as being imposed on all individuals, regardless of their involvement in pesticide application (MONTANARI-CORRÊA, PIGNATI, and PIGNATTI, 2019; OLIVEIRA, BESERRA, and PIGNATI, 2021; PIGNATI *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, these processes reveal that the agribusiness production model disregards aspects related to health and life by failing to recognize pesticide-free food and water security as a Human Right (MONTANARI-CORRÊA, PIGNATI, and PIGNATTI, 2019). This scenario is further exacerbated by the difficulty in accessing publicly available national-level information on pesticide use in Brazilian agricultural production, as

well as by the incipience of public policies aimed at facilitating and encouraging food production organized through models that respect nature, human health, and territorial integrity. According to Montanari-Corrêa, Pignati, and Pignatti (2019: 140):

The relationship between food production, food sovereignty, and health operates at the intersection of multiple factors. Contamination of drinking water, air, rivers, and food has acute and chronic repercussions on population health and constitutes a key mechanism in the social determination of the health–disease process, imposed by the consequences of a chemically dependent production model.

Studies conducted by Pignati *et al.* (2007; 2014; 2022), Bombardi (2012; 2023), Curvo, Pignati, and Pignatti (2013), Neves and Pignati (2021), Costa *et al.* (2021), Lara *et al.* (2021), and Soares *et al.* (2021; 2023) demonstrate that exposure to pesticides has led to acute and chronic intoxication processes that directly affect workers in the sector. Beyond this, Pignati *et al.* (2022) identified that individuals residing in municipalities in the state of Mato Grosso with high levels of agricultural production reported diagnoses of various types of cancer, endocrine and metabolic disorders, neurological and cognitive impairments, fetal malformations, mental illness, suicide, spontaneous abortions, as well as progression to death or irreversible health damage. The authors also found that the closer families lived to agricultural fields, the more health problems they reported among the households they interviewed.

The state of Mato Grosso leads pesticide consumption in Brazil (BOMBARDI, 2023), while the literature indicates that the number of recorded intoxication cases related to their use is very low compared to the volume commercialized, suggesting significant underreporting (BOMBARDI, 2012). Pignati *et al.* (2022) estimated that, in a given municipality in Mato Grosso, for each reported case of intoxication, there are approximately 26 unreported cases. Additionally, the authors identified municipalities, such as Sapezal, where underreporting rates reach 100%. This is an alarming scenario, especially given the legal requirement for mandatory reporting of acute and chronic pesticide intoxication cases within Brazilian health services (LARA *et al.*, 2021; PIGNATI *et al.*, 2022; BOMBARDI, 2012, 2023).

The underreporting of the impacts of acute and chronic pesticide intoxication constitutes a relevant political issue, as it perpetuates practices of colonization of thought among workers and populations, aligning with an exclusionary development logic that is harmful to life. As analyzed by Nasrala Neto, Lacaz, and Pignati (2014), there is a lack of political will to implement health surveillance measures in municipalities closely tied to agribusiness. In the name of development, and shaped by subjectivities permeated by colonial moralities, segments of the population appear to be deprived of the understanding that the devastation of nature in pursuit of plant, water, and mineral resources ultimately represents the destruction of themselves and of the world. Conversely, other groups envision their own demise in the face of ongoing aggression against nature.

Based on these considerations, this essay analyzes the perspectives of residents of a region undergoing intense agricultural frontier expansion in the extreme north of the state of Mato Grosso on ideas of development and their relationship with nature, in light of their lived context.

## Method

This essay is guided by a qualitative methodological perspective that understands the research process as a space in which “the researcher thus sets out to experience the encounters afforded by the research, with the clarity that they do not know exactly what they will find, nor what will result from these encounters” (QUINTANILHA, 2012: 53). In this sense, the methodological choice is structured around the aim of identifying, mapping, and investigating the “products of the interpretations that humans make regarding how they live, construct their artifacts and themselves, feel, and think” (MINAYO, 2014: 57).

We collected data through a group narrative interview guided by a semi-structured questionnaire, recorded in digital audio format. Castellanos (2014) notes that semi-structured interviews may evolve into narrative interviews and that this approach can yield rich narratives. When discussing the appropriation of narratives within the field of Collective Health as a research strategy, Castellanos (2014: 1068) argues that “narrative is considered a universal form of construction, mediation, and representation of reality that participates in the process of elaborating social experience”.

In total, we conducted four meetings. Each meeting was organized around a central thematic axis, accompanied by a set of semi-structured questions to guide the interviews. Alongside the organization of meetings using the snowball sampling strategy, theoretical saturation sampling was also employed; that is, once narratives began to repeat substantially across participants, the meetings were concluded. According to Fontanella *et al.* (2008: 20), “the assessment of theoretical saturation from a sample is carried out through a continuous process of data analysis, which begins at the very start of the data collection process.” In this study, nine participants were sufficient to reach information saturation. Regarding the snowball strategy, Vinuto (2014: 203) points out that:

Snowball sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling method that uses chains of references. That is, with this specific type of sampling, it is not possible to determine the probability of selecting each participant in the research, but it does help study certain groups that are difficult to access.

Quintanilha (2012: 53) notes that “life has normative movements; however, it is also permeated by norms and rules,” and, in this direction, argues that the act of conducting research is shaped by norms and rules that require a certain degree of attention and organization from researchers. Accordingly, this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under opinion n. 6,894,734, CAAE n. 35803020.0.0000.8124. We presented the Research Ethics Committee to all participants, and we obtained informed consent by having them sign a free and informed consent form. To preserve anonymity, participants' statements will be identified only by participant narratives, and the territory will not be disclosed.

## Results and discussion

In the excerpts below, participants reported how the expansion of agricultural frontiers associated with commodity crop production has reached their territories.

Excerpt 1: [Our city] has always had this image of being a city where one can live, bucolic, small, but it suffers from a problem rooted in its origin, as it was a smaller colonization project with fewer financial resources. [...] it has always suffered because it

wants to copy the other, it wants at all costs to copy the other, it wants to be like Lucas [do Rio Verde], like Sorriso, like Sinop, and the good thing is Sinop, so it is a place that I do not see that way, but people consider it to have progress [...] [our city] forgets this and wants to be that, it wants this agribusiness; unfortunately, we are losing this relationship with the environment. [...] it is becoming what [the participant] said, it is becoming a crop farm, without fruit, with dust whirlwinds, without trees, so the environmental aspect is in this sense.

The excerpts illustrate how the colonization of subjectivity by ideas of development and well-being — here represented by Brazilian agribusiness — operates through a relationship of spoliation of natural resources. This process prevents specific populations from understanding the harmful effects of this productive model on their lives and health. According to Deleuze (2019), subjectivity is produced through four folds: the first, material; the second, the relation of power; the third, the fold of knowledge and truth; and the fourth, axiological and transcendental elements, such as beliefs and moral codes. As the author argues, these folds function as “the final cause, the formal cause, the efficient cause, and the material cause of subjectivity or interiority as a relation to oneself” (DELEUZE, 2019: 105).

Thus, Excerpt 1 exemplifies how the advance of the agricultural frontier, even while producing harm to health and the environment, comes to be understood as development for which everyone must strive in order to live better. What is at stake here is a subjectivity colonized by the Western Euro-anthropocentric capitalist imperialist project, which produces modes of existence that naturalize the superexploitation of populations living on the periphery of capital, the depletion of natural resources in their territories, and the elimination of Indigenous peoples. It is also important to recall that Brazilian agribusiness maintains a strong relationship with pesticide corporations based in countries of the Global North, which commercialize in Brazil a wide range of substances that are prohibited within their own territories (BOMBARDI, 2023). This process has been termed “chemical colonization” by BOMBARDI (2023).

Within this context, the subjective material of people living in territories labeled as underdeveloped due to the absence of agribusiness is shaped by the folds of the coloniality of being, knowledge, and power. This subjectivity understands the presence of commodity-based productive processes as a guarantee of development, presented as a moral imperative and an object of desire for all (ROCCON, 2023). Such colonialities become techniques of subjection that, in their encounter with techniques of the self—through which, according to Foucault (2010), subjects produce their subjectivities—lead individuals to perceive the imperialist project that exploits, governs, oppresses, and kills them as a necessary evil. As Acosta (2016: 51) states:

Everything is tolerated in the struggle to leave behind underdevelopment and pursue progress. Everything is sanctified in the name of such a lofty and promising goal: we must at least resemble the 'superiors,' and to get there, any sacrifice is deemed worthwhile. Thus, environmental and social devastation is accepted in exchange for achieving 'development.' In the name of development, to cite one example, the severe human and ecological destruction caused by large-scale mining is accepted, even while knowing that it deepens the extractivist mode of accumulation inherited from colonization, which is one of the direct causes of underdevelopment

Under an anthropocentric logic in which the human — white, European, and colonizing — figures as the sociopolitical, economic, and moral reference for development and civility, the overexploitation of nature comes to be conceived as a

driving force for achieving Western ideals of well-being (ACOSTA, 2016; ROCCON, 2023), of “living better,” which “extracts the maximum from available resources until the basic sources of life are exhausted” (ACOSTA, 2016: 16).

Within such perspectives on the relationship with nature and the material production of existence, tensions emerge that position the human body in opposition to nature, as if it were not dependent on it for its own existence (ROCCON, 2023). The body is produced as a dominator, whose domination is imagined as having no consequences for itself. Likewise, life is understood as something that can be captured and governed through economic and statistical calculations, in an attempt to remove it from its own processual time, which chronometers cannot seize. Life, in its processuality, emerges through events and experiments in the very exercise of living. The event, understood as a process of co-emergence, is that through which life is produced insofar as it also produces bodies and worlds (ROCCON, 2023).

It is precisely in the task of attempting to control, govern, and block the events from which experiments of living and experience emerge—events that announce other possible worlds and that can only occur within the processuality of life—that the Euro-anthropocentric project seems to invest its efforts. It does so by producing moralities and political perspectives that justify the elimination of lives in Latin American nations, as part of a project of expropriation of wealth and destruction of nature, operated under the guise of development as a modern imperialist project (ACOSTA, 2016; ROCCON, 2023).

However, some people persist and resist the colonization of subjectivity. Foucault (2013) previously argued that resistance is a precondition for the existence of power relations. Resistance here is not understood merely as an oppositional force or a unidirectional flow of forces, but as the production of ways of life, or the desire to produce them in order to recreate existence itself—to re-exist. In this sense, participants were also asked to narrate what they would change or transform in their lived reality in light of the environmental problems they reported.

Excerpt 2: Ah, I would turn it into a quilombo... we would transform it into a large quilombo. There are two things I would change here: increase the forests and the water. Before, there was a lot of quality here, and now...

Excerpt 3: I would change almost everything, especially for us Indigenous peoples... I would change many things in our region, especially now that we will have many fires and our river will be polluted. Today, our children have illnesses; they go to the river and come back sick, with diarrhea, spots on their bodies. Health too—not only the health of the city, but health for us, Indigenous peoples, is very precarious.

Both excerpts show that, even as they live under the advance of agribusiness in their territories, the participants express a demand for a symbiotic relationship with nature. They reveal the background of socio-environmental destruction, marked by the reduction of forests and water sources and by increased pollution and illness. Moreover, both excerpts highlight how traditional quilombola and Indigenous peoples are the most affected by a socio-economic development project that promotes a rupture between humans and nature. The excerpts point to a Buen Vivir (Good Living) perspective that emerges as experimentation and as events arising from relationships with the world, nature, and others, opposing colonial notions of development, well-being, and “living better” (ACOSTA, 2016). This is a philosophy under construction, open to the processuality of life, grounded in the cosmology and ethos of Amerindian peoples, sustained by “harmony between the individual and oneself, between the individual and society, and

between society and the planet with all its beings, however insignificant or repugnant they may appear to us” (ACOSTA, 2016: 15). Here, ethos is understood as habits, ways of walking, the calm with which one responds to events, and the manner of organizing, thinking, analyzing, and living life (Foucault, 2004).

Buen Vivir articulates an ethical, aesthetic, and political stance toward the world that opposes colonialist moralities. Gilles Deleuze (2019), in interpreting Michel Foucault, distinguishes between ethics and morality. On this distinction, Deleuze (2013: 129-30) states:

The difference is this: morality presents itself as a set of coercive rules of a special type, consisting in judging actions and intentions by referring them to transcendent values (right, wrong...); ethics is a set of optional rules that evaluate what we do and say in terms of the mode of existence they imply.

In this sense, Buen Vivir, as presented by Acosta (2016), can be understood as a set of optional norms that guide the evaluation of our existence in relation to others, to nature, and to the world. It is an ethics aimed at transforming an ethos shaped by subjectivations produced by colonialist moralities, to promote a subjective repositioning and the construction of an ethos grounded in Buen Vivir. This ethos orients its practices toward overcoming socio-historical inequalities, emphasizing that “decolonization and depatriarchalization are fundamental tasks, as is overcoming racism, which is deeply rooted in our societies” (ACOSTA, 2016: 27).

This ethics is closely associated with aesthetics of existence based on a biocentric perspective, standing in opposition to dominant anthropocentrism. It recognizes the human body as interconnected with other elements of nature and considers imaginative alternatives to established Euro-anthropocentric and capitalist models (ROCCON, 2023).

As a philosophy in continuous development, Buen Vivir proposes understanding and living existence as a creative and open process, fostering the constant elaboration of ways of being, acting, thinking, and coexisting. It presupposes an ethical commitment to the processuality of life, encompassing experiences of unpredictable events (LARROSA, 2017) as well as formative and transformative experiences. It also requires sustained attention to ancestral knowledges and to the potential for individual transformation within everyday experiences.

On the ethical-aesthetic plane, Buen Vivir is linked to a political stance that confronts internal or external obstacles to becoming, especially those of a reactive or reactionary nature (ROLNIK, 1995). It is grounded in the construction of modes of existence oriented by practices of resistance to colonialism and its ramifications (ACOSTA, 2016), emphasizing the importance of collectivity and mutual care, including care for the environment. This perspective entails reassessing concepts of progress, particularly in their productivist and developmentalist forms, and questioning mechanistic approaches to economic growth and their expressions (ACOSTA, 2016).

In line with Acosta (2016), Buen Vivir can be understood as living life as an open work, artistically developed through an inventive and world-creating stance. There are no universal formulas; rather, it is a path to be conceived and built, already present in communities that, by experiencing the processuality of existence, produce ancestral knowledges oriented toward care of the self, of others, and of nature, arising from experience and encounter.

## Conclusion

Buen Vivir proposes a discussion of health from a biocentric perspective, in which the rights of nature and our relationship with it are mediated by a collective commitment to affirming and promoting conditions of existence. This commitment is grounded in an ethos oriented toward respect for difference and the pursuit of “harmony with Nature, reciprocity, relationality, complementarity, and solidarity among individuals and the community, as opposed to the concept of perpetual accumulation” (Acosta, 2016: 33).

The excerpts presented show that the colonization of being is part of the imperialist project of using and dispossessing the natural resources available in territories, driven by capitalist development ideals. Furthermore, the excerpts demonstrate that, for the research participants, organizing life in harmony with nature is fundamental, insofar as transforming the territory into a quilombo restores values of solidarity and reciprocity among individuals, the collective, and the natural environment. Living in a territory impacted by extractivist and dispossessing agribusiness production models leads, from a biocentric perspective, to this reorganization being perceived as a legitimate aspiration or as a necessary project of re-existence in the face of this reality.

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DOSSIE TEMÁTICO:

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**CIDADES EM DISPUTA:  
GÊNERO, RAÇA, SEXUALIDADE  
E OUTRAS DIFERENÇAS  
NA PRODUÇÃO DO  
ESPAÇO URBANO**

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DR. DR. GUILHERME R. PASSAMANI (UFMS)  
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**O**s processos de produção das cidades em relação às sexualidades têm enfatizado ao longo da história a importância das noções de território e territorialidade para a compreensão de como são constituídos os espaços urbanos, os sujeitos e suas relações. Além de indicar que tais processos de produção cidadina correspondem a marcações sociais heterogêneas, é importante ressaltar que todo esse movimento compreendido pelas dinâmicas sociais locais e a ocupação de territórios, dispostos entre "periferias" e "centros", perfaz mobilidades e/ou zonas fronteiriças que nos possibilitam problematizar os manejos, burlas e agenciamentos feitos em torno da produção social das diferenças, bem como seus impactos a partir da articulação com as temáticas de gênero, sexualidade e raça. Nesse sentido, imaginar a produção de sexualidades em diferentes escalas é um ponto constituinte dos três eixos que norteiam o dossiê: as espacialidades, mobilidades e territorialidades. O objetivo é aproximar os debates sobre cidades, gênero, sexualidades e raça na tentativa de promover aproximações teóricas e empíricas que nos auxiliem a refletir e questionar estatutos cidadãos em relação à produção de diferenças e desigualdades, tendo como ponto de partida a seguinte questão: de que forma podemos escrutinar urbanidades/cidadinidades a ponto de fazer com que tais estruturas não sejam meros arquétipos geográficos/cartográficos, mas que internalizem e externalizem ações concretas de pertencimento e uso democrático do espaço público?

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