

THESIS

SEMILLAS DE CONCIENCA | SEEDS OF CONSCIOUSNESS
SOWING CHANGE FROM THE ECUADORIAN HIGHLANDS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

SEMILLAS DE CONCIENCA | SEEDS OF CHANGE

SOWING CHANGE FROM THE ECUADORIAN HIGHLANDS

This thesis is a small part of Pintag Amaru’s story, and mine. I met Pintag Amaru – a small Kichwa organization in Ecuador – in 2022, and this work is the fruit of our collaboration. Focusing broadly on *sumak kawsay*, a Kichwa principle engaged in Ecuador’s 2008 constitution, our research explores Pintag Amaru’s understanding, and living out, of the concept. *Sumak kawsay* has gained recent attention in scholarship as a grassroots “alternative” to the paradigm of international development, but this conversation has rarely included the voices of Indigenous communities at the heart of *sumak kawsay*’s conception and practice. Engaging the central analytical lens of post-development theory and a diversity of anthropological qualitative research methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, I explore *sumak kawsay* through perspectives of – and relationship with – the people of Pintag Amaru. Built collaboratively from the onset, our work seeks to convey Pintag Amaru’s grounded understandings on *sumak kawsay*, development, and their relation as they navigate today’s world. Though they see the state’s use of *sumak kawsay* as a co-option of a profoundly expansive and dynamic principle, I find Pintag Amaru conveys creativity and depth of autonomous efforts towards Indigenous resurgence, and *sumak kawsay* as part of it. They face challenges within the structures of a dominant development paradigm, but navigate these structures strategically to live *sumak kawsay* out amidst them.

Through this work, too, I’ve come to understand *sumak kawsay* is dynamic, and deeply tied to place; it is not a prescription for us to replicate. I do believe, however, it is a view of the possible. We hope that this thesis, if nothing else, can offer such an opening – one seed of many – rooting in the cracks of decaying structures to grow something new.

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Nací en la sierra, en un campo de maíz,
Fui un canario, también un colibrí.
Con el viejo búho levanté mi oración,
Conté mis sueños y también los del gorrión.

¿De dónde viene la semilla?
¿De dónde viene el agua fría?
¿Y a dónde va cuando vuela el gavián?
¿Y a dónde irá el pueblo que vendrá?...

Caminan juntos al son de su tambor,
Tocan pingullo en medio de un salón,
Sueñan vivir en medio de un jardín.
Y a los niños les enseñan a jugar
Con los sapitos y cuidando el cedrón

Pintag Amaru, la serpiente despertó,
No tienen alas, pero sueñan con volar,
Y a los Apus ellos van a visitar.

Pintag Amaru, la serpiente despertó,
Sabiduría, la vida es una revolución,
Los vi cantando, es pura cooperación.
Caminando, mingueando, sembrando,
Reforestando, soñando.
Sí, soñando...

I was born in the mountains, in a field of corn
I was a canary and a hummingbird.
With the old owl, I raised my prayer,
I told my dreams and also those of the sparrow.

Where does the seed come from?
Where does the cold water come from?
And where does the hawk go when it flies?
And where will the people to come go?...

They walk together to the sound of their drum,
They play flute in the middle of a room,
They dream of living in the middle of a garden.
And they teach children to play
With little frogs and take care of the verbena

Pintag Amaru, the serpent awoke,
They have no wings, but dream of flying,
And they go to visit the mountain spirits.

Pintag Amaru, the serpent awoke,
Wisdom, life is a revolution,
I saw them singing, it's pure cooperation.
Walking, cooperating, sowing,
Reforesting, dreaming.
Yes, dreaming...

- *Pintag Amaru, 2021*

Una Semilla | A Seed

Gabriel (Pintag Amaru member): “We're an organization, all in the same place, but with seeds of consciousness, of change. What we're doing in the world, yes, it's local, here, but the idea is to leave a seed planted, and that seed will go on growing and spreading its seeds to others. That's the idea. Here, as much as in other parts of the world, we will keep working and gaining more strength in our struggle, in our dreams. And I think everything will unfold. Let's hope that, over the years, things can be harvested from this great sowing. Only time will know, time will tell, but I think that the things we are doing, we are doing for good, for something we have to take care of, for something we all have to protect.”

This thesis is intended to be a seed of consciousness. Of reflection. Of change. I think many of us see the need for that – change – for ourselves and for our common home. But it's hard to know where to start. The systems we face are immense, seemingly impossible to topple. So maybe we don't topple. Maybe we grow something different.

This starts within ourselves, in our way of seeing and way of being. In our consciousness. We don't see consciousness as a replacement for larger collective action, though – we see it as a seed. One that will grow upon old structures, flower into something different, and be sown again.

Not that we have all the answers – I'm not sure there are answers. But I hope we can offer some insights. Nor do we have grand expectations of where this will go. We know few will read it. But this is just one piece of our work. And one small seed of many.

We also know many of you are sowers yourselves; these ideas are already planted, and growing. Hopefully this can provide some extra nourishment.

For all of you, though – in reading this – you are part of the story now.

A seed in *la gran siembra* | the great sowing.

May we all be.

1- Introduction

While oriented towards a broader vision of change, this research is grounded in the story, work, and dreams of Pintag Amaru. Based in the Ecuadorian highlands, Pintag Amaru is a Kichwa organization focused on Indigenous rights and resurgence, environmental activism, and decolonial education. I began working with Pintag Amaru in 2022 as a volunteer, and over the past two years, we've collaboratively developed and carried out this work.

Broadly, our research focuses on *sumak kawsay*.¹ Sumak kawsay (roughly translated as “life in plenitude” or “living well”) is a foundational principle of Indigenous Andean cosmologies which generally focuses on harmonious relationships between community and nature (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). Though it is rooted in long-standing Kichwa philosophies and values, sumak kawsay has gained global attention in recent decades as part of broader social movements, particularly in Bolivia and Ecuador. In 2008, the Ecuadorian state integrated sumak kawsay – often referred to under a Spanish translation, *buen vivir* – into their constitution and national development plans.

Since its inclusion in the constitution, and even prior, scholars have framed sumak kawsay in relation to the dominant paradigm of international development. Broadly, this paradigm encompasses contemporary ideologies and material realities in which “development” is defined by Western ideals, power relations, and neoliberal ideologies. Significant scholarship and activism engages sumak kawsay as an “alternative to development” that seeks to transform its destructive and hegemonic agenda (Escobar, 2012). The post-development theoretical framework, particularly within anthropology, has brought scholarly attention to the concept. Post-development theory critiques conventional development and argues for recognition of Indigenous concepts of “development,” wellbeing, and human-environmental relationship - sumak kawsay is considered a prime example of these ground-up “alternatives” (Esteva, 2013; Escobar, 2012).

¹ I italicize non-English words upon first use to call attention to their presence throughout the text. However, following Gloria Anzaldúa's and other scholars' arguments that italicization emphasizes “otherness,” I keep foreign words in roman type following first use (Trnka 2016).

Though many scholars have proposed *sumak kawsay* as an “alternative to development” that centers Indigenous values amidst a dominant paradigm, there is little ethnographic engagement with these communities themselves, and even less research co-created by them. The vast majority of research focuses on the Ecuadorian constitution and state, but few studies engage deeply with the Indigenous communities at the root of *sumak kawsay*’s lived practice. While Pintag Amaru recognizes *sumak kawsay* as a central principle in their organization and actions, they see the concept over-simplified within academic literature and misunderstood within government rhetoric; they believe communities like their own must be heard within the scholarly conversation. More broadly, they hope by sharing their story – and the living of *sumak kawsay* as part of it – they can help plant the seeds of a broader transformation amongst us all.

Significance

Pintag Amaru and I developed our research questions together, based on the intersection of their priorities and my own background. As the foundation of “consciousness-raising,” we seek to illuminate grounded experiences, perspectives, and critiques of the dominant development paradigm. We believe that, through sharing Pintag Amaru’s experiences, we can point to the hidden assumptions, power relations, and harms of development and support the “undoing” of its hegemony (Escobar 2011).

Moving beyond critique, though, we also seek to demonstrate possibilities for more radical, communal, sustainable approaches. We engage at the root, exploring Pintag Amaru’s reclaiming of Indigenous identity, and with it, their reengagement with the concepts and practices of *sumak kawsay*. We seek to offer understandings and enactments of *sumak kawsay*, not to encourage static replication, but to expand the lens of the possible – to inspire a broader consciousness of our relationships to our places, to one another, and to ourselves.

Within this exploration of *sumak kawsay*, though, we must also bring to light the complexities. While Pintag Amaru ultimately pursues the world-building of *sumak kawsay*, they believe scholarly understanding is over-romanticized. Much of the literature on *sumak kawsay* portrays Indigenous

communities as static, and isolated from globalized processes and therefore focuses more on historical meaning than contemporary practice (Kiely 1999). Pintag Amaru sees *sumak kawsay* as rooted in the past, but oriented towards the future, making recognition of its contemporary resurgence vital.

Closely related to this recognition, it is important that we identify broader structural challenges Pintag Amaru faces, and opportunities they harness, in the contemporary living of *sumak kawsay*. As part of over-romanticization of the state constitution, much of the literature overlooks ways in which the state may be undermining local efforts through continued extractivism, corruption, and implementation of neoliberal policy (Bengtsson 2019). At the same time, communities like Pintag Amaru are necessarily and strategically engaging in aspects of dominant development in order to reconstruct *sumak kawsay*. By exploring this nuance, we hope to illuminate Pintag Amaru's understandings of the relationships among *sumak kawsay*, international development, and the Ecuadorian state, and identify potential opportunities for support in addressing Pintag Amaru's challenges. As they often make clear, their visionary path towards a different world must be built from the current one.

Ultimately, while acknowledging and navigating the nuance, we hope this work is part of a broader reorienting – seeing clearly the path we are on and opening consciousness to other possibilities.

What is Pintag Amaru?

Diego (Pintag Amaru member): “Pintag Amaru is an organization that works a lot with environmental activism, with activism of protecting nature, but also of preserving the knowledge of our ancestors. So it's a movement that emerges from thinking about the history, memory, and identity of our communities. And if you think about their [Kichwa ancestors'] cosmovision, at some point, you realize that they are connected to the land. They are very much in tune with the land, they cultivate their garden, they have their bees, they have their food, they take care of the water. Because it shapes them – they are farmers, they are *campesinos*.² So from there the idea also arises of, you know, in some way you also have to become a *campesino*, I mean, work with the land, plant trees, cultivate your food, protect the water. And thus Pintag Amaru was born as a way of seeking identity and finding the historical memory of our people. You cannot exist without that. And we also decided to use education or art education, art-medicine, as a way of demonstrating to the world this identity, history, and connection with the land, and also political, social, and environmental conflicts. So we use decolonial education a lot as a form of resistance to what is imposed on us. It's like seeing an alternative, a resistance to those unjust things. We are not rebels, but we are. I mean, we want to make a change, something different, that does not

² *Spanish*; *campesinos* are rural producers, farmers, people of the *campo* (countryside).

harm *Pachamama*.³ Yes, we have many, many activities, but I could summarize it as Pintag Amaru is working to connect to land, seeking ancestral knowledge to incorporate it into modernity.”

I first got to know Pintag Amaru in 2022, when I lived and worked in the community as a volunteer. I don’t even know how to begin describing them – they are my collaborators and friends. They are so many things and have offered so much. They call themselves a *colectivo* – of community organizers, educators, farmers, musicians, artists, craftsmen, and activists – and a *movimiento* – of “dreamers.” As they often say, they are the ones “crazy enough” to dream of and work towards a different world.

Based in the rural community of Pintag, near the capital city of Quito, Pintag Amaru includes 12 central members and their families, as well as a more expansive community of host families and other participants. The majority of members are the children or grandchildren of Indigenous peoples who came to the area as laborers in the Spanish *hacienda* system. Most identify as Indigenous, though Indigeneity in their context has been complex, and much of their work is based on the resurgence of Andean (Kichwa) cosmologies and practices. Pintag Amaru engages in a wide variety of initiatives focused on Indigenous rights and identity, environmental activism and restoration, and rural livelihoods. They are also supported by a larger Quito-based organization, Pachaysana⁴, through which they carry out “decolonial education” programs with international students.

These are the foundations, but there is so much more to say. I hope the many pages to come say it.

All of this is by, with, and for them.

³ *Kichwa*; though often translated as “mother earth,” Pintag Amaru members understand Pachamama as broader – closer to “space-time mother,” “universe mother,” or “mother of the cosmos.”

⁴ Pachaysana is a collective of Ecuadorian and international community organizers, educators, and artists, based in Quito. Funded through study abroad programs and grant funding, Pachaysana seeks to rewrite dominant models of education and community development through deep cross-cultural exchange, decolonial education, and grassroots organizing.

Who am I?

A heart, a brain –
A temporary thing
A Soul, a God –
Eternal Spring.
These things & more
We have to use
Do they blossom forth
or die abused?

-Evelyn Grace Bass-Ross (recorded in 1927)

I came across a family history notebook recently, compiled by my grandmother. This poem was on the first page, copied from the margins of a family bible. A few pages later, another of my distant ancestors is commemorated for his service in the Civil War. In Alabama.

I think a yearning for the land and complicity in violence are both deep in my heritage. And I believe they are deeply intertwined. I didn't understand it at the time, and still don't, but I think a longing to heal both has brought me to Ecuador. Healing of the land, healing of the people – healing of their relationship, really.

The land was my first love. It's taken me nearly 30 years to remember that. This is not our original land, though. Most of my distant ancestors are from England, some arriving as early as the 1620s – Ecuador would have been almost a century into colonial rule by that time. I grew up in a suburban neighborhood of Colorado Springs, Colorado, at the foot of Pikes Peak (called Tava Kaa Vi, "Sun Mountain" by the Ute peoples). My parents are both journalists from the midwest flatlands. The mountains brought them here.

I spent my childhood surrounded by animal (and human) siblings, between sandstone and horseback. I remember dreaming of adventure at that time – something about South America, especially,

captured me. I took my first trip as an undergraduate, a major in Natural Resource conservation, to spend a semester working on small farms in Patagonia. The mountains brought me there.

That's when my early work in international development began. I'd been fed the white saviorist narrative – that “we” needed to “help” other countries not destroy their natural resources – and at the time, thought sustainable development united my love for the land with my pull to “help” distant places. After working on trail crews and farms throughout college, I enrolled in the Peace Corps. I spent 3 years in Nepal as a food security volunteer, nestled in the Himalaya. The mountains brought me there.

Nepal transformed my understanding of development. I saw struggle, of course, I saw need, and I also saw a culture of intimacy with the land, of intimacy with community – a culture that was starting to disintegrate under the pressures of neoliberal development. So, when I came home, I decided to pursue the cultural anthropology/international development program I'm now in. I thought the anthropologist role could help make development more participatory, more culturally aware. Part of me still believes that, but this work has transformed my understanding of development once again. My general disillusionment with the development paradigm pulled me in search of other responses, other ways of reconciling human and nature wellbeing. I ended up in the highlands of Ecuador, volunteering with a small organization called Pintag Amaru. The mountains, and their people, brought me there.

I'm sure so much of this path affects how I present this story to you. The longing to reconnect to land, and to each other within it, is deep in me. I worry my tendency is to over-romanticize because I need the hope of a less violent world. I do my best to offer a balanced perspective of challenges, but I focus more on the hope. I think we all need it.

And I'm sure you'll also see that my own critical perspective of development permeates this work. This still feels complicated within me, and probably always will. I still work in development and plan to continue. I think development means a lot of things, and in some ways, can be reoriented towards good. I see the organization I'm working with doing that. But I think the critique is crucial to this transformation.

And of course, my own identity influences this hugely. I didn't grow up wealthy, but I grew up comfortable. It's easier to critique development as someone who has never lacked the basic necessities and comforts of life. And, I think it's a lot more complicated than that. I've started to see the ways in which a dominant-neoliberal-capitalist-patriarchal-white supremacist system harms all of us. I think some of us are deprived of basic resources and freedoms while others are severed from the foundational interrelationality of existing, empty in our full houses. I'm sure you'll see this come out.

And finally, I am not, and will never be, Indigenous. As much as I've tried to immerse myself in Indigenous cosmologies and values over the past few years, my understanding of Indigenous worldviews is necessarily shallow. Though I share a lot of Pintag Amaru's politics and dreams, I will never fully understand their way of seeing and engaging with the world. Trying to catch glimpses will be the work of a lifetime.

As for now, I'm learning to love the plains.

The Place

Pintag looks like home to me – the rolling hills of Colorado – just greener. It's only 30 km Southeast of the capital city, Quito – about an hour drive on a good day. Considered part of the central Sierra region of Ecuador, the Pintag area is mountainous, lying at an elevation of roughly 9,300 ft. Pintag is a small town in the broader parish of Pintag, a 500 square-kilometer area with a population of nearly 25,000 people. Pintag Amaru members live in a rural neighborhood, about a 15-minute drive from the more densely-populated pueblo.

It's beautiful there, surrounded by volcanic mountains. I could see the white peak of Cotopaxi from the house I was staying in, when the clouds allowed me. The river that flows from it, though, is slowly being consumed by a gravel mine, and there's another mine above the community's irrigation source. The roads towards the city are smooth, plastered with the contents of the mines, but the roads in the neighborhood are muddy, and often closed. There are patches of original forest, though most has been

cleared out for cattle pasture. Almost everyone in the neighborhood has dairy cattle and gardens. Some people earn an income through agriculture (selling dairy, garden products), though most families also include at least one individual employed in nearby cities. Generally, youth leave the community after high school to study in Quito – due, in part, to few employment opportunities in rural Pintag, many do not return. Most people in the neighborhood identify as Mestizo/a and as Catholic, though the majority of Pintag Amaru members identify as Indigenous (to be discussed in more depth in chapter 4); most of these individuals were raised Catholic, but no longer identify as such. Amidst these distinctions, the community feels close-knit. Gatherings, parties, meetings, and neighborly support didn't feel divided across ethnic or religious lines, nor was class distinction evident to me. Though, I'm sure, there was still much I didn't understand under the surface.

Most houses are made of cement, with electricity and running water, surrounded by corn fields and fava beans, cattle, and dirt roads. Some have vehicles, many don't, but cheap public taxis are easy to come by. The sun there is the strongest I've felt – high elevation at the equator – but the cold creeps in at night, just when our host mom would make hot soup. It's quiet, except for the nights of Catholic confirmation parties. There's a spot where you can sit up high and watch the waterfall into the river, and the mine. It's beautiful, and it's so many things.



Figure 1: View of Antisana from Valencia, Pintag, approaching Pintag Amaru's land.

Background

Indigeneity in Ecuador

As Indigenous (Kichwa) identity is a central feature of Pintag Amaru, and of *sumak kawsay* more generally, the broader context of Indigeneity in Ecuador is foundational. This context is complex, part of a broader history of colonization and resistance. According to the 2022 census, 78% of the Ecuadorian population identify as *Mestizo* – a mix of Indigenous and European ancestry – and 8% identify as Indigenous. However, this identification has been heavily impacted by a long history of discrimination against Indigenous peoples, a history in which it has often been socially and economically advantageous to hide or obscure Indigenous ancestry. Additionally, the Spanish colonial *hacienda* system fragmented many Indigenous communities, creating linguistic and cultural discontinuity. This disconnection has made Indigenous identification complex, given many people of Indigenous ancestry have been separated from a cohesive cultural context. I'll discuss this complexity more in chapter 1, grounded in Pintag Amaru's own exploration of their Indigenous roots.

With the nuance of this relatively low official Indigenous-identification understood, the Indigenous presence in Ecuador is strong. The Ecuadorian government recognizes 14 Indigenous nationalities, the most numerous of which is Kichwa. Kichwa nationality encompasses many diverse sub-groups who live primarily in the mountainous region of the Sierra and the lower Amazonian region, estimated to include as many as 3 million people. Many Kichwa-identifying groups speak Kichwa language (in Kichwa, *runashimi*), though some, including Pintag Amaru members, speak Spanish as a first language.

(Recent) History of Sumak Kawsay

Sumak kawsay is a Kichwa phrase that roughly translates to *vida en plenitud/buen vivir* (life in plenitude/living well). Though *sumak kawsay* is a broad, dynamic concept, it is generally understood to reflect a form of life that centers coexistence through harmonious relationships amongst family,

community, nature, and the universe (Macas 2010). Viteri Gualinga, an Indigenous leader from the Pastaza province of Ecuador describes the concept as follows:

Sumac kausai⁵ is ‘Buen Vivir’ or ‘beautiful life’. It is a concept that has a connotation of what the sarayakuruna (Kichwa people of Sarayaku) conceive as the ideal meaning of life. It is a concept formed by two words: sumak: the good, the beautiful, the harmonic, the perfect and kausai: life, existence. The connotation of this phrase relates to an ideal condition of existence without deficiencies or crisis. The concept is intimately associated with a spatial component (territory) and a moral, ethical, and spiritual order, on the basis of individual, community and natural beings. In this context, sumak kausai is not static, but rather a process based on a system of relationships based on the individual, family and community which is exercised in various activities of daily life. The sumak kausai as the ideal of a harmonic life for the runa (the person) implies: territoriality, knowledge productivity and an intimate relation with the cosmos and sacha (jungle), abundance of species, fertile soils, healthy water, agricultural diversity, solidarity in social relations, reciprocity, sharing and the exchange of goods and relationship of respect with places and entities of the transcendent sphere of the jungle (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, 46-47).

Though sumak kawsay has long been rooted in Indigenous Andean cosmovision and communities, it did not gain scholarly attention until the late 1990s (Altman 2013). At this time, Indigenous organizations in the Amazonian province of Pastaza employed the term in their organizing, and in 2000, a leader from Pastaza published the first academic discussion of sumak kawsay (Viteri Gualinga, 2003). From there, other Ecuadorian academics and Indigenous organizations began to use the term (including the Spanish translation, buen vivir) in their publications and organizing (Acosta 2002, CODENPE 2003), framing the discussions that led to its inclusion in Ecuador’s 2008 constitution.

In 2007, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), Ecuador’s largest and most powerful Indigenous organization, proposed to the National Assembly the inclusion of sumak kawsay in the new constitution (CONAIE 2007). This proposal advocated for “the construction of a post-capitalist and post-colonial society, a society that promotes the “good life,” transmitted from generation to generation by our ancient *taitas*⁶ and mamas, a society that regains the teaching of its ancient peoples and can live in harmony with our Pachamama” (CONAIE 2007). Amidst the leftist and publicly pro-Indigenous administration of then-president Rafael Correa, sumak kawsay was integrated in the preamble

⁵ Spellings of sumak kawsay have differed across publications; however, the significant majority of government documents, scholarly articles, and publications by Indigenous activists groups in Ecuador use the spelling “sumak kawsay,” as I use throughout this document.

⁶ *Kichwa*; a taita is an elder, generally a male elder.

(below) and 99 articles of the new constitution and has gained wide academic, political, and activist attention since.

PREAMBLE: Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador
We women and men, the sovereign people of Ecuador
RECOGNIZING our age-old roots, wrought by women and men from various peoples,
CELEBRATING nature, the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth), of which we are a part and which
is vital to our existence,
INVOKING the name of God and recognizing our diverse forms of religion and spirituality,
CALLING UPON the wisdom of all the cultures that enrich us as a society,
AS HEIRS to social liberation struggles against all forms of domination and colonialism
AND with a profound commitment to the present and to the future,

Hereby decide to build
A new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the
good way of living, the *sumak kawsay*...
A society that respects, in all its dimensions, the dignity of individuals and community
groups;
A democratic country, committed to Latin American integration—the dream of Simón
Bolívar and Eloy Alfaro—, peace and solidarity with all peoples of the Earth;
And, exercising our sovereign powers, in Ciudad Alfaro, Montecristi, province of Manabí, we
bestow upon ourselves the present:
Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador (Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, 2008)

After inclusion in the constitution, however, *sumak kawsay* was quickly incorporated within a “neo-extractivist” paradigm that expanded state oil and mining concessions in order to support government social spending (Altman 2013). For these reasons, amongst others, CONAIE ended its dialogue with the state in 2010, stating “the government of Rafael Correa is a false socialist traitor, populist, genocidal, fascist to the principles of the *sumak kawsay*, furthermore, it covers up the colonialism of the XXI century” (CONAIE 2010). This conflict between Indigenous groups and the state regarding *sumak kawsay* continued into the next decade. The subsequent administration of former-president Lenin Moreno was openly opposed to the concept since 2017, removing it from some public policies and closing related agencies (Altman 2019), and the recent administration of right-wing banker, Guillermo Lasso, has similarly taken steps back from related environmental policy and Indigenous organizing. However, *sumak kawsay* remains part of the constitution and Indigenous groups continue to reference it in their organizing, notably in the significant Indigenous-led national strikes of 2019 and 2022. The relationship between *sumak kawsay* and these broader movements for Indigenous autonomy

are often not recognized in the literature (Altmann 2020), emphasizing, again, the necessity of learning from/with communities closest to these challenges.

Guide to Reading

Following this introductory chapter, I describe my process, methods, and theoretical approach (chapter 2) and explore relevant literature (chapter 3). The heart of this work, including most words from Pintag Amaru, are the later substantive chapters.

Chapter 4, *Enraizando* | Rooting, identifies Pintag Amaru's roots in the (re)claiming, (re)learning, and (re)practicing of Kichwa identity, ultimately demonstrating the depth of their resurgence, and *sumak kawsay* as part of it.

Chapter 5, *Sobreviviendo* | Surviving, explores the expansiveness of Pintag Amaru's *sumak kawsay* and illuminates the broader Indigenous movement's resistance amidst dispossession and co-option within the Ecuadorian state; this chapter illuminates the ongoing political struggles Pintag Amaru and other communities face in their living out of "alternatives."

Chapter 6, *Orientando* | Orienting, follows Pintag Amaru's distinctions of pathways, conveying their criticism of the dominant development pathway and the start of different directions; Pintag Amaru identifies harms of the dominant paradigm, and points towards possibilities of reorienting its structures.

Chapter 7, *Floreciendo* | Flowering, presents the fruits of Pintag Amaru's work – and *sumak kawsay* within it – as they navigate world(s), demonstrating the lived resistance of daily, generative acts.

Chapter 8, *Sembrando* | Sowing, focuses on Pintag Amaru's broader orientations towards "consciousness-raising" as they plant seeds of change from the local to the global, implying the role we all play in cultivating change.

And finally, Chapter 9 covers analytical conclusions and broader considerations, and includes closing words from Pintag Amaru members. They offer us their perspectives and dreams – not so we replicate them, but so we continue to open parts of our thinking, our feeling, and ourselves – so we may walk with them towards a different path.

2 - Methodology & Theoretical Approach

This work is built upon relationship with Pintag Amaru, and seeks to center their priorities, decisions, and voices. Having collaborated with Pintag Amaru over the course of two years, I used several anthropological qualitative methods – including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and photovoice – as means to help share their story. As many Indigenous and feminist thinkers have emphasized, though, methodology is much more than the methods we use; it's also the relationship, ethics, and politics in which those methods are grounded (Gardner-Vandy et al. 2021; Kovach 2021; Tuck 2009). It's been complex for me, working with an Indigenous community as a White, Western researcher – as it should be. I hope I look back on this work some day and recognize all the missteps, see that my understanding has grown deeper. But for now, it's the relationship with the people of Pintag Amaru that tethers me to the belief in this work, and my place in it. I'll keep doing my best to honor their trust.

Our Process

Before I met Pintag Amaru, I had spent the first year of my masters program designing research I ultimately decided not to pursue. Guided by the wisdom of my mentors and other decolonial feminist and Indigenous scholars – Margaret Kovach, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Paula Gunna Allen, amongst others – I came to understand the ways in which my previous research agenda perpetuated extractive colonial research legacies. I'm sure there are ways this research still does, things I don't yet see - but I hope to be a small part of a different research practice.

Relationship is the heart of it all: I needed to work *with*.

So, in summer 2022, I went to Ecuador as a volunteer. I had been receiving mentorship from an anthropologist in Quito who connected me to Pachaysana, Pintag Amaru's mother organization. Pintag Amaru welcomed me as a volunteer and potential research collaborator. They knew I was interested in the Ecuadorian constitution and in potential research together, but I also made clear that supporting their

interests was my priority, whether that be research or not. I felt I needed to be there to learn more about the on-the-ground context, regardless of the outcome.

I spent six weeks living in the community and volunteering to help construct Pintag Amaru's *Wawa Amaru* (youth center). This was a pivotal time for me in so many ways, but most of all, it was a time in which I began to know the members of Pintag Amaru, and they began to know me. We formed a relationship that has been the foundation of the past 2 years of collaboration. Towards the end of my time there, I started to talk more with the group about the potential for future work together. I asked if they would be interested in pursuing research or if they would prefer to focus on their projects – they proposed both. They were interested in researching contamination in their waterways, finding additional support for their reforestation and agricultural projects, and, in some way, being part of broader “consciousness-raising” about development, *sumak kawsay*, and our collective relations with Pachamama.

I left Ecuador with these priorities in mind, and the next stage of our collaboration began. During this time, I worked primarily with 2 central representatives of Pintag Amaru to refine our research ideas, and they relayed information back and forth between larger Pintag Amaru meetings and our smaller online meetings. My committee member helped me find an ecology student, Rose, who was interested in carrying out the water quality testing. Together with Pintag Amaru, we received funding from the Center for Collaborative Conservation (CCC) at Colorado State University to support Pintag Amaru's water/reforestation projects and both research components.

While it fits within Pintag Amaru's identified priority of “consciousness-raising,” this research was also influenced by my interests. Pintag Amaru knew I studied international development and was interested in Ecuador's *buen vivir* – we often talked about both over long days of adobe making. I'm sure this awareness and these conversations influenced their research interests. While I made it clear I wanted to support their priorities, they also asked for my ideas. They wanted to collaborate with someone who offered their own thoughts. While this is context dependent and always framed within community leadership, the researcher still brings themselves to the collaboration. Relationship makes the difference. I

believe Pintag Amaru asked for my ideas because they – over time – trusted me to listen, to respect their decisions. And I came to trust they would tell me if we were going in a direction they didn't want to go.

After nearly a year of collaborating and planning virtually, I arrived back in Ecuador in May 2023 and spent another 10 weeks living and working with Pintag Amaru. We carried out all formal methodology during this time. Though the overall research aim and research questions were developed collaboratively, I led the implementation of most of our methods. Over the summer, Pintag Amaru was working on multiple construction projects, supporting logistically-challenging water sampling, and hosting international students, and simply did not have the capacity to be involved in every aspect of the research. This is also something I've had to learn – sometimes the “ideal” level of collaboration is incredibly time-consuming — yet another argument for the importance of trusting relationship as the foundation. So, I tried to balance independent work with opportunities for check-in and change. In addition to working and living together, I met weekly with all 12 central Pintag Amaru members throughout the summer to coordinate next steps. After returning to the U.S, I analyzed interviews – with consistent feedback on themes from Pintag Amaru – and composed initial drafts. During summer 2024, I spent another 3 weeks in Ecuador, meeting with Pintag Amaru to review, discuss, edit, and add to translated drafts – this work, alongside the mini-documentary that accompanies it (created by another student collaborator of ours), is the fruit of our process.

Ethics

Engaging with Indigenous research as a non-Indigenous researcher is ethically complex. Western anthropologists (and other researchers) have a long history of exploiting, harming, and misrepresenting Indigenous communities in the name of research (Kovach 2021; Smith 2021). As Linda Tihuwai Smith (1999) puts it, “‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary.” So

why am *I* – a White, American anthropologist from a settler colonial society⁷ – creating research with/about an Indigenous community?

I still ask myself that question all the time. As I should – reflexivity is a process. My first and most honest response – because the community invited me to. Of course, this “invitation” can be complicated. I reached out to volunteer, I mentioned the possibility of research, and I came with the potential of financial support. And all of those possibilities came from my broader structural position and access to funding. I truly believe, though, Pintag Amaru not only said “yes” at every step but also put significant time and effort into making this work possible. I am confident in their agency and I trust they would have said “no” if they did not know me, trust me, or believe it could be part of their vision. Ultimately, I believe the communities themselves should be the authorities on who can do research with whom, and Pintag Amaru has actively welcomed me in.

I also don’t believe identities alone determine whether or not we do good research. As my mentor once told me, “it’s not about *who*, it’s about *how*.” In Indigenous research, the *who* and the *how* must be grounded in relationship (Gardner-Vandy et al. 2021). Kovach (2009), while acknowledging that identity is still hugely important, states that Indigenous research is also about relationship and responsibility and poses two key questions to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers:

“Do I have a relationship with the Indigenous community with whom I seek to conduct research, the community I seek to represent through my researcher’s voice? Am I trusted by that community?”

These two questions led me to abandon my first year of thesis planning – at the time, my response to both was a no. Especially considering my non-indigenous identity, I needed to be in relationship with an Indigenous community to even consider moving forward ethically with research. How could I help build research around community priorities without knowing the community? And how could they possibly make an informed decision about “letting me in” to research if they did not know me?

⁷ Settler colonialism is the ongoing colonization of territories through the continued occupation of settlers, and continued repression and displacement of Indigenous groups (Mikdashi 2013).

As Kovach (2009) and many other Indigenous scholars remind us, ethics must be embedded in the research methodology from the very start, from the early identification of interest and formation of questions (Tuck 2009). Relationship is the basis from which this can occur, allowing for the co-construction, rather than the top-down imposition, of research agendas. When Indigenous communities are directly involved in the ranking of priorities and framing of questions, research is more likely to integrate local knowledge, account for on-the-ground realities, and respond to verified needs (Smith 2014). This recognition is the ethical basis of the community-based action research (CBAR) approach we engage throughout this study. CBAR emphasizes the direct engagement of communities in the research process (“community-based”) and the application of that research to community interests and uses (“action”) (Lake and Wendland 2018). Overall, our research follows the CBAR approach in that 1) Pintag Amaru has been directly involved in identifying research priorities and questions from the start, 2) the research agenda is relevant to Pintag Amaru’s interests, and 3) the research is part of a broader project that directly supports Pintag Amaru’s efforts.

Building on the tenets of CBAR, David-Chavez & Gavin (2018) identify key indicators of “responsible research practice” with Indigenous communities that have heavily guided this work. One indicator to highlight is the accessibility of research findings to community members. Prior to publication, Pintag Amaru has reviewed, provided feedback, and ultimately approved the presentation of research findings. The final publications will be available in both English and Spanish, results will be translated into a creative form for use on Pintag Amaru’s website and classes, and additional interviews will be part of a short documentary film for use in Pintag Amaru’s outreach and fundraising. These alternative forms also align with many feminist anthropologists’ and other scholars’ calls for more accessible, creative ways to present research (Davis & Craven 2022). Another key indicator is the adherence to ethical guidelines of consent: I followed standard IRB protocol for obtaining prior and informed consent, but I also understand consent here more broadly than individual participation. Consent should encompass the community’s active choice for research to be conducted at all, and I believe our early conversations and decisions addressed this understanding. Another key indicator is the production of tangible outcomes that are useful

to the community. In addition to the creation of the Zine and documentary, this research is part of a larger interdisciplinary project that included significant direct funding to community projects.

Writing

I try to write here with heart and intention. I do so in the footsteps of feminist and decolonial scholars before me – Gloria Anzaldua, Maria Lugones, Leela Fernandes, to name a few – who’ve modeled presentation of research that is both analytically complex and humanly deep, that welcomes the wholeness of our participants and ourselves.

On intention – I try to write in a way that is accessible, a foundation of feminist ethnographic work (Davis and Craven 2022). For much of my life I’ve been trained that complex, vocab-heavy writing indicates “sophistication” and skill. But shouldn’t the foundation of “skilled” writing be that our readers can actually understand us? I’ve started to untrain myself, and I attempt to practice more clear and accessible writing here, though I’m sure I do so imperfectly.

On heart - I try to write in a way that respects the full humanness of my research participants and collaborators, and acknowledges the full, imperfect humanness that I bring. Methodologically, this is grounded in authentic relationships between researchers and participants and is part of a broader framework of humanizing research (Paris and Winn 2013). The writing must and does reflect our relationships. I am not a “detached” researcher feigning neutrality towards my “subjects.” I am a human being trying to help share the stories of other human beings. Their lives are as full and complex and deep as yours. And so, I do my best to present them that way. Obviously I can’t give you a full view of this richness, I have such a limited view myself, but I hope I can write in a way that helps you see people. And I hope this writing helps you see me as a person too. I try to bring my thoughts, my reflections, and my questions as they emerge, engaging in a practice of self-reflexivity encouraged by many feminist, humanizing, and decolonial scholars (Brown & Strega, 2015; Davis & Craven, 2022; Kovach, 2021). I don’t intend to center myself, but I do intend to visibilize myself. It’s important that you know what eyes, histories, and beliefs these stories have been filtered through.

Participants

Because this research was so heavily focused on the perspectives of Pintag Amaru as an organization, I am distinguishing between core participants (central members of Pintag Amaru) and other participants (host family members and neighbors who participate in Pintag Amaru programs, but are not central members), and key informants, each of whom participated in interviews and/or focus groups. In general, core participants were involved in shaping the research from its conception, provided multiple individual interviews, and participated in most focus groups, including the photovoice focus group. Other participants were less directly involved in creating the research and generally provided only one interview.

The 12 core participants are the central members of Pintag Amaru. I've known these individuals since 2022; I've worked and lived with them, and I consider them my collaborators and friends. All of these participants were raised in the Pintag campo and presently live near Casa Amaru, Pintag Amaru's central building. The majority of Pintag Amaru members are men, the context of which I discuss in chapter 4. Though the youngest member is 23 and the oldest is 42, Pintag Amaru core members are all of the same generation – many of them are siblings and nearly all of them grew up together. Overall, 10 of the 12 core members identify as Indigenous and the other two identify as Mestizo/a. The significant majority of core participants were raised as Catholics but very few presently identify as such. Though employment has varied throughout their lifetimes, the majority of core participants are skilled in a trade (e.g., construction, woodworking, welding, architecture) and work in projects both locally and in nearby urban areas. Some of these individuals have also been more recently employed part-time with Pintag Amaru or full-time with Pachaysana. Other individuals are employed part-time in the nearest city (e.g., childcare, cleaning, etc).

Other participants included host family/community members who are involved with Pintag Amaru but are not core members (9 individuals), key informants (2 individuals) and additional focus group participants (11 individuals). All of these additional 9 participants are members of the host family with whom I lived, friends of mine in the neighborhood, or neighbors/acquaintances. Five of these

individuals are women and 4 are men, and their ages range from 21 years to 73 years. All of these individuals identify as Mestizo/a and the majority identify as Catholic. Most of these participants (7 of 9) were raised in Pintag and all presently live near Casa Amaru. Key informant participants are both individuals who have worked closely with Pintag Amaru, and one is a former student in their decolonial study abroad program. Additional focus group participants include 6 students from the U.S., participants in Pintag Amaru's decolonial education program (3 identify as women and 3 as men, and all are between the ages of 19-23), and five women who live in the local neighborhood and participate in Pintag Amaru's women's group, between the ages of 21-57.

Methods

Recruitment (?)

Recruitment doesn't feel like the accurate word here. It implies the agenda is already determined and participants may be "recruited" to join in. In some cases this approach may be necessary, but it doesn't seem to quite fit in collaborative research. Not that this research is wholly collaborative. There are certainly some individuals – primarily host families and key informants – who participated in the research after the agenda had been determined. However, the significant majority of participants in this research were also co-designers of the research, which shifts our conventional understanding of "recruitment."

With the nuance of this language understood, alongside the ownership and power relations it implies, we can focus here on the process through which we shifted from designing the research to doing the research. In our weekly Pintag Amaru meetings, which included all core members of the organization, I shared days/times I was available for interviews and members either set a time during the meeting or texted me after. This approach made the logistics easy for Pintag Amaru but still allowed individuals to opt-out by not scheduling an interview (though all core members chose to participate).

Recruitment for focus groups was similarly based in established relationships but the process varied across different groups. Two focus groups were held amongst a recently-formed women's group which included several Pintag Amaru members as well as outside community members. In the first

women's group meeting, we shared the overall research purpose, questions, and process, and expressed our interest in conducting group interviews in subsequent meetings. The group then chose dates for upcoming meetings/focus groups and participants were invited to attend. The third focus group included different participants – core Pintag Amaru members and 6 international students – and therefore followed a different process. Pintag Amaru members determined a date for the focus group and invited all Pintag Amaru members and visiting international students to participate. Like the interviews, this approach made logistics simple for Pintag Amaru but allowed individuals to opt-in or opt-out. As a limitation, though, this may have led to attendance of only those individuals who were particularly interested in the topic. And, though group members determined the scheduling together, there may have been some interested individuals who were unable to attend.

Recruitment of community members and key informants outside of Pintag Amaru followed more typical approaches. I contacted these participants via text or in-person communication at events. I provided general information about the research purpose, questions, and use of information and asked the individual to contact me to schedule an interview time if they were interested in participating.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a foundational method in cultural anthropology and was critical in this research. Participant observation involves “extended immersion in a culture and participation in its day-to-day activities” (Calhoun, 2002), and especially amongst feminist ethnographers, also includes deep reflection upon one’s own participation (Davis & Craven, 2016). Many anthropologists develop close personal relationships with participants, but “observation” still doesn’t feel like the right language here. It feels too removed to describe the process of living, working, learning, celebrating, eating, and laughing *with* – which was the core of this – being *there*, and being *with*. We (Rose and I) lived with a host family who was deeply involved in Pintag Amaru. We learned how to clumsily milk their cows, fell in love with their little black dog, ate every meal with them. Before we came, they told us our host mom was the best *cocinera* (cook) in the neighborhood - they were right. We talked about everything at these meals, from

ancient medicine to global politics to aliens. We lived right across the road from Casa Amaru and went there often. We attended *mingas*⁸, meetings, and parties, we went on trips to the mountains, we played music around fires. These were the crucial times for developing relationship with people and place. And building from this, being *with* provided a view of the daily, of the lived, of “normal” – the things that aren’t always brought up in interviews. Pintag Amaru’s inspiration lies not only in their beliefs, in their words, but in their practice. I can’t imagine helping to share their story without getting to live within it myself.

Interviews

Understanding interviews as conversations, as “visiting” (Martinez 2021), was more true to the relationship I held with participants than a one-sided interview. And more true to reality. As Kovach (2009) and others identify, the mutual sharing of stories allows participants to situate the researcher, helping to shift the relationship from extraction to mutual knowing. As researchers, we must ask “what is at stake (and whose interests are served) in a power dynamic where only one person is asked to reveal him- or herself?” (San Pedro and Kinloch 2017). As we ask our participants to share themselves with us, we must share ourselves too. These one-on-one conversations allowed us to go deeper, mutually, and to open space for differences of experiences and perspectives between participants. While Pintag Amaru members share many deep convictions, it was also crucial to understand, get to know, and talk deeply with them as individuals.

We met somewhere private, usually the house I was living in, Casa Amaru, or the participant’s house – over coffee or chocolate, or both. We talked in Spanish, though a few Kichwa words were always thrown in. I asked if I could record the interview before we began, as recording allowed me to focus less on notes and more on conversation. I came into interviews with a list of broad themes and open-ended questions, following a general semi-structured interviewing approach (Bernard and Gravlee 2014). This

⁸ *Kichwa*; Minga is a form of collaborative labor, common in the Andes.

served as a guide for our conversation, ensuring we addressed the research questions, but also offered the openness and flexibility to explore the topics people found most important. These conversations lasted between 1 and 2 hours, but the majority were close to 1.5 hours. I conducted between 2 and 3 interviews of this length with each core Pintag Amaru member, which allowed us to explore each topic deeply and follow up on ideas. Interviews with host family members and key informants lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours, but the majority were roughly an hour. In total, I conducted 32 interviews with 23 individuals.

Focus Groups & Photovoice

In addition to conducting individual interviews, I also worked with Pintag Amaru to develop several focus groups. While interviews allowed for deeper one-on-one conversation, focus groups provided a view of group discussions and dynamics, and often opened insightful conversations between group members and other participants.

I led two focus groups with *Warmis of Pintag Amaru*, Pintag Amaru's women's group, in hopes of better understanding gendered dynamics and experiences within the organization and broader community. We held the women's group focus groups as part of a larger meeting. Before the focus group, Rose and I collaborated with women leaders of Pintag Amaru to outline the goals and content. At the start of each focus group, I reminded participants what the research questions were, what the data would be used for, and asked if they would be comfortable with recording. From there, I posed open-ended questions to the group; at times, I would join in the conversation with follow up questions or clarifications. Each of these focus group conversations was held for approximately an hour.

The third focus group was held amongst core Pintag Amaru members and a class of international students. The idea of this focus group came from Pintag Amaru, as they wanted to begin their "consciousness-raising" about development and *sumak kawsay* amongst the visiting students and thought a focus group setting would be a good opportunity to do so. Pintag Amaru proposed the broad idea of holding a dialogue-based focus group between Pintag Amaru and the students focusing on these themes,

but I designed the specific methods. We also engaged photovoice – a method in which participants communicate their lived experiences and perspectives through photos they have taken (Anderson et al. 2023) – as part of the focus group. We wanted to show the participating understandings of sumak kawsay in a way that was more creative, visual, and oriented directly from Pintag Amaru perspectives than traditional methods. Core Pintag Amaru members and I agreed on using photovoice methods but I led the direct implementation. About 1 month prior to the focus group I asked core Pintag Amaru members to begin taking photos that help capture their perspective of what sumak kawsay means and/or how Pintag Amaru is enacting it. I asked them to share 2-3 of these photos at the focus group and briefly describe their meaning/significance. After each member shared their chosen photos, we reopened the group for discussion and the international students asked additional clarifying questions. This focus group lasted about 3 hours.

Analysis

Before I left Ecuador, Pintag Amaru and I talked about how we wanted to approach data analysis. Though examples of collaborative analysis are somewhat rare, there are models for communities to be deeply engaged in analyzing their own data (Cashman et al. 2008). I offered Pintag Amaru some of these models as ideas, but the group ultimately came to the conclusion that they didn't have the time to work through the transcripts with me directly. So, we landed on a compromise between deep involvement and feasibility, following Kovach's (2009) recommendation for analyzing with communities who do not have capacity for a "hands on" role: I carried out the initial coding and definition of themes and then brought drafts to Pintag Amaru for discussion. Based on Pintag Amaru's feedback I adjusted the themes until they were confident in the themes/conclusions I reached. This process was not as onerous to Pintag Amaru as directly analyzing transcripts but still ensured that the "storytelling" was accurate and in-line with their priorities for the research.

Because this research is focused on ground-up perspectives, I used an inductive approach to analysis. I started the analysis process by transcribing all interview and focus recordings in Spanish using

Sonix transcription software. From there, I followed a general approach to thematic content analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) and chose not to use coding software. These were transcripts of deeply thoughtful and personal conversations and feeding them into software didn't feel like an honoring of what I had been offered. Both personally and academically, I needed to sit with the words myself. On the first read, I printed all the transcripts and poured over them with a pencil, outlining initial codes, thoughts, and moments. From there, I made a concept map of all of the codes that emerged, read back through the data with these connections in mind, and developed broad themes. I organized quotes according to these themes, following approval from Pintag Amaru, and developed the narrative of the 5 substantive chapters. After composing the first draft, and translating it back to Spanish, I returned to Pintag for another three weeks; in this time, members read the drafts, and we held several group meetings to discuss and adjust them together. You are reading the final product of our discussions.

Limitations

There are both logistical and epistemological limitations to this work. First, I worked with a very small group in a single community, and though this allowed for deep relationship building and collaboration, it did not offer a broad nor regionally-diverse perspective on the topics. Especially in regards to *sumak kawsay*, it's crucial we recognize this limitation: Pintag Amaru's understanding of *sumak kawsay* can not be taken to represent the understandings of other communities, groups, or of Indigenous Andean perspectives in general. In addition to being a dynamic and expansive term, interpretation and practice of *sumak kawsay* differs across cultural and geographic groups. This study is limited to a single group within a single community and must be understood as a deep, rather than broad, exploration. Translation/language is also a limitation here. Any translation we use of *sumak kawsay* and other terms, whether English or Spanish, cannot fully encompass the deeply-rooted and complex meanings of the Kichwa language. Even from Spanish to English, some meanings are lost in translation.

Aspects of my positionality are also clear limitations in this study. I am not Indigenous, I am not Ecuadorian, and therefore, my ability to comprehend and translate the deep epistemological and cultural

nuances of these topics is severely limited. I do my best to rely on the community's words and perspectives and to relay those honestly. But, I was raised within Western cultural paradigms and this background limits the depth to which I understand and can express these concepts. In addition to the translation to you, my positionality likely influenced the ways Pintag Amaru communicated with me. Though we did develop close personal relationships, my identity as a white, American woman may have understandably influenced the depth and content of their sharing.

Finally, though these personal relationships were foundational to this study, they can also be understood as a limitation. Positivist researchers may argue that a close relationship with participants creates bias and may prevent researchers from presenting findings objectively. I align with feminist theorists in my rejection of this argument as it rests on the false assumption that an "objective truth" can be found (Haraway 1997; Harding 1995). However, I do take seriously the concerns of some feminist ethnographers (Stacey 1988) that close personal relationships can create tensions between the relationships and the research. My decision is clear, though – the relationships will always come first. I agree with Tuck & Yang in their assertion "there are some forms of knowledge that the academy does not deserve" (Tuck and Yang 2014). There were moments, stories, and details I have chosen not to write about here because they were deeply personal, could impact relationships between participants, could be used in anti-resistance efforts, or simply were not meant to be shared. If this is a limitation to the research, so be it.

And finally, as central as it is to this work, I also found challenges and limitations within the implementation of collaborative research. As mentioned, Pintag Amaru members did not have the capacity to deeply collaborate on every aspect of the research. Though we chose methods together, I largely carried them out. Though they provided feedback on themes, I did the analysis. And though they've reviewed this thesis, I wrote it. There are limits, of course, to our collaboration. Overall, our methodology has sought to navigate these complexities. I believe a grounding in mutual trust has allowed for the weaving, the cycle of checking in, and working independently, and bringing ideas back. It hasn't been perfect, but it's felt deep and real and right, at least for now.

A challenge for me, more so, has been zooming back out from this depth, connecting Pintag Amaru's story back to broader literatures and theories. I think I've had a fear of overly-intellectualizing their words; I want us all to feel them as much as we think about them. I try to strike a balance. Though my main theoretical approaches, primarily post-development (to be discussed in the coming chapter), help me do the zooming out, I hope the additional theoretical and methodological considerations, mainly from feminist scholars, help to retain the heart and the humanity. That's been the point, all along.

Theoretical Approach

Like methodology, my theoretical approach heavily shapes the way this work is interpreted and presented. From the beginning, this work has been shaped most strongly by a post-development theoretical framework, as it initially brought my attention and inspiration to social movements of the Andes; however, other perspectives and theoretical approaches are crucial in highlighting post-development theory's potential gaps and limitations. Recent critiques of post-development theory point to its potential de-emphasis on contemporary Indigenous realities and political struggles, highlighting the need to more deeply engage with Indigenous perspectives (Altmann 2020). The additional theoretical considerations of political ecology and feminist objectivity also help to nuance the post-development framework, calling attention to the macro conditions of resource distribution and power, and the micro conditions of knowledge production and representation. Though my analytical perspectives have been shaped most strongly by post-development theory, my approach to this work as a whole human being has been grounded in feminist epistemologies and politics.

Post-Development Theory

In order to understand the emergence of post-development theory it is important to situate it within both development studies and the broader post-structural shift. Post-WWII, development studies has been characterized by three main theoretical orientations: 1) modernization theory in the 1950's-60's, which proposes industrialization, linear progress of societies, economic growth, and science and

technology as the key ingredients for the Third World to “catch up” to the First World (Parsons 1964; Rostow and Rostow 1990); dependency theory in the 1960’s-70s, which emerged out of Latin America and asserted Third World “underdevelopment” is rooted in relationships of exploitation and dependency with the First World (Frank 1986); and world-systems theory in the 1970’s-80s, which built upon dependency theory to outline a global hierarchical structure in which the capitalist system enables “core” countries to exploit the “periphery,” perpetuating “underdevelopment” (Wallerstein 1998).

Starting in the 1980s, a growing number of scholars, activists, and other critics began to question the *very idea of development*, aligning with a broader post-structural shift in the social sciences (Escobar 2011). Broadly, post-structuralism questioned the “metanarratives” of Enlightenment thought, rejected “universal” truth, and emphasized knowledges of subjugated groups (Derrida 1982; Foucault 2013). Thus, the main position of post-structuralism as it related to development studies was not to identify a new path towards development, but to question the ways in which many parts of the world had become “underdeveloped” through the very discourse and practice of “development” (Escobar, 2011). Also influenced by attention to discourse and identity construction within postcolonial theory (Mohanty 1984; Said 2016), post-development theory initially emerged in this time as a post-structural critique of development discourse and has subsequently turned attention towards on-the-ground enactments of “alternatives to development” (Escobar 1992).

A robust literature on post-development has emerged since the 1990s, led by prominent theorists including Wolfgang Sachs, Gustavo Esteva, and Arturo Escobar. A foundational argument of the post-development school is that the very notions of “development” and “underdevelopment” were born out of a political objective to increase Western control in the Global South, initiated in U.S. president Truman's 1949 inaugural address (Escobar 2011). Post-development theorists view these notions as instruments of power that imply the role of the “developed” West in improving other, “less developed” societies. Development, they argue, is based upon a Eurocentric standard of the “good life” that is ultimately used to justify neo-colonial intervention in the Global South (Escobar 2011; Esteva and Babones 2013). Beyond development discourse, post-development theorists argue development has ultimately failed;

generally, its project and programs have actually led to increased inequality, exclusion and impoverishment in much of the world (Esteva and Babones 2013; Sachs 1992). They attribute this decline to the undermining of subsistence economies and centralization of the modern cash economy, which has left many on the margins. The Western economic worldview focused on growth and consumption, they argue, should be seen as culturally-contingent, not universally-desired.

As a path forward, post-development theorists suggest a focus on *alternatives to development* as opposed to *development alternatives*. Development alternatives, as alternate forms of the same top-down, neoliberal concept of development are insufficient for addressing underlying hegemony and global inequality; instead, we must recognize *alternatives to development* practiced in the Global South (Escobar 2011; Esteva and Babones 2013). They argue an increasing number of people are challenging the “developmentalist truth regime” and constructing alternatives that decentralize the economic worldview (Escobar, 2012). Accordingly, post-development theorists turn their attention towards “ordinary people’s attempts at constructing more humane and culturally and ecologically sustainable worlds” in the forms of grassroots mobilizations, social movements, and other enactments of resistance (Escobar 2010). Contending that “we will not have modern solutions to modern problems,” post-development centers these enactments as sites in which philosophical and material alternatives are created (Esteva and Escobar 2017; Esteva and Prakash 1998). This attention to alternative perspectives and worldviews, they argue, is a path towards “undoing development” (Escobar 2011).

Escobar also discusses the critical role of ethnography in bringing to light the ways in which alternatives to development are practiced, specifically by Indigenous peoples (*ibid*). According to Escobar, anthropology must identify and explore enactments of difference and resistance in order to make visible locally-based, alternative frameworks (Escobar 1997). Escobar encourages anthropologists to highlight a plurality of economic and social models as they articulate with global forces, generating a “transition from the dominance of modern science to a plural landscape of knowledge forms” that attends to the ways in which local economic and cultural power is both appropriated and maintained (Escobar 2003). Along with other post-development theorists, Escobar contends that global forces can be “most

effectively and wisely opposed” at the local level, the scale at which both dominant forces and forms of resistance are more concrete (Escobar 2003; Esteva and Babones 2013); accordingly, he encourages ethnographic attention to local contexts in which these forces are experienced and contested.

The concept *sumak kawsay* has been a central principle explored in post-development conceptualization and practice. Post-development theorists generally use the term *Buen Vivir*, which some view as a broader umbrella for the regional variations of *suma qamaña* in Bolivia and *Sumak Kawsay* in Ecuador (Gudynas 2014). Most development theorists understand *Buen Vivir* as a philosophy, rooted in Indigenous Andean cosmovision, which serves as one of the many concrete visions for an “alternative to development” (Escobar 2012). In their view, *Buen Vivir* “signifies critiques of and alternatives to conventional ideas about development” by critiquing a linear conception of progress, engaging with a diversity of knowledges, and promoting harmonious relationships between humankind and nature (Gudynas, 2014, Acosta 2018).

This broad theoretical orientation heavily shapes my approach. As *sumak kawsay* is considered one of the most prominent “alternatives to development,” I seek to explore its grounded understanding and practice in a specific community, and the community seeks to share it – we believe exploration of this “alternative” may help to illuminate some of the power relations, cultural values, and assumptions submerged within dominant development. Broadly, post-development theory proposes that alternative visions and lifeways at the local level can help to destabilize the hegemony of the dominant development paradigm (Escobar, 2004; Esteva & Prakash, 1998), and our overall research purpose closely aligns with this vision.

Post-development Amendments & Considerations

Though our overall research frame fits within post-development theory, other perspectives offer important nuance and considerations. Some scholars have criticized post-development’s seemingly unconditional rejection of development and modernity (Kiely 1999). Escobar and others have responded to this critique by acknowledging that alternatives to development may “strategically incorporate

opportunities offered by development” but continue to challenge the centrality of economic growth and production (Escobar, 2012). Communities’ enactment of the “contemporary art of living,” in which they strategically intertwine long-standing tradition and modern technology, is a newer concept within post-development theory (Esteva & Escobar). This scholarship acknowledges that many communities enacting “alternatives to development” do not wholly reject modernity, and instead, engage strategically with globalized systems and technologies (Escobar 2007; Esteva, 2017). These communities are not static and isolated, and post-development scholarship must attend to the ways in which communities are building alternatives *from within* their integration in global capitalism and development. Thus, this research seeks to add to the effort of bringing non-Western “alternative” conceptions into the conversation while also exploring how those conceptions are understood and lived amidst contemporary realities.

Some scholars have also called attention to the ways in which post-development centers Western perspectives and intellectual foundations while attempting to focus on Indigenous concepts and struggles. Early post-development discussions, for example, celebrated *buen vivir* at the state level and only more recent publications recognize the chasm between *buen vivir* ideals and Indigenous communities’ actual experiences with state-sponsored extractivism (Escobar 2010). In a similar vein, sociologist Phillip Altmann (2020) has critiqued post-development theory’s engagement with *buen vivir* on the grounds that it depoliticizes the Indigenous movement. Altmann argues that post-development theorists portray the Indigenous communities at the root of *buen vivir* as “builders of spirituality” rather than political actors and emphasizes the broader idea of environmental sustainability over the place-based struggle for Indigenous self-determination (Altmann 2020). Accordingly, concepts of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty will be crucial to consider, as they may be neglected within the broader post-development orientation.

Kevin Bruyneel’s concept of “third space of sovereignty” may be a helpful addition here; though his analysis focuses on U.S. tribal and state relations, the concept proposes that Indigenous groups can operate in a third space, outside of first space (assimilation into the colonial state) and second space (direct opposition or succession from the state) (Bruyneel 2007). More broadly, the third space of

sovereignty recognizes that Indigenous movements, actions, and practices can exist outside of their relation (either acceptance or rejection) to colonial structures. This may be an important concept to consider within post-development theorizing. Post-development generally frames *sumak kawsay* and other “alternatives” in opposition to development, but does not often consider them as sovereign principles operating in the “third space,” not dependent on their relationship to development. This could also point to Altmann’s critique, in that these principles may be more about a promotion of Indigenous self-determination and values than a rejection of Western systems. Even the name, “post-development,” is framed around that which it is rejecting, remaining locked into a “second space” relationship to development. Pintag Amaru may (or may not) see this relationship differently.

Theoretical Additions

Supplementing post-development theory’s attention to both local and global processes, political ecology informs this study. Political ecology is a multidisciplinary approach that emerged in the 1980s and is rooted in the application of political economy – analysis of social, economic, and political power structures – to environmental issues and resource distribution (Wolf, 1972; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Robbins, 2004). Broadly, political ecology focuses on the relationship between nature and society and pays particular attention to the ways in which power relations affect the environment, and distribution of environmental “goods” and “bads” at local and global scales (Robbins, 2019). Particularly applicable to this study, political ecology places local environmental change within the broader context of national and international processes, particularly as they relate to capitalist development (Mintz, 1985; Roseberry 1983). This attention to broader socio-political material/environmental processes may help illuminate aspects of this study that are not as thoroughly examined with post-development theory; while post-development theory focuses on alternative meanings and ideas of “development,” it is not always attentive to the material/environmental challenges communities face in enacting these alternatives. While post-development provides a lens for exploring ground-up, local “alternatives to development,” political

ecology may aid in understanding the national and global processes that affect and/or undermine them, specifically as they relate to environmental conditions and resource access.

Within this project it is also vital to consider the power dynamics of knowledge production, center the autonomy and priorities of participating communities, and generate outcomes that are directly useful to the participating community. Though this research does not focus specifically on gender, it will attend to the views of participants of all genders through methodological approaches that engage across intersectional positions of different participants (Crenshaw, 1989). More broadly, this study is guided by feminist theory's deconstruction of positivist epistemology, recognizing that all knowledge production is a political act (Harding, 2006; Sprague, 2016). Consequently, in recognition that "objectivity" is a construction of Western epistemology, this research openly critiques hegemonic structures and integrates knowledge production with activism (Sprague, 2016; Gordon, 1991). Feminist theory also pays particular attention to issues of power, micropolitics, and representation in the production of knowledge and consequently calls for methodological approaches that acknowledge the partiality and positionality of the researcher (Sprague, 2016). These approaches strongly influence the collaborative, narrative-based strategies employed in this research and the ways in which I consider my positionality in its production and presentation.

Overall, our theoretical approach follows post-development's general consideration of ground-up critiques and alternatives – though recognizing its limitations – while staying grounded in feminist ethics. I try to navigate across these, and integrate them, throughout this work. In the next chapter, Literature, I explore how other scholars have discussed, framed, and navigated understanding *sumak kawsay*, and I include additional literatures that offer insight to substantive chapters. Pintag Amaru's efforts are unique, and also part of a broader, shared story.

3 - Literature

Of course, many other scholars have explored sumak kawsay, its relationship to development, and related ideas. Though many have focused on the state, and few have used collaborative approaches, other studies of sumak kawsay offer important points for consideration and comparison. Specifically, I explore literature covering interpretations of sumak kawsay, its relationship to both buen vivir and development, and considerations of practice. Beyond these literatures, I also include a section covering broad ideas of resistance, as this theme weaves throughout Pintag Amaru's movement, and our work.

Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir

Origins & Interpretations of Sumak Kawsay

The origins of sumak kawsay remain one of the “open debates” in the literature (Hidalgo-Capitan 2013). These debates center on the emergence of the term, as some Western scholars argue the lack of early anthropological evidence of sumak kawsay indicates it is an “invented tradition” of contemporary Indigenous academics (Viola 2011); however, many Indigenous scholars and activists have made clear that the root concepts of sumak kawsay have long been integrated within the Andean cosmovision whether or not they were organized within a term (Viteri 2003, Macas 2010, Moldonado 2010).

Interpretation of sumak kawsay has also differed significantly across academic and political discussions. Through a systematic literature review, Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara (2014) highlight three “dominant categories of thought” on sumak kawsay/buen vivir. Though these categories are admittedly over-simplified, they point to the diversity of thought around sumak kawsay and have been widely referenced in subsequent literature on the topic. The first category, eco-statist/socialist, generally uses the terminology buen vivir and is more focused on aspects of distribution and equity than cultural and environmental meanings. This category is associated with the politics of former-president Rafael Correa and has been used to promote extractive industry as a means to state development (Gudynas 2011). The second category, post-development/radical ecologist, views sumak kawsay/buen vivir as an

alternative *to* development and encourages the contributions of Indigenous values in overcoming global socio-ecological crisis. The post-development school within this category generally uses *buen vivir* rather than *sumak kawsay* and is most focused on ecological sustainability, though Indigenous views of nature are considered integral to this (Escobar 2012; Escobar 2020a; Escobar 2008). The third category, Indigenist-culturalist/Pachamamista, focuses on ancestral Indigenous knowledge and culture and prioritizes Indigenous self-determination. This category generally engages the term *sumak kawsay* and centers on spirituality, communitarianism, and harmonious relationships between humans and nature within the Andean cosmovision (Macas 2010).

While these categories can be useful in outlining how different epistemologies influence interpretation of *sumak kawsay*, it's important to recognize diversity of perspectives within contemporary Indigenous communities. While Hidalgo-Capitan and Cubillo-Guevara organize perspectives within the literature along these categories, we (scholars) can not assume that all interpretations of Indigenous communities will fall within them, nor that Indigenous communities view and employ *sumak kawsay* from one epistemic perspective. This diversity of thought regarding interpretation of *sumak kawsay* points to the importance of looking beyond the literature and learning directly from Indigenous communities on the ground, as this study seeks to do.

Sumak Kawsay & Buen Vivir

Though some scholars use *sumak kawsay* and *buen vivir* interchangeably, others point to issues of translation and meaning. Lalander & Cuestas-Caza (2017), building on the 3-part framework (Hidalgo-Capitan & Cubillo-Guevara 2014), argue different translations of *sumak kawsay* feed into these categories. Within the Indigenist/Pachamamista category, *sumak* is generally translated “plentitude,” “harmony,” and/or “beautiful,” and *kawsay* can be translated as “life” or “coexist,” whereas the direct translation of *buen vivir* is generally “good living” or “living well” (Cuestas-Caza & Lalander 2017). These scholars argue that much of the epistemic depth of Kichwa phrases is lost in translation, allowing for co-option of the term into eco-statist/socialist forms of thought. Other Indigenous scholars have

similarly argued that buen vivir has been influenced by Western political thought that does not correspond to the Indigenous view of sumak kawsay (Maldonado & Ariruma, 2011; Oviedo, 2011) and understand buen vivir as the state's extractivism-focused co-option of sumak kawsay (Acosta 2018). Despite these contentions, sumak kawsay and buen vivir are often used interchangeably within much of the literature. Most Indigenous scholars use sumak kawsay and Pintag Amaru also prefers to use the Kichwa term, so I default to sumak kawsay in my use. However, I use buen vivir if the scholar/article I'm referencing generally uses it, and in reference to use by the Ecuadorian state or within the constitution.

Sumak Kawsay & Development

The relationship between sumak kawsay and international development has been debated within scholarly discussions and is included in Hidalgo-Capitan and Cubillo-Guevara's "Six Open Debates on Sumak Kawsay." The socialist/state perspective generally positions sumak kawsay as an alternative form of development whereas post-development and Indigenous intellectuals refer to it as an "alternative *to* development" (Acosta 2012; Viteri Gualinga 2002) or "beyond development" (Gudynas and Acosta 2011). These differences illuminate conflicting views towards extractive industry in Ecuador over the past decades: the former view sees extractivism as a means towards greater domestic development and internal wealth redistribution while the latter argues for a fundamentally different paradigm of human-nature relationship. Other intellectuals reject the comparison of sumak kawsay and development all together. Altmann (2017) argues that framing sumak kawsay as an alternative to development misconstrues its "radically local and relational character" by expanding it from its roots in the Indigenous political struggle for territorial autonomy. He argues the use of sumak kawsay as a universalist critique of development and capitalism parts from the place-based defense of community and territory Indigenous struggles are grounded in.

While this critique of the development framing is an important perspective to consider, Indigenous activists and scholars have discussed the critique of Western development alongside sumak kawsay since the term was publicly politicized in the 1990s. Carlos Viteri Gualinga, the Pastaza leader

who first published discussion of *sumak kawsay*, centered his early publications on his community's epistemological rejection of Western development. Viteri argues in the Indigenous Ecuadorian cosmovision "the concept of development does not exist" and further articulates the differences between Andean and Western views of "development."

"There exists an integrated vision which is to seek and create the material, environmental, and spiritual conditions to reach and maintain *sumak kausai*. For this reason, it is inappropriate and unethical to apply the paradigm of development on the Amazonian nationalities, because it implies the introduction of an ideology that contrasts with our *sumak kausai*. That would be a form of colonization of the imaginary. This shows how two different visions, the development as a Western paradigm does not correspond to the vision of "good way of living" of the *sarayakuruna* and as a consequence the concepts either. The development and the idea of progress constitute values linked to the history of Eurocentric imaginary who seek to dominate nature with a quantitative rationality that contrast enormously from the parameters of *sumak kausai*" (Viteri Gualinga 2002)

The engagement of *sumak kawsay* in the Ecuadorian constitution is also framed in relation to the Western development paradigm. The forward to Ecuador's 2013-2017 National Development Plan states:

"Ecuador, as an Andean country, constructs its human, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights on a concept and worldview born in the ancient societies of the South American Andes: Good Living is *sumak kawsay*. This social idea of solidarity and redistribution is different from the Aristotelian ideal of the Good Life. Good Living is a mobilizing social idea, which goes beyond the concept of development – as it currently exists in the Western tradition – because it is associated with a broader notion of progress. This is not a new development paradigm, but a social, liberating alternative, which proposes other priorities for social organization, unlike the mere economic growth implicit in the traditional development paradigm." (Ecuador National Development Plan 2013-17)

The framing of *sumak kawsay* as an alternative to development has also been central within post-development thinking. Alberto Acosta, an economist and co-founder of the political party that led creation of the new constitution was amongst the first non-Indigenous intellectuals to engage with Viteri Gualinga's work. Starting in 2002, Acosta has cited *buen vivir* as a critique of Western development's focus on economic growth above other aspects of "living well" (Acosta 2012). Arturo Escobar, a Colombian anthropologist and leading post-development theorist also began to engage with *buen vivir* in the early 2000s. Escobar and other post-development theorists primarily frame *buen vivir* as a prime model of an "alternative to development" that can serve to undermine the hegemony of

“developmentalism” (Escobar 2012; Esteva and Babones 2013). Within this framing, buen vivir serves as a critique of negative social, economic, and environmental impacts of conventional development and offers a vision for the future based on de-centering neoliberalism and reframing alternative economic models around community, reciprocity, and harmonious relationships with the natural world (Escobar 2012, Acosta, 2018).

Though the development concept has been central in most scholarly discussion of sumak kawsay/buen vivir, Altmann’s (2017) critique of framing sumak kawsay as an alternative to development will be crucial to consider as we explore Pintag Amaru’s perspectives. Especially considering the ways in which the framing around “development” is built into this study, as encouraged by Pintag Amaru, their perspectives on the relationship between local territorial defense and more global reconsideration of development will offer important insight.

Ethnographies of Sumak Kawsay

The majority of ethnographic studies have focused on understanding and implementation of buen vivir at state or institutional levels in Ecuador and Bolivia (Ranta 2017; Wutich and Beresford 2017). A limited number of researchers have investigated understanding and interpretation of sumak kawsay within Indigenous Ecuadorian communities. Viteri Gualinga (2003), the Indigenous leader who first published discussion of sumak kawsay, conducted an early ethnographic study focused on the perception and interpretation of the term in his native community of Sarayuku. Viteri Gualinga finds sumak kawsay is employed in defense of Amazonian territories against oil drilling and ultimately summarizes the concept as “the ideal of a harmonic life” (Viteri Gualinga 2002). A more recent ethnographic study in the Ecuadorian Amazon explores the meaning of sumak kawsay through participant narratives, ultimately concluding sumak kawsay is grounded in daily practices and beliefs rather than theoretical constructions of an ideal community (Coral-Guerrero, García-Quero, and Guardiola 2021). These researchers distilled sumak kawsay into four 4 central tenets: a nature-focused worldview, an economy based on solidarity, ancestral knowledge, and community.

Two key ethnographic studies have explored *sumak kawsay* in the Ecuadorian highlands. Guandinango's (2013) ethnographic work investigates the use and understanding of *sumak kawsay* in the Northern Kichwa community of Cotacachi. Guandinango finds that *sumak kawsay* is generally understood to mean "harmonious and balanced interrelationship between all beings" but the term has been minimized by the state to mean economic welfare. Additionally, Guandinango notes that participating North highland communities generally used the phrase *alli* (good/beneficial) *kawsay* to reference more day to day practices of reciprocity and community living rather than the more holistic vision of *sumak kawsay* (Guandinango 2013). Churuchumbi's (2014) ethnographic study in Cayambe similarly finds that the phrase *alli kawsay* is used on a more day to day level than *sumak kawsay*. Churichumbi's study explores how Indigenous peoples in Cayambe understand expressions of *sumak kawsay* in relation to dominant concepts of progress, development, and wellbeing. Ultimately, Churichumbi finds that participants have integrated aspects of the dominant conception of progress and development – generally more material factors such as infrastructure and university education – within their understandings of *sumak kawsay*. In other words, participants do not frame *sumak kawsay* as necessarily antithetical to broader aspects of capitalist development, but rather, they emphasize values of community, reciprocity, redistribution, and balanced relationship with nature within more day to day interactions.

Practice of Sumak Kawsay

Fewer studies have examined the practice of *sumak kawsay*. While many scholars have identified co-option and top-down "implementation" of *buen vivir* through policy of the Ecuadorian state (Bravo Díaz 2021; Uzendoski 2018), only a handful have analyzed how *sumak kawsay* is practiced within Indigenous communities. Bengtsson's (2019) explores the "Ecuadorian resource dilemma" and concludes that interpretations of *sumak kawsay* from different epistemologies (state, academics, and local communities) have contributed to the misinterpretation of *sumak kawsay* into the state's *buen vivir*. Bengtsson also uses a comparative approach between an Amazonian and highlands community to demonstrate the ways in which *sumak kawsay* retains place-based features amidst a broader

spiritual/ethical orientation. Overall, Bengtsson finds that *sumak kawsay* is understood and practiced as a lifestyle/set of values that organizes harmonious human/non human relations at the community level, and this meaning is often misconstrued when expanded to the state (Bengtsson 2019).

Looking more concretely at practices, some scholars have identified community-based tourism as a contemporary model through which communities enact *sumak kawsay* prioritizing community and environmental wellbeing over strictly economic growth-based pursuits; this site of *sumak kawsay* enactment has been identified amongst Kichwa artist and tourist organizations in Cotopaxi (Lyll, Colloredo-Mansfeld, and Quick 2020) and Indigenous tourism organizations in Cotacachi (Chassagne and Everingham 2019), and at Waira Churi, a tourist and cultural center in the Amazonian region (Jarrett 2014). Finally, other scholars have found that *sumak kawsay* is practiced in the form of resistance to environmental threat and the construction of more sustainable local economic models. Amongst a community in Sarayaku, Ecuador, Ramírez-Cendrero et al. (2017) find that *sumak kawsay* is practiced through a self-sufficiency (rather than economic surplus) logic that aims to use natural resources sustainably, share surplus production with the broader community, and organize cooperative forms of labor; these practices are threatened, however, by loss of territorial rights and other socioeconomic shifts in the region. The project of Kawsak Sacha (living forest) in Sarayaku, Ecuador, employs *sumak kawsay* and related Indigenous concepts in their campaign against oil exploration in their region, and as an alternative concept in their broader organizing around climate change issues (Sarayaku, 2015).

These ethnographic explorations of *sumak kawsay* meaning and practice highlight important considerations that will weave through this study and may illuminate more theoretical debates in the literature. First, while *sumak kawsay* holds overarching ethical/spiritual orientations, its understanding and practice articulate with local context. The majority of these studies focus on Amazonian Indigenous communities, whereas, in this study, the hacienda system and proximity to the capital city may have more significant influence over the cultural context. Additionally, ethnographic studies on *sumak kawsay* practice may indicate the ways in which Indigenous communities understand their local territorial defense as connected to global processes. This recognition will be a key consideration throughout the study,

especially in relation to Altmann's (2017) concerns of expanding *sumak kawsay* to global critiques of development.

Resistance

Pintag Amaru frames much of their organizing and projects around "*resistencia*." Beyond their more evident resistance to mining in their territories, many of their cultural, agricultural, educational and other projects are referred to as forms of resistance, making the concept of resistance an important topic to review as part of this research.

Resistance in Anthropology

Resistance did not receive significant anthropological attention prior to the 1950s, as much of this work focused on social order and structure rather than friction and tension. In the wake of anti-colonial movements following WWII, some anthropologists began to explore the resistance of marginalized groups and the incomplete presence of hegemony in colonial societies, proposing that "subaltern autonomy" existed outside of colonial representations (Guha 1989). In the 1980s-90s, a new body of work emerged that focused on more diffuse forms of power and resistance. James Scott's work identified "everyday acts of resistance" as ways in which people resisted domination in more subtle, less politically-organized ways (Scott 1985), and other scholars explored culturally-based forms of resistance expressed through subversive ritual practice and symbolism (Comaroff, 1985; Ong, 1988). Amidst this popularization of resistance in anthropology and other social sciences, some scholars began to critique its over-romanticization and overly broad definition (Weitz 2001). In *The Romance of Resistance* (Abu-Lughod 1990), Abu-Lughod argued that resistance should be used as a "diagnostic" of power in a given context that illuminates the structures in which individuals are enmeshed. Others argued that resistance promotes an idealized image of the oppressed which frames oppression as a state of mind rather than material condition (Brown 1996). More recently, scholarship on resistance has demonstrated a renewed interest in social justice movements and related activism in anthropology. As part of the broader

‘subjective turn’ some of these scholars have explored the role of emotion and affect in the mobilization movements against neoliberalism, capitalism, and state violence (Haugerud 2013; Laszczkowski 2019).

Resistance in Development Studies

Diverse explorations of resistance have also emerged within the intersection of anthropology and development studies. Within these fields, resistance was primarily understood as a conscious and direct act of opposition up until the poststructuralist turn in the 1980s (Pfeffer 2014). Poststructuralists, on the other hand, recognized resistance in more discursive and diffuse forms. This turn coincided with the 1980s financial crisis, at which point the dominant development discourse began to be more directly contested. Based on these divergent theoretical trends and historical circumstances, Pfeffer (2014) identifies four main conceptions of resistance within development studies literature: 1) *resistance as absolute refusal*, based on resistance as anti-imperialist, anticolonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-development stances and movements in the Global South (Escobar 1992; Quijano 2000); *resistance as reflexive contestation*, in which resistance can be practiced from a dominant position within power structures (Heron 2007); 3) *resistance as resilience*, characterized by material concerns and responses to immediate circumstances rather than macro-political concerns (Scott 1985); and 4) *resistance as appropriation, subversion, and re-envisioning*, which attends to processes of “reclaiming” by subaltern groups and recognizes the interplay between resistance and strategic integration of dominant ideas and structures (Esteva and Escobar 2017; McMichael and Weber 2020).

Enactments of Resistance

Within these broader anthropological and development-studies categories, more specific forms of resistance that relate specifically to the study community have been explored. Resistance to extractive industry is among the more direct and visible enactments, though this also takes diverse forms. Some post-development scholars, amongst others, have identified resistance to extraction as a site in which alternative conceptions of development are expressed, opposing neoliberal and extraction-based

development paths (Escobar 2003; Rumsey and Weiner 2004). Another element of resistance to extraction has encompassed broader concerns around cultural autonomy; many communities have associated their resistance to mining and drilling as a broader struggle to retain ancestral lands, practices and cosmovisions (Bebbington et al. 2008; Urkidi 2011). This relates to a broader category of resistance centered on culture *as* resistance. Oikonomakis (2020) explores a “culture of resistance” in Sarayaku, Ecuador, characterized by: anticolonial resistance, including the use of Inca names, rejection of colonial holidays, and resurgence of traditional architecture; anti-extractivist resistance, characterized by legal battles to protect their territory; and anti-capitalist resistance, practiced through communal labor organization and management of common resources.

Overall, anthropological and development-studies resistance literature points to the diversity of ways in which resistance can be understood and enacted. This study may add to and help illuminate the understanding that resistance can move beyond oppositional stances and towards more indirect, subtle, and generative forms of refusal and contestation. However, considering critiques of romanticizing resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990; Brown 1996), it is vital to keep both resistance and power structures within view, exploring Pintag Amaru’s enactments of agency without neglecting the ways in which larger structures constrain them.

Finally, while this study may illuminate and celebrate resistance, we must also follow Pintag Amaru in asking the big questions about our collective future – while resistance may be an enactment of strength and resilience in the now, how can we begin to build a world in which *resistance to* can become freedom and flourishing? I hope the chapters to come help us start to imagine responses. Though many scholars have discussed the meaning and expansiveness of *sumak kawsay*, few have explored its lived contemporary reality, its intersection with real political struggles, and its implication towards the broader structures in which we all live. To Pintag Amaru, this work is not just about them – it’s about all of us.

Grounding: Chapters 4-8

The following five chapters explore the story, work, and dreams of Pintag Amaru, and their engagement with the principle of *sumak kawsay*. Most members' words, and my attempts to organize and contextualize them, come here. Each chapter is part of a broader metaphor, a cycle of rooting, growing, and seeding once again. This framing is my own, but I believe it's a theory of change by which Pintag Amaru lives – that they've taught me – and from our reading this together I know it resonates with them too. These chapters are also organized thematically, to an extent. But so much of this story is interwoven, many themes are threaded throughout. The concept and practice of resistance, for example, emerges in every chapter and is a running theme. In addition, there is not a specific section covering Pintag Amaru's challenges – these are also brought up throughout, within the themes most relevant to them.

Throughout the coming chapters, you will also notice most “re” words – (re)surgence, (re)claiming, (re)learning and others – are framed with parentheses. This practice was first modeled by Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman, and like her, I use it for a few different reasons. Modifying the (re) conveys that Indigeneity has been ongoing and doesn't exist only in relation to its (re)surgence or (re)vival from colonial structures. In establishing continuity, the (re) also indicates that Indigenous knowledges and practices are dynamic – (re)vitalizing doesn't mean returning to past conditions, but rather, engaging Indigenous epistemologies as contemporary philosophies (Goeman 2008).

Finally, you'll see these chapters include A LOT of quotes. Pintag Amaru members often have a *way* of saying things that feels as important as the content – I want you to get many of their words directly. I've translated quotes from Spanish to English, of course, and have assigned all participants pseudonyms, but have left them largely unedited otherwise. As modeled by other scholars, I've attempted to retain the “sound and fury” of people's voices and lives – the repetition, “mhhm's,” pauses, and questions are real and important (Martinez 2021; Wacquant 2006). These quotes come from live conversations, unrehearsed and imperfect, and keeping them that way feels to me like keeping the life in them. These chapters are the heart of this work. I hope they speak to you as they have to me.

4 - Enraizando | Rooting

Diego: We come from a context, a context in which resistance was weapons, for example – responding with more violence. So I think that resistance comes from that context sometimes: from violence and weapons, from confronting power. And sometimes there's no other way. But I think that resistance within our organization is a way of understanding ourselves as human beings, inhabitants of this territory, with identity, and with a reconciliation of our history.

Because sometimes, I don't know, history has been so complex for Ecuador. For example, in the context of all the violence it has endured – being conquered, first by the Inca and then by the Spanish – changing so much about Ecuadorian culture and identity. So I think resistance can be reconciling ourselves with this history we have. Because we cannot deny that we come from descendants of Indigenous peoples, we come from an ancestral territory, millennia-old, unique in the world.

So, this is my way of thinking about resistance, as organizations that are recognizing ourselves, embracing all these ways of existing today and thinking about continuing to inhabit the territory. That's the form of resistance, to inhabit this territory that is millennia-old. Nowhere else in the world will you see the sun as you see it here or will you understand the sun as it's understood here in Ecuador or in Quito, in the center of everything. So it's to understand, it's to understand that this land is so sacred and so many people have inhabited it. And that's the resistance.

I mean, despite the fact that education has tried to erase many things, despite the fact that the language has been erased and we are no longer speaking the sweet language, or Kichwa, the *runashimi*, it's still there. Much has been taken away, a lot has been taken away, they have normalized a different way of being. So therefore resistance can come through education, learning the language, resistance of the word, listening to the ancestors, to the living grandparents who still know how to make an adobe, for example, and they teach us. Or they know what this medicinal plant is for and they teach us, and we record that, we do that, we store it in the digital era, we store it. We have information, we think of our myths, we remember our spirits, we remember our dead. That's also a form of resistance.

We're not going to go to the mining company and blow it up with bombs, thinking that, as they have violated the land, our actions should be similar. Instead we are going to think, while they destroy one place, our forms of resistance involve restoring another place. Because at some point it will be a space to sustain the Earth. Because, we're only here for a very short time.

So that's a form of resistance. I think resisting, resisting with culture, with identity. We also resist, we also protest with art, with theater, we are also protesting. That's also a form of resistance. Using theater, puppets, dance, music to say “no, we are here.”

The roots of Pintag Amaru's movement run deep – through history, through imposition, through resistance, through self. This chapter explores Pintag Amaru's grounding in their own (re)claiming of Indigenous identity, and all that it entails. In their understanding, Indigeneity is much more complex than heritage; it is also an active and intentioned way of being (Alfred and Cornthassel 2005; Simpson 2017). Pintag Amaru is engaging in the deep process of exploring and living what this means, in their place, amidst their history. From values, to language, to knowledges, to practices, Pintag Amaru has sought to mend the severing of this history, and use it to grow forward. This rooting is the foundation of their growth towards the radical possibilities of *sumak kawsay*.

Pintag Amaru

Maria: We had some exceptional teachers who put a little bug in our heads to search for our identity. So, from wanting to find ourselves, we said, “why don't we do something, form a collective? Shall we meet? What can we do?” Yeah, because we were like lost minds out there, far from each other, and we didn't recognize ourselves as Indigenous people, as people from the countryside. Some of us even felt ashamed to say we're from this place. So, from recognizing who we are, our identity, our ancestors, this idea came up to create a group. And we called ourselves Pintag Amaru.

The name – Pintag Amaru – holds deep significance. “Pintag” refers to the town near which they live, but holds a broader meaning. Pintag was the name of a local figure who led the defense of early Indigenous groups in the area against the Inca invasion, over 500 years ago. A confederation of pre-Inca ethnic groups – including Quitus, Caranquis, Otavalos, Pastos, and others – withstood Incan conquest for nearly two decades, and Pintag is marked by well-known battle sites. Pintag Amaru members understand themselves as descendents of these pre-Inca groups, specifically Quitus and Caranquis, making their name a reference to a long history of local resistance. Amaru, too, is an important symbol, a serpent in pre-Inca (and Inca) mythology (Kulmar 1999). Closely associated with the underworld, lakes and rivers, and the crossing of spiritual realms, Amaru was a name used by key leaders in the resistance to Spanish colonization of Ecuador, referencing both historical resistance and the winding waterways of the region (Kinti-Moss & Chango, 2018).

The early roots of Pintag Amaru emerged in 2013, when a smaller group of current members organized art-based education activities amongst local youth. In this same time period, as part of their own university studies, central organizers of the group were connecting with community elders, learning deeply about local identities, memories, and histories. They initially organized as a bridge to connect youth with their elders, expanding slowly to a broader focus on identity reclamation and activism. In these early years, members connected with Pachaysana – a larger collective based in Quito – through which they participated in classes focused on local identity, cultivating the discovery of self that would become the foundation of Pintag Amaru.

Esta Cuestión de No Estás Aquí | This Question of Not Being Here

Pablo: It's strong, this question of not being here – because, who is teaching you about the importance of this land? Conventional education doesn't. Look, it's six years of elementary school, six years of high school, six, seven years, ten years of university, and at no point do they give you a book that talks about the pre-Inca culture of Ecuador to delve into and study it as it should be studied – 12,000 years of history, 13,000 or even more – and they never give you two pages at some point in history and tell you about the pre-Incas or the Quitus or the Caranquis. They give you little bits there and then we skip to the Incas. A little about the Incas, the history of the Civil War, Atahualpa and Huascar. And then it's all about the colonial period. Yes, everything is about 500 years of the Spanish conquest, the colony, the revolution of people who weren't even Indigenous. No, because the Indigenous people continued to be repressed.

Pintag's history is key in understanding Pintag Amaru's contemporary process of (re)claiming. As Pablo discusses, much of what Pintag Amaru members have experienced is both overt and subtle attempts to erase Indigenous presence in Ecuador. Pintag Amaru members are descendents of pre-Inca Indigenous populations, affected by both Inca and Spanish colonization. In addition to the direct violence against Indigenous bodies and nations, Pintag Amaru members highlight continued erasure of histories and stories that underlie Kichwa cultural identity, a broader recognition discussed by many Indigenous scholars within the context of settler-colonialism (Alfred and Corntassel 2005). Through various forms, Pintag Amaru members see continued efforts to deny and devalue Indigenous existence, making their own (re)identification and (re)surgence vivid acts of resistance.

Members primarily root this attempted erasure in racial hierarchies constructed through Spanish colonization, particularly with the *hacienda* system. Hacienda was a Spanish colonial structure in which wealthy White Spanish settlers (*hacendados*) took over large areas of land to cultivate in service to the Spanish crown. Though many Indigenous people were enslaved as laborers prior to this time, the Spanish officially turned administration of the Indigenous population to hacendados in 1857, which established a system of forced Indigenous labor that lasted over 300 years (Tuaza 2014). The hierarchical positions of hacienda – generally White Spanish “bosses,” Mestizos who directly managed the workforce, and Indigenous laborers – also came to form hierarchical ethnic categories, the effects of which carry on (Thurner 1993). Though the hacienda system was legally dismantled in 1964 as part of an agrarian reform movement, hacienda legacies heavily shape many areas, including Pintag (Rojas Rodriguez 2023), as I’ll discuss throughout this chapter .

The significant majority of Pintag Amaru members’ parents and/or grandparents came to Pintag from nearby areas as hacienda workers. As part of the dismantling of the system, some haciendas were partitioned and sold to laborers – many of the families within Pintag Amaru bought their land in the 1960s-70s as part of this process, and remain there today. During this time, however, many peoples of Indigenous descent in Ecuador were coming to identify as Mestizos and/or campesinos, attempting to move away from the ideologies and stigmas of Indigenous identity constructed through hacienda ethnic hierarchies (Jackson and Warren 2005). Historically – and still reverberating today – identification as “*indio*”⁹ was associated in the dominant culture with “backwardness” and ignorance; in order to advance in society, many people were compelled to “leave their Indigeness behind” through cultural identification as Mestizo/a (Blosser 2017).

As a result, Pintag’s population is characterized by a mix of identifications. Though most Pintag Amaru members’ grandparents and/or parents speak fluent Kichwa and were born nearby, the majority of surrounding community members identify as Mestizo/a. Movements towards re-indigenization in Ecuador

⁹ Spanish; “Indio” refers to “Indian,” historically often used as a derogatory term towards Indigenous peoples throughout Latin America (Radcliffe 1996).

began to expand in the 1980s-90s, but the ethnic hierarchies and stigmas that underlie these processes continue to shape social dynamics in Pintag (Rojas Rodriguez 2023).

Pintag Amaru members associate these histories with a continued devaluing and dismissal of Indigenous identity, often carried out through direct acts of discrimination.

Pablo: I don't have children, and I'm very afraid to bring a child into the world, into this world that is very unbalanced, this world that is very classist, very discriminatory, right? And also, like, how do I raise a child, hmm, with the pride I feel? – when I know they will suffer discrimination just for being Indigenous. Mhmm. Just because of my long hair, I've received discrimination. And because of my face, because of my way of speaking, because of the way I look. Even sometimes when you're in a shopping center or when you're in a restaurant, right? Like a restaurant, let's say, where normally people of economic power go, and sometimes you want to treat yourself too and decide to go to a restaurant like that, and the first thing you get is strange looks, like, what are you doing here? As if my money doesn't count.

Stemming from the ethnic hierarchies and stigmas initially constructed through colonization, Pintag Amara members discuss how Indigenous peoples are still perceived as “less than,” encouraging many to avoid identification.

Emilio: I remember in school I had a classmate who was from Riobamba, Indigenous, with Indigenous parents. So on one occasion, we were talking, and I asked her, "Do you know how to speak Kichwa?" She said, "Yes." I said, "speak," and she said, "No, because they'll hear me here, and they'll make fun of me, and I'll feel bad." Of course. And I was just like, wow. I mean, it's crazy, right? I mean, it's our language, it's something of our identity. And some people I've worked with in the construction field, they are Indigenous, but calling them Indigenous makes them feel bad because they still have this idea in their minds that being Indigenous is less.

It is amidst this challenging backdrop that many Pintag Amaru members are going through the long process of (re)claiming and (re)engaging with Indigenous identity. As should be evident from Ecuador's history, identification with (or away from) Indigeneity is heavily influenced by political and cultural context. Many scholars understand Indigeneity in the Andes to be an expression of “historical consciousness,” more an awareness of and identification with a pre-Hispanic heritage than a static category (Rojas Rodriguez 2023; Wade 2014). “Historical consciousness” is understood to be lived, carried out through everyday forms of action and interaction (*ibid*). Accordingly, as Pintag Amaru members demonstrate, the deep process of (re)claiming and (re)living Indigeneity begins in the self.

Diego: I'm not mestizo. Yes, a long time ago, I understood that I'm not mestizo. I consider myself Indigenous, yes. I do consider myself Indigenous, but it's more that I belong to this territory, I am from this territory. Although I don't speak an Indigenous language fluently, I understand a lot of Kichwa. Mhm. I know many words. I'm also constantly studying Kichwa, but I've never been in a fully Indigenous context. My parents, apart from considering themselves part of this mixing that we've had, they also considered themselves very Mestizo at some point and forgot about their Indigenous roots. They forgot their Indigenous roots and within that, Christianity comes in.

I am in a territory that is Indigenous, that has ancient and unique knowledge in the world, I mean, it's unique. By being here in Ecuador, there's nothing else like it. If you go to Peru or Colombia, you don't have anything similar because things happened here that haven't happened anywhere else in the world. Mhm. And that's how I understood. I understood the value of this worldview and said, no, well, I belong to this place. And also in my blood, there is Indigenous descent. I can't say that I'm White, Mestizo, Spanish, I mean – I am Indigenous. I am not re-appropriating, but recognizing, this identity. Exactly. So from there, we changed the context of who we are. For example, with my family, my partner and I decided to identify ourselves as Indigenous from the Kichwa nationality. It wasn't just about decolonization exactly. Because, who are we? It is remembering who we are.

It has been and continues to be a process as well. For example, with long hair, for instance, it comes from a very Indigenous context, mhhm, and from a philosophy of thinking that your dreams and thoughts are in your hair and they are very, very valuable for you to have that, mhm, to have that as a value of your identity, right? And in many Indigenous cultures here, long hair is important too, but for example, when the Spanish arrived, the first thing they did when they saw long hair was to cut it, no? To mark who they are and identify these people and take away their identity. I mean, to cut their bond in a sense. For me, long hair used to be a sense of rebellion, like anti-system, anti everything, anti-religion, anti-police and everything. But it was like later I understood that it's not about that process. For example with my son now it's like, he loves his hair so much because he understands this – I am Indigenous, I *am*, I *am*, that's why my hair is like this, that's why I have this clarity, this knowledge. It's because there's something deeper than just cutting your hair and being in line with what the system or society says. Mhm. So it's kind of, it's a lifelong process I think – understanding who you are.

The personal and collective (re)claiming of Indigeneity is foundational to Pintag Amaru's movement. While some members have always understood themselves to be Indigenous, and others remain unsure of this identification, the significant majority have more recently begun to (re)identify. As many Indigenous scholars have discussed, Indigeneity is understood to be actively lived from the self outward, and individual (re)Indigenization is often a foundation of broader decolonization (Alfred and Corntassel 2005). Amongst Pintag Amaru members, this (re)identification is occurring amidst a historical backdrop of constructed ethnic hierarchies, Mestizo identification, and the closely related *blanqueamiento*

(“whitening”) – a system of colonially-rooted ideologies throughout Latin America which positioned Whiteness at the top of social hierarchies (Wade, 2014). Accordingly, Pintag Amaru’s (re)claiming is an act of affirming Indigenous presence amidst erasure and devaluation.

John: What the movement for me is really about is reconnecting with their identity through the land, right? Through their vision of how they relate to the everything out there, meaning, their spirituality, their language. Some people feel, you can't just declare yourself as Indigenous – well, it really makes sense if you think about the fact that their parents, or at least their grandparents speak Kichwa, referred to themselves as Indigenous, but then went through a process of what we call Whitening, right? Which happened all around the country, but especially in these rural areas just outside of Quito. And so this is like, that refusal now of the Whitening of our history. It's the re-Indigenization of who we are, right?

As most Pintag Amaru members understand it, *not* claiming Indigenous would be a continued denial of themselves, a succumbing to attempts to erase their existence.

Maria: The dream of Pintag Amaru is to create community in various communities where we are recognizing ourselves again as Indigenous people. Because we are Indigenous, we have the practices, we have the seeds, we have the mountains, we have the ancient water here, millennia-old, billions of years old in this place. And the information about them is also there. We are people of this land. How can we deny that we are, that we belong here, belong to this land?

The group has mixed relationships with Indigeneity, however. Some have always understood themselves to be Indigenous. But the significant majority of Pintag Amaru members grew up identifying as Mestizo/a, which they attribute to the influence of a system that seeks to invisibilize Indigenous presence.

Pablo: This process is super interesting in my life because I grew up feeling I was mestizo, I grew up convinced that I am mestizo. Because in the educational system, in school, in high school, they convince you of that – that if you were born as a product of colonization, you are no longer Indigenous.

However, through their engagement with Pintag Amaru, most of these members have come to identify as Indigenous.

Alejandro: I started participating with Pintag Amaru as a local student on the first occasion that we were able to develop the program. So, I actually went to the class without having this clarity, this knowledge of where I come from or who I am and why I do what I do, why my face, my features, have Indigenous traits. And since I didn't know, when we started with the class of identity, narration, and then with theater, and speaking, and like reconstructing that history that we carry, it helped me a lot to understand where I come from, right? –Why my face is like this and why I speak like I do – because I have that dialect, like Spanish, but also Kichwa.

Many members associate their Indigenous identification with pride and empowerment despite continued discrimination.

Emilio: Because of the color of your skin you are discriminated against. But this doesn't just happen here, this is worldwide. Yes, everywhere, yes. But something that maybe makes me, let's say, very strong, is knowing who I am. So that makes me not feel inferior to anyone, of course, and in this case, maybe, well, not let myself be humiliated. That's the situation. No, because at some point, when I didn't have this, let's say, this knowledge, when I hadn't studied about who I am, where I come from, then it was very easy to make me feel less than other people. Exactly. But now that I have all this knowledge, I know where I come from. I know who I am.

Two of the core members of the group, however, remain hesitant around their own claims to Indigenous identity.

Sofia: I know that my roots come from Indigenous people, of course. And yes, I'm super clear about that, but I'm telling you, I still don't have that complicated issue well defined. It's also about the way you dress, the way you think about things too. Because what I'm saying, I mean, it's from before, I say, if my ancestors were Indigenous. Because even their clothing, I remember my grandmother, she dressed like that with their typical costumes, with their wide skirts, their hats, their braids, their shawls. So I remember my grandmother like that, because I didn't know her for a long time. Aha, but she was Indigenous, my grandmother was Indigenous and she came from Indigenous people and my mom also descends from that. So I also think that I am, but as I said, I don't know, it's a bit complex for me to define myself.

What Sofia highlights is the question of what it means to be Indigenous, to (re)claim and (re)find Indigeneity in a context of attempted erasure and disconnection. This is a complex question in Ecuador. Amongst other power-laden attempts at classification, the Ecuadorian state attempted to identify Indigenous identity in the 1950 census through three attributes: shoes, housing, and language – at the time, Indigeneity was heavily associated with poverty, rural living, and more isolated linguistic groups (Clark 1998). Given the historical context of colonization, and the broader concern in setting static and superficial definitions of Indigeneity, these attempts are deeply problematic. Most anthropologists and Indigenous scholars understand Indigeneity as lived and dynamically constructed, rather than statically defined, leading to an emphasis on how Indigeneity is understood and practiced (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Ellison 2018). For the majority of Pintag Amaru members, too, their self-defining as Indigenous rests on exploring and practicing what it can mean, now, to (re)connect.

What it Means to be Indigenous in Our World

Mateo: We have such a low official percentage of Indigenous people in Ecuador because of how we associate with Indigenous. Indigenous often would mean, like, if you live in the city, you don't live in your territory, then you're no longer Indigenous. If you no longer speak your language, you're not Indigenous. If you've left your traditional dress, you're not Indigenous, right? And so there really needs to be a rethinking of what it means to be Indigenous in our world, right?

While Pintag Amaru members face a context in which much direct connection to heritage has been disrupted, they are invested in a deep process of (re)connecting and (re)creating. Pintag Amaru members have clear, recent Indigenous ancestry, but they see the claim to Indigeneity as much more than that – it must be accompanied by (re)connection to nationhoods, knowledges, values, and practices.

John: We want people to start to kind of feel themselves connected to their roots. But it's much more than having watched other people do it, like on social media, you know, and then having some conversations and then kind of having that declaration, right? But what Pintag Amaru has really done is gone through a rich, lengthy process... I mean, at this point we're talking about seven, eight years of exploring who they are and who they want to be.

Beginning almost a decade ago, Pintag Amaru members have sought out connections to elders in their area, as well as other Kichwa communities. Their exploration of identity has involved a deeply intentional process of searching for the people, knowledges, and stories that remain.

Diego: We are in an ancient territory. Yes, yes. When I see all these mountains, I simply have an awareness of something else. The mountains are there for a reason. Yes, yes. And it's super interesting understanding the astronomy that is only here in Ecuador, it's not anywhere else, and each mountain is unique because it's only here in Ecuador. Mhm. And the movement of the sun and the moon and the stars is only here in Ecuador. So unique. So it's like saying no, how can I say that I'm not Indigenous if I have this knowledge and I have this land, this environment, all this awareness?

But it's also a process of learning from Indigenous cultures. Mhm. I mean, because it can't just be about being in a territory and that's it, because if so, everyone would have done it, right? And that's why people can't understand these things just by standing on the territory, you have to educate yourself, right? Mhm. And yes, it took time for me. And it's also the universe that allows these things to happen. Because I was able to find a context of Andean knowledge and learning from elders and mothers, very deep in medicine, ritual, I mean, in the sacred, fire, water, earth, wind. So, there came a moment also of understanding the worldview, not only the Andean one, but also the Equinoctial, that of these lands. So it's also a process of education, It's not like it just happens because you're on the territory, of course. You have to seek it out and learn.

In pursuing this deep learning, Pintag Amaru's intent is the (re)surgence of *lived* Indigeneity in their territories, again moving beyond static identifications. Many Indigenous scholars, similarly recognizing

the lived nature of Indigeneity, have discussed the importance of active practice in contemporary (re)Indigenization (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003). As Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred has described it, “being Indigenous means thinking, speaking, and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one’s Indigeneity,” recognizing the challenges and discontinuity that have come from histories of colonization (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, pg. 614). These perspectives illuminate the deeply intentional and practiced nature of Pintag Amaru’s efforts towards (re)surgence. Identifying as Indigenous is a small part of their resistance; (re)Indigenization – through practices, language, spiritualities, ceremony, and kin relations shape the depth of their (re)claiming.

Esto, Si, es Nuestro | Yes, This is Ours

Roberto: Well, the projects that have been done in Pintag Amaru regarding ancestral knowledge, well, actually, we have done many, right? But one that I really liked and impacted me is, for example, the pingullo [Andean flute] workshop that we did, right? Why did that impact me? Look, I come from a family of pingulleros. My grandfather was a pingullos player, right? My uncle was a flutist, he played the flute for the Inti Raymi. So, listening to the children in the pingullos workshop starting to play the pingullo – I mean, well, it comes back to me, like nostalgia, right?

Before the houses weren’t like this. There was my house and here was a house that belonged to my uncle. You could hear a pingullo from the hill, you always heard a pingullo and my mom would say, “Dad is coming,” – I mean, my grandfather, her dad. And actually, he would come down playing the pingullo, but as soon as he entered my house he would hide the pingullo in his jacket and conceal it. I used to wonder why my grandfather would hide the pingullo. So, in a party that took place here in Pintag my grandfather was a pingullo player and there I understood why my grandfather hid the pingullo. My mom didn’t like him playing the pingullo because my mom already suffered from what was known as whitening, the famous whitening, where you couldn’t be Indigenous here because it was frowned upon. And if you played pingullo and you danced like an old man, you weren’t within what was expected, let’s say, in this context of Catholicism. It wasn’t the respectable thing, playing the pingullo wasn’t valued.

So, seeing the children here in Pintag Amaru playing a pingullo, and starting to recognize that this was indeed ours – look, for me, it’s one of the most impactful projects. Personally, the workshops of pingullo that have been done are like saying “yes, this is ours.”

In Pintag Amaru’s (re)claiming of Indigenous identity, they’ve pursued a process of reviving cultural practices, and the values that underlie them. Roberto describes one example of this work – given the historical context of colonization, haciendas, and “whitening,” (re)engaging with Kichwa practices

serves to connect a severed thread between generations. Pintag Amaru seeks to restore pride in ancestral practices, addressing internalized oppression intertwined with the historical context of colonization.

Sofia: We consider ourselves Indigenous and we do things that have a lot to do with being Indigenous. Mhm. Just look. Because now there are things like, for example, even Indigenous people themselves no longer want to recognize themselves as Indigenous. Mmm, and the children of these people are even worse now. And now it's like, that type of denial has been romanticized and people are like "oh, there's the old man who does the things of the ancestors." Mhm. And it shouldn't be like that, because the old man who does the things of the ancestors has so much knowledge that if he dies and goes away, there will be no one else to do it, no one else, no one in the harvests, in the plantings, in the creation of drums, building with adobe

As Sofia discusses, many ancestral practices – in agriculture, medicine, and arts, for example – have become undervalued, seen as irrelevant to contemporary life. However, these practices encompass deep knowledge, increasingly critical to revive and integrate.

For many Pintag Amaru members, ancestral knowledges have always been present, even as identification with Indigeneity has been suppressed.

Javier: It has happened in many, many places, within Christianity, that you kind of forget about these things. But in practices, for example, my father is super campesino, with Indigenous practices. He knows about the moon, when to sow, when not to sow, what things go at what time, what plants to use, how to work with animals, how to work with horses – so a lot, a lot of Indigenous knowledge, I mean, from these lands. Mhmm. And I mean, it's like there, there I understand a little, my perception opens up when I learn from my father, for example, to cultivate the land. It's like, I mean – it's not that he doesn't know, right?

Many of the knowledges Pintag Amaru seeks to (re)engage remain, but must be revalued within their connection to Indigeneity. The hope is that Pintag Amaru's work is part of restoring pride, not only in Indigenous identification, but in the knowledges and practices they understand to be part of it.

Pablo: We had knowledge in medicine. We had it. We had astronomical knowledge. We had knowledge of architecture and engineering. And all of that, colonization wanted to cover up, wanted to erase, wanted to bury. But our hope is that there are people there who are aware of that and who want to work so that knowledge returns, returns to flourish, and returns to strengthen itself.

La Lengua Dulce | The Sweet Language

Mateo: We are trying again to speak Kichwa, which is our native language. It was here long before. My grandparents also spoke it, but I never had the opportunity to share with them. When I met them, they were very old and hardly spoke anymore, I never understood them. I was very young, but I would have liked to. And I think it's like a very important language for our communities, recognizing that we are Indigenous, that many peoples here in Ecuador maintain their language. And I am proud of them because they still persist despite a dominant system that sometimes wants to oppress them, wants to deny them that language. But they persist as peoples who are wanting to maintain their customs, their nations, their language.

In Pintag Amaru's (re)connecting to Indigeneity, they are working to revitalize their mother language – Kichwa, *runashimi*. Most members' grandparents – and in some cases, parents – were fluent in Kichwa, but avoided speaking it and teaching it to their children due to the discrimination that came with Indigenous identity.

Roberto: My grandmother did speak Kichwa. Yes, she spoke, but obviously the dominant language here as a result of the conquest was Spanish. So, they humiliated people who spoke Kichwa, they made them feel inferior and also forcibly took away the language from our ancestors, my grandparents, and great-grandparents. So that was very intense. But yes, my grandmother, my little grandmother did speak Kichwa. Mhm. And also my grandparents on both my father's and mother's side. They did speak Kichwa.

In addition to the shaming that came with speaking Kichwa, the state also imposed specific policies of language assimilation that ultimately fostered the decline of Indigenous languages in Ecuador (Radcliffe 1996). However, Pintag Amaru understands Kichwa language to be an important feature of their cultural identity. Though most members grew up with Kichwa words regularly interspersed in their vocabulary, few know more than a handful of phrases and sentences. Pintag Amaru is now working with other Kichwa-speaking communities in the area to host a variety of Kichwa classes. Many of these classes focus on language-learning through the arts, particularly oriented towards youth. Specifically, Pintag Amaru has worked with a Kichwa hip-hop group to create workshops in which youth compose songs and raps in Kichwa.

Javier: The peoples in Ecuador still persist. They are always in the struggle of not losing their language. There are youth that, now, in these times, have taken a lot of interest in the language. The young people from their own communities, they are starting to speak Kichwa again through music, as a way to resist.

Amidst these creative forms, Pintag Amaru still understands the difficulty of relearning a language, especially with few remaining native speakers in their community. Progress is slow and tedious, but by collaborating with other communities, they are moving forward.

Gabriel: It seems important to me to have that language that was our native language long before, the language that was repressed. Then, they were denying us, denying our language through the Spanish conquest, destroying many things. They destroyed many things, and now it's hard, it's still hard to pick up learning Kichwa again. But if we are in that struggle, in that process, we will achieve it. And I think that over time we will be able to bring the community together more and try to take up this language that is very important as an ancestral people, as Indigenous peoples.

El Universo Mismo Era Sagrado | The Universe Itself was Sacred

Pablo: I've thought a lot about the beliefs of the original peoples here and in trying to understand what God was for them. But the word "God" didn't exist. And they saw certain things as sacred, but it was because, for them, the universe itself was sacred. It wasn't like an identity or a being. Mhm. And I really like that idea has a lot to do with reality. Like, there's no all-powerful being who creates us. But there are many circumstances, there are many forces out there that we don't understand and that are as big and powerful as we are. Of course, it's like, if we look at our own molecules, atoms under a microscope – we are going to find a little universe there. I don't know. It seems to me that if we look small enough, maybe we're seeing big enough at the same time.

Pintag Amaru's reconnection to Indigenous identity is grounded in exploration and (re)engagement with Kichwa cosmological and spiritual beliefs. As Pintag Amaru members put it, they are reconnecting to the Andean cosmovision, to the memory of *los abuelos*.¹⁰

Maria: I don't identify with religions; I rather have that vision of being able to learn more about the ancestral worldview and wisdom of our grandparents, right? And what I do, I do it thinking about this process of understanding my own history and how to value that memory that, in one way or another, is within us, but that we lost for one reason or another. It's like something that slipped from our hands, but it's our responsibility today to rekindle that memory of our ancestors, of our grandparents.

These Indigenous cosmological beliefs were heavily impacted by, and often syncretized with, Inca spiritual beliefs and the Spanish imposition of Catholicism. Many of the buildings in the central historic district of Quito tell this story. If you look carefully beneath some of the massive Spanish

¹⁰ *Spanish*; "abuelos" refers to grandparents, often used to refer to ancestors more generally.

cathedrals, older bricks lie beneath. First, bricks of Inca temples, and below them, an even older set – each colonizing power both literally and ideologically built upon those before them.

Alejandro: I don't believe in God. I can believe in a supreme being. But I don't believe in the God who came and murdered. There was a genocide in this territory that came in the name of God and imposed virgins on us. They imposed saints on us, they imposed practices on us, they imposed many things on us. I don't believe in that God. Mhm. I don't believe. I mean, I don't believe in your murdering God, in few words. But I do believe in a higher power. Yes, I do believe this is not coincidence. The things that happen are not coincidence and there is a great spirit, the great weaver accompanies us and it's like the energy, the great spiral, the, the, the high, the low, the good, the bad, the yin and the yang. But there is this consciousness of the sacred, right? But we can't believe in something that is going to tell you, in the name of God, you can go and end and exploit an oil well and conquer the whole community with that religion.

Many members discuss colonization as a violent imposition of religion that drastically influenced dominant beliefs, the legacies of which carry forward today. Especially as they relate to relationships with land, Pintag Amaru members discuss deep shifts that have occurred between Kichwa spiritualities and the imposition of Catholicism.

Javier: Part of our spirituality remains, but on other parts they imposed a god or a saint. Instead, before all those in the Spanish conquest, before all those saints, those gods, there was a connection with the earth as a god, or even the sun or the moon. It was a god because they were grateful for another day of life, they said thanks for the moon that was there at night, always there serving them well for their crops, for their plantings, everything, everything. But so much was imposed. And now it's like religion, Christianity, a saint.

I'll never forget an early conversation with Roberto – as he put it, “*when they made God a human, everything changed.*” He was referencing a broad shift that Pintag Amaru is now working to restore in their (re)connection to collective, land-based beliefs and ontologies.

Roberto: Before, we were seen as a whole. The human being is no more than the earth, more than the animals, no? – all the same, right? And the moment you look at the world in that way, everything around you, well, you're going to worry about the air you breathe, the water you drink, what you eat, what you sow. That's vital. What we have recovered from our ancestors is that we are no more than the earth, because we ourselves are the earth. So, to continue with a harmonious life, with a happy life as well, I mean, you must care about everything around you and not just one person. And also, that's the collective work that our ancestors teach you, it's like, you don't work alone for yourself, you work for your community and you are part of her.

Inti Raymi | Festival of the Sun

Pintag Amaru's spiritual and cosmological foundations weave through all they do. To them, Kichwa culture is about much more than festivities and ceremonies – it's about practices, ethics, and values that underlie them. Pintag Amaru is revitalizing some ceremonies – in this case, Inti Raymi – in ways that (re)engage deeper ethical orientations.

Inti Raymi is a traditional Inca ceremony, centered around the sun god, Inti, which takes place on the winter solstice. Given Pintag Amaru's association with pre-Inca heritage and resistance, revitalization of an Inca ceremony reveals complex threads of their contemporary engagement with Indigeneity. Though Pintag Amaru recognizes the Inca as, historically, a colonizing power, they also embrace Inca traditions as enduring connections to Indigenous cosmologies, beliefs, and practices in the region, especially considering their understanding that many pre-Inca belief systems were syncretized and subsumed within Inca traditions. More broadly, Pintag Amaru members see Inca and pre-Inca cosmologies as closely related arms of a broader “Andean cosmovision,” and engage Inca ceremonies, like Inti Raymi, as a return to regional Indigenous roots.

It's key to Pintag Amaru, however, to engage more deeply than replicating Inti Raymi ceremonies; more so, they seek to revitalize and recreate Inti Raymi, and other ceremonies, in ways that affirm broader value systems of the “Andean cosmovision.” As members describe, some Ecuadorian communities still celebrate Inti Raymi, but few in the Pintag area engage with its deeper meanings.

Diego: The other organizations simply want to achieve their celebration, It's a celebration around the person, Pintag. But for us, it's not. It's a celebration around the importance of Indigenous peoples, the importance of knowledge, the importance of defending the land and the knowledge that is maintained by Indigenous peoples.

I was lucky to celebrate Inti Raymi with Pintag Amaru last year, the first in which they've held a community-wide celebration. We gathered before the sun rose to drink *guayusa* (an Amazonian tea) and prepare for the day. Community members were invited to the main ceremony – at noon, with the sun directly above us – in which we circled around a huge Andean cross made of fruits, seeds, flowers, cloth,

stones, and many other offerings. Each direction represented an element – earth, water, air, and fire – to which we granted recognition, blessings, and thanks.

Diego: It's about that unique moment in space-time. It's unique. Mhm. And we are celebrating that time because we recognize that we are in a unique place in the universe. And not acknowledging it and not celebrating it is a bit ungrateful to the place where we are. So we as Indigenous people want to celebrate it in that way, and that's where we come in, a bit like, “no, but it's not the character, not Pintag, Pintag isn't all it.” It was also about the solstices and equinoxes. The solstices and equinoxes are much older. Of course, the whole life of the universe is here. So much broader than that. That's what we want to celebrate. We invite you, come, share the sacred fire. Reflect, of course.

Pintag Amaru members frame the ceremony around reflection and gratitude for Pachamama. Speakers were asked to offer a recognition of each of the four elements' roles in existence, and to offer thanks.

Maria: As a collective, we're trying to emphasize that it's not just about harvesting and serving ourselves, but also about being grateful. Because it's energy, it's life. The earth provides food, we feed ourselves from that. So much of that value has been lost – the value of being very aware that if the earth gives to us, we also have to be thankful.

While working to revitalize a traditional Inca ceremony, Pintag Amaru members recognize conditions of change. The reflection in the ceremony focused on present conditions of environmental damage and broader Indigenous resurgence. Using the “seed” of tradition, Pintag Amaru members engaged the ceremony to reaffirm very present values.

Alejandro: We don't believe in saints, but we do celebrate around an important day, like Inti Raymi, for example, and we celebrate it, enjoy it, and share it with other communities as well. It's a form of resistance, it's also a form of resistance. Yes, and now, it's not so much about remembering. Now it's about recreating. Yes, because we are recreating, we are not just like “oh, this was how it used to be. Let's not do it like this now, let's do it, let's recreate how it was.” Because it's not, it doesn't remain. So, then, recreating is the word, I think. We already have the seed, we already have the potato that was missing, you understand? We already have the seed of, I don't know, corn that was missing. So we can continue to maintain the celebration.

Todos Nos Complementamos | We All Complement Each Other

Maria: We [Pintag Amaru members] are 12 legally associated individuals. Yes, the majority of them are men. Mhmm. It's interesting, because at the family level, women are often in charge, and that's important. But here, the majority of us are men and that's partly why we also have so many constructions. I mean, there's strength, there's masculine strength, and they all have their own contribution and knowledge in something, and that's how we've managed to build so quickly, from our perspective here. There's also equality of things here, in decisions and contributions. It's like each person has their skill in something. So

we all complement each other. And still if there were more women, it would be good, because even in children we see it – when there are workshops for children with like fifteen boys and four girls.

Gender is one of the more complex areas in which Pintag Amaru is navigating the (re)engagement of ancestral values and beliefs. One of the first things I noticed at Pintag Amaru was the significant majority of male members. Pintag Amaru includes 12 central members – who serve as the central organizers of the broader group of host families and students – and only 4 of these members are women. Over the past few summers, I've asked participants – especially the women – about the gender imbalance. Though they want to see more women participating, in general, they did not describe the current condition as a significant problem, highlighting to me the complementary ways in which members contribute and relate.

The concept of complementarity is at the root of ancestral Kichwa beliefs around gender and gender roles. *Kari-warmi* (Kari - male, Warmi - female, in Kichwa) is a Kichwa concept indicating the intertwinement and complementarity of masculine and feminine energies (Cervone and Cucurí 2019). This principle is prevalent in Pintag Amaru's practices and work – even mountains, plants, and directions are associated with the masculine and/or feminine. Traditionally, kari-warmi also encompassed distinct, yet flexible gender roles, associating women with the *chacra* (garden/home) and men with the *selva* (forest/hunting). Within these roles, masculine and feminine were understood to be complementary, different, though equally valued and respected (Hidalgo-Capitán et al. 2014). Most members associate Spanish colonization with the imposition of more patriarchal attitudes and structures.

Valeria: Before there were roles like that, I mean, it was complementary. Women maybe were in the fields and men went hunting. Mhmm. And yes. I mean, women could also go and everything, but they complemented each other. But this comes from religion with the Spanish as well. How they see women as something bad. Like, I don't know, something that cannot, like, something like that didn't even have a spirit, they said, less than straw...I mean, it was with religion, I think, belittling women. And with that, like the whole society. Yeah, well, it's something that is experienced on a large scale and maybe men took this moment to say "oh, we rule, we're more."

Most Pintag Amaru members were raised in what they describe as *machismo* culture in the home – discussing distinct power dynamics and violence against women – which they associate with the

imposition of patriarchal religious views. In their (re)claiming of Indigenous identity and cosmovision, Pintag Amaru members are navigating the complexity of present patriarchal context with the (re)engagement of *kari-warmi* principles. Distinct gender roles are an aspect of the current context in Pintag; in general, women have much greater responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and childcare, and men are more likely to be employed away from the home, though this is changing. These roles are still evident at Pintag Amaru – women often do much of the cooking, and some members attribute the lower participation of women to their childcare responsibilities at home. Central members have become so through regular participation in Pintag Amaru activities and organizing, and participation of women, in general, has been lower than men. However, they are working towards shifts; on one hand, men are increasingly taking on cooking and other tasks; on the other hand, members are understanding their other roles as distinct, but not imposed. Overall, it seems as if members are embracing the *kari-warmi* concepts of gender complementarity and equal valuing, but moving away from distinctly-defined roles across gendered lines.

Maria: We've realized that we are capable of doing many other things besides something specific that was set before, right? So maybe there can be a mix between how our ancestors lived. But they're not going to tell a woman that she's only the maid anymore; you have skills, you're going to do the finance part, for example, because it's your ability, and you're going to be part of the whole system that's going to work here, let's say. So, you have new roles now, but maybe you won't feel less valued – they're important things that you also have to do, right? It's not the same anymore. And if they want to go into construction – I don't know if you've noticed, but it's great – in Pintag Amaru, many women work in construction. And there are these new roles, but still. I mean, it's not that you do it because you don't know how to do this part of finances, but because that's your strength. Mhmm. And it's what you want. I mean, there are established roles, but it's about what you want, not something imposed on you.

Women reported that, though there is still improvement to be made, gender roles are shifting more in Pintag Amaru than at home. Women in the group frequently affirmed they feel equally heard and respected within the core group, and haven't seen leadership division across gendered lines. Women members have also begun organizing their own meetings and programs in an effort to recruit more women participants in the organization. When I was working with them last summer, Pintag Amaru women leaders began *Warmis of Pintag Amaru* meetings, inviting other women from the community to join the group and participate in programs. These early meetings brought to the surface many experiences

of violence, pain, and challenges, to an extent I hadn't imagined. But I think these emerged, in huge part, because a safe space between women was created.

The context for these women, and for Pintag Amaru more broadly, is complex. They have significantly more male participants – in part because many women are already overburdened by more contemporary gender expectations – and yet, are shifting gendered roles within their own organization. As they deconstruct these roles, they are also engaging with the ancestral principles of *kari-warmi*, which traditionally had roles of its own. Within this navigation, they seem to be embracing the *kari-warmi* principles of complementarity – equally valuing different contributions to the whole – while expanding and diversifying the types of roles needed in their contemporary organizing.

Sofia: It's like this idea, I mean, of the people who are in construction, for example. I don't know. I mean, it's like, maybe these are more modern ideas of who is in that role, mhm – but we are always looking for something complementary, right?

Estábamos Fuertes, Gracias | We Were Strong, Thankfully

Gabriel: Something that happens here, especially when we talk about our own identity, is how our history has been told by the victors. The Spanish wrote the history, and the descendants of the Spanish wrote the history, and our current societal norms are based on that. But what about the losers? Do we just have to follow along? But maybe we're not losers. Perhaps we are the ones who resist. Because our memory continues, because our, because the knowledge that our grandparents had hasn't died. Much has been lost, but it's still here. It's in our ways of expressing ourselves, in the way we work, in the way we organize ourselves. And although society sells us a different purpose, we continue with that, and that is resistance. We are no longer the ones who lost and stayed behind; we are the ones who resist and are still here. We are Indigenous people living in a society of mestizos. We were strong, thankfully.

Pintag Amaru's (re)engagement with Indigeneity has been, and continues to be, deep. From spiritual beliefs and values, to language, knowledges, and practices, Pintag Amaru is exploring what it can mean to (re)enact Indigeneity. Stemming from a complex historical context, members were raised within the narrative that they must move further away from their identity, from how they understand themselves, to gain success in the contemporary world – that Indigeneity was a thing of the past. In this way, members see deep (re)discovery and (re)claiming of self as a powerful act of resistance to attempts of erasure, assimilation, and destruction. As other scholars have brought to light, practiced

(re)Indigenization of self can be the foundation of broader decolonization (Alfred and Corntassel 2005), an early occupation of the “3rd space” beyond colonial definitions of possibility (Bruyneel 2007). Pintag Amaru sees this too. To refuse their erasure is to affirm their presence – the start of walking their own path.

Emilio: Often, resistance is thought of as enduring, as stopping, as halting something. But maybe, just maybe, it's not like that. Resistance could be about understanding our own relationship with the eternal and from there, thinking about who I am, who I want to be. Society tells you who you are or who you should be or who you have to be. But many times, society can be wrong. And it is wrong, because they sell you an idea and tell you what to wear, what to think, what knowledge you should have, and what you should do to live. But can you think differently? What happens when we think differently? We start to have a conflict with society. If you don't want to have problems, you can go along with society and say no, I don't want problems, I'll keep going. But you can also resist and say no, I want to be who I am. I recognize and acknowledge myself as I am. I respect who I am and I can move forward being who I am. It's difficult to always fit into society because we are all completely different, we think differently, we have different tastes, we have different aspirations. So why should we all be the same? We resist that temptation to be part of everything and decide to step aside and walk our own path, walk our own ideas and our own interests.

Enraizando | Rooting

Pintag Amaru is deeply rooted in a (re)claiming of ancestry, of history, of self. Their reconnection to Indigenous identity is grounded in deep and practiced exploration of the cosmologies, values, ceremonies, languages, and knowledges of their ancestors, while navigating the complexity of their contemporary context. To Pintag Amaru, Indigeneity is about much more than the (re)claiming of identity; it's about the living it out. This recognition is the foundation of the (re)engagement with the principle of *sumak kawsay*, the focus of the next chapter. They see *sumak kawsay* as deeply rooted in Kichwa cosmologies and values, and ground its practice in their own Indigenous resurgence. This (re)claiming has not been easy, however. Pintag Amaru's story is one of both challenges and resilience.

Chris: The idea of Pintag Amaru was born from this disconnect that they felt between sort of like this identity that they felt that they were forced to take on in order to survive economically versus this identity that was kind of being pushed aside. And most of them were told like you should be, or most of them felt like, you know, you should be ashamed to be from el campo, or the countryside. You should be ashamed to be from an Indigenous heritage because that is seen as like, you are a lower class of society and you are behind, you are not participating in modernity and capitalism the way that you should be.

So I think especially, some people in the collective of Amaru are young men or middle aged men who had felt this pressure since very young where it was like they felt this pressure from their families, you need to leave the community and study in order to be someone to be better. You need to go to the city and go to college, or you need to go and work somewhere in the city and make money, bring back the money for us. Um, and so there was this whole idea. A lot of people were basing their entire identities or their entire sense of self on like, I need to leave the community. And I think that in this process with Pachaysana classes as well as other processes they were going through, they started to think about like, am I mestizo? Why is all the world telling me that I should be mestizo when if I look at my grandparents, if I look at all my ancestors, if I look at my family tree, I don't think I am. Um, but, you know, I no longer speak Kichwa, I only speak Spanish. I don't have this connection to my ancestors in the same way that my, that my grandparents did, right?

But I think that a lot of the members of Pintag Amaru started to feel this urgency of like, we're losing this connection and we don't want that. This connection is something that makes us who we are and it makes us stronger as a community. And I think it's also that they see the connection to the land, the connection to their ancestors, the connection to Andean cosmovision as kind of like a necessity and something that everybody needs – not necessarily the Andean cosmovision, but everybody needs something.

Um, and I think that in the world, like in the face of modernity, these ideas of capitalism, the endless accumulation of wealth and trying to, like, be better constantly and be better than other people and get to the top. To what end? Like, to be the best, to have the most money? And they see that in that rat race, in that system, all these ancestral ideas get forgotten. And, um, and then at the end, it's like you, you have your money, you have your fancy house, but where is your connection to the food you eat? Where is your connection to the world around you, the other beings that live in the world around you?

5 - Sobreviviendo | Surviving

Pablo: Sumak kawsay is an ancestral concept in the form of existing and acting in this world, in the place where we are. What does living in fullness mean? It means knowing how to live in harmony and balance with all forms of existence. That's what sumak kawsay means. So it's an Indigenous concept that doesn't come from recent times, but it's a concept that dates back, I don't know, thousands of years. And the thing is, this concept, well, it aims to understand ourselves and to act in everyday life, in daily life. Because it not only explains the existence of human beings, but also the existence of microorganisms up to the macro, up to the planets and the moon, the universe in her completeness.

But there's a conflict when actually applying sumak kawsay, living in fullness. It's like, we are facing a matrix where there isn't the opportunity for this idea of sumak kawsay to emerge. Why? Because immediately they want to give it a theoretical framework, they want to give it a methodology, a system that comes from the West or from North America, to systematize sumak kawsay. And you can't because it first arises in an Indigenous process...It doesn't come from the West, from the Western idea of seeing everything systematized, measured, surveyed. I don't know, from this sense that everything must have an answer.

Because here, it comes from the sacred. From the magical. Many of these things won't make scientific sense. How can you believe that water has life if water doesn't have life? How can you believe that fire is a sacred being? Are you crazy? This is wrong for the West, no? Fire is just fire. It's a discovery. Yet, here it's completely different... I also think that this concept is quite general and refers to living well, living in plenitude, but it's not setting a parameter for life – like, this is the right way and we have to follow it. And maybe that's the idea of academics, to synthesize it into a written document, on paper, and a set of rules that we must replicate in different places. And it doesn't apply because all places are completely different.

So I think it's about understanding the place, understanding the space-time in which we live, the people, the conflicts that also evolve. And maybe that concept also evolves over time because if everything is moving, it cannot be synthesized. It cannot be static; it has to change, it has to be reflected upon, it has to be questioned because not everything we do today is right for tomorrow, or not everything that was right yesterday will be right now. So it's about finding that balance. And it's not about resembling anyone, but I believe that this idea of living well is living with dignity to the extent that we can live with dignity, not only as humans but as living beings who share a space – as beings who share a space beyond everything that can be said about our gender, our origin, our history. Whether we are animals or simply matter, living with dignity within this space that we know.

It makes me think a lot about this idea that currently sumak kawsay, seen or processed from systematization and presented as it is being presented, is like repeating history from the colonial era because in the same way, there was the Chacana, there was the Andean Cross, and at the time of colonization, what did they do? They brought the Christian Cross and said it's the same cross. And what they are doing today is the same, they are saying it's the same sumak kawsay, but this sumak kawsay is already implementing the idea that development is linked to exploiting natural resources. In the same way that the spiritual belief was imposed, now they are imposing this supposedly sumak kawsay in order to pursue and achieve their own interests, which is economic and political power, unfortunately. So, for me, this is how the conflict is generated, right? On one hand, there are groups of us who are trying to implement sumak kawsay in our way of life, in our communities. But on the other hand, we are fighting against very powerful interests, against very powerful people who, for them, capital value is above human value or the value of any living being, not just human, but any living being.

Sobreviviendo | Surviving

Deep roots ground Pintag Amaru in a different path. But not without challenges. Pintag Amaru's (re)rooting in Kichwa cosmovision, values, and practices has encompassed a (re)engagement with the ancestral concept of *sumak kawsay*. *Sumak kawsay* – a principle, philosophy, ethical orientation – is a vital element of the Andean cosmovision. This principle heavily influences Pintag Amaru's efforts and aspirations. This chapter explores aspects of Pintag Amaru's understanding of *sumak kawsay*, but also expands to the larger context of Indigenous organizing in Ecuador, especially as it relates to the government's co-option of the concept. Though some scholars consider *sumak kawsay* to be a key “alternative to development” (Escobar 2011), we must understand the real stories of communities living it out. This is a story of challenges, of violence, of repression, but also of survival. Pintag Amaru's efforts to (re)enact *sumak kawsay* – alongside the broader Indigenous movement – reflect the immediate survival of a people, and the visionary survival of a way of living.

La Vida en Plenitud | Life in Plenitude

Pablo: For me at least, *sumak kawsay* is life in abundance, life in balance, and how that allows you to exist and coexist with the beings that inhabit this world. Understanding that, you know? Understanding that we are not superior beings. Understanding that we are not owners of the land, that everything is borrowed while we are in this world, in this life.

My intent here is not to provide an overarching definition nor an “answer” as to what *sumak kawsay* is – as Pablo and others make clear, *sumak kawsay* doesn't operate through systematization nor prescription. It is profoundly expansive, adaptive, daily, and specific to place and time. My intent, therefore, is to hint at this expansiveness, sharing some features of this community's perspectives at this time. As Pintag Amaru believes, and is also framed within post-development theory, sharing other understandings of “the good life” can help us point to assumptions and lacks within the dominant paradigm of development (Escobar 1997). Pintag Amaru seeks to share some of their understandings of *sumak kawsay*, not as a prescriptive model, but as an offering for broader reflection and reconsideration.

Pintag Amaru's own engagement with *sumak kawsay* has come from many directions. For most Pintag Amaru members, their first awareness of the *term* *sumak kawsay* came from either academic studies or government rhetoric, but they deepened their understanding by connecting to community elders and other Indigenous groups.

Diego: We were doing these studies, but it was a bit more academic. Then, a friend came and said, "Hey, look, read this book about *sumak kawsay*, this is the truth," and I didn't understand until we started delving deeper and getting to know the Andean worldview better. He helped a bit to educate us in this regard, and then, in that quest, I began to meet the *taitas*, the *mamás*. For them, it's not theoretical, it's more practical. It's the philosophy, which is sometimes abstract – it's a time for reflection, but also constancy. So, it's different with them – it's not just reading a book and finding answers. It's about oral tradition, you know? And that's where I began to change my awareness about what's happening.

Despite exposure to the term initially coming from outside the community, Pintag Amaru members see the philosophies and ethics of *sumak kawsay* deeply embedded in the worldviews and practices of their ancestors. As many participants discussed, Indigenous academics may have synthesized and/or published the term *sumak kawsay*, but its concepts have long been practiced. When I asked Gabriel to share his thoughts on the origins of *sumak kawsay* – as either a long-rooted philosophy or “invented tradition” of contemporary academics (Recasens 2014) – he shared thoughts supported by many others.

Gabriel: It could be both in different ways. It's like, the elders saw all these ideas and someone tried to synthesize them. Maybe that's what they refer to as the Indigenous academics who decided to synthesize this into the basic ideas of *sumak kawsay*. But this is in many cultures, not just Indigenous ones in Latin America. This idea of balance requires many parameters. Your behavior with your family, your behavior with others, with your friends, with society, with nature, with the earth. What you do. So I think there was already an idea, but it didn't need a title, it didn't need to be on paper. Someone decided to do that, maybe. And from there, the idea of *sumak kawsay* emerged. But in the end, it doesn't matter who it came from or when, what matters is that it exists and that it can work.

Other participants highlight the ways in which *sumak kawsay* shares foundational principles with many other Indigenous philosophies; while the government may have co-opted the term (to be discussed later in this chapter), they certainly did not create it.

Alejandro: I really don't think it [*sumak kawsay*] came with any government, not with Correa or anyone else. I think many years ago there was *sumak kawsay*. Yes, *sumak kawsay* existed. Because it's known that these kinds of civilizations much older than the Inca Empire..they lived in this *sumak kawsay*, in the good living, because they took care of everything. They took care of

nature, they knew what it meant. Like cutting down a tree, they asked permission from the tree first to cut it down, and only if it was something they needed. Nowadays, trees are cut down for pleasure, animals are killed for pleasure. So, I don't think it was an invention of politicians or anything like that. Sumak kawsay has been here for many, many years.

Finally, some participants ground their lack of exposure to the *term* sumak kawsay in early life to cultural and linguistic loss. While all Pintag Amaru members agreed the values of sumak kawsay were apparent throughout their upbringing, they believe the term dissipated in their area due to cultural fragmentation, decline of Kichwa language, religious imposition, and discrimination. They see sumak kawsay, therefore, not as an “invented” concept, but as part of reclaiming their cosmovision, territories, and selves.

Sumak Kawsay: Photovoice

Valeria: Living well is knowledge, respect for space, respect for nature, for sacred places, respect for yourself, respect for others. I think this word sumak kawsay encompasses a lot. It's like... so many things. It's not simply coexisting with nature and that's it. It's not just that, it's much more, much more.

Sumak kawsay is an expansive, dynamic, and place-based concept. Accordingly, Pintag Amaru and I hesitate to provide a static definition, to put it in a box. And yet, we want to provide some level, albeit surface-level, of understanding. We present some contours of sumak kawsay through photovoice – using this method, Pintag Amaru members presented photos that, to them, represent aspects of their living of sumak kawsay. This presentation is not an all-encompassing, nor permanent, nor a representative presentation of sumak kawsay – as the community would say often, sumak kawsay can not be systematized – it will mean different things to different people at different times in different places.



“For me, the first photograph is, um, it's the stream. It's the water. It's life. Because there we can see various things. There are plants, there are many things that are there. It's constantly flowing. It's the stream. So, sumak kawsay, for me, that's it. It's your food, your everything. It's all forms of existence, because if there's no water, there's no growing, there's no life, there is nothing we can do. So that's why it's called home. Because life in its fullness is here. That's the ultimate expression of life”



“This is the representation of the four forms of existence, the four forces of nature. So sumak kawsay for me is understanding the other forms of existence that are not only human, but also other forms, they are the colors, the food, the smells, the senses, what you see, the harmony, the balance.”



“I feel like it's a strong connection with nature. Respecting the four elements and, above all, especially. I love watching the moon. I mean, we have to be aware of everything that's here and that helps us. And, I mean, I really love watching the moon and I respect it... Yes, I feel like it's being in harmony with all the spaces I have around me.”



“The other image is of a bear up in the mountains... And yes, I feel like it's also a good connection because, um, they are owners of those spaces, and unfortunately, as humans, unconsciously we go and destroy their vegetation. Because they feed on a little plant called achupalla. Right? And so people, to feed their livestock, go and cut all that vegetation and leave the animal without its food, and then they start to misinterpret, saying that the little animal starts attacking other animals. But I come to a conclusion that the fault is our own, because we are depleting its food source, so what else is it going to eat?”



“Well, the first photo of the *chacra* is not just about cultivating your food, it's about feeling yourself there, in contact with the land. And what you're going to eat, it's something healthy that you're cultivating, right? So I think that's a way of living well, not harming the space where you are, but rather taking care of it. It's like feeding the space where you are, by producing your own food, right? Because it's a way of thanking the earth.”



“The other photo is about respecting nature. We can't talk about sumak kawsay if there's no respect for nature, no respect for rivers, lakes, right? There's no respect in environmental pollution, so, no, you can't talk about sumak kawsay without that.”



“The next one is a Valdivia figurine, representing recognizing your roots, your ancestors, and respecting them, respecting where you come from.”



“This image is like the balance between nature and our own, our own presence. Understanding that we too are part of nature. We are water, we are earth, we are air. So we are not disconnected, we are one. And if we understand that, we are working in community with them.”



“Yes, I mean, sumak kawsay is as the word says, living well, but truly living well, respecting all beings, all people, respecting, um, the water, the air, um, respecting the trees, respecting, respecting ourselves too. So sumak kawsay would be respect for the whole. Respect for the universe, for all forms of life, for everything around us.”



“There is a group among, of course, the Amaru Community and those who have been here. So, yeah, that's like buen vivir, right? I mean, for me, friendship, getting along, not harming anyone, sharing, not competing. Of course, it's not something new. They (ancestors) were always united for any work and always communicated among themselves, which is the best thing that can be done to achieve something better. Similarly, they took great care in their food, they had good harvests, they ate well. So that's how they created a good life. Yes. Sharing, being united among neighbors or family. They would always share a good, a better life.”



“I also put an image of a pamba mesa that was made after a community work event on the irrigation canal. So it's important to understand that we share a space with other forms of life, other people, and understand that we are there and that we have to interact with them and perhaps work with them to improve, work with them to build, work with them and dialogue, share what we have.”



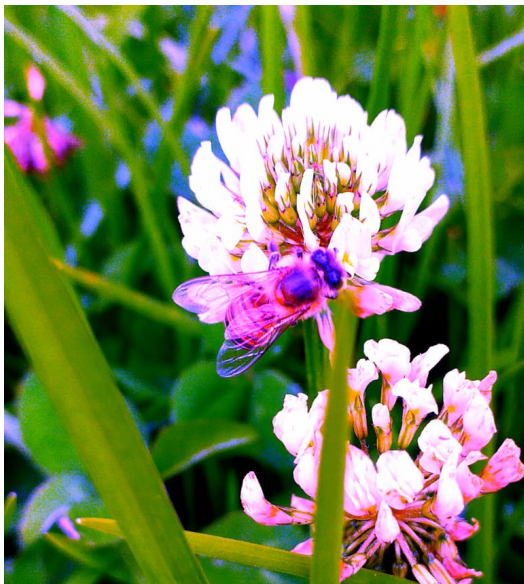
“The next ones are seeds. Yeah. I believe sumak kawsay is also your food. It's also the seeds. I mean, also thinking about it in a metaphorical sense too, it's like what kind of seed you are and what is that going to blossom into, right? Because not all seeds are beneficial, right? And because seeds are important for our existence as well, and to maintain the balance of the earth, of life. So that's also sumak kawsay for me. The seeds, the food, the diversity.”



“Our ancestors, during harvest times, always reached a certain state and made offerings thanking the mountain. They thanked the mountain, held a ceremony of gratitude. Part of their crops they also offered to the land, as it nourished them. Because the land gave them food. It gave us food and they always gave back. In the same way, they offered to the land, they offered to the mountain – to what gave them water, the water that gave them life and also the water that served for the crops on their lands.”



“So for me what’s important in describing sumak kawsay is recognizing first that in the world we are all different. In this photo precisely, we are in a community in the north, and there are many people, some are from here, some are from the village we visit, and some are from other countries. And I believe that sharing information, sharing space, sharing knowledge, is super important for sumak kawsay. Not imposing anything, but just sharing and allowing this to happen, not imposing anything, but just sharing.”



“The bees - the work they do, right? It's very beautiful and it's a collective effort among all of them, and it's not just for themselves. Because essentially, they help pollinate. So they're also helping with your food, with different products, right? The crops we have. So, um, I have great respect for bees, right? Seeing the work they do without expecting anything in return. I mean, they do their job while they're pollinating. They also give you their honey, right? So they provide their product as well, and they don't receive anything in return from us.”

	“And the next one is from a strike, a protest that happened. It represents the unity of the community to fight, you know, the struggle. Because even though living well is about living in fullness, living something good, right now you have to fight for it. I mean, the world isn't as well off as to just say, "Oh, it's only about living in fullness," but rather, to fight to have that good life.”
	“There are two sides. One is to fight through a good life, and the other is to continue fighting for a good life. Because as humans, we will always be in that space between good and evil. And who decides who is good and who is evil? It's very complex. So, no matter how much we live in an ideal and balanced society, there will always be conflict. Many times we have learned that it's not about avoiding conflicts, but embracing conflict and solving it within what we have possible. I think it fits perfectly on both sides and it's how we evolve as individuals. It's like a search for balance. We seek to eliminate inequality in society, but that balance and equality is not a straight line. So sometimes we'll rise, sometimes we'll fall, and we'll be dancing all the time, and inevitably we'll have to protest a little.”

Figure 2: Photos and quoted descriptions from photovoice exercise with Pintag Amaru members.

Paro Nacional | National Strike

Javier: For me, *sumak kawsay* is also about knowing how to raise your voice...Knowing how to raise your voice when you feel that your rights are being affected or violated, and in a way, I mean, and doing it in a collective way, with empathy, with solidarity, right? I believe that's what has kept us as a society going.

It's like, people ignore that many of the possibilities that we all now have are thanks to the struggle of Indigenous communities, with the intention of having their rights recognized and their ancestral territories acknowledged in some way. Yeah. So, for me, *buen vivir* or *sumak kawsay* is directly related to that, I mean, to having that communication and knowing how to say what's wrong – what's wrong for your community at a certain moment, yeah? Or at the right moment. Yeah. But as always, expressing what you're feeling or what you believe is being done wrong to you. Or if you're simply not being taken into account in the decisions when the powerful groups, in their ambition to expand their power, are not considering you as a person.

This comes in a lot in the context of *sumak kawsay*, because it's the Indigenous peoples and nationalities who rise up the most in these demonstrations due to the precariousness of life that exists...And the popular manifestation of the Indigenous peoples is *sumak kawsay* because they recognise it as defending their territory ... I think the demonstration has much more to do with *sumak kawsay* because it's not a manifestation of the elites; it's a manifestation of the people, of the people who have the least.

Pintag Amaru's living of *sumak kawsay* is so many things; but it is not a utopia. As members discuss, working towards *sumak kawsay* in today's world includes confronting systems of oppression, alongside the building of new paths. Pintag Amaru, like many other communities, fight for conditions that allow the pursuit of more conscious lifeways – balance and harmony do not, in this case, imply pacifism towards power. Recognizing critiques that have highlighted post-development theorists' lack of attention to the political struggles of Indigenous communities (Altmann 2020), it's crucial we explore the fight for autonomy many face in pursuing their own visions. To pursue the living of an “alternative to development,” Pintag Amaru also confronts local and global processes that undermine their ability to do so, pointing to the importance of a broader political ecology lens in understanding communities' efforts (Escobar 1992; Peet, Robbins, and Watts 2010). The story of the most recent *paro nacional* (national strike) demonstrates this complex context and Pintag Amaru's navigation within it.

I was first set to arrive in Ecuador on June 21st, 2022: on June 13th, the paro nacional began. Initiated and led by Indigenous activists, notably the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the paro included a series of protests, road blockages, and other demonstrations condemning the economic, social, and environmental policies of former president Guillermo Lasso. The Indigenous movement in Ecuador is one of the most influential and organized social movements in Latin America, responsible for several paros over the last several decades that have shifted policy, changed law, and unseated presidents. Ultimately, this paro ended on June 30th when Lasso came to an agreement with CONAIE, after waves of state violence and repression responsible for the deaths of six Indigenous protestors and one state soldier. I arrived in Ecuador the next day. This issues that incited the paro, however, continue to this day and speak to the complex dynamics of Indigenous (re)surgence and *sumak kawsay* in Ecuador (Malliquinga 2022).

The 2022 paro centered two key aspects of the Indigenous movement's calls for change: rejection of neoliberal austerity measures, which shrunk state services towards marginalized communities; and opposition to continued expansion of extractive industry. CONAIE's demands included a freeze on fuel prices, economic support for small farmers, ending privatization of public companies, respect for Indigenous rights listed in the constitution, and a moratorium on mining and oil expansion. While, at surface level, opposition to high fuel prices and opposition to extractivism may seem contradictory, they are both part of a broader recognition of Indigenous Ecuadorian communities' structural exclusion and dispossession within a neoliberal development framework (Malliquinga 2022). On one level, CONAIE's demands align with post-development's assertion that neoliberal development has further marginalized many, especially rural campesino communities (Esteva and Babones 2013); on another level, their demands highlight the movement towards a radically different conception of what "living well" could mean.

The government's treatment of these issues, even under the progressive 2008 constitution, points to the chasm between a statist/socialist interpretation of *sumak kawsay* and the communities' grounded political struggles (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014). While the initial expansion of extractive

industry was (at least publicly) justified based on public redistribution of wealth, president Lasso signed decrees that simultaneously expanded and deregulated extractive industry while privatizing profits. Decree 95, for example, would have transferred 71% of Ecuador's state-owned oil production to private corporations – a move that would facilitate significant deregulation – and Decree 151 would have allowed for significant expansion of extractive industry in Indigenous territories (Zahidi 2022, 184). Decree 95, in its move towards privatization, would have been one way for Lasso to follow loan requirements of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which include austerity measures of privatizing industry and reducing public spending. Historically, Indigenous and campesino communities have been the hardest hit by IMF-imposed austerity measures. The 2022 paro, accordingly, brought attention to the ways in which already-marginalized Indigenous communities have been most heavily impacted by rising prices of basic necessities – fueled by neoliberal austerity measures – and simultaneously dispossessed by the extractive industry that would supposedly bring economic prosperity (Ospina Peralta 2022).

Pintag Amaru highlights both of these conditions – the continued structural exclusion of Indigenous peoples, alongside the expansion of extractive industry in Indigenous territories– within their own involvement in the 2022 paro nacional, and in their discussion of *sumak kawsay*. In their own community, they've seen continued divestment in local infrastructure and lack of support for rural producers, even as the state is profiting significantly from the expansion of gravel mining that impacts local environments and threatens their water source; they've seen similar patterns amongst the communities they partner with in Amazonian regions. In resistance to these conditions, many Pintag Amaru members were involved in the paro, directly and indirectly. They highlight violence enacted by the state as experienced during the paro as part of a long history of Indigenous repression.

Alejandro: When there's a strike, they throw tear gas at us, and we end up paying the government again. They pay the police. And the police receive our money. And when there's a bad government and the people rise up again, the police throw the same tear gas at us, bought with our own money. So they will always manipulate us. And if someone wants to rise up and protest or, or do something, they label you as a revolutionary. They have power and sometimes, even, they might send someone to kill you so you calm down and don't continue with what you want to do. It can be dangerous, it's dangerous if you go. Many have died being leaders of communities here in the Amazon.

Some members highlighted ways in which discrimination against Indigenous peoples was woven through the power dynamics and discourses of the paro.

Valeria: We receive many comments, many comments, many criticisms, sometimes constructive, but also very negative, in the sense that at that moment everyone shows their, um, mestizo or European side, or the idea of feeling in a higher socioeconomic position than us. So we receive comments like “lazy Indians,” that we are lazy, that's why we protest, that we are lazy and that's why we protest, to destroy the city.

As Valeria and other members describe, ethnic and class distinctions became more apparent within rhetoric of those opposed to the paro; state and media representations often presented Indigenous protestors as “lazy” and destructive, responsible for their own economic precarity.

Referencing the deaths of one soldier and six protestors, members also brought to light the ways in which dominant media representations often minimized the deaths of Indigenous participants.

Diego: Who was in the news? Who was the victim? It's a shame the soldier was killed, but what about the Indigenous people who were murdered? They never said anything about them. Never, never, never was there any follow-up on what happened.

In addition to the violent dynamics that played out within the paro, Pintag Amaru members discuss the ways in which proposals that underlie the paro respond to both the state's continued exclusion of Indigenous peoples and exploitation of Indigenous territories – both closely related to the state's co-option of *sumak kawsay*.

No Está en Práctica | Not Put Into Practice

Roberto: Yes, the Constitution of 2008. Realistically, it's just what's written in a little book, but it's not put into practice.

In general, Pintag Amaru members see the government's engagement of *sumak kawsay* as co-option of a dynamic Indigenous philosophy. Reflecting Hidalgo-Capitan's (2014) categories of thought, the state has largely interpreted *sumak kawsay* as wealth redistribution, and Pintag Amaru members see profound difference between this and their own understanding of *sumak kawsay* as lived, expansive, and

rooted in Indigenous cosmologies. Many members believe the concept of *sumak kawsay* was engaged, not as a radical alternative, but as a political effort to gain support from an Indigenous voter base.

Emilio: *Sumak kawsay*, as it's said, *buen vivir*. Unfortunately, in Latin America, it's been used politically. They started using this term, *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir*, to win elections through the *pueblos*. They have communities like Otavalo, Riobamba, their own sectors include many Indigenous people. Yeah, but in reality, they don't really know about *sumak kawsay*.

Others believe Correa initially had good intentions in integrating *sumak kawsay* in the constitution, but was corrupted by a larger global development system.

John: While I think I truly believe that Correa had good intentions, you know, I think his intention was to really have like this other kind of development. I mean, he was a development economist that believed in a different kind of development. And I think he really believed in an Indigenous way of seeing the world. Um, but also that it's not possible according to that capitalist system that was, you know, running his government and makes everybody corrupt.

Correa engaged *buen vivir* as a supposed tool of wealth redistribution, expanding an extractivist agenda on the basis of nationalizing natural resource profits and distributing those profits through social programs. However, Pintag Amaru members have not seen the benefits of even this – what they see as hugely misunderstood – interpretation of *sumak kawsay*.

Sofia: No, just because it's written there, it says *sumak kawsay*, *buen vivir*, that the communities of Ecuador implement it. Mhm. Yes, they implement it, but very few. But there's no support from the government, very little. There's no support, and they also lack interest in it. But in reality, the communities face many needs. So the government doesn't care about that either.

While the government has employed *buen vivir* as support for Indigenous, rural, and small-producer communities, Pintag Amaru members have seen little of that support develop in actuality.

Alejandro: They're just words, there's no support for producers so that these producers can market their products at a fair price. Nowadays, big companies often take advantage of the producers. I can speak in this case, the case of my mom. She sells a liter of milk, maybe for 40 cents, but you go to the store and you find the same liter of milk for a dollar. So, what *buen vivir* can we talk about if there's no fair price for producers? There are no policies to help artists, policies to help Indigenous people, policies to help musicians, artists and so on, because all of that should be part of *buen vivir*, but it's not there. So it's only on paper and nothing more.

This continued lack of support for rural and Indigenous communities brings to light the first thread of the *paro nacional*. While continued extractivism has been publicly justified on the basis of development for

impoverished communities, those communities continue to receive the short end of both sticks – the unequal impacts of extractive development, without the supposed economic benefits it would bring. These conditions are crucial to recognize, as Pintag Amaru and other communities face deep structural challenges in their pursuit of alternative lifeways; as Altmann (2020) calls attention to, we can not separate the ideals of *sumak kawsay* from the very real conditions in which communities seek to live it. As post-development theory posits, many of these conditions are arguably products of development itself (Esteva and Escobar 2017); however, in rewriting epistemological understandings of development, communities must also survive, materially, in the now.

Maria: In the last national strike, many, many attempts were made to bring benefits to the Indigenous people. But it's not as it should be. The Indigenous people are the ones who feed all of Ecuador and they don't have many benefits. They don't have schools, they don't have hospitals, they don't have many things they need, they don't have enough food.

Cambios de la Paradigma | Paradigm Shifts

John: You know, the Indigenous folks can't even really publicize what their movement is about. Because I don't think we can understand it according to our development framework. We can't understand it according to just our reality. They're not, you know.. People say oh, it's about gas tax. It's about, you know, more funds for education or schools or, you know, that kind of thing. Or it's, you know, they just want to have control over the natural resources or stuff like that. It's like, no, what they really want is there not to be natural resources, meaning that we don't see nature as a resource.

You know, that's what they want, much more fundamental. Yeah. So. But if you say that on TV, you're going to be like, huh? I mean, you know, 80% of the population is going to be like, you lost me, right? And so I think what, what those marches were about and the reason I supported them personally and like, you know, by extension of who we are and being involved, you know. The reason we supported those and what we see them as about are these big paradigm shifts, right? Um, and when people hear that, it's like, oh my gosh, that's, that's so big. That's impossible. You know, you can't think about paradigm shifts because you can't do that. And they're thinking about, you know, you can't do it from like one day to the next, one month, one year to the next, one generation to the next. You can't, right? But that's, you know, part of what is humanity's weakest part. You know, we have a short memory and like a short term vision for the future. We just, we can't grasp more. You know, this kind of abuse of nature or resources because, well, I'm not going to be alive, you know? You know, it's like but it's this, it's the long memory of where we've come from.

The long dreaming of like where we're going is what I think is, is happening in Ecuador, although, it's not like everybody is thinking about that. I mean, many Indigenous people are probably just thinking about it, like, I would like to have access to a decent school for my kids

and I'd like to have schooling that's in our language and I'd like to have access to decent health care, you know, like the rich people do. So I mean, I think that that's really what they're immediately wanting. But I think broadly as a collective they're really wanting the world to change, to be more like how they see the world. And they want the way they see the world to be respected.

While a demand for fair treatment and economic support was a significant aspect of the *paro nacional*, it was not the whole story. Many participants understand the *paro* as part of the Indigenous movement's call for radical paradigm shifts. Beyond structural support, many Pintag Amaru members center a broader emphasis on Indigenous autonomy.

Mateo: I think we have a collective belief in Indigenous autonomy, right? That we are part of the country of Ecuador, but we should also have our own ways of living be respected. We should be able to consider our territories as sacred nations here within the middle of the nation of Ecuador, right? That we have a way of governing our own territories and that there should be no manipulation of that autonomy. That's often what happens in a capitalist colonial world. The government and oil companies come in and it's very manipulative in terms of how they work with those communities. They purposely try to divide the communities, find the people that do support them, get them to sign documents that says it's okay now to basically drill for oil in your ancestral territories.

Extractive industry is a hugely significant area in which Pintag Amaru members see great difference between the government's rhetoric of *sumak kawsay*, and their actions. While Pintag Amaru members understand *sumak kawsay* as a complex philosophy that encompasses radically different understandings of nature, the government has used it to continue developing an extraction-based economy.

Roberto: There are certain candidates who, with the concept of *sumak kawsay*, offered, so to speak, to take care of nature, to learn to coexist with nature. But economic power lies in mining. How can we talk about *sumak kawsay* if today I take office as a public official, as President of the Republic, under the banner of *sumak kawsay*, but over here, I'm working with mining? Because mining companies sponsor my campaign, because they gave me money. So, looking at it from that perspective, I could say that *sumak kawsay* in Latin America was used for political ends, nothing more. Mhm. Because true *sumak kawsay* should be good living for everyone, really. Mhm. I mean, everyone. Not just humans. Everyone. All the species that are here.

Pintag Amaru members highlight the hypocrisy between the government's public promotion of a nature-based worldview and their own actions.

Alejandro: Many times governments also run campaigns, campaigns like don't pollute the water, don't cut down trees. But they give permits to log the Amazon, they give permits to build sewer systems, which then lead to polluted water flowing into rivers.

Overall, Pintag Amaru members have seen *sumak kawsay* co-opted into a dominant, extraction-based development agenda. They see the government's engagement with the term, at best, as superficial, and more so, manipulative and violent. The paradigm shift they believe *sumak kawsay* should call for has not been supported by the state, and instead, has been subsumed within a mainstream understanding of development.

Sara: The Global South has a long history and tradition of alternative proposals to what development is. So, I think sometimes when we talk about development, the global north now tends to try to say, oh, that's super cool and let's include it in what we consider development, and it's a way of like, taking it out –the powerful part from it, which comes from the global south – by incorporating it... by incorporating it into development instead of really changing.

Most participants understand this co-option as having occurred within a broader neoliberal capitalist system. They highlight the tensions and contradictions in interpreting an Indigenous philosophy through a system based on Western worldviews, echoing critiques brought forward by other scholars (Altmann 2017); the epistemological grounding from which *sumak kawsay* is viewed profoundly affects its interpretation.

John: As soon as you categorize this into a set of clauses and package it as *buen vivir* is, you know, you have to structure it right into these categories. You've Westernized it, and that's what's in the Constitution. So it's a Westernized version of *sumak kawsay*. Sure. And you're seeing things more linearly, you're seeing like quadrants, right? And no Andean Amazonian cosmovision is going to really see life as quadrants. You know, it's going to be much more cyclical and circular. I mean, there's levels, right? But it's not defined with these rigid lines and all, like, in boxes. So I think that it's easy for the government to say we are achieving the *buen vivir* because we just go to this box. Have we done it? Yes, this way, this one, we've done this way, right? But maybe this one is in contradiction to this other one, right? Like the *buen vivir* for communal growth is for the *buen vivir* of the forest, nature, right? And so those things don't work according to communal ways of living and the cosmovision, but they're being trained in that way, right? And so. You know, and it was also with Correa. It was very manipulative. I mean, it was like this. All these signs all throughout the Amazon, which were like “*buen vivir* is petroleum.” Um, you know, and talking about development in your communities because they needed to convince the locals, you know, that this is good for them.

As John alludes to, Pintag Amaru members see *sumak kawsay* as daily and practiced, echoing findings shared by others who've explored the concept (Guandinango and Carrillo-Maldonado 2013). The

government's buen vivir, however, became systematized in a way that allowed for its misinterpretation and co-option into an extractivist frame, disconnected from Indigenous epistemologies, cosmologies, and values (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014).

While many members condemn the co option of *sumak kawsay*, they also affirm they've never understood *sumak kawsay* to be centered nor reliant on the state – I'll discuss their own, autonomous, daily practices more deeply in the coming chapters.

Maria: It's quite difficult because everything stems from a bad ruler that every country has now. And it's been pretty tough, what we've been going through for the past years. Mhm. I mean, all my life. Because for me, I don't raise the flag for anyone. And what I want to defend is the people, the people who are really sacrificing themselves and, and no government, no government, whether left or right, is going to come and solve the problems. So that's what we want to break, to end that, so that, yes, we can live, yes, exactly, a good living like the *sumak kawsay*.

Sobreviviendo | Surviving

There's a song Pintag Amaru members always sing when we sit around the fire together - *Sobrevivendo* | Surviving. I remember the sound of them harmonizing on that word together. All that it means. As Pintag Amaru carries forward, they navigate the survival of a foundational principle – *sumak kawsay* – and with it, the survival of so much more. But survival also indicates challenges, as there certainly have been. While *sumak kawsay* is a profoundly deep and expansive vision for Pintag Amaru, it is not a utopia, and it is not disconnected from their present political realities and struggles. As they make clear, they continue to fight for conditions – cultural and political autonomy, economic survival, and environmental protections, amongst others – that support the possibilities of *sumak kawsay*. While post-development theory points us to the possibility of *sumak kawsay* as an “alternative to development,” we must also attend to the structural conditions in which communities are trying to live it out (Esteva and Escobar 2017). State-level analysis points only to the ideals, not the realities, and the government's co-option of *sumak kawsay* is just one of the many challenges Indigenous peoples in Ecuador are facing. Many are contending with immediate needs and dispossession in a present paradigm, and with the survival of a different one.

John: Often, like you'll hear in the United States, stuff like “we want to preserve the American way of life.” You know, you would often hear that, even Obama would say stuff like that. You know, “this is our way of life.” And I think what people are starting to realize in the United States and all around the world is that this way of life is destructive. This way of life is not the future.

The future is basically an Indigenous way of life, a way of life that lives in balance. And so what's going on in Pintag is this struggle to connect with a harmonious and balanced way of living with nature. And that's what's going on in other parts of the world. But that's why people are really rising up because they need that way of life – not just like our forests respected, our mountains respected, our waterways respected – we need that way of life respected. And so that marching in the streets and with what Pintag Amaru also supports, with Indigenous people coming from all around the country here in Quito to protest, they're supporting that way of life.

They're not just supporting those people.

They're saying that is the future.

6 - Orientando | Orienting

Diego: Thinking about the idea of pathways, yes, it's like – where do you want to go? Because, I don't know, we're already in this world that requires technology, petroleum, devices. So we can't completely separate. And so many of us are at this point of wanting to use this pathway, this pathway that destroys everything, where development is just money. And we don't think of or take this other path, that is, of using the time we are in – being able to use petroleum hoses to carry water where it's dry. I mean, I'm speaking metaphorically too. So it's like, I prefer this other path now. I don't want this path that implies pollution, that implies extraction, that implies damaging forests, that implies using people for my benefits. I mean, I don't want that path because that path is individual, that path is of one person.

On the opposite of this path is one where many minds are connected to the idea of change. So, it's of the community. This path of this form of development that is good – I don't think it's called that, but we're trying to explore what it's called — but it's this path of community. This path of finding things different from what we are doing, while also living here in this world that requires resources. So I prefer this one, I prefer the path that protects the Earth in some way. Because in the other path, maybe I'm going to use more fuels, I'm going to use more things, I'm going to extract everything anyway, I don't care if I do harm.

So we don't want development in general. It's like, we're not attached to this idea of development, to this idea of capitalist development that is constantly extracting knowledge, extracting resources from the earth. We don't want it this way, because this idea does not consider that everything has to stay in one whole. Instead, it has to be absorbed, and only the system can have that information. The way forward must be the community. I mean, we all must have this knowledge, we all must appreciate it. And there it is, the true way of thinking about it – I don't know, I don't want to call it development – but in the *sumak kawsay* and in the good way of life, in the abundant life, no? In the great life. Because, it's like, if you're okay, if my brother is okay, if my neighbor in the community is okay, then we're all going to be okay. Because we're taking care of the earth, we're thinking of acting for the benefit of someone who is not just human. It is of everyone. So in that way it is different. Those are two very different paths. One is super individual, never thinking about others, about other human beings, let alone other forms of existence.

However, we're thinking differently. We're thinking like this, right? – Well, the tree is important, the toad that's there is important, so we have to help it, give it a home, set its space where it lives right? So this is already another form of doing things. It's biodiversity, it's not just one person. I mean, it's not only an end like it is in development where it's like “this is for me” and it's over, it doesn't benefit anyone else. Even though it says there's benefit in development for everyone, right? But it's not true. Because the benefit always only goes to the rich people, I mean the very few, the 1%. It's not for everyone, right? But we're brainwashed that it's the way – to extract, to have, to cut, to kill.

I don't know, but if we're convinced of that, then the thing is that no, I don't know. The thing is that we can be biodiversity, incorporate everything – not only animals, trees, other forms of existence, but also the sun, for example. The wind is here, the water, the earth. Understanding how to have consciousness that they can be as they are here, I mean, they are part of it. We have to respect them, we have to respect, because they are important. We wouldn't exist without them.

Sometimes we're very human-centric. We only think about ourselves, there's no other, there's no other option. That's why we've destroyed millions of species, millions of flora, fauna. Because it's just us sometimes. I don't want that path anymore. I don't want that path of thinking about development if it's not a path of going with all things. Indigenous peoples actually consider this existence as everything – it's *Pachamama*. We are the mother, we are *Pachamama*, we are of the time-space here now, we are trees, we are stars, we are mountains, we are wind, water, we are the moon, we are the sun.

Now, at this moment, we are not just us.

Diego describes a metaphor that has come up often: *dos caminos* | two paths. Generally, Pintag Amaru members are referring to the path of “dominant development,” and a different one – good living, *sumak kawsay*. In contemporary reality, these paths are winding and intertwined. But the concept of orienting pathways raises the key question – to where are we going?

Pintag Amaru’s perspectives towards development, in general, are critical, and share many features of broader post-development critiques. However, this does not mean that Pintag Amaru members are somehow separated from development, nor does it mean they oppose all aspects. In many discussions around these themes, Indigenous peoples are often portrayed as isolated from modernity, as “pure” in their rejection of any environmental impact (Kiely 1999). As Pintag Amaru makes clear, however, Indigenous communities are not utopias, and their engagements with the land are often deeply practical. Pintag Amaru navigates, uses, subverts, and interacts with the contemporary reality of development, modeling the “contemporary art of living” more recently recognized within post-development theorizing (Esteva and Escobar 2017). Much of this reality includes choosing to, and needing to, use the systems they seek to change. Pintag Amaru’s criticisms of the development paradigm should be understood within this framing – they offer criticism, reflection, nuance, and space for (seeming) contradiction, navigating distinct, yet intertwined roads. They propose a transformation of the system from within it – “*que otra opcion hay?* | what other option is there?”

With this grounding understood, Pintag Amaru’s criticisms of development highlight their experiences of the shortcomings and violences of a dominant path – one often seen as the only. This view follows the call to begin “undoing” development through the exploration of its local realities (Escobar 1992), and is a crucial piece of the consciousness-raising Pintag Amaru seeks. We must be willing to see the current paradigm to transform it. This chapter explores Pintag Amaru’s experiences of the dominant development paradigm and highlights the beginnings of their responses. They don’t have all the answers, and don’t profess to. But they do offer an important view of the paths – the foundation of (re)orienting.

“Big D” Development

John: Development is confusing because there's the big D and the little D, right? The big development that's discussed, like at the levels of multilateral organizations and governments and all that, you know, and then there's the little D, which is more like community development. But I think, more than anything, those two get confused, right?...Development really was just a conversation about what we have versus what we don't have, what we'd like to get done, as opposed to who we want to be in this world. Yeah, I would say one of the big differences is, yeah, [Pintag Amaru] is more about who we are, not what we do, right? Although what we do is an offshoot of who we are, but we're not focused on getting shit done. You know, we're focused on recreating ourselves. And if you're recreating yourselves, you're doing stuff, right? But you're not focused on benchmarks. You're not focused on, you know, a project that's going to be approved by some aid agency that really doesn't give a shit if you've done anything or not, right? They want it to look like you've got something done so that they can have some good reports, right? And I think more and more people are starting to see that. Because I think they all know instinctively that big D development doesn't work. Yeah, you know, it's going to destroy us. It's going to be our end, right?

A foundational question – what do we mean by development? As John highlights, our exploration generally focuses on “big D” development – very broadly speaking, a global paradigm framed by “developed” countries/governments supporting “less-developed” countries/communities in “developing.” As understood within post-development theory, this paradigm encompasses specific Western worldviews, ideologies, and power relations that operate across many scales and realms of life (Esteva and Babones 2013). Most importantly, our exploration focuses on what Pintag Amaru members understand development to be, and to mean. Members often use the phrase “dominant development” to refer to a paradigm that is imposed and generally includes neoliberal ideologies, colonial power relations, extractivism, and a central focus on economic growth. Within this broad framing, Pintag Amaru members illuminate more specific outcomes and experiences in their context.

I clearly remember an interaction in one of our focus groups that says so much about Pintag Amaru's experiences. This was the focus group with Pintag Amaru members, as well as 6 international students participating in their decolonial study abroad program. To start the conversation, I asked each group – Pintag Amaru and the students, separately – to briefly discuss/write/draw in some way their understanding of development and describe it to the other group. The international students went first, and shared ideas that some of us might be familiar with – though they recognized development might mean

different things in different communities, they broadly referred to concepts of “bettering society,”

“improving quality of life,” and “providing basic resources.”

Then came Pintag Amaru’s turn. The room grew quiet when they held up their poster and started to explain.

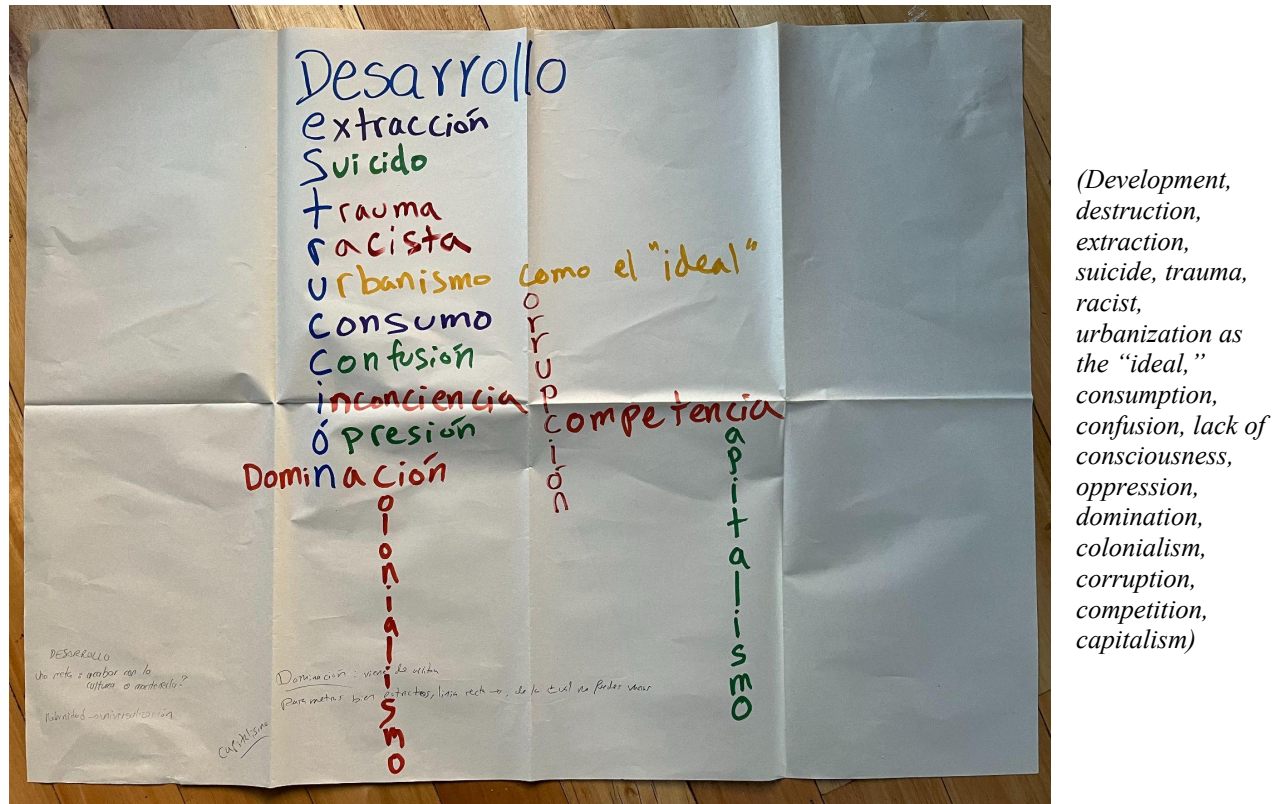


Figure 3: Pintag Amaru members’ poster from development focus group activity.

I explore the content of what Pintag Amaru shared throughout this chapter. But what I seek to call attention to here is the recognition of different lived experiences, and your openness to see them. I do not intend this to be a broad, sweeping statement about all international development everywhere. Instead, I see this as a grounded exploration of one group’s experiences and perspectives. And of course, maybe those perspectives can illuminate our own experiences, views, and narratives – that’s part of what we’re doing here, after all – and can hint at broader, shared processes. But they should be understood as grounded reflections rather than universal critiques. Experiences rather than answers.

Naturaleza | Nature

Valeria: There are some communities that have already done it, and we are on that path, on the path of true development, a development where everyone has something to eat, everyone has a space to live, everyone has land to produce our food. So, that is development; dominant development is more focused, in this case, on acquiring wealth, acquiring goods, acquiring land and things, just accumulating, accumulating, accumulating.

Un Sinónimo de la Destrucción | A Synonym of Destruction

Gabriel: I feel it as destruction. Yes. For me, it's that. Mhm. Because where development comes, there comes roads. Where development comes, there comes mining. Where development comes, there come many things that are a contrast to what we should think about, like the development of nature or humanity and things like that. Maybe it shouldn't have that name, but – for me, it is a synonym of destruction.

In countless interviews and conversations, the first word Pintag Amaru members associated with development was “destruction.” Participants have witnessed huge environmental change in their community and largely attribute it to the impacts and attitudes within development, echoing the post-development assertion of the paradigm’s “earthlessness” (Icaza and Vázquez 2022). Deforestation is one of the most evident impacts they’ve seen throughout their lifetimes – many members describe growing up in the area surrounded by diverse native forests, and within the past 30-40 years, these forests have almost entirely disappeared.

Mateo: They are extracting and deforesting trees, the lungs of the planet, for cash – sacrificing trees that are ancient, that have history. There’s a lot of damage to keep advancing.

Causes of this deforestation, and its association with development, are layered. The majority of forested areas have been replaced by grazing lands, the foundation of Pintag’s dairy-dependent economy. Though members attribute the initial introduction of cattle to Spanish colonization, they understand the more recent intensification of dairy production, and consequent deforestation, to development processes. Especially since the 1990s, dairy production has expanded significantly in the Ecuadorian Andes, including in Pintag, as a result of specific policies and market conditions (Jampel 2016). Throughout this time, many smallholder farmers have shifted from crop-based agriculture to more land-intensive dairy production in reaction to declining value of agricultural goods; this decline is thought to be a product of

expanding agribusiness within the “Green Revolution,” a broader effort to promote development through the introduction of intensive agricultural technologies (Toledo, Salmoral, and Viteri-Salazar 2023). A parallel cause of dairy expansion has been the decline of labor availability, as outmigration to cities – spurred by economic necessity and cultural shifts, which members also associate with development’s marginalization of smallholders – has also increased significantly since the 1990s (Jampel 2016). Members understand the rapid deforestation of their lands as rooted in an intensification-focused model of development, resulting specifically in the expansion of dairy in their area; as post-development scholars also discuss, this model often leaves smaller producers on the margins, and drastically changes environments (Sachs 1992).

This model, and its association with destruction, is also evident within the members’ experiences of extractive industry in their territories. The community faces impacts of two different mines, both of which they see as consequences of development.

Maria: Development is not a mine that destroys your entire main water source. Because with that water, I plant my food, plow with oxen, give water to my animals, all of that. So, development should be having water. Having that should be true development, that should be the true reason – to live with nature. In other words, it's not money, it's not resources, it's not capital, but life itself. So, I embrace water more than the mine. And development, for me, is that – water, that should be it, right? But I don't want to define development because development is already defined. We also need to be aware because development is already defined as a way of using nature for the existence of capital.

As Maria alludes to, one of the mines impacting the community is an active lava mine that sits directly on top of their main water source. Material from this mine – primarily large stones and gravel – is used in construction; though these materials may not contain contaminants, members fear mining could cause a collapse of the stone upon the water flow below, leading to a blockage. Though members report this mine has been active since their childhood, they’ve witnessed a shift from small government concessions that use only hand tools, to larger concessions that use heavy machinery and explosives, increasing the probability of a collapse. Though community members have contacted local government officials and environmental authorities in efforts to initiate studies of the mine’s potential impacts, they’ve heard no response, and the government has continued to expand concessions. Members believe, in the eyes of

government officials, the economic benefits of the mine outweigh the risk; the dominant understanding of development, they argue, prioritizes economic gain over the foundational elements of life.

Pablo: Supposedly, with development, we will have more, generate money for the country that will help, and we will continue to develop more projects. Mhm, but no, I mean, you're going and doing everything opposite to what development is. You destroy for your supposed development.

No Somos los Dueños | We Are Not the Owners

Gabriel: There are many, many factors that are taken into account, primarily if we look at very standardized forms of development. It's like having enough resources, both economic and natural, but nature is seen as a resource, water is seen as a resource, land is seen as a resource, people themselves are seen as a resource – there are human resources offices. But there is a lot, there is a lot of disconnection from all of that. It's about who manages the resources. The less you have to *be part* of those resources and instead can manage resources, the more you are a successful person and your society is developed. But. But there is a disconnection. We are not the owners of nature. We did not come to manage it. We are nature. And perhaps thinking about development in this way is like finding a balance. Because we live on the earth, but the earth does not belong to us. We are part of the earth, and if the earth changes, we will change.

Pintag Amaru members attribute development's destruction to a foundational disconnection. As Gabriel highlights, dominant development is shaped by a worldview that sees nature as a resource to be managed, controlled, and used. This worldview contrasts with their understanding of human beings as part of nature, both reliant upon and responsible to her. However, they argue, Western/Christian/colonial perspectives of division between nature and human beings infiltrate the fundamental philosophical perspectives of development – also discussed by many post-development theorists (Esteva & Babones 2023) – leading to a destructive relationship. Pintag Amaru members discuss the ways in which, as part of this disconnection, development lacks a “consciousness” of impacts to other species and systems.

Roberto: We were also talking about the development that the system imposes on us, but they are very unconscious of the actions they are committing. We have a clear example here where they are building the sewage system, and they sell us that idea for living well, for development, for a healthy community. However, as everything has a cycle, most of the waters are already contaminated by these systems themselves. So, they work without consciousness. And maybe we don't realize that, in the future, we will have health problems, right? All of that. So, that is development for me –they lack awareness, they don't know what they are doing, and every time they talk about development, they always do it through an ignorance that is affecting us all. And it's also unconscious of other forms of existence. Like, development is only for a group of people – and what about the rest, including nature, animals, and resources? Yes, there's no respect for the whole, right?

As Roberto references here, the state was constructing a piped sewer system in the community during the time interviews took place, replacing individual household septic systems. However, these systems often do not function well; in the municipality of Quito, which Pintag is part of, only 3% of collected wastewater is actually treated (Epmaps 2024), meaning the remainder is dumped untreated directly into rivers and streams. In line with these conditions, and findings of significant E. Coli contamination in rivers and irrigation ditches within Pintag (Parham, n.d.), many community members cite centralized sewer systems as a primary cause of contamination in their waterways. This system was implemented by the state, and community members were not in any way consulted or involved.

Pablo: Their [the government's] idea of development is like, 'Oh, your neighborhood has grown a lot and needs waste management. You need a sewage system,' and they won't consider any other form of waste management, even though it's not working...they won't understand any other possibility, of course. And it's like, they have a very academic idea of poverty or development. And so, if you don't live like they do, you're poor or doing badly. If you didn't go to university and don't have all the degrees, you're ignorant, you have no reason to give your opinion in decisions.

As participants see it, imposed “developments” often operate through unconscious replication, ignoring long-term impacts on people and the environment. Though Pintag Amaru and other community members have openly opposed the sewer system in meetings with the state organization leading the project, encouraging collaboration on more effective and ecological alternatives such as biofilters, their perspectives have been dismissed as “ignorance.” From Pintag Amaru's view, these development projects are implemented in a highly standardized form, without consideration of other perspectives, species, and forms of existence.

Sewer systems, though significant, are not the only form of waste members see impacting their waterways. Over their lifetimes, particularly the past 2 decades, members have witnessed an increase in plastic waste, a change they attribute to increased dependence on an industrialized food system.

Alejandro: It's not development, it's not development when enormous companies produce plastic bottles and those kinds of things that end up in the sea...Of course, maybe people in the city see it as development. But what about the water? You can see here in the Machángara. That river is no longer useful. Many years ago, that river had life, had fish, had flora, had fauna. And today, due to supposed development, it is as it is, no? It no longer has life.

Alejandro and others often discuss contamination of land and waterways as a consequence of development; similar to the impetus for expanding dairy production, members have witnessed the decline of local agriculture as industrial firms dominate the market and outcompete small producers. From this change, they argue, more and more households are consuming packaged goods, and municipal waste systems have not been able to keep up. As a result, they've seen irrigation ditches and rivers fill with waste as aquatic life, particularly fish species, declines; many describe growing up drinking from the same river they can no longer swim in, and presence of fish has declined so significantly that even recreational fishing is no longer viable. While the causes of this decline are multiple, members draw important connections between waste resulting from a “developed” food system, and the undermining of their own resources.

In addition to plastic waste, members attribute water contamination to the increased use of agrochemicals. As small producers have been replaced by industrial firms – specifically large-scale potato producers in their area – members have witnessed drastically expanded sale and use of pesticides, and associate this with both environmental and human health impacts, notably cancer. Though specific statistics for Pintag are unavailable, the broader municipality of Quito has shown a near 5-fold increase in incidence of cancers between 1985-2017 (Cueva, Tarupi, and Caballero 2022); other scholars have shown rates of glyphosate application have been particularly high amongst inter-Andean potato producers during this time (Andrade-Rivas et al. 2023), and have demonstrated links between glyphosate and cancer (Avila Vazquez et al. 2017). While these patterns can not be taken as direct cause and effect, they align with community members' witnessing of expanded agrochemical use alongside an increase in local cancer rates.

Alejandro: The chemicals they use in crops also affect all of us. It's like, we're all being poisoned. So, to what development are we heading?

El Otro Lado | The Other Side

Maria: If your development involves killing hectares of nature, I mean, you're not doing good with something bad. It's important to think about the other side.

Pintag Amaru members' perspectives focus heavily on the impacts of extractive industry in their community and throughout Ecuador. While dominant conceptions of development often focus on certain outcomes of extraction – construction, technology, wealth – Pintag Amaru calls attention to “*el otro lado* | the other side” : impacts on communities and landscapes.

Gabriel: To obtain something you have to destroy something. When doing something good for yourself generates a lot of harm for other places, you can't talk of development.

Participants criticize the way development, particularly extractive industry, generates “good” for some at the expense of others, often Indigenous communities. In their own region, they face the impacts of gravel mining in nearby waterways. In addition to the lava mine above their primary water source, another mine is working its way up a river held sacred to the community, Rio Pita. The mine – operated by Ecuadorian-based company, SUDINCO (Sudamericana Integral de Construcciones S.A.), whose shareholders and management reside in the U.S. – has extracted gravel material from Rio Pita since 2012; this material is used to create asphalt for roads and highways. Pintag Amaru members highlight how these materials are sold to the state and applied primarily in Quito; meanwhile, local roads are ignored and community members bear the environmental impact of extraction. As the mine extracts gravel along the river bottom, it degrades the river's structure; during heavy rains in 2023, the river destroyed a bridge and home immediately below the mine, and high sediment levels found in the mine likely impact local species and water quality (Parham, n.d.). Despite many community members' attempts to contact SUDINCO, their emails and phone calls have been dismissed, and they've had no direct contact. Members have also expressed their concerns to local officials and authorities; regardless, the government has granted SUDINCO concessions along an entire 70 km stretch of Rio Pita.

Valeria: We are always fighting to prevent them from disrupting our tranquility. The struggle with mining companies is tough; they are always trying to find new places to extract minerals. It's a constant fight with communities, not just here in this community but in different communities. We are always fighting and supporting each other, not letting them exploit our peace.

While members are concerned about the impacts of gravel mining in their own community, they focus much of their discussion on petroleum extraction in Amazonian regions. Pintag Amaru works closely with several Indigenous communities in the Amazon, and though they are highly concerned about mining in their own community, they've seen even more drastic outcomes in these regions. The group frequently brings students on a "Toxic Tour" of the region to witness these impacts.

Pablo: [Students] were recently in the Amazon, talking about how the people there live in fear when strangers arrive. Because they know that with them comes the evil –they want to evict them from there to come in with their companies and extract everything else. And it's like, look, what we talked about regarding development is this. For supposed development, we have to kill people. We have to kill nature.

Pintag Amaru invited me to join them on the "Toxic Tour" in 2023. I witnessed dead swaths of forests, black rivers, and the smell of tar through hours and hours of driving; the continued impacts of oil drilling are hard to understate. Oil was first discovered in the Ecuadorian Amazon in the late 1960s by a consortium of U.S. companies, including Chevron, and was heralded as the solution to Ecuador's "underdevelopment" (Kimerling 2013). The boom did not last, however; after only 5 years, oil production declined, and Ecuador was left in debt to foreign investors who stepped in to "rescue" a newly oil-dependent economy (*ibid*). And to cut costs, companies evaded environmental regulations: in a well-known example, Chevron Texaco spilled more than 17 million gallons of crude oil and 16 billions of toxic wastewater in the Ecuadorian Amazon between 1964-1990, much of which was left in open pits (Amazon Watch 2018). Despite a successful court case against them in 2011, Chevron has continued to evade payment of the 9 billion dollars legally owed and has not carried out environmental remediation in affected areas (*ibid*). Entire communities in these areas have had to leave their homelands as a result of this contamination, and those who remain face high incidence of cancer and other health impacts (San Sebastián and Karin Hurtig 2004), and ongoing drilling.

Pintag Amaru members know some of these communities personally, and bring attention to this destruction – in the name of development – and to the violence enacted against those who resist. Just months before these interviews took place, Eduardo Mendúa, an Indigenous (A'í Cofán) activist resisting continued oil extraction in his community was shot to death by armed gunmen (CONAIE, 2023).

Diego: They killed him there. Eduardo, and so many others. And what can we do? And that's funded by the oil companies, by the State, by the police, by the military. I mean, it's funded by them. The system is paid for by them. It's covered up by the judges, covered by everyone. So it's. It's an open secret that's there. And it's always been like that with Indigenous peoples. It's always been like that. There's no change, I mean, no, because Indigenous peoples are the ones who resist the most to protect.

Participants largely view extractive development as an act of violence against both nature and Indigenous communities, and ask all of us to consider “*el otro lado* | the other side” of the “developments” received.

Maria: Developed countries have a lot of technology, but perhaps they don't think about where they got the materials to be able to create such things. Maybe they will never know. But they sacrificed communities, no?

Poder | Power

Mateo: Development should be, maybe, I help a community and I help in a good way, in a collective way. Mhm. Not in an individual way. We talk about development, but when these multimillionaires talk, and everyone else, development is only for them. Mhm. Exactly. I mean, they make you believe that yes, it benefits you, that it's good for you.

Una Nueva Colonización | A New Colonization

Diego: For 526 years, we have continued to resist various impositions. Because up until now that imposition has not changed. So we still must resist. Now it's a new colonization; it's about mining, it's about oil. Now it's about the internet, now it's about language. For example, now it's more important to speak English than to speak your own language. Now it's about education, where you confront all of these things. The resistance has been going on for 526 years, and the conquest continues in one way or another. The idea is to erase everything that remains of Indigenous information that is connected to the land, that is connected to a more peaceful, more balanced way of coexisting.

Pintag Amaru members understand development, in many ways, as part of the ongoing colonization of their territories, echoing the post-development assertion that development has perpetuated colonial wealth and power divides (Escobar 1992). Diego references 526 years ago – 1497 – as the start of a series of ongoing impositions, the product of European's incursions into what they deemed the “New World.”

Roberto: This idea of development came over 500 years ago from when they [Spanish colonizers] conquered us, of course. So, that's how the first large-scale mines arrived, right? Cattle arrived, lots of cattle, and the destruction of many forests in this territory.

Pintag Amaru members mark colonization as the foundation of modern development, built upon significant economic changes and power relations that continue to shape local environments. As Roberto references, members attribute the introduction of cattle and centralization of a market economy – which continues to be a central cause of deforestation in the region – to Spanish colonization. Ideas of imposition and domination color the continuity that Pintag Amaru members see between colonization and development, echoing considerations of colonial power relations recognized within post-development theory (Esteva and Babones 2013).

Sara: I believe that this concept of development has been like an imposition, a domination from the Global North to the Global South. And during each decade, it changes a bit and keeps changing. But I think its structure itself doesn't allow anything other than domination towards the Global South. And I think every year, every decade, the Global North makes a little change here, a small path there. But we already recognize that it's wrong...they can change the definitions, they can change the vocabulary, and supposedly, the content can change. But I believe that this development is already such a great trauma for the Global South that it can't be saved. Honestly, I don't know if that development can change enough to be anything other than what it has always been – a domination and pull towards the Global South.

As Sara discusses, and post-development thinking acknowledges (Escobar & Esteva 2017) development has shifted in some ways; many development organizations have turned attention to environmental sustainability, equity, and participatory processes in development planning (Horner and Hulme 2019). Many Pintag Amaru members, however, see these as only surface-level adjustments to broader relationships of domination – rooted in colonial wealth and power divides – and share post-development's argument that development has been used to increase the Global North's influence over the Global South (Escobar 2011). Similarly, some participants argue that even direct development aid – not to mention extraction and other processes – ultimately serves Global North, rather than Global South, interests.

Gabriel: That's what happens with countries like the United States. Because in their definition of aid, they have to find a reason to do what benefits themselves. From my perspective, what I see is a system in which countries like the United States, self-proclaimed as developed, send money claiming they are helping, trying to change the way they say they are helping and modifying their

methods. However, they still use the same system they rejected in the first place. It doesn't make sense to keep investing money in something that is like giving a gift to someone. But that person told you, "I want a gift, but I'm allergic to oranges." You give them a gift that is an orange – so although they received something, it's not something they can use.

Many participants discussed the ways in which development aid is framed as a charitable gift or contribution, but doesn't attend to a fundamentally unequal system. Globally, through the export of commodities, the Global North drains an average of 2.2 trillion dollars per year from the Global South; for every dollar of aid received, the global South loses \$14 through this unequal exchange alone (Hickel et al. 2021). Though these outflows have not been specifically quantified for Ecuador, its high export dependence would imply even more drastic losses. As Pintag Amaru members see it, development neglects these ongoing imbalances while often disguised as charity, only perpetuating the "wound" of colonization.

Emilio: "Development" is not the right word to describe what is happening. Because it really seems like a game in an open wound. Obviously, the ideal scenario is to have no wound. But it's like, these countries, like the United States and others, are constantly reopening the wound. So, yes, it's like reopening it with assistance that isn't helpful, that isn't truly assistance.

La Mafia Del Mundo | The Mafia of the World

Diego: Of course, they can extract [gravel] outside of the river, but it costs more to do so. So, they take the gravel, and yes, they can destroy the river, right? There is a boss who understands all of this. It's not just one boss, it's a complete mafia. The entire mining industry is a complete mafia. Everything, everything, everything. All mining in the world is a corrupt mafia. All of it. But it's a part of the mafia of the world, of course. Yes. Because they are in bed with the governments, and they will never let them die with the charges, with everything. The entire community may perish, but the corporation will continue.

Pintag Amaru members also understand development as a process through which already-unequal power and wealth relations are intensified. Diego discusses this process within the context of Rio Pita gravel mining, as mining companies and the state hold power over decisions and profits, at the expense of the community's waterways. The community has not been in any way consulted, included, or considered in decisions made by the mining company, and local government officials have been unresponsive to the members' concerns. As members see it, corporations, governments, and other members of the global elite

collude to continue the extraction of resources and labor from poorer communities, under the banner of development.

Valeria: It's like the world is upside down. There are people who are rewarded, billionaires who are rewarded, I don't know, for exploiting people. Because essentially that's what it is. Companies grow, generate wealth, and all that, but it's through the exploitation of people, through labor exploitation of people.

As Valeria discusses, Pintag Amaru members see development as a system that rewards the wealthy for their exploitation of others, particularly Global South communities and environments. One of Ecuador's most significant exports, for example, is cut flowers; the industry was initially supported by development loans from the IMF and World Bank and has been headed primarily by foreign businesses (Krupa 2022). Some community members, primarily women, have found employment in export-bound flower plantations, but face long hours, low wages, and frequent exposure to pesticides. Because unemployment is high, members have little power to protest these conditions; meanwhile, flower export in Ecuador remains a 1 billion-dollar industry, and the majority of profits go to U.S. and European companies (*ibid*). Aligning with post-development's attention to extraction of labor from the Global South (Esteva & Babones 2013), participants see this type of ongoing exploitation as a condition of an economic growth-centric model of development.

Gabriel: There are certain powers in the darkness that don't want us to be free—free, completely free, from everything, free from religion, free from dogmas, free from energy, even free to produce our own food in this case. Long ago, our parents used to sacredly save the seeds, but nowadays, it has even become illegal. I know I've heard in Colombia that you can't save seeds because the government can arrest you if you do.¹¹ I mean, where are we going, where are we heading? Of course, it's only that, well, it sides with the business of certain people who want to monopolize everything.

Participants understand development, in its focus on macroeconomic growth, as primarily benefiting governments and corporations. This growth focus leads to political support of big business, particularly transnational corporations. Pintag Amaru members have seen this pattern in many realms –

¹¹ In 2013, successful farmer uprisings in Columbia resulted in the freeze and revision of Resolution 970, which made it illegal for farmers to save their own seeds as part of a free-trade agreement with the U.S.; however, legal battles over seed saving continue today in Columbia, and globally (Hernández Vidal, Merlinsky, and Bolados 2023).

including mining, agriculture, and pharmaceuticals – but one clear recent example is the state’s inclusion of transnational corporations in the management of Ecuador’s child malnutrition initiatives. Policy changes approved between 2020-2023 integrate corporate representatives in the state’s child malnutrition task force and enable them to gain tax deductions, allocate resources, and determine public policy towards malnutrition, which often includes the promotion of their own brands – even those that sell only highly-processed foods and sodas (Torres et al. 2024). This is just one example of a broader trend members recognize; they believe the financial entanglement of corporate and state power, and the neoliberal focus on macro-economic growth, leads to policies that ultimately prioritize profit gain over the wellbeing of communities.

Alejandro: Most politicians – I can't say all because I don't know them directly – seek development through the creation of businesses, building infrastructure, and economic growth... most of the time, that makes things easier for many groups that want their share, for large corporations, not for small ones. Mainly the transnationals... Their name may belong to the United States, but they are everywhere. They are the world. Of course, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, MGM, Bayer. These are huge companies that are not interested in the well-being of others. They only care about their own profits.

Pintag Amaru also argues development has largely been equated with economic growth, without attending to the question – growth for whom? Their view closely aligns with post-development tenets, as they argue neoliberal development policies have most benefited the wealthy while rural and Indigenous communities experience social and environmental costs (Escobar 2011). Increased international trade in Ecuador, for example – a hallmark of neoliberal development – has been shown to generate significantly more income gains for the wealthiest 10% of Ecuadorians than middle and lower classes (Adão et al. 2022); meanwhile, poverty rates amongst Indigenous and Afro-descent populations remain nearly twice as high as other groups (World Bank 2020). From Pintag Amaru’s view, neoliberal development continues to prioritize profit gain, but neglect distribution, deepening inequalities and power imbalances that particularly impact rural and Indigenous communities.

Javier: Those at the top are basically doing whatever they want. Especially in mining, look at the people at the top and the owners; they practically gain everything, without caring about the people, the land, nature, or the environment. They don't care about anything, honestly; they only care about their own wellbeing and having more and more money.

El Sistema de Desigualdad | The System of Inequality

Gabriel: What they teach us in school – and perhaps it's the most accurate idea of how development began – is that initially, we started by gathering foods, consuming what was available. However, someone discovered that if we plant, maybe we won't need to work as hard. Hmm. But what do we do with the surplus? So someone said, well, I can rest and watch how you work. Hmm. I'll be your leader, and I'll make sure that what we're doing is functioning. And people said, oh, okay. And for a while, it worked. But it got out of control. Those who decided to supposedly lead started leading only for themselves. So what was produced was no longer enough because of the luxuries required by those who were leading. They just wanted more and more. Many super luxurious things were built, but only a few used them, of course. So I think that's where this idea of inequality and development – as a way to hoard resources and exploit resources, even viewing people as a resource – originates. Most problems are caused by the system of inequality. Exactly. People need to work more because the resources don't stay with them. Mhm. Most of the resources go out.

Many Pintag Amaru members understand development as a process that was founded upon, and perpetuates, inequality. As Gabriel describes, members have witnessed the continued economic exclusion of Indigenous and rural communities like their own, even as they face the impacts of extraction. Many participants refer to concepts of individualism and greed as feeding into this system, contrasting that with alleged Christian values of charity and service they see development promoting.

Alejandro: When you can help, when you can buy bread, or give something to a person in need, do it because that is what enriches us as human beings, our spirit. What more, if we talk in this case about Jesus, Jesus would do that. Jesus would give bread to a homeless person before giving to the Church. And I repeat, I am not against any religion, but it doesn't seem right to me that while churches, while the great powers, governments, and such accumulate wealth, there are people dying of hunger.

Adding to this association of development with inequality, participants highlight massive global wealth disparities that have continued throughout the era of development, contributing to the assertion that development, in many ways, has failed (Esteva & Babones 2013). Levels of inequality between and within countries were as high in 2020 as in 1910, during the peak of Western imperialism; as of 2021, the richest 10% of society owns 75% of global wealth (Chancel and Piketty 2021). Members question the efficacy of a development paradigm that appears to, at best, maintain levels of global inequality, despite its framing around charity and redistribution.

Gabriel: The most powerful, wealthiest individuals, and the most powerful, wealthiest companies, consume things they don't need and accumulate endlessly. Then they die and it remains accumulated while others have nothing. And for them, that is success. And to showcase their success, they sometimes make donations, but insignificant ones. For someone who earns 1 million dollars daily, donating 10 million is like... it's like giving a penny for an ordinary person earning a basic salary. It doesn't affect them in the slightest. Shouldn't such marked social differences cease to exist?

As Gabriel highlights, donations by the mega-wealthy are often viewed as charitable, but many Pintag Amaru members see them as signs of the profoundly unequal system that generates such wealth in the first place.

In addition to a global system of inequality, participants also call attention to inequality within regional development processes. Many Pintag Amaru members highlight rural/urban dynamics and see development as benefiting urban populations at the expense of rural and Indigenous populations. From their view, politicians prioritize areas with dense populations in order to gain the most votes, leaving rural communities like Pintag on the margins. Accordingly, as Pablo discusses, many see development as a form of “racist exclusion,” in that, the Indigenous communities in the impact areas of natural resource extraction do not receive the financial benefits nor remediation measures. In the case of water, for example, rural communities like Pintag protect the watershed; however, Epmaps – a private water management firm sponsored by the state – sends the vast majority of water to Quito without meaningful consultation nor inclusion of these communities. Epmaps receives earnings through the sale of this water to Quito, but from the perspective of Pintag Amaru members, has not provided any form of compensation to rural and Indigenous communities who protect source watersheds.

Pablo: The water sale from Antisana [volcano] in Pintag brings in \$67 million annually, of which not even \$1 million is reinvested in the town, in the Pintag area. And of course, they [Epmaps] prefer to take the water to sell rather than address the needs of the communities from which they are extracting. Yes. Mhm. And the same happens with mining... So, from that perspective, I see it as racist and unfair.

Vulneracion de Derechos | Violation of Rights

Sofia: For me, the main feeling is a violation of rights because they sell development as very commercial, very economic, with a lot of political power, a lot of social power. So, in the pursuit of that goal, which is supposedly development, they don't care about violating the rights of people, or any living being.

Many Pintag Amaru members describe development as a violation of local communities' rights. They've seen corporations and governments manipulate communities into accepting a top-down conception of development, particularly in the context of extractive industry. As Sofia and many other members discuss, "economic powers" show no concern for the wellbeing of the communities in which they extract resources; they often promise forms of compensation – including employment, "donation" of extracted materials, and improvements to local infrastructure – that are rarely fulfilled. Many members discuss how, in their region, mining companies do not follow through with compensation and remediation measures required by law, and local politicians often evade community members' concerns. Amidst this intertwinement of corporations and the state, communities have very little power to hold them accountable.

Pablo: When you are unaware of your rights, economic powers can trample on your rights. You're not even on their radar; you don't exist for them because you are manipulable, easy to overcome, and they will tell you, "we'll give you material or some money, but stay quiet." Mhm, mhm. So, I see that much of the concept of development comes with this violation of rights, mistreatment of people, and not just people but also nature, living beings, and even water itself.

Many members also see development as a violation of the rights of other species, and of nature more broadly. In addition to mining, they see many development impacts in their community as violations of these rights, including expanding urbanization and deforestation that reduce habitat for local species, and centralized sewer systems that bring untreated water to local rivers. Given Ecuador has received widespread attention for inclusion of the Rights of Nature in their constitution, the community's association of state-led development with *violation* of the rights of nature is an important counterpoint to the government's rhetoric.

Pintag Amaru members also discuss violation of rights within Ecuador's broader development efforts. Again referring to the Amazonian communities they partner with, members highlight the ways communities can be manipulated to accept oil extraction as a supposed way out of poverty.

Mateo: In the Amazon, it's even more pronounced due to contact with water contaminated by oil extraction. They sell it to the world, they sell it as Ecuador's success and claim that if there's no oil extraction, Ecuador will live in poverty. They convince you of this. They convince communities that if they don't allow extraction, they will become impoverished. But they extract and the communities still remain poor.

Pintag Amaru members do not see the financial benefits of this development reaching the communities it negatively impacts. These dynamics are clear in their own community – while clean water from the watershed they rely on is tubed to Quito, their own water, and consequent livelihood, is threatened by the mining of materials used to develop urban infrastructure; meanwhile, profits from both water and gravel sales are accrued by private entities, and the community experiences the environmental costs. In their own community, and those of partner communities in the Amazon, they see development marketed as a form of progress while actually leading to further impoverishment and destruction.

Pablo: Now I understand how the government and its entire system manipulate us. When they talk about development, it's to harm us more, to screw up our lives, to ruin our lives even more. So, if the government comes and talks to us about development. No, I don't believe in that.

Cultura | Culture

Diego: Development and capitalism are, they aren't the same thing, but they are both tools that North America has used as a means to invade other communities. Not just to steal their resources, but to strip away their culture. Because it's not only about taking their resources. When you enter there, not only are you extracting, but you are also bringing things from outside that don't belong to that place.

Dejarlo de Lado | Leaving it Aside

Emilio: Being Indigenous here is somewhat rejected. It's like, here, in the context of education, training, and knowledge, it's like no, it's better to be White, it's better to speak English, it's better to have all the luxuries and everything you can, similar to North America, Europe, it's better. And you start leaving behind ancestral knowledge of adobe construction, medicinal plants, etc. You start leaving it aside, right?

In addition to the direct material impacts of extractive development, Pintag Amaru members discuss its cultural dimensions. Aligning with post-development's attention to the ideologies and discourses of development (Escobar 1992), members see a dominant paradigm imbued with the assumption of white/Western cultural superiority: the West has defined progress and must “help” other communities reach it. In realms of education, language, media, knowledges, and values, development presents White/Western cultural ideals as the pinnacle, and members see many devaluing their own cultural identity.

Diego: Development is often thought of as this idea of having my own house, my job, my car, my money, and I'm going to improve. Let's extract more oil, more things, more, more, more. More GDP so that there is equality, so that there is the same level of development. But it's because we are in this idea that our cultural identity is worth nothing. That it has no validity compared to North American or European culture. We are not aware of all the value that Ecuadorian culture or identity has, from the territory, practices, food, water, air. It's like, no, no, no, it's not worth anything because development has taught us that everything from the North, everything North American, is superior. Even on the map – North America is up, right? Yes, and it's not exactly so. It has invaded us so much through education, television, media, everything, absolutely everything has invaded us so much that now it's normal. So, now it's normal if a North American company comes and starts extracting resources, it's normal, it's fine. If we sign a free trade agreement with Americans because American food is supposedly better, it's normal. Or foreign things are better, no? But it has a lot to do with that cultural fragmentation.

Diego describes Ecuador as culturally-fragmented, resulting from centuries of colonial and neocolonial imposition. As he frames it, colonization weakened local cultural identity, making it easier for the White/Western cultural ideals of development to infiltrate.

Pablo: We have, I don't know, we have become acculturated. We shouldn't acculturate ourselves so much to the foreign, to the Western, to the North American, to the point where we discriminate against our Indigenous identity.

Pintag Amaru members have seen the devaluing of Indigenous and campesino cultures alongside the expansion of Western development. As they see it, this cultural oppression can be internalized, compelling some individuals and communities to see their own Indigenous heritage as inferior; amidst even their own families and neighbors, members still see a dismissal of Indigenous identities, beliefs, and practices as a “thing of the past,” irrelevant to contemporary living.

Some Pintag Amaru members also brought attention to the ways in which an assumed cultural superiority allows development to perpetuate colonial power relations. As Gabriel highlights here, members see the outcomes of development and “progress” used to justify and excuse continued impacts of colonialism.

Gabriel: The world system...the problem is, precisely because of this competitive system, all of the world wants to promote their culture, the ideal culture of development, of progress. So, all the historical mistakes we have made as human beings – those who supposedly have a superior culture will not admit them. They will always seek an excuse, saying it's not their fault that history was that way. "What can we do?" I think there's also a feeling that it's not my responsibility because, well, I wasn't alive when that happened. And that's not true because it is still happening, albeit in different ways: the same colonial structures. So yes, we have a responsibility to repair it.

No Queremos Que Sean Ignorantes | We Don't Want You to be Ignorant

Valeria: A lot of people enter into a state of, I don't know, thinking that their knowledge is not valid. Yes, exactly. Older people are like, at one point my parents said, "no, you have to study in school, you have to study in high school, university, because we don't want you to be like us." Yes, "We don't want you to be ignorant," they used to say. Sometimes I heard that from my parents. Mmm. And I didn't understand that until later.

As part of development's imbued White/Western cultural superiority, Pintag Amaru members see development as devaluing Kichwa knowledges and values, particularly within education. Development brings an education system that holds an assumed superiority of knowledges, thereby positioning other knowledges as "backwards" or "ignorant." Many Pintag Amaru members discuss their challenges in navigating this system.

Diego: You face an education where you don't have the opportunity to show your culture because education is structured in such a way that it doesn't allow you to identify yourself as Indigenous. Instead, it guides you to be someone who supports capitalism or who supports being a laborer, it guides you. The education simply does not encourage critical thinking or learning from your deeper culture. And Indigenous peoples constantly face that, constantly confront that, because we are facing very, very strong things. Imagine, my son turns five or six, and he has to go to school. The school he attends is the only school offered by the state, and it's a very traditional school where they make you do things that a child shouldn't be doing, where they start raising you with an idea that this is wrong, it's forbidden, you shouldn't do this, things are not like this. You must hold the pen properly, you must learn to sing the national anthem. It's almost military-like. It's a bit violent too, education-wise, I mean, it treats you badly, and if you're an Indigenous person, you're even more rejected from the group. And education nowadays doesn't have a focus on bilingual education, – there is bilingual education, but in English. Yes, but there is no bilingual education in Kichwa or in a native language like Shuar or Safi, which are the original languages of our nationalities. So here, education is structured in such a way that it makes you lose your identity and makes you lose the value of your culture.

As Diego discusses, members are compelled to send their children through the state education system; however, this system comes with continued discrimination against Indigenous identity and instills Western cultural ideals and knowledges as superior. As they see it, the dominant education system positions only certain forms of knowing and learning as valid.

Gabriel: Uneducated people are sometimes seen as ignorant, but they're not necessarily ignorant; they just may know about some things more than others. Life itself teaches you. We tend to think that having a degree is more important than acquiring knowledge or experiences, but that's not true. There are many people with multiple degrees who end up working for a corporation and that's all they aspire to or want as long as they can earn money.

In development's positioning of Western formalized knowledges as superior, members see ancestral knowledges as undervalued, and often lost.

Pablo: There's a lack of appreciation for non-academic knowledge that has been lost in many societies, mainly in Latin America. These societies were politically and scientifically advanced, but they lacked the advantage of writing, for example, or perhaps the understanding of numbers. However, they possessed a great deal of knowledge that has been lost because it was considered ignorance.

¿Quién da de Comer a la Ciudad? | Who Will Feed the City?

Pablo: Economic power makes you believe or live convinced that success isn't here in the countryside, that success, progress, is in the city. And that's why we also question what happens if the countryside becomes urban. Who produces? Who will feed the city?

Many Pintag Amaru members associate development with the promotion of “success” and “progress” as in the city, and with the growing urbanization of the campo. Closely tied to the state education system, members discuss the development narrative as pulling young people towards the promise of “getting out” of undervalued, and increasingly economically inviable, rural livelihoods.

Valeria: That's a big challenge with many young people. Many young people leave because there's no work. You finish high school, there's nothing to do, you finish university, neither. So it's super difficult. They face, I mean, there are many challenges that the system itself imposes on you, like a gigantic weight and you don't have the opportunity to shake off that weight because, that weight, that weight implies a lot of money.

While members see it as important and necessary for their children to study and gain employment, they also see the future of their community moving to the city. They face the continued challenge of maintaining rural lifestyles and cultures while surviving economically in an increasingly urban world.

Pintag Amaru members also discuss encroaching urbanization *into* the campo as an aspect of development. Only a few kilometers outside of the city of San Golqui, Pintag sits on the outskirts of a highly urbanized area. Pintag Amaru members question the costs of the urban expansion that has become associated with development.

Maria: I can't say that urbanization is development; for me, it's quite the opposite. Yeah, I was also thinking about urbanization because many people see it as development when the population grows, and there are more houses in a place, so that place is developing, there are more houses, more services. But where does that end? I think that previously, at least in these territories, the use of space was taken into account. There were sacred places dedicated to food cultivation, research, and astrology. But now, if I have the power, if I am so developed and have a lot of power, I can build

wherever I want in any way I want, and I can bring resources from wherever I want. So, that's a very aggressive form of development that is constantly sold to us as ideal.

Alongside the encroachment of urban areas, Pintag Amaru members have witnessed a growing trend of wealthy “city people” purchasing properties in the campo. From their view, however, these individuals do not engage with a more communally-oriented campo culture.

Javier: Many people from the city come to buy in the countryside because, of course, they are sold the idea that the countryside is quieter, safer, and all, but they come and they are not involved in any community action in the countryside. They just come, perhaps build their houses, build their fences, make their four walls, lock themselves behind walls, and they don't even have a relationship with their neighbor. They don't even know each other.

Yo, Solo Yo | Me, Only Me

Valeria: I think many people there go about their lives, they see their lives, but they don't focus on what they are doing with the world, with other people. They don't think about our connection with others. It's like me, only me, I'm going to look for a job, have children, and I don't think about what we are doing as human beings.

Pintag Amaru members also associate development with a strong cultural shift towards individualism. Closely related to their discussions of the education system and urbanization, they highlight the ways in which development has instilled metrics of “success” that are highly individual. Many describe how this conception of success neglects relationship with community and place.

Pablo: If we don't generate this action of resistance, of activism, many people, and especially future generations, will grow up believing or convinced that success or triumph, or being successful in life, is only linked to economic and political or social power. So, for us, it's precisely about working to convince ourselves first that knowledge is super important, but the relationship with the land, the relationship with people, is much more important than just waiting to obtain a degree that says you are an engineer or a doctor. And your relationship with the community –what about that? There are people here in the community who have, let's say, succeeded, in quotation marks. That is, they are people who studied, had the opportunity to study at a university, who have a profession, who have economic stability, but still, they don't contribute in any way to the community. Right?

Pintag Amaru members describe their ideas of success as grounded in communal benefit and wellbeing, and highlight how this conflicts with the individualist orientation that underlies dominant development.

Diego: If I have a better job, I have better pay, I can buy more things. And it's like, I can have a car, I can have a house, I can have food all the time. But it's super selfish because it's for me. I can, I can, I can, and I don't care about the neighbor who is starving. I don't care about anyone. It's just me. Even capitalism reaches a point where it's so selfish that it doesn't let you see even your own

family, right? And in the Indigenous context, it's not like that. It doesn't work that way. It's not about me. So, capitalism has clashed a lot in this Andean context because it's a different world here, it's a different world. But despite that, capitalism has gained a lot of ground, a lot of ground, but it comes from identity too because, for example, people who still live in the countryside and practice their customs still share and still act as a community. But people in the city, those people have already been completely consumed by the system. Mhm. Capitalism, yeah. But now if we think about development, they're like brothers or buddies, they're brothers. Development is like a much dirtier tool of capitalism to come and seek to extract your resources. To trick you into thinking that's the way to improve a community.

While Diego highlights the persistence of more communal practices in the campo, he and other participants also call attention to the growing shift towards individualism even in these areas. From their perspective, development has compelled more and more community members to focus on their individual/family-level economic stability, undermining broader senses of community and collectivity.

Sofia: It's like you see people here, it's not like they're united, it's not like they see the welfare of the whole community. But rather it's more independent, just for me, for my family, just looking out for them, for their well-being. Yeah, it's not like 'Well, maybe I'll join, help the neighbor, or go for them and let it be a well-being for the whole community.' Don't they see it that way. They always see it as for the welfare of my family, personally.

At What Cost? | Grappling With Complexity

Roberto: I can tell you that development, or perhaps, the word development, I don't really like. I mean, many can say now we have sewers, now we have buses, now we have this, we are developing. But at what cost? Like I said a while ago, no? Where the bus crosses – you no longer see the birds.

Pintag Amaru's experiences of development are deep and complex. There's a lot to grapple with here – I think that's part of the point. Pintag Amaru is grappling too. It's important to see the nuance in their relationship to development and in their visions for the future, which I explore here. This has been one of the hardest sections for me to sort through, honestly. I keep coming back to it, trying to see clear answers. I think that's where I'm getting stuck – there aren't clear answers for all of this. I don't think that's what Pintag Amaru is trying to do, really. And yet, I want to help convey the breadth of Pintag Amaru's navigation – while they criticize the development paradigm, imagining the possibilities of a radically different world, they also understand well the world we live in today. As also emphasized within

post-development thinking (Escobar 2020b), Pintag Amaru recognizes the need for transition. And yet, their pragmatism doesn't deflate their expansive, radical view forward – if only we can see the nuance.

At the baseline, Pintag Amaru's orientation towards development calls for the recognition that everything has costs. While some of us may be familiar with the narrative that international development is unequivocally beneficial, charitable, and just, Pintag Amaru encourages a deeper reflection. It's important to recognize that, from their perspective, this reflection isn't always to have a clear answer. In Roberto's point above, he isn't necessarily saying the community shouldn't have a bus line – he is simply recognizing what is given and what is lost. I don't think Pintag Amaru members are encouraging a prescriptive answer to the questions of what costs of development are “worth it.” They, instead, are encouraging a deep reflection, an internal guide, which helps to balance costs across different contexts at different times. Pintag Amaru grapples with these sorts of questions every day. But maybe the grappling itself shapes the path towards a different paradigm, decision by decision.

The Pursuit of Balance

So much of Pintag Amaru's grappling points to the pursuit of balance. While they raise critically important harms of the dominant paradigm, their position towards development is not a full, binary opposition. Their broader criticism does not mean a complete rejection of everything development has produced. In so many ways, their efforts reflect post-development's “contemporary art of living,” (Esteve and Escobar 2017) as they navigate between future visions and contemporary realities. Largely, Pintag Amaru pursues a rebalancing – bringing what is useful to a new path, and leaving what is not. This should not be taken as a solution to the complex criticisms of development that Pintag Amaru introduces. I propose it as a possibility to explore – as Pintag Amaru often does – not a solve-all. While my below discussion only scratches the surface, and certainly does not address all of the discussed harms of development, I hope to point at some of the ways Pintag Amaru broadly imagines transition.

Broadly, Pintag Amaru centers the rebalancing of our relationship to the earth. They have never imagined a world in which we don't use any resources, technologies, or modern conveniences. However,

they see the dominant development paradigm as founded on excessive and wasteful consumption, and argue for a more balanced relationship with what the land offers.

Gabriel: It seems very difficult, maybe it is a romantic idea. Mmm. But it's... It's the change we need – to stop thinking that being romantic in this aspect is something bad. Mmm. Like relating to the environment in a very strong way, it's too romantic and it's no longer possible. It's not only possible, but necessary. And yes, maybe when we go to the city, it's much harder to think about this idea of relating to space, to the environment, to nature, to other forms of life. Mhm. But it's still possible. If we weren't destroying, life would start to appear everywhere. Mhm. So yes, it's possible. And yes, we're at a point where we need a lot of this technology to communicate, to do almost everything we do. Mhm. Because this need has been created in the way society has developed, these needs have been created. Maybe they're not so necessary, but they're already there. Mhm. So we can't escape anymore. But at least we can think that everything we use or consume or seek impacts the environment in some way. Mhm. We also know that they impact us in some way, maybe we'll see another alternative, maybe small changes.

Pintag Amaru sees transformation of the paradigm, in part, as predicated upon a transformed relationship with the land, and the impacts of extraction upon it. In Diego's and other members' experiences, "development proposes extraction, but it never proposes remediation," echoing the fact the remediation measures have often been required by law, but unmet (see Amazon Watch 2018). Pintag Amaru seeks to, in part, call attention to this imbalance. While they are encouraging a radical paradigm shift in terms of relationship to nature, they don't understand this to mean returning to a "pre-development" past. They understand that many of the things they still need – good roads, electricity, hospitals – necessitate using resources. They propose, however, the possibility for extraction to occur without being (as) *extractive*, at least in the near-term.

Pablo: When it comes to mining, it's as if seeking a balance is not taken into account. It's true that the mine is unlikely to go away. And if it's true, then what would be good? I mean, I pollute, I take the water, but how can I give back, right? I mean, maybe I help the community that is closest. I also do some reforestation program. I don't know, something conscious too, because many times they say it's a sustainable, ecological program, but I mean, they don't care. It's just to fulfill the things they ask you for, but there's no real awareness of whether, I mean, I'm affecting, I'm affecting the water that I consume myself. So how can I help improve this? It's complicated because we need good roads, good lighting, and everything more accessible, right? But now we have to go with the same, I don't know. I mean, there are more ecological ways of extraction. True, but if that's the case, we can change consciousness. Maybe we're going to do things that cost more because they cost less to the environment. This is a matter of consciousness, of changing the system.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there are many other social dynamics around mining/oil that would need to change in order to shift away from extractive structures. The broad point, however, is that

possibilities exist for using resources without irrevocably destroying ecosystems and communities – though they may cost more economically– if we have the will to use them. This point should not be misconstrued to justify the expansion of extractive industry, as has often been the case in Ecuador. From Pintag Amaru’s view, a radical (re)relating with nature should still be the aim; however, in the spirit of nuanced rebalancing, perhaps this recognition of reciprocity opens the door for retaining some development “goods” within radically reimagined structures.

The distribution of these “goods,” however, must also be transformed. As part of this, Pintag Amaru discusses the need for North/South rebalancing. They highlight that overconsumption in the global North leaves the global South with a “small piece of the cake” – for example, more than half of all petroleum extracted from the Amazon rainforest is consumed by the single state of California (NBC, 2021). Distribution of consumption is a condition the dominant development paradigm rarely attends to. Of course, global distribution is much more complex today than North/South boundaries; since 1980, inequality within countries has expanded much more rapidly than between countries (Chancel and Piketty 2021). Both scales of inequality, however, characterize the need for rebalancing. If we, globally, are to maintain some level of ecological grounding, we must better distribute resources amongst us.

¿Cómo Lo Ponemos en Práctica? | How Do We Put it Into Practice?

Maria: I think one of the objectives or goals from our perspective, from our history – one that we would like to reach other countries – is how our grandparents lived, how that relationship with the land made them live more balanced. Mhm. We're not saying that modernity is bad or detrimental in all its aspects. There are very positive aspects that science has generated, right? The advancement of science, studying deeply, I mean, we're not saying it's wrong, but how, how do we put it into practice? How do we ensure that that knowledge doesn't end up damaging the space we're inhabiting?

The question of how – and for what – aspects of development are used illuminates much of the nuance in Pintag Amaru’s perspectives. They don’t see technology, for example, as inherently destructive. They see that certain technologies, with a transformed ethical orientation behind them, could support the global paths towards more balanced living.

Alejandro: Practically, development should go hand in hand with respect for everything, with respect for nature. Because there are ways to... There are ways to, in this case, treat different water sources. Mhm. But yeah, since it's not profitable, it's not profitable to address this type of issue that we have. But is it profitable, I don't know, to send a bunch of weapons to a country so they can kill each other? Or maybe it's profitable in this case here, like in Ecuador, to equip police and military to go out and suppress people who are asking for policies to be changed or the, yes, the social structure to be changed? So, on that side, there is money, but maybe like to protect rivers and water, there's no money. Nowadays, with the technology we have, we can build huge treatment plants for sewage, for dirty water, even for plastics. Mhm. But there simply isn't, in this case, the will to do it.

As Alejandro discusses, the central focus on profit within the dominant paradigm influences which technological developments are prioritized. This idea also comes up in their discussion of extraction - because the dominant system is so oriented towards profit gain, at any cost, extraction is carried out in deeply unjust ways.

Pablo: If we talk about a developed country, clearly, we're talking about industry, and much of the industry is polluting the water, contaminating the environment, the air. Mhmm. And there's no, I mean, there is, I think there's a way to do it responsibly, but the fact that it costs more money to do it that way responsibly is like – they don't care. For the example we have here in the Amazon, they could have avoided that disaster, right? Chevron-Texaco could have avoided it if they had extracted it in a responsible manner and thus thousands of people wouldn't be suffering from cancer now.

As many members highlight, a highly individualist perspective underlies this pursuit of profit. Referencing Chevron-Texaco's widespread contamination of the Amazon, Pablo discusses how already-powerful individuals gain massively from the application (or misapplication) of some technologies – drilling technologies, in this case – while others pay the costs. Chevron-Texaco earned a profit of more than \$20 billion from drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon between 1972-92 (NYT 2003), the same time period in which billions of gallons of spilled waste from their operations negatively affected the health and livelihoods of an estimated 30,000 Ecuadorians (Amazon Watch 2024). In these cases, members see clear cases of technology being used to enrich corporations – fueled by development's embedded condoning of the individualist pursuit of profit – while communities face the consequences and have few mechanisms of accountability. In reorienting towards communal benefit, however, Pintag Amaru members see the possibility for technology to support a different path.

Alejandro: So, from my point of view, if technology is applied for good it would go hand in hand with *sumak kawsay*. Mhm. But in this case, technology must be used for something productive – then we would indeed be talking about *sumak kawsay*: for the benefit of humanity or for the community or for society.

Within the dominant paradigm of development it's the broader power relationships and individualist pursuit of profit – regardless of environmental and human costs – that, in part, distinguish it from more balanced paths. Even in cases where Ecuador's environmental protection legislation would, theoretically, dampen the pursuit of profit, power imbalances between corporations, communities, and the state often mean that these laws are not enforced. Accordingly, a different paradigm must attend not only to laws and ideals, but also to the broader power relationships in which they are embedded. Within radically transformed ethical orientations and relationships, however, some of the same resources and technologies of the present paradigm could be used as important tools.

Gabriel: A phone is an excellent tool for many things, but the fact that a company manufactures it with the idea that it may fail as soon as possible, so that you need another one, that's very, very strong. Mhm. I know companies have to live on something, but at what cost? So maybe the company is not the problem, but how we see what we consume, how we see what we offer – not just as a tool, but as a good business. Mhm. That's all. It can be a good tool. A hammer is a tool, but if we want, it can be a weapon. Mhm. So let's hope we think more about tools and less about weapons.

Seguir Adelante | Continue Forward

Maria: What can I tell you about development? We must focus well on reality and say, well, this serves and this doesn't serve. Let's embrace what serves us and keep moving forward, because if we say, “well, I want this, I don't care what happens later, but it will be fine.” I mean, that's not development for me.

Pintag Amaru criticizes the social and ideological structure of the dominant path, and its material consequences. Their experiences closely align with post-development's broader tenants – that development operates through colonially-rooted power relationships, assumes a Western ideological superiority, and has often further damaged communities and environments (Esteva and Babones 2013)– and demonstrate their understanding that development threatens their own pursuits of good living.

Pintag Amaru's critique, however, does not come from a binary opposition, nor separation from development. Their rejection of the paradigm does not mean opposition to philanthropy, for example.

They, like many communities, need resources to follow their own vision. While they still call into question the profoundly unequal system that makes philanthropy possible, they recognize the need for resources to be redistributed to communities like theirs. What they seek, though, is the autonomy to follow their own path in using these resources – in deciding where they are going. This opens the way for millions of little pathways instead of assuming we all want the same road.

I remember talking to Maria a lot about this idea of pathways. She used another metaphor I think helps here: a backpack. Pintag Amaru is following a different path, she said. One that walks away from development as we know it, rather than staying locked against it – a clear occupation of the “third space” (Bruyneel 2007). But in their backpack, they’ll take some things from where we are now – the things that help them in walking towards a more conscious and balanced way of living – always moving forward.

A Breath: Orienting, to Flowering

John: You know, technology is modern, but it doesn't necessarily have to be modernity. There's certain things that are part of our world now that, while they came as part of, I guess, that like movement towards modernity, it doesn't mean that they're beholden to it, right? They can be shifted and changed or integrated into more ancestral communal practices. And I think it's, we live at a time where if we want that slow transformation to happen, those big changes to happen, you have to integrate modernity, right? You don't just refuse it in all its forms, right? I mean, you've lost before you started. Because people depend on it.

And so, you know, the idea of like, of like using like hip hop or rock or whatever, you know, like electronic music within Indigenous, you know, artistic expressions – some people stick their nose up at that. And I'm like, and I'm a huge supporter of it because it's people reaching out to communities or groups of people or demographics that would not be able to be reached by elders, right? It's also like looking at how do we, how do we hospice out modernity?

And so I think this is a way of like, when you hospice, you know, you let it die slowly, gracefully. You help it die, right? But you learn from it as it's dying, right? And I think that's what death is like. We hear it that way, oh, that's bad, right? That's our Western side, right? We're very death averse. But death is what regenerates life, right?

So modernity, being hospiced out and dying is like, seeing it as the compost, you know, that will regenerate something else. It's going to have technology, right? It's going to have other elements of modernity. But it's not going to be modernity as as we know it. And so what I think Pintag Amaru is doing, and so many other groups around the world, is they're trying to find a way to hospice out modernity – as a tool that helps them, at the same time, regenerate who they are.

7 - Floreciendo | Flowering

Diego: I think that in this moment we find ourselves in, it's a moment to recognize that there is a super big conflict around many things. I mean, violence, for example, education, and the treatment of the earth. It's something that is super complex. I mean, we can't think that now nature is similar to how it was in the past, but we also can't stay in the mindset of wanting it to be like the past because it's not possible anymore. We're in this moment, so I think now is the time.... Because later on, other generations won't have that opportunity that we had. So if we can pass on that opportunity to our children, our grandchildren, then the legacy can continue – so the time is now as well because there are the people and there is consciousness.

We're going to change things in some way, I mean, change is a bit contradictory because sometimes resources are seen as a necessary evil. As we were talking, you wouldn't be here to do this if you hadn't used resources from development, resources from extraction to take your plane, you wouldn't be here doing this. I mean, you wouldn't be here talking about development and trying to change the paradigm. And you used something from that paradigm. Something from that world. It's like a necessary evil. But this is already what's happening.

We're trying, we're trying to find alternatives to change that way of understanding the earth, of relating to others, because ultimately, if we could manage resources, there wouldn't be poverty in the world. But something else happens. Someone controls the strings of all the games in this game of human existence and so, no, and it can't be done. You can't find balance with all forms of existence, with all, with everyone. But trying, to try, is better than not trying. Of course it is. And that's what we're doing. We're trying to change that.

It's a complicated position, of course. But I speak for our communities, because here we are very aware of what is happening, and even though we are working and doing things somewhat related to capital or related to development, we are thinking about what must change. We're constantly discussing that we don't want that. We want our food, we want our garden, we want our forest, and we work towards that. So I don't know anymore, that's why it's a necessary evil sometimes. And how, how do we navigate these worlds? It's difficult, I mean, it's not so easy. No, it's not so easy. But we're here trying. Trying to improve those things, those relationships. So, that's it. That's why we have Pintag Amaru.

Floreciendo | Flowering

Pintag Amaru's paths forward are not clear, nor straight. But they are already fruitful. Amidst all of the challenges, complexity, and nuance, Pintag Amaru's work carries forward. As discussed, Pintag Amaru is not separate from development, nor in opposition to all of its products. But they are working towards different paradigms, building from below. In their ground-up creation and continuation of radical models for living well, Pintag Amaru is one of many communities autonomously constructing post-development futures (Escobar 2010).

In this chapter, I hope to draw out the flowering of this work – the coming to fruition – as they navigate many worlds. While working from a foundation of ancestral values, Pintag Amaru has always centered on the acting, the doing, the practicing, the making. Their active living of communal, earth-bound values is, in itself, an everyday enactment of resistance to a system of domination, individualism, and extraction (Scott 1985; Simpson 2017). As Pintag Amaru shows us, change may come from our best efforts, now, to live it out; not waiting for the skies to clear to begin a new flowering.

Navigando Dos Mundos | Navigating Two Worlds

Chris: Part of Pintag Amaru's philosophy is reconnecting with this idea of ancestrality in conversation with modernity. Because obviously they don't see it as, like, we need to go back to the way it was. Um, because that's not realistic. But, but I think the idea is to find a balance, right? Because they know modernity is not going anywhere. Like, we're not going to get rid of all the technological advances we've had in the past, you know, 200 years. Um, they're not going to go away, but like, how can we live in a more harmonious way with, with that technology and also with these ancestral ideas that had served their ancestors and their parents and grandparents, etcetera, for thousands of years, before the arrival of the Spaniards and the Incans and all that? But they are kind of in the process of reclaiming their indigeneity and like navigating that line between the two worlds.

Pintag Amaru inhabits, crosses, and navigates many worlds – an Indigenous collective within a broader Mestizo-identifying community, living in the campo yet minutes from an encroaching city, (re)living ancestral values and practices in present context. As broader post-development thinking has

also recognized (Esteva and Escobar 2017), this navigation of worlds comes with both challenges and opportunities, but regardless, is simply the reality.

Pablo: We're immersed in the system. Yeah, yeah. If we want to break all of that, it's difficult, because everything else is the conventional, traditional system. And we have to, I don't know, live with that and, rather, support ourselves with it. Because in some way, I mean, we have to take advantage of it, right? We're not completely isolated from the system, we're not. No, that's not it. It would be cool, I don't know, that would be nice, but it's also like another challenge. Having our own water, our own electricity, it's like, we're getting more independent too, right? Yeah. Independent. Yeah. But that still depends maybe on land, paying taxes. It's still the minimum, it's what's necessary.

As Pablo discusses, Pintag Amaru is not isolated from the globalized capitalist system - even with the hoped-for future of independent electricity sources and water capture on their land, they would still be navigating employment, land taxes, and so many other conditions.

Pintag Amaru's pursuit of ancestral philosophies, knowledges, and practices, of course, occurs through engagement with contemporary systems and tools. Pintag Amaru members, as well as some scholars (Kiely 1999), have discussed presentations of *sumak kawsay* that assume Indigenous communities are isolated and static – even the most isolated Amazonian Indigenous groups, however, negotiate globalized systems. To Pintag Amaru, *sumak kawsay* is not about going back in time. Instead, it's about enactment in the present, and orientation towards the future, using all available tools, practices, and strategies that can serve its core values. Echoing emphasis on lived daily values found by other scholars (Bengtsson 2019), Pintag Amaru members pursue the embedded ethical orientation of *sumak kawsay* within conditions of contemporary living.

Maria: We have techniques that were used a long time ago, but mixed with modern things. Because it should be a mix. Times have changed quite a bit. You can't live like before. No, it wouldn't be right. I mean, from my point of view. But you can combine things. Mhmm. Of course, always remembering ancestral knowledge. Respecting a lot. Taking care of nature too. Because that is, that is the most important point I believe, this care for nature. *Sumak kawsay* is like seeing yourself as part of it. And when you see yourself as part of it you don't want to harm it anymore. You look for modern techniques that you can mix with ancestral ones.

Pintag Amaru members see *sumak kawsay* as a foundational value system, and like many other communities, are navigating it's (re)engagement in a globalized world. They frequently bring up what

may seem like a contradiction – that they criticize “the system” while using it – but this is the necessary nuance of navigating our one world, and the many worlds within it.

Roberto: We can be here and love this land, but also use a bit of the other – of the modern, of the North American. It’s like being on a line, one foot on one side, the other foot on the other side, but more in our identity, of course. And now we can be so aware of what we have and show you internationals, people from elsewhere. It’s like, look, this is what we have. And it’s much more complex than the story of the English arrival in North America. But it’s also a contradiction sometimes because, for example, for you to be here you needed to take a flight. We need to use development to generate resources, of course, and find the money and be able to pay people and be able to buy. I mean, in the end, it’s like, as they say, one foot somewhere, one foot on the other, and neither pulls you. But don’t go more to the dark side, right?

Engañar la Sistema | Trick the System

Diego: We have to trick the system. It’s like, we have to trick the system because it’s the only way we can create our utopias, our dreams. What other option is there? Right? What other option do we have? Because what we are doing right now is tricking the system in any way. Yeah. Mhm. We’re tricking the system because we’re awakening its consciousness. And at the same time, as we awaken its consciousness, we’re also taking advantage of the things we can learn from outside. For example, we’re learning the language, we’re learning the culture, we’re using your resources so that we can do something different. Mhm. This idea of using universities, for example, to conduct anthropological studies or scientific research, well, it serves us a lot already. So, what we want is to change reality, at least from our perspective. Mhm.

We’re trying to change the context a bit because, in the end, everyone is governed by it. If you don’t have funds or you don’t have resources, you’re not going to be able to do anything, you’re not going to be able to do things. So, yes, it’s a contradiction. At some point, in the end, you’re spending a lot of resources, you’re buying, buying things from extraction, for example, you’re buying iron, you’re buying things that are extracted. You’re doing that. But what is the purpose of what you’re doing? Mhm. I mean, why are you building this? We’re building this to educate. We’re building this to live in a different way and to empower our culture and to grow with the culture. So we’re already doing something different. We’re tricking the system with its own tools, with its own money, with its own strategy.

Pintag Amaru’s navigation of worlds isn’t only about balance - it’s also about subversion. Pintag Amaru seeks to “trick the system” by engaging its resources and tools in service of their ethics, values, and broader (re)surgence.

On one level, this subversion is simple necessity – there is no real “getting out” of the globalized development system. So, as Diego puts it, what other option is there? However, Pintag Amaru engages “the system” strategically, using it to support their “world-building” and “consciousness-raising” efforts. Their engagement with international students is a key example of “tricking the system.” Much of Pintag

Amaru's funding for projects, labor, and activism comes from international students' participation in their study abroad programs. Pintag Amaru recognizes, of course, that the presence and prestige of higher education study abroad, and students' literal ability to travel to Ecuador, are all products of globalized development. Pintag Amaru uses these conditions, though, to support their efforts.

In addition, they see engagement with international students as an opportunity to "plant a seed" of consciousness that can transform broader systems, as I'll explore more in the next chapter. So, international students provide both tangible funding and support – many of them have even returned to carry out funded projects with Pintag Amaru – and also engage in Pintag Amaru's efforts to shift the systems in which we are all enmeshed.

Diego: The seeds come here and they return, they return here in some way or another. We aren't in a world where you don't need money to live. This is how you can live. You need oil, I mean, you need money to be able to do things, build the houses, I don't know, have the land. You need resources. So, in some way, that seed also returns, resources return, projects return. I don't know, it's a bit of activism. And it's also about education because there are universities that are coming and working with us. It's better than corporations or the State that want something else, that wants a vote, that wants their logo to spread. It's better. Even though money is still money – money that you don't know how it got there – the point is that, yes, it's planting something different.

As Diego highlights, it's the "what for?" that, in part, distinguishes perpetuating the system from "tricking the system." Referencing the use of funding from international students, he discusses how Pintag Amaru is using "the system's" resources towards a communal benefit – much different from what they see as political or transactional use. In doing so, they demonstrate the creative, lived practice of building new paradigms from within the current, directing the resources at hand towards radically different ends (Escobar 2020b). From harnessing the funding sources of wealthy Northern universities to restore local ecosystems, to using audio/video equipment to record the stories and language of elders, to engaging academic publications to shift hearts and minds – Pintag Amaru is using the system to change the system.

Maria: The fact is arriving at that point of recognizing the benefits of current technology and also how to adjust or use it along with ancestral technology. Because, I mean, that's technology too – ancestral knowledge. Thanks to technology we have contact with the world, let's say, right? Thanks to technology, there are airplanes that can transport you and bring you here. And that's how we can be in communication, we can use audios, we can use videos to convince people who may be able to

finance one of our projects, one of our dreams. And in that way, we also live out ancestral knowledge, right?

Actuando | Actualizing

Mateo: People who try to change this [world] try to be connected to the Earth. It will be very different, but we will be, as always, absorbing what others will always be – we will always depend on her entirety. So it's time to put our shoulders, our arms, and keep fighting for this change – acting, doing things, improving our way of sharing with others, improving our awareness, improving our way of actualizing.

Over the past few chapters, I've attempted to portray the complexity of Pintag Amaru's world(s) - their exploration of an identity, reclamation of a value system, and critical engagement negotiation of a dominant paradigm. Now, I hope to show what they are *doing* amidst it all. Pintag Amaru members have always centered the importance of practice – *actuando*. The direct translation of *actuando* is “acting,” but I believe Pintag Amaru's use of the word is more like *actually doing*, or *actualizing*. They are referencing the need to offer “more than just words” in the daily living out of social change, reflecting everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985) and affirmative resurgent practices discussed within Indigenous literatures (Simpson 2017). While the criticism and exposure of injustice are essential, members also enact the generative practice of living out alternatives – *actuando*.

Gabriel: When we talk about changes, we all want a change or, well – many people would raise their hands that they want a change. But who wants *to* change? That's where everything gets complicated. And maybe we show that we can change, we need to change, and propose changes that we ourselves can make.

Pintag Amaru members critique the dominant system but are not locked into an oppositional stance, occupying a “third space” through their living of alternatives (Bruyneel, 2007). They see *actuando* as another, generative form of resistance, a lived rejection of a dominant system through the creative, daily practice of Indigenous ways of being. Though Pintag Amaru is also involved in more direct resistance efforts, they see *actuando* as a central form of their organizing.

Chris: I think there is sort of this comparison of like, oh, like you're a real activist if you get blinded or like, you lose an eye permanently from a rubber bullet or if you if you're on the front lines – you're more of a real activist, right? But I think Pintag Amaru started to kind of like play with this idea of like, what if it's okay that our activism is here? People from the collective started to feel like, maybe it's okay to not have that be our fight because we are fighting all the time, every day, but in a different way.

Pintag Amaru sees *actuando* in its many forms, as the daily, practiced living of *sumak kawsay*. Even more so than direct confrontation, their resistance to development is often practiced through generative efforts to actualize *sumak kawsay* in their space, programs, and organizing, clearly reflecting the broader post-development vision of “undoing” development through the living of alternatives (Escobar, 1992). Though Pintag Amaru members don’t see themselves as living a perfect, full, balanced *sumak kawsay*, nor is it a destination. They see their work as efforts to actualize it, at least in small ways, in their every day.

Roberto: We try to do *sumak kawsay*, right? The whole process that we have has always been focused on respect towards, towards nature, towards our brothers, animals, species, trees. I mean, it has always been focused on that, right? So, possibly, we may lack a lot or maybe we are closing in on certain things, but there is no worse project than the one that is not initiated.

Of course, *actuando* occurs in our complex contemporary context – it encompasses the practiced navigating of worlds. I use the discussion below, in part, to show this complexity – both the opportunities and challenges. I only scratch the surface of some of Pintag Amaru’s work. But I hope even the surface-level review exemplifies their creative and deeply-intentioned navigation.

Un Espacio Para Compartir | A Space to Share

Gabriel: We empower ourselves in this territory, not as owners of this space, but rather as part of this space. And by having a mission to care for it, to care for ourselves, and to share that idea with others. And I believe that this is a just space. The collective, yes, as an association, is important because we need to enter into the game of the system. But the most important thing about the collective, its philosophy, is the idea of seeing this space as a space for sharing. Not just for organizing events or creating art, but for learning and teaching, for understanding and sharing as well.



Figure 4: View of Pintag Amaru's land, including Casa Amaru and Wawa Amaru

Much of Pintag Amaru's work is carried out on a small, shared piece of land. Their property, about 3 hectares, includes their central building (Casa Amaru), a youth building (Wawa Amaru), a communal kitchen, and a variety of agricultural and conservation projects, and is central to most members' homes. Pintag Amaru gained access to this space in 2019, as a nearby neighbor/host family member offered its use, and it has been the center of their gathering, organizing, and programs since.

Pintag Amaru's space is "shared," in one sense, in that it is collectively managed by core members and oriented towards communal projects, activities, and benefits. Many see the space as Pintag Amaru's "own small world" in which they live out a different way of being than that which is imposed by dominant systems.

Valeria: When we are here and work here we have our own food, we feel free, and don't feel like we are being directed by someone else. Hmm. I mean, we don't feel that oppression of economic development, that development of everything in the city. No, no, we don't feel like that. I mean, we feel free and like we make our own food, we work, so we don't feel that dependence, right?

Pintag Amaru's space is also "shared" in that it hosts a variety of agricultural and conservation initiatives – they seek to also share the space with other species and forms of existence. Much of Pintag Amaru's land is devoted to reforestation. They attribute heavy deforestation in the area to the Spanish introduction of cattle and contemporary economic reliance on dairy farming – reforestation of native tree

species is one of their many efforts to restore balance. More recently, they've also created a pond in order to support native toad species.

Javier: We are now experimenting with caring for toads, and this space has many, many toads that are here because elsewhere there are cows and animals eating the grass. So this has become a bastion of resistance for amphibians to exist. So, that's the idea as well, that there are other animals that can accompany us. Other plants, other trees, not just humans. That's the conflict in all of this. We think that humans have to exist and destroy everything that is here rather than change the way of thinking a bit – not destroy, but create new things – forests, new life.

These are just two examples of the many efforts to “share” that Pintag Amaru has engaged in their space.

They are already seeing the return of many native species.

Maria: We are rethinking what we are doing as human beings. And well, yes, yes, we have managed to reforest a part of the space where we are working. And now we also see that there are amphibians, there are birds that were hardly there, they no longer existed in the area. They are coming back. And the mission is that – the care of nature, the trees, the animals, and the water, which is the most important thing and should be important for all people in all countries and all over the world.

While, in many ways, Pintag Amaru's space is a haven of “living differently,” it does not exist in isolation from the system. One of Pintag Amaru's biggest challenges is that they do not legally own the land. Though they've been granted permission to use and build on the land, it is not legally theirs. Pintag Amaru hopes to purchase the land and expand their work (see pg. 173 to learn more), but faces legal and economic challenges in doing so.

Sofia: It's also a major challenge to acquire the land. Yes. It's difficult to see how a large piece of land can belong to everyone and yet belong to no one at the same time. It's hard to grasp this because now, it's like, you must have your land in your name, your deeds. So, you have nothing, they say, but at the same time, you have everything. I mean, all this is yours, right? And also, that's where the legal challenge comes in because yes, we're trying to buy the land and all, but it's difficult.

Pintag Amaru is working through the challenge of collective land ownership in a world of individual land titles. They are making headway here, but still face the economic hurdle of the purchase, especially as land prices are increasing in the area due to encroaching urbanization. So, while Pintag Amaru orients their space towards a world of sharing, they must negotiate the current one.

Proyecto Pi | Project Water

Roberto: Water is important for Pintag Amaru because it's what gives us life. Can you imagine if there was no water? Someone said that the third World War will be about water. I mean, look, we have little water. It's a non-renewable resource. And if we destroy it, what are we left with? So, we're talking about how we're going to live. Look, I mean, no matter how much money someone may have, if they find themselves in a desert without a glass of water – they could have a suitcase full of thousands of dollars – that is of no use to them. So, if we weigh it like that, water is more important than anything.

Pintag Amaru's navigation of worlds is exemplified in the larger project this thesis is part of - *proyecto pi*. "Pi" is a pre-Inca morpheme that references water – the root of *Pintag*, *Pichincha*, and other local names (Floyd 2022). Proyecto pi includes several components in addition to this research, including the construction of rainwater capture system – a huge, egg shaped tank they fondly call "*proyecto huevo*" – and a 3-tank biofiltration system used to purify wastewaters from their space. While Pintag Amaru uses the composted solid waste in their permaculture work, the main purpose of the biofiltration system is to return the water to the river clean. This is a clear expression of values, enacted through a mix of ancient and contemporary techniques. Pintag Amaru also hopes their system can serve as a model for other households in the community.

Maria: Doing these water purification projects and having them here in Pintag Amaru is an example, a model that someone comes to visit and says "I also want it in my house, let's build it in my house."

Proyecto pi also includes the creation of a water ritual space, which the purified water passes through, on Pintag Amaru's land. They see this space as part of their broader efforts to (re)store relationship with water, an entity understood very differently in many Indigenous contexts.

Diego: The Indigenous world sees water as a complement, and as another way of life. That's why it's sacred. Because it has life – not like ours – but it has life and that must be respected. That must be understood because we don't understand, I mean, we don't understand. The Western world sees us as managing that resource. And it's yours because you're human? No, no, the resource is for us to be with it. With all the forces of nature – water, earth, air, fire. They are sacred, they have life. Yes, they have a different life from ours, but they are forms of existence. And the Western world doesn't understand that. But the Indigenous world understands it that way already. And that's the idea also, to change that relationship. Yes, to change that relationship, because it's broken in many ways too. The system itself forces you to let the water come to the tap and it just goes away and is wasted. And you don't think about what's happening with that. If you don't think, the world has so much water that it won't run out on us. Generating that awareness is one of the main objectives. And here, creating that change in the construction of filters and also in the space for the healing of

water. Where you can come and just be with the water. Maybe if you need to, a space for meditation, a space where you can truly feel this connection and where you can feel healing in your body. Where we can understand the importance of stopping the damage to the liquid that gives us life.

I vividly remember catching a glimpse of this relationship while helping to carry out the other component of proyecto pi, water quality testing in the nearby rivers and streams. We were at the headwaters of a river held sacred – Rio Pita – on the first day of collecting samples. Having (barely) gained permission from the national park to gather samples, Rose (my research collaborator) and I were eager to get started. But Diego paused – we still had to ask the water for permission. When I saw him gather a bouquet of flowers that morning, I didn't think much of it. But in that moment, he pulled them out and laid them by the bank. They were for her, *mamayaku*¹². He asked for forgiveness, for permission, and for a blessing of the work we intended to do.

In gathering and analyzing these samples, Pintag Amaru hopes to better understand the impact of mining and other land uses in their area, using the results in education and activism. They articulate their deep knowledge of the area – they identified all of the testing sites – with the tool of Western scientific analysis. The heart of it all though, is a relationship with their river - a (re)membering.

John: When you cover a river up, what else are you covering up? And so I think it's like this act of remembering. And when you think of that word in English, it's really beautiful, right? Because you are not just remembering the past, but you are re, remembering that river. If it's part of you, it's like a member of your body or collective body. And so maybe that's what they're doing. They're remembering the river into their collective body.

Una Casa de Barro | A House of Mud



Figure 5; Casa Amaru and Wawa Amaru in front of Cotopaxi volcano.

¹² *Kichwa*; yaku refers to water, often said as *mamayaku* or “mother water.”

Pablo: There was this opportunity to work on the Wawa Amaru. So we said – there it is. That moment was like the ideal to be able to also return to that intention of our grandparents. Why build with mud, why do it with mud, why? I mean, how do you feel when you have that contact with the earth, right? It's super beautiful when you break this idea that you live in a mud house because you're poor and because the system said so. I heard a lot of stories that said that, of course, a mud house is synonymous with poverty. And that only Indigenous people live in those houses. Mhm. And Indigenous people live in those kinds of houses, but yet we haven't had health problems, say, for having lived like this. So, eh, that helped us to understand, right? To be able to also take advantage of the natural resources. Also we did it with this idea of using natural steel – bamboo. Mhm. So, eh, we fused it and it turned out to be a very beautiful construction. It's designed as a space for children's education because we also believe and are convinced that they need to have their own leadership role with their own space. And what better than today? They can already have that intention of organizing.

During my first summer in Ecuador I worked as a volunteer helping to build Wawa Amaru, Pintag Amaru's building devoted to youth activities and events. The majority of the work was making adobes – shoebox-sized bricks made of mud, straw, and manure – and arranging them to dry hard in the equatorial sun. At the time, I didn't quite understand the depth of all this project meant.

Adobe construction is an ancient technique in the Andean highlands, as in many parts of the world, and until recent decades, was very common in this area. With the development of less-laborious techniques and materials, however, use of adobe has greatly diminished. As Pablo alludes to, adobe buildings have come to be associated culturally with poverty, specifically that of rural Indigenous communities. When collaboration with a former student provided resources to construct a youth center, Pintag Amaru's choice of building material was deeply intentional. They've come to understand adobe as an ancestral technique that uses what is locally available, and does so without contamination.

Valeria: The house that was built, the Wawa, is all like that, nothing, nothing, no pollution. So I would like them [the youth] to see that, I mean, there are ways to build houses, there are ways to live well, without pollution, without exploiting the earth.

In Pintag Amaru's choice of adobe – combined with bamboo beams, glass windows, and solar panel electricity – they are rewriting for themselves the narrative that the techniques of their ancestors are only of the past– instead, they look towards the future. While Pintag Amaru members don't see adobe construction as a universal solve-all, they do see it as an opportunity to bridge generations, and build differently. They will cultivate the future leaders of Pintag Amaru in a space created by the knowledge and ethic of their ancestors, constructed from the literal earth around them.

Herramientas de la Revolución | Tools of the Revolution

Diego: It's difficult, but this is our way of revolution, right? If there's no other way, of course. Because in times of revolution, it would normally be the weapons. Let's go to weapons. Everything we have, we invest in weapons. But still, we are attacking the earth. So now, I think, it's to the earth. It's not to the weapons anymore, it's to the earth. I always used to say – since we started with this revolutionary idea, because it is revolutionary – it's with the hoe and the machete, it's with the tools of the earth. Because there it is – our life, our food, the forest, our home.

Pintag Amaru identifies strongly with rural campesino culture and sees the revival of ancestral agricultural knowledge, synthesized with some modern tools, as part of their daily living of *sumak kawsay*. This turn towards the land reflects their broader conceptions of resistance, and of revolution, as they generate change through the practiced resurgence of their own values and knowledges. While they don't see rural living as a universal tenet of *sumak kawsay*, they do understand sustainable agricultural practices to be a foundational point of (re)connecting to land in their context.

Mateo: I think that now *sumak kawsay* is a part of ancestral knowledge. Perhaps people nowadays don't practice it, and they also don't know or understand how to have a good life. I believe that the central knowledge was based on good living, a lot of respect for life, kindness, humility, good companionship among all neighbors. We are reviving how they lived, reviving our way of living and our way of cultivating our products, which is also based on good living, having our own food, cultivating our own food, reviving our ways of feeding ourselves.

Though Pintag Amaru members refer to their agricultural work as “permaculture,” they use this term in reference to ancestral techniques that reflect lunar and seasonal cycles, naturally restore soil fertility, and avoid chemicals. They've connected with a Kichwa permaculture trainer to relearn these techniques, implement them in their own space, and hold broader trainings for the community. Like other communities who have engaged agroecological methods as features of food sovereignty (Holt-Giménez et al. 2021) Pintag Amaru sees this work as foundational in restoring a more balanced relationship with land, moving away bit by bit from an industrialized food system, and towards greater self-sufficiency. Their space is small, and not enough to feed them fully, but many of them have replicated learned techniques in their own homes and are working to (re)engage these methods in the broader community.

Part of Pintag Amaru's engagement with both agriculture and forest restoration also centers on the revival of medicinal plant knowledge and cultivation. Many of the elders in the community still hold a depth of this knowledge, and most Pintag Amaru members grew up using a wide variety of local plants as sources of medicine. A garden in Pintag Amaru's space, managed by the women's group, is devoted to the cultivation of medicinal plants, and Pintag Amaru is working with community members and with visiting students to catalog plants species and uses. The hope is that, through time, Pintag Amaru's space can serve as a center of (re)engaging ancestral knowledges and relationships, cultivating the revolution of (re)connection.

Gabriel: It's about finding that balance that hasn't been achieved yet, especially in medicine – medicine that is very scientific, very Western, and so-called ancestral medicine, because all medicine is ancestral, even Western medicine is ancestral because it comes from the knowledge of many other people from a long time ago. Mhm. I don't know if all of this knowledge can be recovered. Mmm. But if we could do something, it would be excellent. Mhm. Hopefully. If everything goes well, it would be great. I think this would be a place to live, to research, to learn.

Minga | Minga

Maria: I think the way we live this good life is by seeking that idea of solidarity among us, helping and supporting each other. Also this idea of community work, always the idea of minga, the idea of gathering to converse. The idea that not everything has to be for economic value. Mhm. The idea of knowing where our food comes from, our food sovereignty. Mhm. And I also believe that, while we have a lot of work to do – I feel that we need to know a lot, to organize ourselves, because yes, it's quite a challenge to reach an ideological form of thinking, of work, of relationship among everyone – we still have a lot to do, but we are indeed heading towards the idea of community. Because most of us work together, work united, of course. But it's also difficult because everyone sells you the idea of individuality –so, how do you live your life, how do you generate your resources, how do you spend your resources? And we have a different idea.

So much of Pintag Amaru's practice is oriented towards the resurgence of a collective ethic. The practice of minga is one example through which this ethic is enacted. Minga is a form of collective labor, very common in the Indigenous Andes, which generally involves reciprocal labor between families or communal labor on community projects. All of the constructions and other projects in Pintag Amaru's space were built primarily through minga. Pintag Amaru generally holds minga on Saturdays and provides food – as many mingas do – for those who participate.

Pablo: The minga has always been a foundation of work, and to this day we have the minga as a methodology or an anti-capitalist way of being able to build or have the community in good health or for a common benefit. It's completely anti-capitalist. So we do that. Casa Amaru, for example, was built solely with mingas, only with mingas every Saturday.

Members refer to minga as “anti-capitalist,” in that it has no relation to individual wages nor individual profit – communal benefit is the goal and motivation. Of course, they still need to navigate the contemporary capitalist system in their implementation of minga, scheduling around members’ and other participants’ work and other obligations. Within this navigation though, Pintag Amaru members are working to reinstate a broader orientation towards collective living and organizing.

Minga is just one of the many forms in which they carry this out. Even the meals at Pintag Amaru gatherings have a distinctly communal orientation. During mingas, events, and meetings, Pintag Amaru practices *pamba mesa*. Pamba mesa is a shared meal in which all participants contribute a food item or dish to a central arrangement, often a cloth laid on the ground. Before eating, Pintag Amaru members always offer a thanks for the food, the farmers, and Pachamama. Even when we were in the field collecting water samples, we’d arrange our tupperwares on the earth between us, using the lids as our shared plates. Sometimes new students would bring their “own” food on trips, not yet quite understanding this communal culture, and be asked to wait to eat until all could partake. It could come down to breaking a single piece of bread into 12 pieces; and yet, it was done without hesitation. While these may seem like small moments, small acts, they reveal an ethic of something much larger.

This ethic is also carried through Pintag Amaru’s organization and decision-making processes. When I first arrived in Ecuador, I was surprised – and sometimes frustrated – by what I perceived as the “inefficiency” of meetings. I remember one conversation in which we were planning snacks for the youth camp. Some members thought popcorn would be too dry...fruit too light..what about fruit and juice?....Too sweet. Maybe popcorn and fruit?... The back and forth went on for what seemed to me like an eternity. But I learned to love these conversations. Everyone had something to say. And that was the point – everyone had something to say. The popcorn-fruit debate is a small example of this larger communal ethic, one which weaves through all decisions, from the miniscule to the huge.

Gabriel: From the idea of conventional development that they sell you, it's like, there are always dominant powers. It's almost like a pyramid structure. And what we want and appreciate is this idea of breaking those, those, those structural guidelines that generate power over other people or simply over the earth. And that's why we always talk about how circles are super powerful, and that makes you feel like there isn't a structural hierarchy. Mhm. So, that can break that idea of being afraid to speak because you're ashamed that someone will criticize you or say you don't know. From our, from our actions, from our activity, we've started to break that idea that there are wrong answers or incorrect responses, right? We always say and convince and give that confidence to the people we work with that your perspective will never be wrong, it always has power, and your presence as a person is always important in the community. Mhm. And if we take that to the practices of our grandparents and with the development of sumak kawsay, we seek that balance, right? That way of existing without harming the other person.

In Pintag Amaru, decisions are not made by leaders, nor by majority vote, but through practiced and open conversations. These collective practices aren't always easy, of course. Pintag Amaru has faced intergroup conflict and has had many tenuous and challenging conversations.

Alejandro: I believe one of our challenges is like, um. It's like when you start learning to walk as a child, right? It's like learning to walk again. It's difficult. But also to walk and make that path lead us to a goal. And when there are several people with different criteria, with different perspectives, it sometimes causes friction among us.

Though Pintag Amaru operates through a collective ethic, this doesn't mean they always agree. The open discussions I've witnessed have often included disagreement, from small to significant, and involve a concerted effort to understand and navigate different views.

These are stumbles of learning to walk in collectivity. And there will always be, I suppose – that's part of following a different path. Pintag Amaru sees this collective orientation – towards one another, and towards all forms of existence – as a central thread of sumak kawsay, and ultimately, as a way forward.

Valeria: We are always trying to live sumak kawsay, where living means having a good relationship within the collective. First and foremost, from there, we are learning many more things about good living and that good living of sharing with others such as neighbors, family members in the house, in the home, everything living. It's about respect, kindness, humility, community work of sharing in the community, dialoguing among neighbors, and forming a collaboration where everyone agrees to work together.

Floreciendo | Flowering

From strong, deeply-explored roots in identity and place, Pintag Amaru's efforts have grown. This growth isn't linear, though – it's a weaving across worlds. Pintag Amaru navigates many in their efforts to (re)vive ancestral values and live them today, engaging strategically in elements and tools of development while grounded in Kichwa ways of being. They do so subversively, “tricking the system” by applying its resources towards the revitalization of their own culture, lifeways, and pursuit of coexistence. From a widely-shared space and “revolution” of the land, to a renewed relationship with water and to one another – Pintag Amaru understands *sumak kawsay* as lived in the day to day, and their efforts to do so serve as generative forms of resistance to the dominance of development. In this actualizing, Pintag Amaru epitomizes a broad post-development vision, de-centering development through their affirmative, resurgent living of Indigenous ethics (Escobar, 1992). Their pursuits orient towards *sumak kawsay* as a practiced philosophy, not only of the past, but the future. The result yields early blossoms of a different world.

And these blossoms, too, will offer new seeds.

Diego: It's resistance too, in some way, to give a message to everyone. So our resistance is, it's also sowing seeds in you all from the other side and who understand that they can go and do things there. Because here you learn a bit about the land, you learn how to cultivate, how to work on something, you go and do it at home, in another country, in a different country – like a sower to sow. Many seeds have been sown and they have been sown from here, they have gone there to the United States. So it's not only, not only literally, it's also metaphorically. Because you're sowing a seed that at some point will become, I don't know, a person who received a lot of inspiration from the activism that is being done here, organizing a, I don't know, a movement there that works to defend Afro-descendant people, for example. There are things like that, or defend your agriculture or do things for water.

I don't know, you go with a metaphorical seed too.

8 - Sembrando | Sowing

John: Students, especially coming from the United States, especially activist students, you know, believe in big changes in the world. They want to see massive changes and they often cry out for these changes, and especially through technology, you know, social media. But being truly engaged with social change, like at a grassroots level, their experience is very limited. And if they do have it, it's often focused on a very transactional relationship, a very like "I demand you give" kind of thing, right? You know, that's kind of where we are right now in colleges, and have been for a while. And it's kind of like where we are also in politics. It's about demands and like, giving in, compromising and negotiating.

But I think what happens here is something completely different. I think you have those students with that energy, and it takes them a while, but they learn that social change is something very creative, constructive – something I would actually argue is much more than building a new structure. It's more like planting a garden. It's more like – or if you want to think about it as structures – I've often thought about it as, like, creating vertical gardens, you know, transforming these wall-based institutions by, by growing vertical gardens.

I think of the cracks in the walls in our current structures – those cracks are just indicators of something that needs to change, right? I think you work with all these people and altogether you plant in those cracks little seeds that everybody wants to plant, little seeds of change and outcomes, sprouting this vertical garden. And yeah, your walls are going to look a lot different.

Now, theoretically, if you plant the right seeds, there is change. You don't need those walls exactly how they were because all the roots are going to come in and create a different kind of wall. It's going to be more solid. It has a whole different identity because of how you planted it and constructed it. So I think, when we talk about international students, we really try to get them to recognize that we don't know exactly what's going to come out. And you can't if you try. If you already know what's going to come out, what's the real fun in doing it really? We just have to keep planting seeds of change. And the structures will grow. The structures won't be built that strongly immediately, but they'll grow.

And so I would say that's how Pintag Amaru grew. And it was also built, in part, because of that interaction with students. I don't think they would be who they are without the interactions with students that gave them space, time, and tools for planting, tending, growing. Sure. And vice versa. When you talk to, you know, students – especially the ones who stay in touch or come back or, you know, the ones who helped here and all that – something was planted inside of them.

Sembrando | Sowing

Pintag Amaru's work has flowered locally, but their visions of change are much broader. As a colectivo and a movimiento, Pintag Amaru pursues both local action and global reflection. Though they understand sumak kawsay as rooted in a place and cosmovision, they see the need for reconnection to a deep collectivity far beyond their own space. Change, they believe, will come from resurgent ways of seeing, from a consciousness of profound interrelationality between nature and ourselves.

Their efforts to live sumak kawsay don't serve as a prescriptive "alternative to development," nor is this the intention of post-development thinking (Escobar 1992); instead, and as part of the generative "undoing" of development (*ibid*), Pintag Amaru sees their work as providing a view of the possible. It's up to us to inhabit the possible in our own lives.

In this way, Pintag Amaru sees consciousness as the "seed of change" that creatively, and in cooperation with others, will lay the roots of a transformed paradigm – growing in the cracks of old structures. This growth is quiet, slow, but persistent.

In time, the first fruits of new growth will drop their own seeds – to root once again.

Cambiar la Matriz | Change the Matrix

Diego: That's one of the dreams within the community. It's one of the biggest dreams – changing the matrix. I mean, changing that relationship that we, as forms of existence, have with each other. Because it's not possible to inhabit this planet without existing alongside others, without existing with life itself. So, why are we here? The water, the fire, the earth, the air—they are all here, they are part of us. So, once we understand all of that and realize that the Earth is our sustenance, our constant existence, we'll love the Earth more. We'll love the planet where we live much more. So, the idea of changing the matrix – I mean, the idea of changing the context, the form of inhabiting this time-space here and now – is like trying to impart that knowledge to the rest of the people, to try to contribute to changing existence itself.

Pintag Amaru is navigating the complexity of living a place-based philosophy in a globalized world. They invest deeply in relationship to their own spaces, their own territories; and, they understand these spaces do not exist in isolation. Pintag Amaru recognizes that even successful resistance to a mine,

for example, would mean the mine simply destroys a different river. They see that something broader, something collective, must transform.

Gabriel: Maybe Indigenous peoples can offer several alternatives, and of course, reduce the impact generated by development and extraction. But, the big machine still continues as it is. I mean, the big machine keeps going constantly. So, we can do something, small things, and maybe they'll become really big. But if the machine continues, if the whole system keeps generating destruction I mean, nothing changes. We may ease it a bit, but it's not fundamentally changing anything.

When Pintag Amaru members refer to “the matrix,” they mean many things – the social fabric, the way of relating to the land and to one another, our understanding of the world and our place in it – and begin by “changing the matrix” in their own space.

Roberto: The idea is that if we change the matrix, even in a small way, in two hectares or in the space we are working on, it's like, we're doing something for the world, and it's not just about this small thing; there are also many more people who are doing it. We are also doing this to tell the world that they can change their way of thinking – in some way, the matrix.

Pintag Amaru members see their projects, in addition to the tangible impact in their space, as models of a different way to relate. Though they do encourage some literal replication of their projects in the right contexts, they are modeling, broadly, a more conscious way of relating to the life and land around them.

Diego: I understand that it won't be easy to change a matrix that has existed for so many years, right? It's not as simple as saying, "stop extraction, let's turn everything into forest." That would lead to significant conflicts and likely a lot of hunger, given that we're accustomed to a certain way of life. However, what we're trying to do as a community, with a mindset rooted more in our Indigenous heritage and in the original principles of these lands, is to seek harmony and balance with all forms of existence. There are so many, from microorganisms in the soil, to planets like Venus, the Moon, or the Sun, which are all important parts of the balance. Once we, as human beings, understand this, our actions towards the Earth and our surroundings will be different. We'll be able to see a different way of relating to life itself.

Pintag Amaru members hope their practices can model and inspire broader shifts in consciousness that are part of, over time and in concert with many others, changing the matrix.

This movement has not been easy, however. One of Pintag Amaru's challenges has been gaining support in their own community.

Valeria: The challenge is how to convey this ideology, this mindset that we have, towards the rest of the people, towards more communities. Because that would be the challenge: to help them understand, to make them reflect that we should take better care of our space, respect it more. Nowadays, this is not happening as much, it's not as common anymore.

As some have described, many community members don't understand or support Pintag Amaru's (re)engagement with ancestral principles and practices. One neighbor, when I asked about their (lack of) interest in Pintag Amaru, said simply, "there's no money in the ancestors." From Pintag Amaru's view, many community members hold more dominant views of development, religion, and relationship to land, and are not convinced by the organization's ethic. Though members still hold friendly relationships with them, many nearby community members chose not to participate in programs and events. Amidst this challenge, though, Pintag Amaru moves forward, focusing on shifting consciousness when and where they can. They understand these are long, incremental processes – that this is a task of generation after generation, as it has been.

Maria: Many Indigenous peoples in general are focusing, or we are focusing, on how we relate as human beings to Pachamama, right? And how we can change the matrix, the capitalist matrix of extraction, of extracting resources, to a more conscious matrix of defending the Earth.

No Van a Comprar mi Manera de Pensar | They Won't Buy My Way of Thinking

Sofia: It's like, now everything is about money. Mhm. And they think that with money, they can buy everything. But they won't buy my life. They won't buy my way of thinking. Mhm. So, of course, a lot of things need to change. Many things. But mainly, we need to open our minds and our hearts so that we can have consciousness and grasp the reality of what we're living.

Pintag Amaru members believe changing the matrix, fundamentally, is about changing a way of thinking – a consciousness. As Sofia references, she and others see consciousness as a haven, a seed, of resistance – a place “the powers” can't fully reach. Echoing broader conceptions of “decolonizing the mind” (Thiong'o, 1998), Pintag Amaru members see their consciousness, and their efforts to shift that of others, as the foundation of transforming colonial logics and structures.

Alejandro: Pintag Amaru is a movement where what we try to do is create consciousness, no? Consciousness about what we are doing as human beings, about how we are behaving, let's say, about what is really happening in the world. There are alternatives to reverse all of this, but only if there is consciousness. Consciousness within the people who wield power: because instead of spending millions and millions of dollars on weapons, tanks, on useless things that serve us no purpose, on idiotic wars that are waged, we could create systems that could clean up rivers, greywater. It could be done, it can be done, there's technology, there's knowledge, but there isn't the willingness.

Above all, members see a lack of consciousness in relation to collective treatment of Pachamama.

Roberto: In reality, the objective of Pintag Amaru is to seek connection, to search for the connection of each human being, however independent. Even outside of the members of Pintag Amaru themselves – to change consciousness, and turn our eyes to the earth, to the Alpa Mamita — what I call her, the one who feeds us.

Broadly, members see lack of connection, awareness, and concern for the other forms of existence as both a cause and outcome of a broken physical/mental/spiritual relationship with the land.

Alejandro: The gods want us conscious, not religious. That's what I take with me, to have consciousness, because what we are doing is contaminating the house of the gods, the earth itself, the planet.

Awakening consciousness, they believe, can serve to reconnect. They see a collective need, and a collective benefit. Much of their work is oriented towards this expansive vision.

Valeria: Imagine if we all changed our way of thinking, our way of being, of starting to value what we really have and to be grateful for what we have, what the earth gives us. I mean, it would be totally different, the world would be different, right?

La Semilla Más Grande | The Biggest Seed

Diego: If we sow something in someone, in some person, and at least out of the hundred we know, if ten, five, have started the change, it's like, we've already achieved it. If they teach and it replicates. But it's not only with the global world, it's also with our children, with my son, for example – he is the biggest seed, because he has to continue. This is of generations.

Pintag Amaru plants many seeds of consciousness close to home – amongst the youth of their own community. Local education (or “unlearning” as many members would call it) is a huge focus, structured within after-school programs, art and theater performances, and organized camps. One of Pintag Amaru’s initial intentions in its founding was to help bridge generations, connecting youth to the values and views of their ancestors, and in doing so, help to overcome limitations of the dominant education system.

Maria: Traditional education separates you from your roots. They don't talk to you about history anymore. And to proceed to your future, you have to know your past, you know? You use the past, live in the present and know what it can be in the future. It's a cycle.

Members see this generational continuity as necessary to carry forward their values, practices, and relationships with land, and to help address contemporary challenges.

Valeria: My vision is also to have a place, a place healthy for our children, for our future. And, and I'll tell you. I don't know. To have this, to have that tranquility, that peace that everyone would like to have. And a place where we can find all that and where the traditions of the grandparents are not lost, the cultures are not lost, where the flora, the fauna is not lost. I mean, trying to maintain that place and not just for us, but also for future generations. I mean, as we say, we want to focus on the wawas, on the youth, so that they see and learn a little bit of everything – how to take care of the earth, how to try to improve the situation we are living in practically all over the world.

Through education that centers ancestral values, philosophies, and practices, Pintag Amaru members seek restoration of a landscape, and a restoration of relationship to it – but they know this is a long-term vision.

Pablo: If one of our objectives, our goals, our dreams, is to generate or create a more conscious generation. Mhm. We understand that we, well, we are aware that we live in a very capitalist, very oppressive system, and that has caused us to carry several issues within ourselves...But yes, we can identify and recognize these problems. Maybe we can generate this form of education that future generations need to be able to coexist better with society, with the place we're in, with animals, with all living beings. And we always say it's like, maybe what we plant we won't see bloom. And we also talk about reforestation and we talk about these teaching methodologies, learning, maybe we won't see it bloom. But our joy is that someone else will. And I would have loved to see it in this life, but I know I won't be able to see how we recreate the forest again. I won't see it, right? It will take a long time, maybe 40, 50 years, surely we won't exist anymore, but future generations will enjoy it and we hope that this idea continues to be born in them and continues to strengthen what we do, what we dream of, even with the mistakes we have, right?

Pablo recognizes a condition of Pintag Amaru's work that surfaces often; this is the work of generations.

While Pintag Amaru's pursuit of "changing the matrix" may seem ambitious, it is grounded in a collective effort and long view of time; they know that much of their work will not "bloom" for many generations to come. With this vision understood, Pintag Amaru members recognize the responsibility their children – and all of our children – will hold.

Roberto: There's a phrase that goes, "What kind of society are you going to give to your children?" But I say it the other way around – what children are you going to give? So this project of Pintag Amaru is aimed at creating new people with new visions focused on reality. In our, in our land, in our sumak kawsay, in our air, in our cosmovision.

Pintag Amaru members often discuss their own responsibility towards the land, and in many ways, see raising a "conscious generation" as part of fulfilling this responsibility. As they often say, the wawas are the future – not just in their direct practice of relationship with land, but in their continuation of "consciousness-raising" itself.

Roberto: The base of what we want to teach, what we want to instill in children is like planting a little seed. A seed so that they too can create, let's say, a broader level of consciousness, a broader one, so that, umm – not necessarily just Pintag Amaru – but Pintag Amaru could be a cell, so that they go on to create more cells and change consciousness. That would be it. I mean, that's what we aspire to as an organization. That we today can be the cell. And maybe when it's my time to die, because we all have to die, I will come back – maybe as a tree – and I can keep watching that the children have achieved something of what we are trying to do. Of course. Mhmm. That would be the biggest dream.

Arte Medicina | Art Medicine

Gabriel: We can't exist without art, we can't exist without colors, without music, without, I don't know, poetry. So, we can't exist without that. And we also decided to use education or art education, art medicine, as a way to show the world identity, history, work with the land. Also political, social, and environmental conflicts. So, we use a lot of decolonial education as a form of resistance to the imposed, to what was imposed upon us.



Figure 6: Mural in Casa Amaru.

Pintag Amaru enacts much of their consciousness-raising work through music, art, dance, and theater. Some of my earliest memories in Pintag come from late evenings in Casa Amaru, prepping for our upcoming theater performance. I (luckily) played a minor role – the swaying mountain in the background – and got to partake in the chaos and beauty of puppet-making, script-writing, and acting. This particular *teatro* focused on extractive industry in Indigenous communities. From an early scene in which Spanish conquistadors found gold and claimed control of the land, to a later scene exploring the power dynamics of oil extraction in the Amazon, the entire *teatro* exposed both injustice and resistance – the final scene ends with characters coming together to revive an ill Mother Earth.

Theater performances like this one are one of the many ways in which Pintag Amaru engages youth – who make up most of the cast – and reaches a broader audience. They perform their *teatros* within

the community, in central Pintag, and often, in Quito. Pintag Amaru uses theater, and many other art forms, as a way to express their broader messages related to identity, the environment, and social change.

Valeria: And this theater theme, theater workshops, it's like, it helps us to manifest our protest, to manifest against the system in the country. It's a way to protest, right? Against the whole situation that the country is experiencing. Of course, I mean, imagine when you put together this whole theater theme and, you can do, for example – We recently had a theater presentation in Pintag where we portrayed this issue of mining exploitation. Which is very strong, as we say. This theater that we put together has a very strong content that we try to expose to other people. Mhmm. It helps us quite a lot, let's say, to express ourselves more and to try to communicate more of what we're trying to do, through the theater programs. It's like, we try to explain to people about the things we're doing. Mhm. About how we're polluting the environment, about what we're really experiencing from the government system, about all those things.

In addition to theater performances, Pintag Amaru engages art in much of their “decolonial education” work with local youth. From painting murals, to producing recorded radio teatros, to writing raps with a Kichwa hip hop group, art is a central medium through which they explore and express identity, history, and relationships with land. Overall, they engage art to encourage social change, identifying wounds and calling for healing – a collective medicine.



Figure 7: Mural on front wall of Casa Amaru.

Cambiar esa Forma de Pensar | Change This Way of Thinking

Diego: When I was in college, I hated North America and Americans. Yes, I hated them because I understood all the shit they've done wrong in the world. I didn't want to have absolutely any relationship with this, this idea of Americans, of thinking that way. But then as you delve into things, it's like, I abhorred these things so much, this thinking about Americans – and now I'm working all the time with Americans. And now I'm doing things all the time with people from the United States. But now it's like, we're all human beings in the end and we have the same right, the same, the same planet, of course. So the way is not to hate, it's to love. And it's to change this way of thinking. It's like sending a seed that, at some point, can germinate.

Pintag Amaru sees their work with international students as part of their broader intention – to shift ways of thinking. As has been stressed within other Indigenous resistance movements (Blosser 2017), Pintag Amaru believes decolonization of consciousness must take place amongst us all. The need, and responsibility, are collective.

As part of these efforts, Pintag Amaru has received international students in their decolonial study abroad program – mostly from the U.S. – since 2016. Students usually stay in Pintag from several weeks to several months, engaging in classes taught by Pintag Amaru members, coordinating projects, and volunteering. Through their programs, Pintag Amaru exposes students to a “different type of education,” that supports their broader goals of planting “seeds of change” globally.

Pablo: So, the idea of having the support of people, of foreign students, is really cool because on one hand, it gives us hope that we can spread through them what we do, that these stories will be shared. As we've said, like, go tell in your countries that there are some crazy people dreaming of a different world. And that if they can, they should also go to their country and generate the change we need, right? Mhm. Maybe we don't, of course, we don't have a project or a process already, like, working perfectly, but we understand that it's part of the process, we understand that we're learning to walk together and we're understanding that when foreign students come, it's like a different world for them too and for us as well. Each person, each student, is a different world and yet they, and you, fit in very well with what we're doing. They are part of our dream, they support us to dream, they support our work.

I've been able to know some of these students and learn more about their experiences. Personally, I have been deeply impacted by my time working with Pintag Amaru and other students have shared similar perspectives. At the foundation, many of them/us are inspired by the clear, tangible impact of Pintag Amaru's work, especially amidst seemingly insurmountable global challenges.

Chris: I feel like what they're doing, like the vision that they have, the ideas that they have – I feel like, not only is it helping me in terms of my own personal growth. I think it's like helping the future..And that's where we where we align, you know? Like, I don't necessarily share all of their dreams and hopes in, in their vision, right? But we definitely share a lot of ideas and, and values. And most of those have to do with creating this idea of like, better living for the future generations, right? And like, how do we navigate our places, as this kind of this generation that's inheriting a lot of a lot of problems, a lot of things that seem insolvable, seem so huge and complex that we little people as individuals can't do anything. It's paralyzing. Yeah. And it feels like this work in this tiny community feels like it's actually doing something. Feels like there is actually a difference and it's, it's tangible.

Students are also inspired by Pintag Amaru's living of communality. Especially coming from a highly individualistic cultural context, witnessing and living with a deeply intertwined group has encouraged students to reflect on their own relationship with and need for community.

Chris: For me personally one of the most powerful things of being here is, like, thinking about a possible world where not everybody's thinking about what they can get from you all the time. Human nature isn't necessarily greedy, but maybe we've created this system that makes us be more greedy. Um, I don't know. I think it gives me hope about humanity in a certain way of, like, we were always designed, or we were always meant to work together. And I think that so much of the world that we live in now encourages us to be like, be your own individual. You can do anything you want to, and you can do it by yourself. You don't need anyone else, you know? And I think for me, one of the most powerful lessons is like, it's okay to need other people. It's okay to rely on community. And if you can, if you can create a community and you can live in one that's so special. And, and also it's not perfect ever. You know, like I don't think that there's any community in the history of humanity that was like everybody was happy all the time and there wasn't like conflict and blah, blah, blah. Um, but I do think that getting closer to the way that we naturally thrive is all we can try to do.

Learning from/with the organization has already cultivated in some students the deep reflection on life, interconnection, and responsibility that Pintag Amaru seeks. Ultimately, they hope students will take what they've learned from Pintag Amaru back home – in ways of thinking, ways of recognizing interdependence, ways of interacting with Pachamama and with one another.

Chris: I've been given this gift. And I feel like, by living here and by working with these people – and I hope to bring it with me to another place – this lesson is that, like, we are all connected regardless of where we're from. We belong here as human beings. We're not some entity separate from the rest of the living world. We are one and the same, right? And so many people don't believe that or don't trust it, even though it's, I think it's one of our most basic instincts, to like marvel at the world around us, you know? I think, Yeah, we lose that. We lose that as we get older. Yeah. And I think that's, that would be my main take away. Yeah. That another world is possible and that we have what we need already. We just have to remember. We just have to.. exactly..we just have to remember it.

Pablo: If we talk about us being intelligent beings, we should understand that we are filled with cultures, with ethnicities, full of diversity, of existences, and that should be our pride. And to truly understand that, that we are rich because of being so diverse. And that is what enriches us because, I mean, if I visualize a world where there is only one race of people and one language, it seems very poor, very sad. And so those differences, I think, complement us and make us interesting because otherwise it would be a very boring world, right? So I dream of a world where we can break those social classes, those differences in religion, in beliefs, that are simply tearing us apart as a society. Mhm. Um, I don't practice any religion, I have no problem with any religion, right? But I do have problems with religious people who want to impose something you don't agree with or who always want to contradict what you think, what you believe, and what sustains you. Mhm. Right. If I did the same thing, they wouldn't like it. Mhm. So in the same way, I aspire and dream of that world where you can exist and be yourself. No matter what social class you are, no matter what economic class, what economic power, what political power you have, but simply in how you relate to others and how that relationship with others makes you great, as a person. How your existence contributes to the construction of a fairer world, of a fairer society. Mhm.

So, what's important is you, and enjoying the moment, but if we look at it from a perspective outside of egocentrism, you don't just need to think about the present, you also need to consider that animals also need their space, they also have their families, and not just selling the idea of progress, development, right? Building large cities all over the countryside. And what about the animals? What about the water, huh? What about your production area? What about what you eat? So, that, in some way, is going to bring about a very strong problem. But we still hope that what we do can impact someone else. And that someone else will be interested in getting to know what we do first, in learning from us, and us also learning from them, and that they can replicate it in their own spaces. Mhm. And that they can generate movement from a lighter, more thoughtful knowledge, where you don't harm someone else by pursuing your own interests, where your interests are the interests of the community or the people with whom you live, with whom you exist. We feel and dream that that knowledge, that recognition, can contribute to the world we want to build. And as we always dream and say in many of our publications, right? Maybe we're crazy to believe it, to see it that way, but we say it from our space, from what we want and dream – of building a better world.

I have a vivid memory of sitting around the fire one evening at Casa Amaru, all of us huddled under each other's panchos in a light rain. I recorded our conversation – we were nearing the end of the summer and the goal of gathering was to talk about next steps – and after it all, there was only one title for the recording that felt right: *Fire Dreaming Session*. Our dreaming started with smaller things; with their mini-documentary, with their next projects, with the construction of this thesis. But as so often happens here, our dreaming expanded. We dreamed about what it could look like – the world we are working towards.

I think sometimes the idea of dreaming can sound too light, too hopeful, lacking action and substance. With Pintag Amaru it feels different. They dare to dream, and work tangibly towards that dream. I'm afraid many of us have given up on dreaming, have resigned ourselves to numbness or apathy – in a world that feels like it's falling apart, amidst challenges that feel so daunting, convinced this is the only possibility. I am constantly inspired by Pintag Amaru's unwavering dream of something different – a grounded, confident hope of a better world. They know we won't see that world in our lifetimes. It may never fully exist, even. But as they always say – *mejor intentar* | it's better to try.

Los Locos | The Crazy Ones

Roberto: I think we're the same crazy ones. We have the same craziness, eh?

Pintag Amaru members often, and with laughter, refer to themselves as *los locos* | the crazy ones. On a surface level, they are referencing what they've heard from some community members and outsiders who don't understand, or don't agree with their movement.

Valeria: I think most people are in that idea of the economy as a form of development, the pursuit of development based on how much, materialistically, I can get – money, things. And it's difficult to judge them because, after all, the world is like that. If the world is drawn like that and if you step out, you're someone very strange, very weird, or very crazy.

In their self-references as *los locos*, however, they reclaim the term, proud to be visionaries and implementers of something different.

Gabriel: One thing I've realized in life is that everything can become a habit. So many things have become habitual for us, like the messages society sends us, such as consumerism, the idea that you have to buy, that you have to have. It's become so ingrained in our own habits. And proposing another possibility is very difficult because people think we're crazy. They say that success is having a lot, a lot of power, a lot of money, a lot of possessions. And if you tell someone that you don't need so many possessions or resources to live, they say you're crazy. "We need money, we need to work, I can't stop working." And to a certain extent, it's true, because society instills that idea in you. Education costs, healthcare costs, food costs, unless you produce your own food, unless you have your own ways of healing or preventing illnesses, unless you research and educate yourself, everything costs, and you need money, and you have to be part of society.

It's as if, if you don't find a real and strong purpose in life that can sustain life itself, the system presents you with a life proposal according to its convenience, according to its own societal criteria. Breaking free from that is very difficult. It's necessary, but if you tell many people, they'll think it doesn't make sense and they won't want to do it. And it's always like, you're crazy. That's the word

they often use, and we've heard it many times for a long time. It's like "they're crazy, idle, they have too much time, they're lazy." But it's necessary. It's necessary to be a little crazy in the world too.

As Gabriel highlights, being loco to Pintag Amaru means being part of pushing the world in a different direction – one must be “crazy” to dream of and enact other possibilities.

Javier: As a collective, we are encouraging coexistence between communities, between the peoples that are still here....They'll say we're crazy, that this isn't a good vision. But eventually they'll see that it can be achieved. Mhm. Yes, yes, it would be crazy. But let's hope that at some point, maybe, large or small collectives, they start joining, joining, joining this struggle.

Una Minga Tratando de Vivir Mejor | A Minga Trying to Live Better

Mateo: I think something can be achieved, to change, to improve the world. Mhm. But wouldn't it be cool, huh? Yeah, to see everyone rise up and say, "Why can't we do that?" We still have time. There's a minga trying to live better, to balance life.

Minga is the perfect word here – an effort that is inherently by and for the collective. While Pintag Amaru centers Indigenous resistance and resurgence, they see the call for change as relevant to us all. On one level, they recognize the inextricable collectivity of sharing a planet – they understand their efforts to care for land cannot flourish in isolation.

Alejandro: This is where the concept of "living well," *sumak kawsay*, comes into play. That's where we really need to act; it's not just words. We could say that we must do it, we should do it, or else we'll simply cease to exist at some point. Because the Earth is simply defending herself, it's because we've caused so much harm. Pollution and all those things, cutting down forests, all of that is simply the Earth defending herself. The Earth can't take it anymore. So, if this doesn't stop, if it continues, what awaits us will be very strong. And perhaps in the future, on Earth – after all, the Earth will endure, we will disappear – perhaps at some point an intelligent race will come and find us and wonder what happened to these people. So, this is a call that we can change. Not all is lost. We still have time.

Pintag Amaru pursues a minga to live better because, quite simply, our collective existence relies on it.

They recognize the systems in which we are enmeshed – disconnected from the foundations of life – are harmful to us all. In this way, Pintag Amaru members nuance conceptions of wealth and good living.

While, of course, they condemn the massive wealth inequality we see globally, and push for better material circumstances for many, they also question the extent to which the materially-privileged are truly living fulfilled lives.

Mateo: They're not going to buy their own peace. I think some of the world's problems are that they believe they can improve how they feel inside with money, but they only create more problems. Yes. I don't know. It's very complex and difficult to analyze those things. How can they feel calm, hmm, while destroying us and destroying the earth? Because sometimes, I don't know, I think and I say, what future are they going to leave for their children, for their grandchildren? Because you can't live on money alone. We also breathe. And we live off of that too.

Even in discussing the most powerful global class, Mateo frames the inadequacy of wealth alone in the pursuit of living well. This is another dimension of Pintag Amaru's call for collective effort, and collective change – that none of us, not even the “winners” are truly living well in the current system. They see a world in imbalance; on one side, material deprivation and exploitation, and on the other, deep emptiness and isolation. This recognition does not diminish their calls for justice and reconciliation; it does, however, add to their conviction that this *lucha*¹³ pertains to us all.

John: It goes into all those things that we all know, like the difference between being developed and being happy and like the Gross Happiness Index and all that kind of stuff that, sure – having needs met and of course, you know, entertainment and all that kind of stuff, you know, money for certain things obviously needs to be there but. You know, just like in education, just like in development, we've been deceived about what it means to have a successful, productive, joyful life. And, I mean, that's where this has all got to go at some point. I mean, for us as well, you know – because it's just more and more violent, right? In every aspect of life. And not the healthy violence, you know, like, that happens in an ecosystem – but aggressive violence to, you know, accumulate more. And it's why we know that – you know it probably won't happen in our lifetimes – but we know that modernity is on its way out. Because nothing, you know, it's like a virus that eventually can dissipate after it consumes everything that it can, right? But that doesn't need to happen. And so in line with that, it's like, the hope and vision and the joy and the celebration and all that that you see here and you see in other communities where we work, that also needs to be considered.

Granos de Arena | Grains of Sand

Roberto: Governments may not change, but the change lies within each of us. Each of us can contribute with a grain of sand to make this world a better world, a beautiful world. This is the idea of Pintag Amaru.

Some of you may not be convinced by the big dreams of a tiny organization. I think that's how many of us often feel, anyway. That what we can do is so small, while the challenges are huge. But Pintag Amaru never imagined they would do this alone.

¹³ *Spanish*; *lucha* refers to struggle, fight, or movement.

Valeria: Imagine if there were more people who joined this cause – to see things differently. Mhm. I mean, it would be different. We would practically change everything. But as we sometimes say, it's like, we're a needle in a haystack, so to speak. Mmm. I mean, it's like we're trying to do something. But if we don't have the support of other people, it's like, of course, we wouldn't be able to accomplish anything.

Pintag Amaru's identification as a movement speaks to their orientation towards broader, necessarily collective transformation. They understand themselves as one grain of sand amongst many – but the *many* is key.

Mateo: Everyone is so important – there's so much effort in this struggle, it's so vast. There are always different collective groups, perhaps even larger ones like these, always in the fight. And we are there too, fighting, putting in that grain of sand, trying to reforest the space little by little, seeing the trees grow a little bigger each time. And for me, it's a joy.

Pintag Amaru members see their own work – especially within their “unlearning” with international students – as bridging people from across the world, reorienting towards a collective future.

Diego: The ancestors saw how the eagle and the condor have to come together at some point, and that's where the resurgence, the healing, will happen on Mother Earth, in life, right? So we are connecting. It's the eagle representing North America and the condor representing South America – they come together. It's a prophecy, perhaps, from the elders. We are not just a local community, but we are a community that brings together, that joins the North with the South or the South with the North. As all of us have to change what we are.

Beyond their own movement, Pintag Amaru aims towards the possibilities of global coalitions and solidarity. Though they recognize they are a single community in a single place, they also recognize they are far from the only community/collective/movement planting change.

Diego: There are other communities like Amaru, elsewhere there are other similar communities. And maybe little by little we will start linking up more, forming alliances. I think that this way we will become bigger, stronger, more powerful, and perhaps even more powerful than industries and mining companies and all these, don't you think?

In this gradual, ground-up alliance-building, Pintag Amaru sees the possibilities for expansive transformation. Though they see their own efforts to live *sumak kawsay* as rooted in place and cosmovision, they also recognize the intertwinement of people and place. Their conception of “seeds of consciousness,” is grounded in the conviction that we must all transform – not attempting to replicate *sumak kawsay*, but living out our own forms of connectedness to earth and to one another, of deep collectivity – in order to, piece by piece, cultivate a different world. Many scholars have come to

metaphors of this message, too; from the linking of everyday resistance to form a new grid (Scott 1985), to living Indigeneity within found “constellations of freedom” (Simpson 2017) – we live freely as best we can, now, and we connect; as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson said it, “revolution will come in a form we can not yet imagine.”

I think many of us are trained to think of revolution as a moment, a dramatic event, a violent toppling. And I don’t know, maybe it will be. But like Scott (1985) and many others, I venture to imagine there may be millions of revolutions, built on something slower, quieter, but deeply rooted – the linking of many branches to grow something new.

Gabriel: Many people are becoming interested in this, in our ways of seeing the world, life. Mhm. It seems like it, doesn't it? It's cool that this is happening. I didn't think it would happen like this. Because, of course, in a globalized, capitalist world, everything is consumerism. And a different idea seems very difficult. But apparently it's not as difficult as or not so isolated – the idea of a better world. So, I really like that. I think some connections are being made or strengthened.

Maybe the idea isn't to change the world, but to go on making a different one.

9 - Discussion & Conclusions

I've struggled with titling this section "conclusions." My conclusions aren't neat, nor conclusive. I don't see that as the goal of this work. But I think there are bigger themes and responses to identify, and I hope to do that here. Overall, I hope this exploration can draw out some of the nuance in these ideas, and offer some further clarity on Pintag Amaru's perspectives and hopes.

Sumak Kawsay

Sumak kawsay could be called many things – a principle, a philosophy, a set of values, an ethical orientation. And sumak kawsay is many things. Maybe that's one of the most foundational recognitions here: sumak kawsay is much more expansive and dynamic than can or should be captured in a Western academic document, by a Western academic. Any commentary I offer on sumak kawsay's dimensions should be understood within that profound limitation. And yet, as part of our broader goals for this work, I think it's important we try to convey some foundational features of how Pintag Amaru understands and practices sumak kawsay at this time.

In discussing sumak kawsay, Pintag Amaru members almost always use the phrase "equilibrium amongst all forms of existence." This short phrase holds so much. Foundationally, it necessitates a recognition that *there are* other forms of existence. In the Andean cosmovision, these include other forms of animal and plant life, but also encompass elements of existence not often considered "alive" in a Western worldview – water, air, earth, fire, amongst others. Recognition of these other forms positions human beings as just one of many. The pursuit of equilibrium holds the acknowledgement that all of these forms hold an inherent right to exist and grounds the understanding that our collective existence is mutually interdependent; this understanding is foundational in many Indigenous belief systems (Nelson 2008) and has been explored by countless scholars in other contexts (Tsing 2015). In this way, sumak kawsay is both expansively collective – aware of the presence, value, and innate rights of other forms of existence – and deeply practical: our survival literally depends on the practice of coexistence.

While this broad meaning is similar to other researchers' conceptions of *sumak kawsay* (Coral-Guerrero et al., 2021), it's key to understand the principle is dynamic. It's about continuous interaction, listening, response, and reflection. This is part of why Pintag Amaru is concerned about the attempted "systematization" of *sumak kawsay*, especially within government institutions, a critique also highlighted by other scholars (Hidalgo-Capitán, García, and Guazha n.d.; Altmann 2020). As Pablo clearly laid out, Pintag Amaru understands *sumak kawsay* to be dynamic, grounded in "understanding the place, understanding the space-time in which we live, the people, the conflicts that also evolve. And maybe that concept also evolves over time because if everything is moving, it cannot be synthesized. It cannot be static; it has to change, it has to be reflected upon, it has to be questioned because not everything we do today is right for tomorrow, or not everything that was right yesterday will be right now." So, while overarching ontologies and ethics of coexistence are foundational to *sumak kawsay*, the principle is practiced differently across time and space. To make it systematized or prescriptive would violate its necessarily place-based and dynamic nature.

Similarly, Pintag Amaru members ground *sumak kawsay* in daily living and practice. *Sumak kawsay* is an ethical grounding, not a formulaic "how to." Equilibrium is based on continuous actions, decisions, responses, considerations, and interactions. In this way, *sumak kawsay* is focused more on dynamic and present living than on any achievement or completed state, as a statist/socialist interpretation often implies; from this epistemic perspective, *sumak kawsay* would be "achieved" when all citizens have sufficient economic resources for living well, neglecting its dynamic and lived nature (Hidalgo-Capitán et al. 2014). As Pintag Amaru sees it, *sumak kawsay* is practiced through endless and ongoing decisions on the ground – guided by an expansive collective orientation – rather than static, overarching structure.

With these features in mind, Pintag Amaru has seen *sumak kawsay* misunderstood and manipulated by the state, and often over-simplified by non-Indigenous academics (Radcliffe 2012; Altmann 2020). While, clearly, *sumak kawsay* is rooted in ancestral values and philosophies, it is and must be creatively practiced in the contemporary. They've often seen *sumak kawsay* discussed by the state and popular media as utopian, antithetical to technology, and based on a romanticized conception of

Indigenous communities, as other scholars have identified (Kiely 1999; Altmann 2020). This presentation not only perpetuates stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, but also undermines the serious consideration of *sumak kawsay* as a viable principle of contemporary living. From Pintag Amaru's view, it's important that we seek *sumak kawsay*'s deep roots, and also see its relevance to current conditions. And these current conditions are far from utopian. While Pintag Amaru members are doing their own "world-building," their practice of *sumak kawsay* entails the thoughtful navigation of contemporary challenges and opportunities. *Sumak kawsay* is broadly oriented towards coexistence, but in today's world, the broader defense of Indigenous communities has compelled Pintag Amaru's direct confrontation with the state, as occurred within the 2022 *paro nacional* protests. Pintag Amaru is not practicing *sumak kawsay* in their own isolated utopian world, but are going through the complex and nuanced navigation of orienting towards it within the world we all share.

The State of Ecuador

Based on Pintag Amaru's insight, the literature's largely state-centered focus around the concept and practice of *sumak kawsay/buen vivir* may be one of the greatest points of inconsistency. Initially, many post-development, anthropology, and political science scholars raised the Ecuadorian state's *buen vivir* as the shining "alternative to development" (Escobar 2011; Gudynas 2011; Lalander 2013). As time has gone on, however, many Indigenous scholars and activists have argued *buen vivir* is a co-option of *sumak kawsay*, used to justify extractivism-based economic growth (Oviedo, 2011; Acosta, 2018). Overall, Pintag Amaru's perspectives align with this concern, as most members believe *sumak kawsay* was engaged as a political discourse in Ecuador but was not put into practice. Beyond simply not being enacted, Pintag Amaru argues that the state's expanded extractivism – which state leaders justify through an assertion of extractivism as a means towards *buen vivir* – is actually undermining local communities' efforts towards *sumak kawsay*.

From Pintag Amaru members' views, the concept has been misinterpreted and misapplied by the Ecuadorian state as only economic welfare for all citizens (though even this hasn't been carried out

equitably), and has lost the deep significance it would hold from Indigenous epistemological perspectives. Many Pintag Amaru members argued, as is also discussed in the literature (e.g. Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara, 2014), that these incompatibilities stem from the state's and other scholars' attempts to interpret an Indigenous principle through Western frameworks. I think this is particularly apparent in the comparison of collectivist vs individualist philosophies that emerges in Pintag Amaru's discussions; as they highlight, Kichwa worldviews hold a deeply collective orientation, but over time, they've witnessed a broader cultural shift in Ecuadorian society towards individualist ideals and priorities. This tension of individualist versus collectivist ontologies in the interpretation of *sumak kawsay* has similarly been identified by other scholars (Alonso González and Vázquez 2015; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014), and speaks to their drastic differences. "Life in plenitude" from a deeply collectivist perspective speaks to *all* forms of life in plenitude, necessitating efforts towards balance, reciprocity, and ultimately, coexistence. From an individualist philosophy, however, "life in plenitude" becomes "*my* life in plenitude," pulling it back towards Western conceptions of human economic welfare and development. This interpretation, too, neglects the interdependence of life forms and retains a human-centric ontology. Without a collectivist ethical and spiritual orientation, the concept is profoundly misunderstood. From Pintag Amaru's perspectives, leaders of the Ecuadorian state are heavily influenced by dominant Western epistemologies, ontologies, and values, and their interpretation of *sumak kawsay* heavily reflects an individualist – or at least, human-centric – worldview. Disconnected from Kichwa understandings of deep collectivity and interdependence with other forms of existence, *sumak kawsay* has been co-opted into a shallow and hugely over-simplified form.

While recognizing the shortcomings and dangers of this co-option, however, it's crucial we recognize *sumak kawsay* is not – and has never been – dependent on the state. Some scholars have argued that, as result of difficulties of implementation by the state, *sumak kawsay* has largely failed (Bravo Diaz 2021, Garcia Garcia 2022). While it could be fair to argue the state's attempt at implementing the principles of *buen vivir* has failed, stating *sumak kawsay* has failed ignores its continued potential and its past and ongoing existence outside of the nation-state. Pintag Amaru, as well

as scholars (Artaraz, Calestani, and Trueba 2021), have highlighted the possibility for Indigenous groups to still harness commitments within the constitution in their organizing and resistance. In the recent successful referendum to cease oil exploitation in Ecuador's Yasuni national park, for example, Indigenous groups harnessed aspects of *sumak kawsay* constitutional commitments to further substantiate their case (Garcés-Velástegui 2024). Though the government hasn't fully followed through with implementing constitutional agreements, this doesn't mean Indigenous groups can't still engage the constitution in attempts to hold the state accountable.

Beyond this potential, it's also crucial to recognize *sumak kawsay* as a daily, practiced, ground-up principle that has never been dependent upon state structures. We can't accept the state's failure in implementation as the failure of a concept that has endured for centuries. Maybe *sumak kawsay* is inherently a concept that can not be implemented from top-down colonially-rooted structure. This isn't to say the state shouldn't play a role of ensuring protection of its citizens, freedom from violence and exploitation, and social and economic inclusion, for example. The state can heavily influence conditions that either support, or undermine, communities' efforts towards *sumak kawsay*; their continued expansion of extractivism in Indigenous territories is just one example of the conditions in which they can play a role, either halting or encouraging this expansion. And of course, state leaders should still be held accountable towards their constitutional commitments. However, *sumak kawsay* had been practiced by Indigenous communities long before the establishment of modern nation-states, and citing *sumak kawsay* as a failure neglects the longevity and inherent sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and principles. More broadly, this recognition speaks to the broader consideration that, perhaps, decolonial possibilities – in this case, efforts to live *sumak kawsay* principles– are not, and can not be, reliant on the state. *Sumak kawsay* is more a way of being than a direction, and maybe this ethical orientation is something cultivated, not imposed. Again, this isn't to say the state doesn't have a role to play, but it is to highlight that the state's failure to implement a decolonial (and, precolonial) way of living should not be interpreted as a failure of the concept. Communities like *Pintag Amaru* have lived, and will continue to live, *sumak kawsay* regardless.

Development

Pintag Amaru's perspectives also offer great nuance in understanding the relationships between *sumak kawsay* and development. I think the literature presents many "either/or's" that can be reconsidered as "both/and." While I take seriously Altmann's (2017) critique that comparing *sumak kawsay* to global development misconstrues its local character, Pintag Amaru clearly recognizes them as intertwined. While Pintag Amaru's enactment of *sumak kawsay* *is* focused on local relationship and territorial defense, they understand the globalized nature of the threats – and opportunities – they face. Like many other Indigenous communities, Pintag Amaru recognizes that local protection of territories and communities often necessitates attention to global development processes. To argue that these communities can't and don't connect their place-based struggles for self-determination with global processes and ideologies is to minimize and oversimplify many Indigenous groups' local focus. As John states, " what people are really facing right now is how to navigate a world in which we can have a claim to our ancestral territories, have a relationship to like who we are in our place, and then at the same time fight this huge beast that's incringing upon us." Pintag Amaru is navigating the interconnection of the local and the global - it's both/and. In the case of mining, for example, Pintag Amaru faces direct impacts of two gravel mines in their territories. At the same time, they understand successful defense of their territory, without broader structural/ideological change, would result in extraction of resources from another area. And especially amidst global challenges like climate change, of course, Pintag Amaru is understanding defense of their territories as part of global processes. They seek to protect their space and their community's autonomy over it, grounding efforts to live conceptions of *sumak kawsay* locally; and, they see a global picture of needed change.

However, I also believe Pintag Amaru's perspectives highlight oversimplifications in post-development's framing of *sumak kawsay* (Escobar 2011; Acosta 2018). Foundationally, Pintag Amaru's criticisms of the development paradigm's impacts – environmental destruction, growing inequality, relations of domination, and cultural hegemony, amongst others – do align well with post-development theories' foundational tenets (Escobar 1992; Esteva & Babones 2013). I'm not sure the framing of *sumak*

kawsay as an “alternative to development” is fully accurate, though. In some ways Pintag Amaru does discuss it as such, as a different pathway away from the dominant. However, I believe the idea of an “alternative” frames sumak kawsay as a response to development. Clearly, sumak kawsay and development are related; but if we recenter from an Indigenous view, the relationship is not so much because sumak kawsay is an alternative to development, but because development has become a threat to sumak kawsay. This positioning aligns well with Indigenous academics’ and activists’ engagement of both concepts since the 1990s, notably Gualingas’ original discussion of Western development as an imposition against sumak kawsay. I think this reframing offers a nod to Altmann’s critique too; communities like Pintag Amaru have criticized development in order to work towards sumak kawsay, rather than engaging sumak kawsay as a critique of development. While this may seem like a subtle difference, recentering sumak kawsay makes more clear its ancient roots – it’s not new, the development paradigm is – and offers insight to their relationship.

This reframing also aligns with the nuance Pintag Amaru’s navigation of worlds conveys. Post-development theory, especially more recently, has acknowledged communities’ strategic engagement with aspects of development; this “contemporary art of living” is evident within Pintag Amaru (Esteva and Escobar 2017). Pintag Amaru’s criticisms of the dominant development paradigm do not mean full and dual opposition to all development offers; they necessarily, strategically, and subversively use development in their pursuit of sumak kawsay. However, they engage the tools of development – globalized processes, resources, and technologies – within radically different social relations and ethical orientations than the dominant paradigm.

I think it’s also important to discuss what development *could* be, both from the perspectives of Pintag Amaru and from my own. As Pintag Amaru discusses, they experience a dominant development paradigm that perpetuates colonial ideologies, power relations, and resource exploitation, and advocate for a radical reconsideration of what is generally considered “development.” While Pintag Amaru criticizes the dominant paradigm, however, they see possibilities for reorienting some development

organizations. Even Pintag Amaru's mother organization, Pachaysana, originally started with a development focus:

John: Pachaysana grew out of observing how we do education and development with communities in our world, especially in the Global South, and being really deceived by a top-down or outside-in model of both development and education. And while we didn't know what we wanted to do, we knew we wanted to work with communities and from their own terms according to what it is they were really hoping to achieve and how they wanted to grow, what they want to learn, how they want to develop. And as we moved forward, we kind of learned that what communities want is to develop and learn according to their own identities, their own stories. And so that's why we really had this development focus at the beginning. It slowly moved more into community based education so that we kind of take a distance from that word development, right? Because it becomes confusing and we think about how we can create education programs that liberate us from perspectives of what developing or development means, that liberate us from what we think education is, what success is, so that when we start to go into any kind of project, we really attach it to our vision.

Working closely with communities over time, Pachaysana has moved away from the word “development,” understanding it often implies a top-down orientation. What they've moved to instead is supporting communities like Pintag Amaru – through local leadership, open-ended funding, and deep relationship – in pursuing their own conceptions of success, wellbeing, and “development” So the point here is that Pintag Amaru is criticizing the impositions and assumptions of the dominant paradigm, but this doesn't mean they oppose all forms of support. As discussed in chapter 3, for example, Pintag Amaru still sees a great need for philanthropy – at least until global wealth is more equally distributed – including in their own efforts. While not in place of attending to the massive global wealth inequality that underlies philanthropy, Pintag Amaru still argues for the need to transfer resources to communities like theirs. What makes this different from the dominant paradigm, though, is the metanarratives that define macro development – Western superiority, endless growth, and universal desires – are replaced by communities' identities, stories, direction, and autonomy. With the leadership and ethical orientations of communities like Pintag Amaru shaping their own path forward, some of the same resources of the dominant paradigm could be pivoted towards profoundly different outcomes. I think this nuance offers for retaining the supposed redistributive ideals of development while transforming some of its Western, colonial, destructive structures. Some of the most forward-looking organizations, for example (aside from moving away from the concept of development all together), are engaging with development funding as

reparations (see International Center for Transitional Justice) and/or engaging in deeply collaborative and long-term relationships with communities, ultimately supporting a community-led vision (see Trees, Water & People, for example). In some of these cases, communities are using “development” funding to rebuild sustainable local food systems, support cultural revitalization efforts, or even legally oppose mining efforts, for example. I’d like to think, alongside Pintag Amaru, there’s possibility to pivot today’s development resources – though we may no longer call this “development” – towards radically different visions.

Seeds of Consciousness

I think there’s a lot more to learn here than the analytical conclusions. These are hugely important, but not the whole story. It’s key that you see the conditions and nuance of Pintag Amaru’s context; and ultimately, they hope we will apply some of the lessons to our own – that we will all help plant the seeds of something different.

This doesn’t mean attempting to relocate or replicate *sumak kawsay*. *Sumak kawsay* is rooted deeply in place, culture, and cosmovision, and as we’ve seen throughout this work, attempting to enact it without this grounding can empty it of its profundity.

However, I do believe an understanding of *sumak kawsay* can help illuminate the harms of dominant systems and help to orient us towards different directions – though I’m sure many of you already are. These lessons aren’t meant to be prescriptive. We must all decide for ourselves how Pintag Amaru’s words and stories may permeate our own lives. But here are some of my broad thoughts:

I think Pintag Amaru is really asking us to look at the big, collective picture. I think this is what *sumak kawsay* does, too. To think far beyond ourselves, our species, and our time.

And I think this is really an inside-out process. The dominant development system rarely asks us to look at ourselves – at our consumption, at our deep wellbeing, at our relations with the cosmos. As Pintag Amaru has done, however, I believe they ask us to start with understanding ourselves. To

recognize who we are, and begin to practice who we want to be. To belong somewhere. To start from the roots: *enraizando*.

This doesn't mean everything goes back to individual choice, though. I think "awareness" and "consciousness" often get co-opted into green consumerism, ignoring structural constraints and placing all responsibility on the individual. There's more nuance in the message here. I think Pintag Amaru encourages us to find the cracks in the current structures and inhabit the spaces of agency and freedom we can within them. We must grow the new world from within the current: *sobreviviendo*.

Ultimately, consciousness is about being aware of where we (collectively) are going, and where we want to go. This often requires a recognition of and reckoning with what is dominant and a simultaneous (re)building. The path will be challenging, as it has been for Pintag Amaru. But simply recognizing another path exists is part of the work. It's the art of navigating the structures while not losing direction: *orientando*.

The fruits of this navigation will be different for every person, in every place. We can't (and shouldn't) all do exactly what Pintag Amaru has done, but we can find versions for our own lives and context – one of many blossoms growing towards a more collective and conscious existence: *floreciendo*.

And the cycle repeats itself. It will be slow, and in many cases, quiet. But this will make a stable foundation. And our flowering does not end with us. The seeds of change are small, but abundant. Growing strong in the cracks, widening them, making space for more to take root: *sembrando*.

De unas semillas empieza un bosque.

Una Llamada a la Consciencia | A Call to Consciousness

Hope: If you could share a message directly with the people who might read the research, what would you say? What do you think are the most important changes we need to be making in the world?

Alejandro: Yes, perhaps. I don't know if it's a call. Maybe. As I said earlier, a call to consciousness. To consciousness about what we are doing as human beings. What are we causing? We are self-destructing. And it's not fair. It's not fair that it's simply because of economic interests. I don't know what can be said, we end up self-destructing. Because we are fortunate to have water, we have plenty of water in the area, the Pintag area, we have a large amount of water. But we also depend on only one area, and that area is being exploited, it is being exploited by a mine that is extracting material. It's already very deep. What the mine is excavating, what they are extracting, the material is very deep. And from there is where we receive the water. So what will happen when all this is contaminated? What will happen when we can no longer drink the water? So, that's the call to consciousness. And also the call to be attentive, to be vigilant – that we can do better things without contaminating. We have the technology, we have the knowledge, human beings have the knowledge. What is lacking is the will. That's what's lacking, simply the will. Because we could do everything the other way around.

Roberto: Starting to understand that we're all here for a purpose, and that purpose is to take care of our common home. That's what I call it. I call it a home, everyone's home. Here, even the little dogs live. You know, though I have a fear of toads, over there, there are many little toads, there are many little animals. I mean, we're all beings. We are the beings, let's say, intelligent beings in quotes, but we're the ones who cause the most harm to the planet. So, sometimes I think that we have to learn from our brothers who are here, the little animals, those that live with nature. Sometimes I say we, I speak in general, humans sometimes destroy things because of ego. Or sometimes the need of having money. We sacrifice land, forests, we extract resources from the earth, but we don't really measure ourselves. I mean, what are we really doing? I mean, how does it affect us? Us as people and as human beings? And to what extent do we affect those around us? Yeah. That's why the action of Pintag Amaru is very important. I can tell you that in the Constitution of 2008, the rights of nature began to be claimed. Yes. So, as we talk about the rights of nature, we can also talk about knowing how to live with nature. So it's very important, because we, I mean, we must understand that we are not owners of anyone, not of anything. Here, we're not owners of anything. Everything is connected. As Pintag Amaru, we can tell you it's very important that people start to look back to where we come from, I mean, where we come from and why we're here. Because in words, let's say, I don't know if they're the right ones – I've told someone, a person is born, grows up, some start families, others don't, and they die. The normal cycle of life, isn't it? But I could say that people should be born, appreciate what they have, grow, make history, leave a mark, but leave a mark on the planet, in the world, in your space. And there they can die in peace. Because we're here for something. They can have whatever belief they want. I'm very respectful of everyone's beliefs. They can have whatever beliefs they have, but take care of the common home. That's the cause of everything. That would be the biggest dream I could say I have, and I don't lose hope.

Pablo: I think that developed countries, in quotes, have to learn, or rather, relearn how to live in collectivity. It's like, society sells you the idea of success based on how much money you have or

how much power you have. The true value of people lies in their own essence, like, if you have a lot, how much are you willing to share? If you know a lot, how much are you willing to teach? And if you don't know, how much are you willing to learn? And I think from our perspective, that's why our work is important. That's why we constantly rethink ourselves, if what we're doing is right, if what we're thinking is right, and if the way we share is right, because neither knowledge nor resources belong to us. They were here before us and will be here after us.

Mateo: Perhaps the idea of solidarity. Mhm. Maybe the idea of not seeing the world as a big business. Mhm. Perhaps the idea of seeing art not as a show that you can buy and sell, but as seeing everything more for a spiritual purpose of understanding ourselves as human beings and understanding all others as human beings. Maybe the idea of breaking with this idea of competitiveness, that we are the best because we have a lot of power, because power doesn't make sense. What's the point of being the best? For what?

Gabriel: This idea of development based on consumerism and the accumulation of wealth or power is reaching a point where it's no longer viable, it's no longer sustainable, and everyone is realizing it – not just in terms of resources and the physical idea of this, of global warming and environmental problems – but also in the idea of social inequality, which is no longer sustainable. Most problems, perhaps all of them, are based on this violence. The need for violence is based on this inequality, and I believe that the only possible and sustainable way of development for the future is an idea based on *sumak kawsay*, if we want to describe it like that. If you don't want to think about *sumak kawsay*, maybe, then maybe it's a spiritual idea, in a more spiritual idea that connects us with others. In a different way that connects us with the environment. I believe it's the only sustainable way of development. Otherwise, human society will become extinct. If we think about the idea of development as evolution, it's also said that humans evolved from a supposedly lower species. But it's not, I don't think it's like that. I think we just changed in some way to have a certain awareness of our presence here. But if we think that this awareness means we are better, we are regressing in evolution, we are destroying ourselves and destroying others, other species. But if we manage to repair that, we can evolve into a higher form of consciousness, into a more spiritual form.

Diego: In this moment that we live in, it's so important to reconnect with Pachamama. I believe it's quite important now to act and reconnect with the earth because we are causing a lot of damage, we harm the earth, the ecosystem. That's clear to see, what's happening. There are many natural disasters now, there are storms, very strong rains, and sometimes people don't realize that it's because of many factors, that we are polluting it ourselves, that there are many changes. It's easy to see, it's noticeable that there were bad winter and summer seasons in Ecuador, but now sometimes we don't know if it's winter or summer because sometimes it rains, it's windy, or sometimes there are years when there's no wind, lots of sun, years of heavy rain. So, I think it's now the time to change, to think about where we live and what we want from the earth or what we also want to leave for our children, for our generations. Because we have learned many things, but it's clear that now we also need to keep changing those same ideas to maintain a balance with the earth in the future.

Gabriel: I can't develop, whether economically or socially, while people around me can't, because that generates conflicts. The majority of social conflicts in the world arise from this social difference, mainly economic, but there are many more factors: educational, social, cultural, but mainly economic. When there's a difference between someone earning \$5,000 and someone earning \$500, there will always be friction. The person with less will aspire to be like the person with more, and the person with more will always look down on the person with less. So, there's a lot of imbalance. Therefore, the main thing would be to think of success as a social issue. It's not

about me having success, but about our society as a whole. Our close circle, and then our distant circle. I would like to see cultural changes first because I feel that society is becoming more and more individualistic, and success becomes very individual—like, I'll fight for myself and the rest, well, if they can, if not, too bad. So, I think we need to change that idea and think more about how we are part of a society. Development necessarily has to be related to the rest of society.

Sofia: I think the biggest change, in order to change our way of thinking worldwide, is that we need to reach a sensibility and a – how can I say? To be more humane among each other. To be more human. And I also believe that respect plays a significant role there already in changing, and in thinking about the many things that could be changed. It's quite complicated, but I think that's where we could start. Also, accepting that we are living in a world that is very complex, but we can, how can I say, get along with each other and try to balance for a better life.

Javier: We're here for a purpose. I believe that if we start to seek that purpose, based on our conscience, I think we'll change the world, right? Sometimes we look for things outside, for someone to tell us what to do, and we never sit down to think, to reflect deeply within ourselves and start saying no, well, if we want to change the world, I'll start with myself first. And based on my actions, someone else will follow. That's what I can say.

Valeria: Being with Pintag Amaru I must also say, look, there are other options. So, there are people who think that development means having everything, having money. But from my perspective, development for me is learning to live together, to live well. Maybe not just Pintag Amaru, but us too. To serve as an example for the rest of the people who live in the neighborhood. Mhm. That if there's a different way of doing things, a different way of treating people. A different way for children to be free.

Emilio: To motivate people who can listen to us, who can learn about us or about other collectives that are doing similar things. To dare to dream, to start activism from their communities, from their families, right? And to generate that change that society needs, that change that we need as humans, as living beings, to improve our relationship with the earth, with our family, with our community, with our society, that can help to build that *ayllu*, that family that we deserve, that we desire in society. And if someone also believes they can support our dream, we also appreciate it very much, right? The fact that you are here now and we are generating this project is super hopeful for what we do, for what we dream. To be able to die peacefully, to know and have that tranquility that while you could, you contributed something to your community. And yes, if seen from another perspective, you contributed to your world. How great is that? And not with the idea that someone will remember you with admiration or that they will put up a monument in your name, right? But simply because you believe and are convinced of what we do. It's important. Mhm. To build and rebuild this world that we are just passing through.

Maria: I would really like us to try to be freer, but not just free to do as we please, because that's something else. It might be liberation perhaps – but free to create, to think, to make mistakes, to rise up. Free, to feel.

To learn more about Pintag Amaru, or make a donation towards their youth programming, environmental restoration efforts, or campaign to purchase their land, please visit www.comunidadpintagamaru.com.

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