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Rationalizing 'Vivir Bien': The Modern State and the formal limits to transformative rationalism in Bolivia

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Abstract

Drawing on the case of the 2011 march against a highway project through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) in Bolivia, alongside a discussion of Max Weber's conceptions of rationality, this paper situates that demonstration in the interface between the Bolivian State's modern formal rationality with the substantive rationality proposed as 'Vivir Bien'; an umbrella term for a conglomeration of indigenous proposals for a sustainable relationship between humans and nature that goes beyond neoliberalism, colonialism, and their cultural and environmental consequences. As with *any* modern institution, the Bolivian State performs with modern means-ends calculations, thus subduing the transformative potential of 'Vivir Bien' as a distinct rationalism, with its means-ends framework, knowledge, and patterns of action.

In a Weberian critique of Modernity, two issues will be raised. First is the need to recognize the modern state as the institutional embodiment of modern formal-instrumental rationality bound to Modernity's means-ends framework. Second, an evaluation of the possibility of incorporating other rationalisms into the modern state, allowing other means-ends valuations for state policymaking involving other patterns of action and sociality.

Based on these considerations, this paper recognizes modern rationalism in contrast to other rationalisms, worldviews, and practices in a critical search for alternative approaches and proposals for attending to local and global problems threatening sustainable human existence, from environmental devaluation to social inequality.

Keywords: rationality; modernity; state; alternatives to development; Latin America

1 Building alternatives from the borders

'Buen Vivir' (Living Well), known as 'Vivir Bien' in Bolivia (BV)[1], is a cluster of indigenous, intellectual, and academic conceptions of human and nature relationships, a notion acknowledged as an alternative to Western development models and neoliberal policies in some

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[1] Indigenous intellectuals and scholars translate the Kichwa *sumak kawsay* and the Aymara *suma qamaña* to the Spanish term '*Buen Vivir*.' Despite 'Vivir Bien' being used in Bolivia's Constitution and by some scholars, it is 'Buen Vivir,' commonly used in Ecuador, which has gained global projection. For this paper, both Spanish terms are considered mutually interchangeable (Ranta, 2018).

Latin American countries. During the 1990s, BV became a discourse for social resistance movements in response to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)[2] applied in line with the Washington Consensus (Ranta, 2018). It gained regional and global relevance as an alternative to 'development' and Eurocentric modernization when it became the political banner of progressive governments formed during elections in Bolivia (2006) and Ecuador (2007) (Ellner & Santos, 2020).

As a decolonial, post-developmental alternative (Radcliffe, 2012; 2015; Costoya, 2013; Acosta, 2017; Ranta, 2018), BV criticizes *development* as a colonial worldview of the human and environment relationship, measured using profit involving objectifying humans and the unsustainable exploitation of Nature, with consequences posing not only a threat to local indigenous communities but also representing a global menace to human survival on the planet. BV emerges as a framework for an ethical relationship between human existence and Nature; a *substantive* means-ends appraisal of social action to achieve plentiful, sustainable living through rescuing Andean and Amazonian indigenous knowledge, values, and worldviews; encouraging ethical, value-laden ends beyond neoliberalism and colonialism and the objectification of humans and Nature as sources of exchange value for global markets (Albó, 2009; Gudynas, 2011; Radcliffe, 2012; Bittencourt-Rodrigues, 2021). From this perspective, BV stands against not only specific development plans; instead, it criticizes the core assumptions through which those policies achieve their legitimacy, the idea of everlasting progress through modernization and development (Estermann, 2012; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014; Acosta, 2017).

Although the 2009 Bolivian Constitution makes only five explicit references to BV, it recognizes Bolivia's ethnic diversity and intercultural background, outlining the *ends* of a multinational state as a political organization (Fernández, 2009; Ranta, 2018), as well as including novel constitutional support for environmental legislation.

BV is not a monolithic philosophy nor a single way of living. Each indigenous community has its own worldview and practice of BV, and several intellectuals and academics have discussed the sense of BV from both indigenous and Western perspectives (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2014; Cuestas-Caza, 2018; Ranta, 2021). Because of its contested meanings and differing interpretations, those views differ in terms of BV's transformative potential: from a demand for historical justice for indigenous communities in respect of colonialism to declarations against neoliberal agendas and global capitalism through a defense of local agriculture and sustainable production; as an alternative to development; or even as a *new age* movement. And within that diversity, the Bolivian Constitution is not the ultimate word concerning the meaning of BV. But it is the Bolivian State and the *formal* boundaries founded in the Constitution that political actors refer to for transforming BV into a *political project*.

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[2] Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) are a set of policy and economic reforms guided by International Financial Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank with the main objective of the reduction of national external debt (Molero-Simarro & Paz-Antolín, 2012). The application of these programs is a requirement for highly indebted countries to obtain debt renegotiation and qualify for new loans from those institutions.

2 Modernity doing its job: 'Vivir Bien' and the 2011 TIPNIS protest

Given diverse interpretations of BV and the different social and environmental demands articulated around them, attempts at institutionalizing BV as state policy have been uneasy endeavors (Fontana, 2013; Fabricant & Postero, 2019). The 2011 Bolivian protests against the construction of 'Road 24 Villa Tunari – San Ignacio de Moxos Highway', a road project announced by the Bolivian Government in 2009 that would run through Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (*Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure*, TIPNIS) (Guzmán-Torrico, 2012), made visible a conflict between the formal rationality of the Bolivian State as a modern organization and its *raison d'état* (Weber, 1946b, p. 334), thereby confronting the substantive values indigenous peoples, academics and intellectuals propose and defend as BV.

Located between Beni and Cochabamba Departments in Bolivia, the TIPNIS was declared a national park in 1965 and recognized as an Indigenous Territory in 1990, granting the communal land title to three local indigenous Amazonian groups, Tsimane, Yuracarés, and Trinitario-Mojeños (Fabricant & Postero, 2019). In 2010, Evo Morales' government decreed the park an Indigenous Peasant Original Territory, ensuring constitutional local autonomy and the right to the natural resources of the indigenous communities and peasants in the territory.

From the government's perspective, the projected Route 24 was part of a vow to promote economic development and national sovereignty (García-Linera, 2012), an axis for the modernization of Bolivian Amazon lands, allowing access for the Bolivian state-owned oil and gas enterprise and the diversification of productive activities in the park, thus granting new prospects to local indigenous communities. Furthermore, the highway would bind two historically unconnected regions of the country. Other internal political issues were also in play: the projected highway would facilitate access from La Paz, Bolivia's seat of government located in the Andean highlands, to agricultural markets in the northeastern Amazon departments, thence avoiding the traditional but longer supply route through eastern Santa Cruz Department, the country's wealthiest region, but also Morales' political opposition stronghold (Achtenberg, 2011b). In contrast, in relation to the indigenous communities and organizations, Segment II, the longest projected road section (177km), would split the TIPNIS in half, jeopardizing the park's biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities, easing access to oil and gas industrial extractive activities, while opening new agricultural lands to migrant highland peasants and coca leaf growers – mainly ethnic Andean Aymara (Achtenberg, 2011a).

In May 2010, TIPNIS indigenous organizations initiated a local consultation process on the projected route, stating they 'strongly and irrevocably reject the construction of the highway and any segment that would affect [their] territory' (Achtenberg, 2011a), arguing the government's plan was not formally discussed nor approved by local indigenous organizations, violating the constitutional principle of participative democracy (Fabricant & Postero, 2019), threatening the autonomy of the indigenous communities and organizations in the territory vis-à-vis the state (Ranta, 2018). In June 2011, TIPNIS indigenous organizations proposed a new route that would go round the park, ensure the preservation of its biodiversity and respect local indigenous autonomy (Mendoza, 2011a).

The conflict began in August 2011 when construction squads arrived at the southern outskirts of TIPNIS (Mendoza, 2011c). On August 15, the Indigenous Central of Indigenous Peoples and Communities of Eastern Bolivia (CIDOB) started a 600 km march against Road 24 from Trinidad, in the Beni Department, to La Paz. The march generated national and international debate about the environmental and cultural effects of the road, signaling the inconsistency of the government's development plan as regards both calling for BV and the advancement of indigenous autonomy. The ambassador of Brazil declared that the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES), the main financial partner of the project (Fabricant & Postero, 2019), would finance Segment II only if the socio-environmental conditions are met in dialogue with the indigenous communities (Mendoza, 2011b).

After almost two months and intermittent but hard clashes with the police (EFE, 2011), marchers arrived in La Paz on October 19, welcomed in the city with vibrant support, with locals joining the march (Opinión, 2011). The demonstrators gathered in Murillo Square, facing the *Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional* (Bolivia's Parliament), intending to maintain a vigil until the government canceled the planned highway.

Given the national commotion, pressure from environmental organizations, and increasing tension between the government and indigenous organizations, on October 24, Morales signed Supreme Decree Nº 1146 in front of marchers' representatives, thereby ceasing the construction of the highway through TIPNIS (Los Tiempos, 2011) and accepting the alternative route proposed by indigenous organizations. The next day, protesters lifted their vigil in Plaza Murillo and returned to TIPNIS.

This summary of the central events of the TIPNIS protests in 2011 shows several intertwined processes of social and political change, political discourse, and social aspirations (Fontana, 2013; Fabricant & Postero, 2019) involving coloniality and structural inequality; the challenge to neoliberal policy, human rights and the struggle for identity recognition; the autonomy of indigenous communities and democracy; economic growth, development, and environmental protection. With their national specificities, The *Pink Tide* of democratically elected governments in Latin America during the first decade of the twenty-first century appeared to respond to yearning demands against neoliberalism, coloniality, neo-extractivism, and social injustice on the continent (Ellner & Santos, 2020). Common to all of them was the intention of a new way of doing politics whereby historical, cultural, and ethnic particularities take the stage in front of neoliberal policy and globalization (Fontana, 2013).

Acknowledging this complex background, this broad illustration of the 2011 TIPNIS protest outlines a scenario for observing different means-ends valuations, the *rationality* underlying political decisions, and the social action of the actors involved.

3 Rationality as a Weberian problem

In his essay on *Objectivity,* Weber acknowledges: '[A]ny thoughtful reflection about the ultimate elements of meaningful action is initially bound to the categories "end" and "means"' (Weber, 2004, p. 361). Confronting metaphysical readings of this concept (Levine, 1981), Weber conceives *rationality* as the coherence between behavior and the ends in-

tended by the actor (Weber, 1978, p. 24; Kalberg, 1980). With this conception, the meaning of any social action responds to a unity of means, values, and ends – a *reason*, be this considered objectively and subjectively.

However, the diverse contexts in which Weber uses the concept of *rationality* throughout his work can be considered a theoretical problem in itself (Kalberg, 1980). Brubaker (1991) describes this problem by referring to Weber's usage of the concept without qualification or explanation in an unsystematic and careless way. In response to these claims, Eisen (1978) has illustrated Weber's theoretical consistency by highlighting six related components that can be connoted in Weber's references to 'rationality': the *purpose* of the action; the *calculability* of the action's efficacy regarding the achievement of the intended results; *control*, allowing to measure the action's scope and predictability of the environment; *logical* coherence between ends and means; *universality*, the capacity for abstraction from the empirical case; and the *systematic* organization of 'the parts to whole in the manner most efficacious for the achievement of desired results' (Eisen, 1978, p. 60).

This characterization may appear isolated from the rest of Weber's oeuvre unless it is deployed within Weber's research agenda (Tenbruck & Weber, 1980; Kurthen, 2021): to unveil the roots of 'the specific and peculiar rationalism of Western culture' (Weber, 2013, p. xxxviii).

From this statement, two fundamental postulates can be derived. First, the theorization Weber developed about rationality became the cornerstone of interpreting diverse processes and *elective affinities* (Howe, 1978) underlying the birth and development of Western culture (Tenbruck & Weber, 1980) and one of its finest products, Modernity. Second, Weber's studies of ancient religions of China, India, and ancient Judaism, beyond reading them as the Occident's 'contrast cases' (Kalberg, 2014, p. 206), led to a groundbreaking formulation: *rationality* is not an exclusive product of the Enlightenment, an outcome of Western Modernity. Instead, different civilizations and cultures have developed standalone *rationalization processes* guided by other rationalities (Kalberg, 2014; Risjord, 2021). Therefore, we can ponder the specific *rational* character of BV in the Andes, the *Swaraj* in India, and the concept of *Ubuntu* in South Africa, with their particular means-ends calculations and their ethical valuations for achieving them; *rationalisms* born from other historical, social and cultural contexts. In opposition to evolutionary interpretations that conceptualize Western rationalization as a *necessary* process for *any rational society*, Weber's sociological approach to rationality highlights the contingency of Modernity and its emergence as a *peculiarity* of the constitution of the West, different from other civilizations in which rationalization processes underlying social action are oriented by other rationalisms (Weber, 1946d; Kalberg, 2014).

Despite its centrality, Weber does not offer an explicit typology of rationality. Instead, scattered discussions appear in several sources (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1146) as a scaffold running through, for example, the description of the types of social action (Weber, 1978, p. 24) or ethical conduct and the religious world image (Weber, 1946d, p. 293). To tackle the different meanings and implications of the German term *Rationalität* (rationality) (Schluchter, 1985; Brubaker, 1991), this paper departs from Kalberg's summarizing approach (1980) and relates the different types of rationality and their usage through Weber's *oeuvre*.

Kalberg summarized Weber's fourfold typology of rationality as follows: Formal, Substantive, Theoretical, and Practical, underlining these as quasi-universal, anthropological stances from which individuals render coherence between the action orientation and way of life (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1150). Practical Rationality is the calculation of the most expedient means of dealing with difficulties existing in unquestioned, given realities (Weber, 1946d, p. 293; Kalberg, 1980, p. 1152). Theoretical Rationality is 'an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts' (Weber, 1946d, p. 293). Furthermore, despite Weber's warning about its conceptual ambiguity (Weber, 1978, p. 85), Substantive Rationality refers to humans' 'capacity to value-rational action' (Kalberg, 1980, p. 1155) and to putting action patterns in coherence with a consciously enacted value, allowing the judgment of the empirical world. Last, Formal Rationality is the actually applied calculation of means-ends bounded to technical and legitimate normative prescriptions (Weber, 1978, p. 85). Thus, Formal Rationality assumes its shape interrelated to the cultural framework and the social structure where it unfolds. Therefore, Weber's typology of rationality describes the *condition* for assessing an action as rational.

The term *Rationalität* also appears in two concepts, now from a psychological perspective: instrumental-purposive rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) and value rationality (*Wertrationalität*) (Weber, 1978, p. 24). Here, rationality refers to the individual's *mental process* for appraising the ends guiding action (Weber, 1978, p. 24; Kalberg, 1980, p. 1159). In this sense, and in relation to accusations of modern society's ethical devaluation (Blau, 2021), instrumental-purposive rationality enables actors to logically interrelate their desired ends and the means of achieving them, the reach of their actions and the range of control they have on their environment (Eisen, 1978).

Focusing on the actor, Weber developed his four-item typology of social action (Weber, 1978, p. 24). Distinguishing non-rational types of social action (affectual and traditional), the rational social actions are instrumental-purposive action (*zweckrationales Handeln*) and value-rational action (*wertrationales Handeln*). This typology makes visible to sociological research the subjective motivation of the individual for their action.

While interpreting these typologies as proposed by Weber, here appears a sometimes-overlooked methodological element. Defining social action as purposive-rational or value-rational does not render an understanding of the act that is performed as a meaningful totality. There are myriads of motives for each social action, and typologies are just hermeneutical ideal-type guides to such endeavors. But for individuals, motives and the means to satisfy them are framed within their cultural background in a constant interplay with interests, values, and ideas as well as with macrosocial, structural factors: 'Not ideas, but material and ideal interest govern men's conduct' (Weber, 1946d, p. 280). Therefore, rationality is the synonym of *rationalism* when referring to the cultural, civilizational frame underlying the shared patterns of action related to ends and values guiding social action (Kalberg, 2014, p. 224). Last, Rationalization (*Rationalisierung*) is the historical-social process in which social action patterns within a life order are organized around contingently determined, culturally legitimated means, ends, and values.

Two last conceptions of rationality, Subjective and Objective Rationality, sketch how social action has a meaning not just for the agent but also from the observer's point of view (Brubaker, 1991): an action can be objectively rational for the agent when there exist for the individual logical, legitimate ways to perform in the given circumstances coherent

with the means-ends calculation or valuation, in contrast to a rational but value-laden observer's subjective interpretation of the performed action. The opposite is also true. The observer can judge an action as objectively adjusted to means-end calculation or values supported by a shared rationalism. Meanwhile, the agent can perform an action pursuing other motivations or intending other meanings in given circumstances, in which case the agent's means-end calculation or valuation is subjectively different to the socially shared rationalism in respect of the given situation. Regarding this standpoint, Weber adopted a perspectivist, interpretive stance (Kalberg, 1980) about the judgment of the rationality or irrationality of any social action, even in its institutional, organizational arrangement:

> Each of these [life-spheres] may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another. (Weber, 2013, p. xxxviii)

This theoretical frame allows us to address rationality and rationalization processes in other cultures beyond Modernity. Considering Weber's analysis of the rational character of other civilizations (i.e., in *The Economic Ethic of World Religions*) that is against applying the adjective *rational* to Western culture exclusively, it describes how the former developed their rationalization processes with Reasons different from Enlightenment Reason. From that perspective, BV, as a conglomeration of indigenous and academic discourses and transformative proposals, can be examined as another rationalism with its own rationalization processes, and it can be contrasted with the modern rationalism embodied by Bolivia's modern State.

4 The modern state in Latin America

However, a question remains: How can we talk about Modernity and modern rationality in Latin America? Compared to Modernity's historical and socio-cultural core, the geopolitical West, Latin America appears as an *unfinished* project: Latin America is not modern because it is still tied to pre-modern worldviews, traditions, or even perversions; there are *irrationalities* hindering its process of achieving Modernity (Escobar, 2007; da Silva, 2022). For instance, socio-historical and cultural particularities of the establishment of the nation-state in Latin America, *caudillos*, patrimonialism, and the survival of 'traditional' social structures (Lambert, 1970; González, 2020) are phenomena that have been explained as forms of the 'incomplete modernization' of the continent (Waldmann, 2006; Centeno, 2016), thus conceiving the observed phenomena as the cause of Latin America's 'backwardness' and 'underdevelopment', a hindrance to the modernization of the institutional order and the spreading of *modern* rationality.

In contrast to these conceptions, the constitution of current hegemonic societies in Latin America involved the same historical-cultural process that established the modern societies of the Western hemisphere. And this is not only due to the colonial history and the nineteenth century's Latin American independence movements that followed the core values and formal principles of the Enlightenment (Aracil-Varón & Alemany-Bay, 2009; Bhambra, 2020) – those that shape the geopolitical and cultural map of the West. As the seemingly cohesive set of ideational, material, and symbolic trends in human-nature

relations, historically originated in Western Europe and then expanded globally, shaping action patterns and specific developments in various domains – social, cultural, cognitive, institutional, economic, and territorial (Kolinjivadi et al., 2019, p. 6), Modernity constitutes the horizon of sense to the cultural, social and institutional orders of current hegemonic modern Latin American societies.

Eisenstadt (2013) points out the source of those particularities in Modernity itself: this allowed multiple institutional and ideological patterns to emerge, all with the modern ethos as their foundation. Regarding the nation-state institutionalized in Latin America, it is a full realization of Modernity and diversity itself advocated as a *rational* goal: During its establishment, it was governed by interpretations, biases, and nuances while maintaining the rational coherence provided by Modernity as a *rational* project for its accomplishment.

In America, several indigenous communities, although they were colonized, assimilated, discriminated against, or even exterminated within the nation-states that included them in their territories, preserved their cultural forms and worldviews despite the imposition of Modernity as a *civilizing* project. Ethnic and cultural diversity within Latin American nation-states has been hidden, even denied by the actual implementation of the modern project on the continent, by the same principles on which Modernity was founded (Mignolo, 2007; Escobar, 2007).

Articulated during the nineteenth century as *progress* and during the twentieth century around the idea of *development* (Puentes-Cala, 2021), the modern ethos requires controlling worldviews that have not conformed to Modernity as a *human* historical project: either they were dismantled within the modern cultural framework, or they were *tolerated,* framed within the tradition-modern dualism as *souvenirs* from humanity's historical-evolutionary past (Rouquié, 1994) as long as the possibility of 'civilizing' those remnants was clearly stated: the *necessity* of overcoming them through an inevitable western *modernization.* Nevertheless, alongside the indigenous communities maintaining their worldviews, practices and knowledge (their *rationalisms*), Modernity is the cognitive framework, cultural foundation, and interpretative context for understanding Latin American modern institutions.

Applying this conception, we can refer to Weber's theorization regarding the Latin American state as a modern socio-political organization 'since the concept of the State has only in modern times reached its full development' (Weber, 1978, p. 56). Of course, we can agree that the nation-state in Latin America 'does not correspond' to the ideal type of modern state (Lambach et al., 2015; Centeno, 2016) insofar as we introduce prescriptive postulates concerning the different characteristics with which Weber identifies the modern state (Weber, 1978; Dusza, 1989); thus overlooking a fundamental element of the explanation of the state as a mode of organization of social action, 'a historically and structurally specific organization of the rule of men over men' (Dusza, 1989, p. 74): the *modern rationality* underpinning it.

5 The Modern State and Raison d'etat

Deploying a civilizational approach, Weber points out the peculiarity of Western culture (Weber, 1946d, p. 293; 2013, p. xxxviii) as the specific elective affinity between the contents of rationalization in the modern institutional orders and the disenchantment of the world

(*Entzauberung*), a process in which the meaning of social action has become progressively detached from other-worldly ends and ultimate values legitimated by religious worldviews.

In a disenchanted world, the cognitive totality of religious worldviews granted to social action is fragmented into diverse life spheres – economic, political, intellectual, aesthetic, and erotic – (Weber, 1946b), a differentiation process within social experience in which each life-sphere defines the values guiding action in coherence with the ends.

Once freed from outer-worldly substantive values, instrumental-purposive rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) appears as an 'evil genius' permeating every interstice of the now fragmented modern experience in a disenchanted world due to the continuous retreat of ultimate values as guides for social action through the modern rationalization processes (at different paces) of life-spheres (Kalberg, 1980). In this scenario, the formal-rational routinization of action patterns is both cause and consequence of the dominance of instrumental-purposive rationality in modern societies (Gane, 2002) – the 'iron cage' in which individuals' reflexivity about their actions wanes into a bounded framework involving *possible* means to formal legitimated ends. In other words, this is the modern rationalism imposing calculability in respect of other means-ends assessments (Weber, 1946d, p. 287).

Instrumental-purposive rationality is a cognitive exercise enabling the individual to relate the consequences of action to the means used to achieve a given end (Kalberg, 1980; Blau, 2021). This value-free conception enables the observation of instrumental-purposive rationality and the social actions it supports taking place in other cultural contexts different from Modernity. Counter to evolutionary interpretations conceptualizing Western rationalization as a *necessary* process of *any* modern society, Weber highlights the contingency of its emergence as a peculiarity of the constitution of the West, different from other civilizations in which the rationalization processes underlying social action are guided by other rationalisms (Kalberg, 2014; Weber, 2013, p. xxxix, 1946d, p. 293).

And here is where Weber's critique of Modernity assumes its foundation: the tragedy of Western culture is the growing predominance of *substantively unladen* instrumental rationality 'at the expense of any belief in absolute values' (Weber, 1978, p. 30, 2013, p. 124) and its increasing opportunity to be performed as a consequence of the peculiar elective affinity between the Western disenchantment of the world and rationalization processes within modern life-spheres; a process Weber analyses in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and, from a civilizational perspective, in *The Economic Ethics of World Religions* (Kalberg, 2014).

However, formal-instrumental rationality and individual methical conduct by themselves could not produce social structural changes and the modern forms of social organization (Kalberg, 1980) since they require the rationalization of life orders and action patterns institutionalized on *substantive* ends (1946d, p. 287): it was *Substantive Rationality* that guided the action of the Calvinists described by Weber, underpinning their methodic behavior and reflexivity (Webel, 2014). The connection between Substantive Rationality and the instrumental action of individuals can be considered a core of Modernity since only *ethical substantive* rationality may introduce methical, formal ways of life (Kalberg, 1980) through the modern formal calculability of behavior and its consequences:

> With the rationalization of culture, and the corresponding disenchantment of religious ideas and beliefs, the modern world is ordered increasingly upon instrumentally rational grounds, and hence organizes itself less and less according to value-rational principles. (Gane, 2002, p. 23)

In this scenario, the modern state, 'the institutional embodiment of instrumental reason' (Gane, 2002, p. 24), structures social organization on impersonal, *rational* principles, in which relations between the state and its citizens are established for formal-instrumental purposes (Weber, 1946d, p. 299); relations that are destined to be in constant conflict given the diversity of interests a modern rationalized society harbors in its midst (Weber, 1946c, p. 147). In this respect, the modern state secures for itself a *beyond-values* status, assuring its instrumental role through the formal legalism that bureaucracy as a type of domination imposes from its institutional order on the rest of rationalized life spheres.

6 A hidden politics of rationality

Besides the involvement of national and international political actors, as well as the rise of interculturalism as an ethical principle supporting 'a political project to mobilize traditionally marginalized sectors of postcolonial societies, in particular, peasant and indigenous groups' (Fontana, 2013, p. 25), the 2011 TIPNIS protest illustrates a clash between the formal means-ends calculation of the Bolivian State as a *modern* political organization with the substantive valuations underlying BV as *other* rationalism. The Bolivian State has a constrained field of action not just because of the formal-legal boundaries of the Constitution. Like *any* modern institution, Modernity imposes the *rational* coordinates around which state policy is circumscribed. On the one hand, the formal organization of modern state bureaucracy; the normative, procedural, and value-free calculation of means to achieve ends, whatever the intended purposes are; with specifically Modern core assumptions underlying those ends – with its universal, logical criteria, its internal consistency, its predictability and control (Eisen, 1978) e.g., the modern category of citizenship, or the state's legitimate authority – the power to enforce rules on its citizens, to point out two of the former. On the other hand, it involves a *substantive* valuation of those ends, the coherence between means and legitimate, explicit claimed ends (Weber, 1946c, p. 151). Undoubtedly, the tension between bureaucratic formal organization and the substantive or instrumental valuation of its ends falls on the actors and their subjective intentions since, in principle, office staff members 'are personally free and subject to authority only with respect to their impersonal official obligations' (Weber, 1978, p. 220). This is, as Levine has described (1981, p. 16), a 'subjective sense of autonomy, the condition in which individual actors choose their own ends of action.'

However, both the formal means-ends calculations of state bureaucracy and staff members' substantive valuations are intertwined because 'a thing of process can ultimately be judged efficient, purposive, or systematic only relative to some end. [...] Considerations of substance are not extraneous to "formal" ones but rather built in unavoidably' (Eisen, 1978, p. 9). Thus, even the formal rationality that constitutes modern bureaucracy (with its universalism, logical criteria, internal consistency, predictability, and control, all of which are considered *ideal-type* characteristics) could only be evaluated based on the *substantivity* with which any modern organization assesses its ends and the *rational* account of the means to achieve them (Weber, 1946d, p. 287).

Therefore, for Bolivia and, by extension, for the Latin American states, their modern bureaucracies, and the modern hegemonic societies they rule (including those indigenous

communities considered 'non-modern'), the assessment of ends is sustained by its modern cultural configuration: the *ends* of bureaucracy as a modern organization in Latin America are the ends of a modern *Weltanschauung*.

Fontana singled out that the political process carried out in Bolivia

> could be read as the latest attempt, from a culturalist viewpoint, to resolve the structural problem arising from the gaps in the process of creation and consolidation of the modern nation-state and of its basic pillars (territorial control, equality of citizens in front of the law, separation of powers, and the creation of a national 'imagined community'), that are themselves rooted in the colonial past. (Fontana, 2013, p. 27)

The modern worldview, even with diverse interpretations and implementations (Eisenstadt, 2000), establishes the cultural coordinates by which the ends of state policy assume their meaning and legitimacy, as well as the means to achieve them: a framework with undeclared presuppositions and hidden preconditions concerning the valuation of means and ends conceived *substantively* as its *raison d'état* (Weber, 1946a, p. 95) – the modern formal rationality.

In the governmental attempts to propose a political and social transformation as a counter to neoliberalism and coloniality, BV challenges those rational coordinates of the modern Bolivian State because it stands as another *rationality*, another rational framework, with a different assessment of means and ends for social action.

For instance, contradicting assessments of the means-ends calculation of the highway project appear in two spheres. First, indigenous communities and organizations saw the highway plan as the continuation of neo-extractivist activities following already denounced neoliberal, technocratic criteria aimed at achieving modernizing, neo-developmental goals envisioned within Modernity and its rationality (Rivera-Cusicanqui, 2015). The distance between the highway project's objectives and the substantive values integrated into BV was insurmountable due to the experience of neoliberalism and its social, cultural, and environmental consequences in the recent history of the country (Ranta, 2018; Ellner & Santos, 2020). Second, although the Bolivian Constitution includes a broad calling for other means-ends valuations from those of the State as a socio-political organization, the Bolivian State championed the highway through TIPNIS as a modernizing, developmentalist plan. Thus, the project is opposed to the enacted constitutional defense of the multicultural background of Bolivian society, the protection of indigenous peoples' autonomy, culture, and way of living, as well as the recognition of the environment and biodiversity as the source of human existence: i.e., substantive ends-and-means valuation foreign to the formal rationality of Bolivia's modern state.

7   The rational interface between 'Vivir Bien' and the Bolivian modern state

Departing from the interpretive context discussed above, the 2011 TIPNIS protest against Road 24 illustrates the confrontation between two rationalities: the modern formal-instrumental rationality of the Bolivian modern state and attempts to introduce a substantive rationalization into the State policy-making processes. From an institutional level, the agency of the State as a modern organization can be examined as *ideally* embedding dif-

ferent types of rationality; the conditions for assessing state actions as *rational*. For example, the calling for more social equality appears as a *substantive* end for any rational, democratic government. A policy directed to solve this issue can appear as a *practical* end; both can be supported by a *theoretical* valuation of the structural and historical conditions that led to the raising of the issue in the first instance. The means assessment for achieving those ends is an exercise of *instrumental-purposive* rationality, i.e., involving the needed political alliances, funding, political opportunity and electoral costs, etc. But all of those ends and means are circumscribed to a specific *formal* rationalization of how they should be considered and treated within the political life-sphere: this formal 'ruling' is inherent to the modern state and its constitution as a modern socio-political organization.

Regarding the acknowledged transformative, decolonial potential of BV discourses (Gudynas, 2011; Chassagne, 2019; Ranta, 2021), BV 'not only aimed to open [such discourses] to previously marginalized peoples through new conceptual thinking, indigenous epistemologies, and alternative knowledge orientations but in doing so, it also challenged the expert technical regimes and the authority of public servants by condemning them as remnants of neoliberal colonialism' (Ranta, 2018, p. 91). This challenge has been responded to by the Bolivian bureaucracy with the tools the modern state has: formal-instrumental rationality, its inherent means-ends calculations, and ends delineated from its institutional order.

The ethnographic account of the translation attempts of BV into state policy in Bolivia made by Ranta provides an insightful exposition:

> On the emergence, meanings, and use of the notion of Vivir Bien, a conglomeration of critical ideas, worldviews, and knowledge deriving from a complex set of social movements, indigenous groups, activist networks, and scholars of indigeneity – in policymaking and state transformation processes in Andean Bolivia. (Ranta, 2018, p. 2)

In the search for an 'alternative to [...] transnational capitalism and [...] neoliberal development thinking' (Ranta, 2018, p. 34) – the translation process into state policy of a conglomeration of indigenous and intellectual worldviews, ethics and practices – Ranta (2018) evinces how the Bolivian bureaucracy *efficiently* wields a power that 'enforces and realizes an order' (Dusza, 1989, p. 76), and that this order is no other than modern formal-instrumental rationality.

Underlying Ranta's depiction (2018), this is the modern formal-instrumental rationality of the Bolivian State and how it imposes the legitimate knowledge that shall be implemented as state policy. The frame of calculability and predictability required by modern bureaucracy built on the means-ends calculation of *any* modern state policy stands in stark contradiction when confronted with BV proposals:

> A conglomeration of knowledges [...] about being and thriving, about learning and thinking, and about relating with one another, [...] constructed based on harmonious relations between the individual, the community, the cosmos, God, the family, and Mother Nature. (Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 2015, p. 4)

Therefore, the Bolivian State and its public servants, in their attempts to translate BV substantive rationality to the political sphere 'only do what they do': instrumentally transpose those alien values through their depoliticization, converting them into variables, objectives, processes, and requirements, items to be measured and reflected in daily or weekly

reports. The technicalization of the BV and the subduing of its social, cultural, and ecological transformative potentials is an illustration of the coloniality of knowledge production (Escobar, 2010), showing how Modernity and its institutions impose themselves as colonial mechanisms in Bolivia and, by extension, to the Global South. Furthermore, following a Weberian perspective, this phenomenon could be described as an *ideal type* of formal-legal domination, the *formal rationalization* of a value sphere within the coordinates of Modernity, and from this viewpoint, evidence of the modern condition of the Bolivian State. Therefore, actual attempts to introduce BV into Bolivian policy-making (Gudynas, 2014; Cuestas-Caza, 2018) appear as an effort to *reenchant* the Bolivian political life order with a *substantive ethic* born in that conglomeration of indigenous, intellectual, and academic ideas that BV is: a process of decolonizing the state, removing the discriminating, unequal, unsustainable traces of the modern formal-instrumental rationality and its means-ends calculability and, in its place, positing substantive, ultimate values as sources and guides for state policy and social action. And it is precisely here that lies the issue: between BV and the modern Bolivian State is a conflict between rationalisms.

Regarding Weber's mixed sentiments on modern rationality and rationalization (Levine, 1981; Whimster & Lash, 2006), especially the professionalization of public servants and their imprisonment in the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy, their submission to an impersonal, formal-instrumental rationality as the exercise of their *profession* – while probably founded on Weber's observation of the Prussian culture he experienced (Levine, 1981) – illustrates the relation between bureaucrats and their cultural background. Given the intercultural constitution of Bolivian society, it is expected that officials from indigenous backgrounds would be carriers (*Träger*) of *indigenous* ideas within the state bureaucracy, pursuing indigenous values in the daily activities of their bureaucratic routine. In this sense, regarding the opportunity to act from personal interest, even if assessed from other rational valuations (deeming bureaucratic activity only as a means to achieve such ends), those actions would assume the formal rationality of the bureaucracy they serve. The description of Ranta (2018) of the inner mechanisms of the Bolivian State translating BV into policy portrays this conflict: the situation that the 'alien' rationality is BV, even in a restrained, 'politicized' form. Not because of its 'indigenous' origins, but because it is *another rationalism*.

As already discussed, Weber conceived *rationalism* as the cultural-historical frame underlying social action. The modern state and its bureaucracy are the institutionalized forms of a specific type of social action in a specific historical context (Kalberg, 1980). Moreover, state-building processes in Latin America have a role in the emergence of the contemporary identities of its citizens, even those discriminated against and excluded by the modern state:

> These concepts of collective entities which are found both in common sense and in juristic and other technical forms of thought, have a meaning in the minds of individual persons, partly as of something actually existing, partly as something with normative authority. This is true not only of judges and officials, but of ordinary private individuals as well. (Weber, 1978, p. 14)

As observed in Morales's Bolivia, indigenous and peasant organizations, as well as governmental actors, stress their collective identities following an approach of *strategic essentialism* (Fontana, 2013; Rivera-Cusicanqui, 2015), which, in the search for legitimacy for

their policy-making or political mobilization, appeals to the indigenous, *aboriginal* character of their intentions and demands. However, this instrumental use of identity also illustrates how the state's *formal* rationality shapes those collective demands so they can be understood within the modern political life-sphere. They are to be stated in line with the state's rational formal assessment of means of lending legitimacy to the desired *substantive* ends. But in doing so, those substantive ends then are assessed from the *raison d'état*, the modern rationality that constitutes the Bolivian State, no longer from an alternative means-ends valuation – another rationalism, whether of indigenous roots or otherwise.

By not considering the rational character of BV (as a rationalism distinct from modern rationalism), its proposals are formally and discursively integrated through a 'taming' process of the modern state as a populist, mystical endeavor of the Bolivian State. A risk of that approach is the reification of both the modern state as it appears in the current Latin American historical context and the 'zombification' of alternative proposals – the formal technicalization of other sustainable, substantive worldviews considering the actual human and global ecological issues the modern instrumental rationality supports and facilitates within the heavily contested, though still dominant, myth of formal (Western) progress.

8 Concluding remarks

From a theoretically founded pessimistic standpoint, the insertion of other rationalisms different from the formal instrumental rationality in the modern state appears an unattainable goal. In our global ecological and humanitarian context, from a Weberian stance, there is no possible re-enchantment of our modern world, the unification of the differentiated life spheres around a comprehensive, unique world meaning. Such a longing would be a world-flight (*Weltflucht*), a mystical, irrational rejection of the empirical world. And with it, the sacrifice of the intellect (Weber, 1946c, p. 155).

In response to a mystical attitude to the world, Weber pointed out the existence of realist, responsible, this-worldly committed activity (Weber, 1946a, p. 122): the recognition of the modern world as it is, a disenchanted world, but with the 'ability to clarify the nature of this order, and to delineate the grounds of possible value-choices and future courses of action' (Gane, 2002, p. 153). In our modern culture, we should realize, on the one hand, the modern state is bound to modern means-end calculation and ends valuation framework: it is the institutional embodiment of modern formal-instrumental rationality. On the other hand, modern state policy is bound to substantive ends legitimized and assessed by modern rationalism. Far from reifying the modern state, this paper has highlighted its contingency as a historical product, an outcome of organized human action, and, in a modern cultural context, as action rationalized along modern coordinates.

For instance, from the field of Critical Development Studies it has been questioned the meaning of development and development cooperation by reviewing the concrete results of programs for development in the Global South (Unceta, 2013). Despite those observations, North-South development cooperation largely follows criticized discourses and practices (Buch-Hansen, 2012), maintaining local and global cooperation practices that replicate colonialism, dependency, and inequality (Quijano, 2007). Regarding this concern,

guidelines have been proposed to solve what is considered an *efficiency* issue of North-South development cooperation, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), which led to the creation of formal mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring international development cooperation policy (Brown, 2020). Despite their scope, both the problem and its solution have been rationalized as an exclusive matter of the *management* of development cooperation (Girei, 2017), i.e., this is observed in relation to modern formal instrumental rationality. Moreover, many North-South development cooperation NGOs have devised bureaucracies to systematize fundraising, train their collaborators, and manage their programs and projects. The ethnography of development cooperation (Lewis & Mosse, 2006) is focused on the functioning of those organizations: their constitution, structure, discourses, and practices; how development cooperation is built and ordered as 'the set of instruments and policies put in place to promote development processes' (Unceta, 2013, p. 16). With regard to the discussion this paper has outlined, one might ask: To what extent do the explicit ends of NGOs as modern organizations correspond to the rationalism of the communities where they are deployed? How is a cooperation project understood, negotiated, and applied in and by the beneficiary communities, mainly those situated in the Global South? This is still a matter for research, but recognizing other rationalisms in the design and implementation of such cooperation projects would lead to an increase in their effectiveness.

This paper has pointed out, from modern coordinates, the bounded formal-instrumental rationality underlying modern state policy, as well as recognized other non-modern *rationalisms*, other Reasons, in opposition to Enlightenment Reason. Modernity has created its opposite, Tradition, the core dualism of the modern project and, with it, the application of the categorial term 'irrational' as a measure of the adjustment of human action to the modern project in its implementation process. Weber critically realized this issue, stating that 'something is not of itself "irrational," but rather becomes so when examined from a specific point of view' (Weber, 2013, p. xxxviii). Of course, this does not mean there is no *irrationality* in our this-worldly experience, but rather, that our judgments about the *rational* quality of action should be assessed from the actor's context, whether this refers to the life order within Modernity or the worldview of the total Otherness.

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