

### Falling Walls: Can Civil Society rock global North-South divisions? What are its Resources, Agents and Limits?

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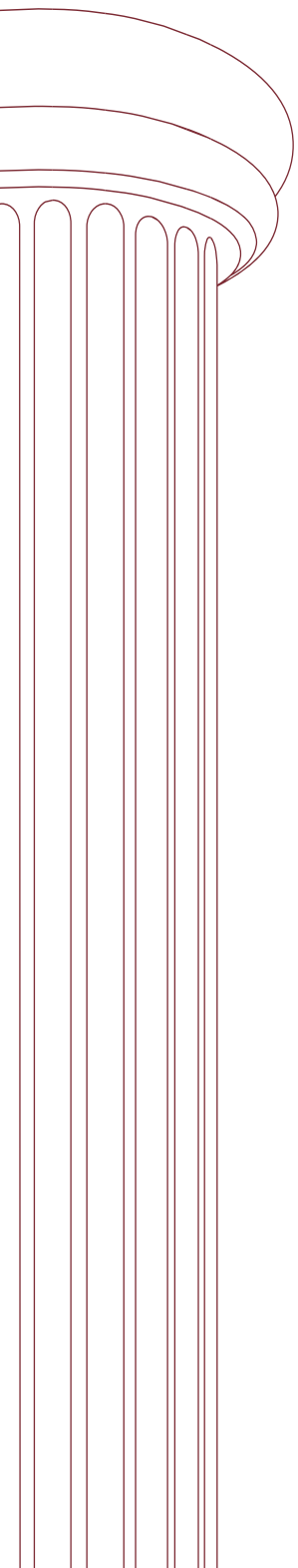
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# MAECENATA



Wolfgang Chr. Goede

## **Falling Walls**

Can Civil Society rock global North-South divisions?  
What are its Resources, Agents and Limits?

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## ABSTRACT

The world is at a turning point. The climate crisis, Covid-19, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine are sounding the alarm. The governance of our global community is in need of new rules, models, and paradigms on a grand scale. This applies above all to the relations between the Global North and the Global South. Invisible walls, cemented by historic inequity, must fall. This working paper identifies push and pull factors. In the North, one of the key players is the Catholic Church's reform wing; in the Americas, it is economists and ecologists embedded in indigenous traditions who question the status quo. The *Buen Vivir* (good life) philosophy of indigenous cultures which reunites man and nature and forms an essential part of the environmental movement in the North, could build a bridge between hemispheres. Anthropological research into pre-Columbian America provides new insights into a well-functioning indigenous civil society. These may be a valuable starting point for a new culture of dialogue and the foundation of a newly balanced world order with shifted normative standards, which is expected to be on the agenda at the 12<sup>th</sup> World Conference of Science Journalists in Medellín, Colombia in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.wcsj.org/home> [24.05.22].

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper was inspired by the *Falling Walls Conference*, an international science conference held every November in Berlin. It is reminiscent of the Berlin Wall and its fall. Nevertheless, many other walls still standing in science and society need to be brought down for overall transnational advancement. One of these dividers is the wall that separates the Global North from the Global South (written throughout the text in capital letters).<sup>2</sup> On both sides, serious forces are at work to bring it down.

### 1.1 Relevance of the Topic

When in the run-up to writing this paper, the author mentioned its title in conversation, he was misunderstood and received responses like: “East West conflict, very interesting, please let me read the publication.” Indeed, in 2022, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the world has entered another East-West confrontation with walls rising again, an uncertain outcome, and an as yet undefined role for civil society. The Cold War eventually came to an end in the 1980s through the involvement of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Monday demonstrations in East Germany, which in November 1989 led to the opening and subsequently the fall and removal of the Berlin Wall. Pink Floyd’s famous Wall Concert in Berlin commemorated the event.<sup>3</sup> The closing song was “The tide is turning.” Now it has turned again, from positive to negative - not just through the ongoing pandemic, as yet unstoppable global warming, and the new East-West conflict, but also and finally by changing the relations of the Global North with the Global South, formerly the known as the developed and the underdeveloped world.

The wall that marks some of the border between the United States of America and Mexico is partially as visible and notorious as the Berlin Wall. It has already been there for decades, long before the fierce rhetoric and efforts of former US President Donald Trump to construct such a barrier. Walls can also be fluid and remain highly effective, wide and deadly, such as the one between Europe and Africa. The Mediterranean, which divides both continents, breaks tidal surges of refugees from the South driven by political injustice and social inequality, as well as

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<sup>2</sup> The Global North, colloquially the West, refers to the OECD countries with an emphasis on the European and North America nations. The Global South encompasses the newly emerging (or developing) countries, with a special focus on Latin America.

<sup>3</sup> Pink Floyd Wall Concert. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Wall\\_%E2%80%93\\_Live\\_in\\_Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wall_%E2%80%93_Live_in_Berlin) [08.03.2022].

diminishing economic opportunities. Climate change on the African continent, partially inflicted by the emissions of the Global North, is just one example of the causes behind this migration. Substantial military investments in high-tech tracking and surveillance equipment for the European Union, increasingly directed towards its southeastern borders, have deterred some of these flows and established a new type of wall, the digital wall, which has contributed to the image of an ever-more fortified continent in progress.<sup>4</sup> Increased measures to contain the flow of Global South residents to the Global North has put into focus another wall, the “Darién Gap,” colloquially the Jungle Wall.<sup>5</sup> Refugees have chosen new migration routes across the Atlantic and South America to reach the United States and Canada. The isthmus in the centre of the Americas, the terrestrial bridge between Colombia and Panama, a rain forest and swamp, hardly navigable until recently, have become the latest frontier in the ongoing global conflict, albeit rather low-key in relation to other North-South confrontations.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to this division, beyond the uneven economic, educational and health data on both sides, and to examine the embedded socio-political structures with historical and anthropological arguments.<sup>6</sup> If, to put the strategy into diplomatic terms, it is smart that the North keeps the South at a distance, would it not be smarter still to eventually level the barriers, recognise the cultural heritage of the South, assimilate and perhaps even integrate it into the knowledge of the North? Since merging as a matter of natural law always results in gains, this process could upgrade the quality of national political, economic and scientific performance. Embedded in the joint efforts of civil society and civic engagement, and equipped with innovative participatory tools, a newly forged North-South alliance could enhance theories and concepts of transnational civic empowerment. This paper focuses on the Americas, Anglo- and especially Hispanic America with its well-documented history of indigenous societies. According to the latest research, these societies may have been more democratic, egalitarian and civic-minded than the Europeans who conquered and subjugated them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Guardian. Fortress Europe. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/dec/06/fortress-europe-the-millions-spent-on-military-grade-tech-to-deter-refugees> [08.03.2022].

National Public Radio. Darién Gap Migrants. URL: <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/19/1055936165/rainforest-darien-gap-migrants?t=1646728274042> [08.03.2022].

OECD: Latin America – Data: Education and Skills. URL: <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/data/education-skills/>; <https://www.oecd.org/latin-america/data/health/> [19.03.2022].

<sup>7</sup> See: Graeber, David, Wengrow, David (2021): *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity*. London: Allan Lane.

## **1.2 Methodology, Definitions, Structure**

This study focuses on leading publications in the field, some of which are recent releases and not yet widely reviewed. The predominantly social-sciences and humanities-based sources are twinned with relevant natural science findings. The entire package is framed by the significance of civil society in this context and, in addition, by the interactions of civilisations, disruptions and cross-cultural mingling effects. The emerging pros and cons of the falling walls argument will be discussed. As for the methodology, the study is geared towards a hermeneutical approach. Within the defined topical framework, it will identify relevant sources, break them down into their key components, compare them, and interpret the results.



## 2. HISTORY, FACILITATORS, CHALLENGES

Evidently, members of different cultures and civilisations have been in contact at least since the beginning of recorded history and, most probably, for much longer than that. This process has always caused friction, but also broadened views and led to new insights.

### 2.1 The Battle of Civilisations

A quarter of a century ago, Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* caused a global stir and seems to have remained quite timeless.<sup>8</sup> It claims that Europe passed the peak of its power around 1920 and has since then moved downhill, while new centres of power have risen in the "global process of indigenization and the revival of non-Western cultures."<sup>9</sup> One hundred years ago, Oswald Spengler had already picked up on this erosion of the West and his book *Decline of the West* sent out shock waves across Europe.<sup>10</sup> By the 1990s, according to the data presented by Huntington, the occident's downturn had continued, and since then has been superimposed by China becoming a new economic and military world power. The author had correctly predicted this shift in Asia and introduced the term "westtoxication" as a driving force of the newly emerging transnational power architecture. It is a declaration of cultural independence of the non-Western world: "We will be modern, but not like you."<sup>11</sup> In Huntington's view, this polarisation occurs mainly between the West and Asia. However, Hispanic America with its large indigenous population, can be included in this strive for independence and reliance on one's own resources.

### 2.2 Anthropocene Versus Gaiacene

Peter Finke, professor emeritus at Bielefeld University, a knowledgeable philosopher of science, broad-based innovator specialising in citizen and grass-roots science and tireless author, is an outspoken sceptic regarding mainstream Western or Northern science and in favour of

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<sup>8</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. (1996): Kampf der Kulturen. Die Neugestaltung der Weltpolitik im 21. Jahrhundert. München: Goldmann (11. Auflage) 2002, original: *The Clash of Civilizations*, New York.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p.136.

<sup>10</sup> See: Spengler, Oswald (1923): *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*. München: Beck.

<sup>11</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. (1996): Kampf der Kulturen. Die Neugestaltung der Weltpolitik im 21. Jahrhundert. München: Goldmann 2002, p.154; original: *The Clash of Civilizations*, New York.

westtoxification. In his most recent publication *Courage to enter the Gaiaecene*,<sup>12</sup> he concludes that the anthropocene, the current human-made geological era, is at a dead-end and introduces convincing arguments for considering the planet and the creation as one living organism, as suggested originally by James Lovelock in his Gaia theory and long before that by the ancient Greeks.<sup>1314</sup> This concept is shared by many indigenous societies. Above all, Finke criticises the increasing “mechanization” of Northern science and underpins this with many examples: His main complaint is that modern science, beginning with Francis Bacon in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, started to take every investigation apart into its most minute elements and atomised natural phenomena and thus loses the overview and comprehension of immanent complexity.<sup>1516</sup> This has caused a loss of reality, led to the commercialisation of science, its economisation and the hasty categorisation of research results into right and wrong.<sup>1718</sup> Finke agrees with Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, the former Vice President of the Club of Rome, who argues that the European enlightenment is partly responsible for this distortion, which has also contributed to our depreciation of indigenous cultures and their expertise.<sup>1920</sup>

Finke concludes that Europe and the world need a new enlightenment, and proposes three major agents to correct mistakes and to attain universal scientific insight und discovery: women, civil society, and indigenous cultures.<sup>2122</sup> As a novum, he bridges Western natural sciences and the common comprehension of nature in the Global South. This follows Werner Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, which lies at the core of quantum mechanics and claims that all particles are relational and interrelated and can only be understood holistically and as an entity. This, on one hand, beats the Bacon dogma, while on the other hand corresponds with indigenous thinking.

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Finke, Peter L. W. (2022): Mut zum Gaiazän. Das Anthrozopän hat versagt. München: oekom. URL: <https://www.oekom.de/buch/mut-zum-gaiazaen-9783962383664> [08.03.2022].

<sup>13</sup>Science Direct. Gaia Hypothesis. URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/gaia-hypothesis> [08.03.2022].

<sup>14</sup> Wiktionary. Gaia. URL: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Gaia> [28.03.2022].

<sup>15</sup> Finke, Peter L. W. (2022): Mut zum Gaiazän. Das Anthrozopän hat versagt, München: oekom. p.75. URL: <https://www.oekom.de/buch/mut-zum-gaiazaen-9783962383664> [08.03.2022].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p.55, p.64.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p.46.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p.152.

<sup>19</sup> Deutschlandfunk: Neo Enlightenment and Weizsäcker. URL: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/50-jahre-club-of-rome-wir-brauchen-eine-neue-aufklaerung-100.html#:~:text=Ernst%20Ulrich%20von%20Weiz%C3%A4cker%2C%20Co.%E2%80%9C%20und%20%E2%80%9Eeverharmlost%E2%80%9C%20werde> [08.03.2022].

<sup>20</sup> Finke, Peter L. W. (2022): Mut zum Gaiazän. Das Anthrozopän hat versagt, München: oekom, p.171.

<sup>21</sup>See Goede, Wolfgang Chr. (2021): Systemischer Reset, jetzt! 20 Einwüfe zu Zivilgesellschaft und Bürgerwissenschaft, Berlin: Maecenata (Opusculum 154). URL: <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/73616> [09.03.2022].

<sup>22</sup>Finke, Peter L. W. (2022): Mut zum Gaiazän. Das Anthrozopän hat versagt. München: oekom, p.163.

“The thinking of the Indians is generally more verbal, more process-orientated than ours, and comes closer to what the physicists who were used to matter did not understand for a long time when the quanta were discovered. It is also what the Gaia theory expresses and what makes the prisoners of conventional thinking suspicious of it.”<sup>23</sup>

### 2.3 Quantum Mechanics – A Catalyst

Even a century after their birth, quantum mechanics remain a conundrum for many scientists. For non-scientists, they seem so far away from the rationality of Western civilisation that the phenomenon has frequently been interpreted as mysterious and haunted in popular science publications and beyond.<sup>24</sup> This actually goes back to Einstein, who termed the entanglement of particles “a spooky remote effect.”<sup>25</sup> With their theory, Heisenberg, Planck, and Einstein literally turned Newton’s supposedly logical verdict of the cosmos as a clockwork with God on top as the clockmaker upside down, which overlaps with Bacon’s credo on a strictly mechanical approach to science. Modern experiments have proven the basics of the theory: that particles are not isolated but connected and in constant communication with each other; natural scientists around the world are attempting to uncover more of the underlying secrets.<sup>26</sup>

For two hundred years now the double-slit set-up, a key scientific experiment, has been keeping physicists on their toes, many even in suspense.<sup>27</sup> Light and matter cannot only assume two different states, waves and particles, but particles act like twins, one manages, drives and controls the other, faster than light, in fact. The experiment has been repeated many times and has led to new insights into matter and reality. In some of his related experiments on particle entanglement, Antoine Suarez from the Center of Quantum Philosophy, Zurich has found that this “information channel works over the largest possible distances and ten million times faster than light,”<sup>28,29</sup> which is to say practically without time delay. “It looks like there is a superpower behind our reality, an invisible intelligence, which creates relations instantly, in no time,” he commented. His findings do not match classic physical categories, but rather neatly fit into the triangle of science, religion, and philosophy. This may shed light on something which is considered obvious, and by many people as trivial: that human

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<sup>23</sup> Finke, Peter L. W. (2022): Mut zum Gaiazän. Das Anthrozopän hat versagt. München: oekom , p.175.

<sup>24</sup> Nature. Quantum Physics. URL: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00120-6> [09.03.2022].

<sup>25</sup>MPQ: „Spukhafte Fernwirkung“: URL: <https://www.mpg.mpg.de/6520992/05-revealing-einstein-s-spooky-action-without-destroying-it> [09.03.2022].

<sup>26</sup>Ludwig Maximilians University Munich LMU: Particle Physics. URL: <https://www.lmu.de/de/newsroom/newsuebersicht/news/tandems-in-der-teilchenwelt.html> [09.03.2022].

<sup>27</sup> Wikipedia. Double-slit Experiment. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double-slit\\_experiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double-slit_experiment) [10.03.2022].

<sup>28</sup> Independent Academia. URL: <https://independent.academia.edu/AntoineSuarez1> [10.03.2022].

<sup>29</sup> P.M. 11/2003: Wenn die Zeit plötzlich stillsteht (When time suddenly stands still), p.21ff.

societies, the planet and matter as such form a systemic entity and source of synergy, or in the words of Joseph Beuys, the avant-garde German artist: “Things talk with each other, and everything depends on everything.”<sup>30</sup>

All this corresponds to Alexander von Humboldt’s principal scientific and philosophical belief, which may be taken back to Aristotle, the father of occidental science: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” It indicates that Newton’s and Bacon’s mechanical approaches to science have been overcome in the last century by a more complex view, yet far from the scientific mainstream, and considered sectarian by some schools. In the context of this paper, quantum mechanics constitutes a unique and common property of Northern and Southern culture.

## **2.4 Civil Society as Mediator and Instigator**

Civil society has an important role to play in this, being a major agent for social enhancement and change, although vastly underrated. Civil society is amorph and unlike political parties, its actors possess a legal right to voice concerns in the political arena but lack official representation. This may occasionally be an advantage, granting independence and enabling spontaneous action.<sup>31</sup> The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequently the reunification of Germany proved to be a milestone, a magic moment in the history of civil society:<sup>32</sup>

“Without the civil society movements in the German Democratic Republic and the other Central and East European countries the transformation process would not have happened and proceeded.”<sup>33</sup>

It should be remembered, however, that civil society is not a modern invention, but has existed for at least 2500 years as a community-based action force, principally in a dichotomy to the ruling classes.<sup>34</sup> Modern thinkers have sharpened its profile, Karl Popper with his claim for an “open society” for one.<sup>35</sup> It is built on hypothetical knowledge, proven right or wrong by means of criticism,

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<sup>30</sup>RP Online. Beuys. URL: [https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/kempen/beuys-gewinnt-heute-wieder-an-bedeutung\\_aid-21266293](https://rp-online.de/nrw/staedte/kempen/beuys-gewinnt-heute-wieder-an-bedeutung_aid-21266293) [10.03.2022].

<sup>31</sup> Strachwitz, Rupert Graf, Priller, Eckhard, Triebe, Benjamin (2020): Handbuch Zivilgesellschaft (Handbook Civil Society). Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p.85.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.266.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>35</sup> Popper, Karl (1945): The Open Society and its Enemies. London: Routledge.

expressed by self-responsible citizens.<sup>36</sup> Jürgen Habermas's model of a deliberative and participative democracy<sup>37</sup> has enhanced civil society theory as has Robert Putnam's quest for "bonding social capital."<sup>38</sup> These elements make up a major feature of self-empowered and self-organised civil society action.<sup>39</sup> This represents an attitude of being non-affirmative, in fact rather doubtful towards state institutions, and self-confident, which may result in resistance and civil disobedience.<sup>40</sup> This mind-set enables us to look at major agents of change in the Global South, analyse their civil society elements and raise the question whether through bridge-building and bonding, civil society in the North and the South may narrow gaps between – or rock the dividing walls, to stay in the picture.

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<sup>36</sup> Strachwitz, Rupert Graf, Priller, Eckhard, Triebe, Benjamin (2020): *Handbuch Zivilgesellschaft (Handbook Civil Society)*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, p.20.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.63; see also Habermas, Jürgen (1989): *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.99; see also Putnam, Robert (1994): *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p.145.

<sup>40</sup> Strachwitz, Rupert Graf, Priller, Eckhard, Triebe, Benjamin (2020): *Handbuch Zivilgesellschaft (Handbook Civil Society)*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, p.248.

### 3. THE AGENTS OF CHANGE

Three geographical angles with transcultural and transdisciplinary views from Germany, United States and Ecuador shall now be discussed. The institutions and individuals under review are considered agents, that is to say movers who will open and promote new avenues of communication and understanding between the Global North and the Global South. These agents come from a wide range of civil society organizations (CSOs) such as religion, science, and politics, and thus represent relevant societal sections.

#### 3.1 A Catholic Reception of the Andean “Good Life”

‘Good Life’ or ‘Living Well’ tries to reach out from rural Bavaria to rural Latin America and establish a line of communication and exchange between the traditional indigenous way of living and young Bavarians in the country.<sup>41</sup> A good life does not mean the individual well-being of a single person or their family but living in social and natural harmony with the country and the planet. This is what a primer, recently published by Misereor, Germany’s Catholic Development Agency dedicated to assisting the world’s needy populations by means of self-help and empowerment, clarifies right at the beginning.<sup>42</sup> So “*buen vivir*” is not the Italian “*dolce vita*,” as the term mistakenly suggests. As one of the editors, Barbara J. Th. Schmidt, points out Good Life, “*Buen Vivir*”/”*Vivir Bien*” in Spanish, is devised as an alternative to the development concept of linear growth in the Global North. The traditional cultures of the South American Andes were geared towards “Living together in diversity and harmony with nature.”<sup>43</sup> Good Life implies a mixture of basic human values in their complexity and dynamics, related to space and time as well as humans and nature. Basically, everything is connected and forms a unity. Time is not linear, but circular and spiral, the future and past are intertwined.<sup>44</sup>

Pablo Solón, a Bolivian contributor to the Misereor publication and former UN ambassador for his country, environmentalist, and expert on *Buen Vivir*, reveals its fundamental principle, which is a

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<sup>41</sup> Misereor/Katholische Landjugend Bayern e.V./Werkbrief Landjugend: Gut(es) Leben. Impulse aus Lateinamerika und Bayern. Augsburg: Senser-Druck 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Misereor. URL: <https://www.misereor.org/> [15.03.2022].

<sup>43</sup> Misereor/Katholische Landjugend Bayern e.V./Werkbrief Landjugend 2021: Gut(es) Leben. Impulse aus Lateinamerika und Bayern, Augsburg: Senser-Druck, p.10.

<sup>44</sup> Goede, Wolfgang Chr. (2021): Quadruple Helix and how spirals are an elementary element of the cosmos and how they drive evolution, in: Systemischer Reset, jetzt! 20 Einwüfe zu Zivilgesellschaft und Bürgerwissenschaft, Berlin: Maecenata (Opusculum 154). p.17. URL: <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/73616> [09.03.2022].

systemic dualism.<sup>45</sup> Everything is polarised and can only exist in seemingly two opposing states, e.g. good and bad, which actually form a unity such as individual and community, mankind and nature. “*Buen Vivir* is the search for a balance between the different components of the whole,” including physical and spiritual things, knowledge and wisdom.<sup>46</sup> The driver is not competition, but complementarity and “how we can supplement the adverse components and contribute to make them fit to an entity.”<sup>47</sup> Another Latin American intellectual specialising in Andean heritage, is Alberto Acosta from Ecuador.<sup>48</sup> He succeeded in including *Buen Vivir* in his country’s constitution, and in his work he provides more detail on complementarity, such as the relational level, which he calls relationality and further detail on integrative and holistic reciprocity.<sup>49</sup> Being much more profound, broad, and comprehensive, *Buen Vivir* “is superior to development,” which means superior to the values behind the Western/Northern development concept, such as individualism.<sup>50</sup> While Acosta recognises that individual power was instrumental in toppling authoritarianism and monarchies, it has also nourished neoliberal capitalism with social marginalisation, discrimination and colonial extractivism, which perpetuates Latin America’s dependence from the North as a detrimental force.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the German Green party and the environmental movement, promotes the *Buen Vivir* philosophy. The former head of the Böll office in Brazil, Thomas Fatheuer, contributed to the *Misereor* publication with a critical historical review of how the Spanish crown destroyed the Andean cultures.<sup>51</sup><sup>52</sup> As a substitute, the new elites introduced their own language, justice system, landownership on a large scale with dependents and slaves, with complete disregard for local customs. In Fatheuer’s view, the alternative to this is a post-colonial model based on *Buen Vivir* and its major features:<sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup>

- recognition as “plurinational,” the parallel existence of different cultures and people with equal rights,
- full recognition of indigenous idioms,

<sup>45</sup> Wikipedia. Pablo Sol Romero. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pablo\\_Sol%C3%B3n\\_Romero](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pablo_Sol%C3%B3n_Romero) [14.03.2022].

<sup>46</sup> Goede, Wolfgang Chr. (2021): *Systemischer Reset, jetzt! 20 Einwüfe zu Zivilgesellschaft und Bürgerwissenschaft*, Berlin: Maecenata (Opusculum 154). URL: <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/73616> [09.03.2022].

<sup>47</sup> Goede, Wolfgang Chr. (2021): *Systemischer Reset, jetzt! 20 Einwüfe zu Zivilgesellschaft und Bürgerwissenschaft*, Berlin: Maecenata (Opusculum 154). URL: <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/73616> [09.03.2022].

<sup>48</sup> Wikipedia. Alberto Acosta Espinosa. URL: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto\\_Acosta\\_Espinosa](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Acosta_Espinosa) [15.03.2022].

<sup>49</sup> Böll Foundation. *Buen Vivir*. URL: [https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/Buen\\_Vivir\\_engl.pdf](https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/Buen_Vivir_engl.pdf) [15.03.2022].

<sup>50</sup> Goede, Wolfgang Chr. (2021): *Mentale Gesundheit. Kein Tabu, sondern selbstverständlich!* Maecenata Observatorium 55, URL: <https://www.maecenata.eu/2021/09/16/mentale-gesundheit-kein-tabu-sondern-selbstverstaendlich/> [31.03.2022].

<sup>51</sup> Blickpunkt Lateinamerika. URL: <https://www.blickpunkt-lateinamerika.de/artikel/buen-vivir-in-lateinamerika/> [15.03.2022].

<sup>52</sup> Böll Foundation/Thomas Faltheuer. URL: <https://www.boell.de/de/node/35019> [15.03.2022].

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p.38.

<sup>54</sup> Wikipedia. Alberto Acosta Espinosa. URL: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto\\_Acosta\\_Espinosa](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Acosta_Espinosa) [15.03.2022].

- acceptance of indigenous property rights and collective use of pastureland,
- autonomy of indigenous territories,
- recognition of indigenous justice systems and its independent administration.

In addition, Misereor highlights intrinsic indigenous efforts to organise cross-continental fora to debate *Buen Vivir* strategies and their implementation around “Mother Earth.” This is the central premise of the philosophy, which sees the globe as an organic being in the complete absence of colonialism and interventionism. Thomas Müller, consultant for the Catholic Rural Youth in Bavaria (KLJB), and the publication’s editor, explains the “Mother Earth” concept (known as ‘Pachamama’ to indigenous communities):

“For representatives of the so-called Gaia theory or Holism nature is a large network (...) This is being shared by Latin America’s indigenous population, which worships nature as Pachamama, as Mother Earth. As a personalized Earth she stands for the entirety of being and time. Humans are part of the natural network (...) This view of nature clearly opposes Western tradition, in which man as the ruler over nature can consume it unlimitedly for his own purposes.”<sup>55</sup>

Misereor repeatedly refers to its Christian religious structure and its head, Pope Francis, whose title *pontifex* translates as “bridge builder.” The fact that the Vatican dedicated its 2019 synod of bishops to Amazonia, and a large delegation of indigenous people attended the Rome event, is recognised as a sign of the pope’s support of *Buen Vivir*, as the synod is seen as an act of inculturation, and of the mutual influence of North and South. The Pope’s encyclical “Laudato si’” on the environment, issued in 2015, referred to the “Common House” and, as a tribute to *Buen Vivir*, expressed that “we are all connected by invisible bands and form a universal family.”<sup>56</sup> Misereor emphasises that this underwrites the cause (including the quantum universal connectivity), together with the Pontifex’s apologies:

“In many different instants Francisco has asked for forgiveness regarding the committed sins by the church in the past against the natives of America and seeks to

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<sup>55</sup> Misereor/ Katholische Landjugend Bayern e.V./ Werkbrief Jugend 2021: Gut(es) Leben. Impulse aus Lateinamerika und Bayern. Augsburg: Senger-Druck, 2021, Ibid, p.52.

<sup>56</sup> Wikipedia. Laudato si’. URL: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laudato\\_si%E2%80%99](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laudato_si%E2%80%99) [15.03.2022].



strengthen the pluri-culturality of the autochthonous people. (...) Francisco pronounces an explicit invitation that Good Life is for all.”<sup>57</sup>

In other words: Catholic and indigenous beliefs are basically alike. The author of this section is a female theologian and the Misereor Brazil referent in Amazonia. She advocates for a comprehensive interreligious dialogue with the inclusion of male and female shamans. This exchange on the Catholic side should not only acknowledge the leading role of women in the Amazonian church but must also endorse their intimate collaboration in religious leadership, which necessitates “diaconate and consecration for women.”<sup>58</sup>

Christian Felber, a renowned German advocate for an “Economy for the Common Good,” completes the Misereor plea for transregional Andean spirituality, philosophy, and sustainable economic wisdom.<sup>59</sup> He calls for the integration of indigenous economies into world trade, defines ecological human rights, promotes collaboration instead of competition, and proposes units of civil society such as citizen councils and systemic consent as governing instruments for more equality and justice, balance and compensation.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the African proverb, “I am because you are,” underlines the Buen Vivir concept.<sup>61</sup> More generally, German cultural scholar Mithu M. Sanyal summarises this societal and individual dependency in a nutshell: “We need each other – fullstop.”<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2 Native Impulses

As these examples show, the wall is anything but hermetically sealed. Actually, every potato reminds us of the Andean Buen Vivir. It belongs to the traditional indigenous food staple, which has saved Europe from starvation more than once. The *Kosmovision Andina* conference, held in Munich in November 2021, and organised by the Peruvian Cultural Association Chasqui, remembered this

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<sup>57</sup>Misereor/ Katholische Landjugend Bayern e.V./ Werkbrief Jugend 2021: Gut(es) Leben. Impulse aus Lateinamerika und Bayern. Augsburg: Senser-Druck, 2021, p.83: „In vielen verschiedenen Momenten bittet Franziskus um Vergebung für die in der Vergangenheit seitens der Kirche begangenen Sünden gegen die Ureinwohner\*innen Amerikas und sucht, die Plurikulturalität der autochthonen Völker zu stärken. (...) Franziskus spricht deutlich die Einladung aus, dass es um ein ‘Gutes Leben’ für alle geht.“

<sup>58</sup> Misereor/ Katholische Landjugend Bayern e.V./ Werkbrief Jugend 2021: Gut(es) Leben. Impulse aus Lateinamerika und Bayern. Augsburg: Senser-Druck, 2021, p.84.

<sup>59</sup> Economy for the Common Good. URL: <https://www.ecogood.org/> [24.03.2022].

<sup>60</sup> Sociocracy. URL: <https://www.soziokratie.org/fundus/systemisches-konsensieren/> [15.03.2022].

<sup>61</sup> UNESCO. Interdependence. URL: <https://en.unesco.org/courier/octobre-decembre-2011/i-am-because-you-are> [15.03.2022]

<sup>62</sup> Mithology. URL: <http://www.sanyal.de/> [30.03.2022].

nutritional airlift during talks on the frugal and highly adaptable tuber plant.<sup>63</sup><sup>64</sup><sup>65</sup> Domestic academics from the North and the South explained the cosmological and planetary understanding from different perspectives and compass directions. The list of speakers included a psychologist from the Apache tribe. Interestingly, he could demonstrate that the population by and large shared the same beliefs about “the Good Life” across the continent over a distance of 15,000 kilometers, although the cultures in the South, the Centre (Mesoamerica) and the North were not in contact with one another. *Buen Vivir* is an overall pre-Columbian characteristic of America originally called Abya Yala.<sup>66</sup> This translates to “land in its full maturity” or “land of vital blood.” The name has made an impact among the Latin and Anglo communities in the Americas, South and North, and expresses the original American way of life.

This links to the research of Alberto Acosta, an Ecuadorian economist and politician. He reshaped his country’s constitution by including Good Life into its provisions. This achievement is unique and unmatched by other nations: In Ecuador, nature has an important legal status. Acosta’s publication *Buen Vivir* was also published in German,<sup>67</sup> in an effort to support the national transformation debate and to promote the degrowth paradigm shift with arguments from the Global South. The translation was provided by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, closely affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and which traditionally has a keen interest in Latin America.

The author picks up on the Dependency Theory of the 1960s and basically injects new oxygen and relevance into it with the Andean indigenous philosophy.<sup>68</sup> The North dwells on an individualistic, capitalistic and (especially since the 1990s) neoliberal concept, driven by economism and consumerism, which, in Acosta’s eyes and in relation to the South, is an extension of former colonial and hegemonial structures. It culminates in neo-extractivism that jeopardises the environment and world climate and maintains the South’s dependence on the economic centres in the North.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Kosmvision Andina. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/events/amerikahaus-m%C3%BCnchen/cosmosvision-andina-weltanschauung-der-andinen-v%C3%B6lker/1104493800358755/> [21.05.2022].

<sup>64</sup> Generally, there is a keen public interest in Buen Vivir. The Protestant Academy/Conference Center Bad Boll held in June 2021 a workshop on the topic: Academy Bad Boll: Buen Vivir. URL: <https://www.ev-akademie-boll.de/tagungsarchiv/430521.html> [16.03.2022]. In January 2020, Misereor’s Latin America conference “Vamos!” dedicated a weekend to the cause <https://www.misereor.de/presse/pressemeldungen-misereor/misereor-laedt-zu-lateinamerika-kongress-nach-muenchen-ein> [16.03.2022]; see also the report in the Magazine of DKF German Colombian Friends “Kolumbien aktuell”, Nr. 111, p. 31f; URL: [https://www.dkfev.de/downloads/KA\\_Archiv/ka\\_111.pdf](https://www.dkfev.de/downloads/KA_Archiv/ka_111.pdf) [16.03.2022].

<sup>65</sup> Running messengers of the Inca Empire – Wiki Chasqui. URL: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chasqui#:~:text=From%20Wikipedia%2C%20the%20free%20encyclopedia%20Chasqui%20playing%20a.km%20per%20day%20through%20the%20chasquis%20relay%20system.> [04.05.2022].

<sup>66</sup> Wikipedia. Abya Yala. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abya\\_Yala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abya_Yala) [24.03.2022].

<sup>67</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben.* oekom: München. Original: Alberto Acosta 2012: *Buen Vivir Sumak Kawsay.* Ecuador: Abya Yala.

<sup>68</sup> Wikipedia. Dependency theory. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dependency\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dependency_theory) [16.03.2022].

<sup>69</sup> IPG Journal. Schon wieder ausgebeutet. URL: <https://www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/wirtschaft-und-oekologie/artikel/schon-wieder-ausgebeutet-5531/> [28.03.2022].

Indigenous cultures, in turn, constitute the opposite. They are based on collectivism, which means consensual decisions, no private land ownership, and living in harmony with nature based on the principle to take and to give back. While the North has separated man and nature, the South maintains a union between them.

According to intellectuals like Acosta and many other activists from the Latin American indigenous communities, this is the dividing borderline, the wall that splits the world. Development must be a matter of universal definition and not the domain of the North. Development, as such, must be reversed. Issues related to development in its current state stem from the North, not from the South. There is a need to rethink and reconstruct the entire system, including democracy, and also the discriminatory idea of a supposedly superior civilised class in the North and inferior primitive natives in the South. The Anthropocene as an outcome of the Eurocentric rationale needs to be enhanced by a “biocentric attitude.”<sup>7071</sup>

Acosta backs up his fundamental criticism with three sources: Francis Bacon, René Descartes, and the Bible.<sup>72</sup> He quotes the first with “the science shall torture nature, as the holy inquisition has done with its victims, with the purpose to tear away its last secret.”<sup>73</sup> The method of taking everything apart and thus lose the overview had been criticised by Finke, along with a machine-like thinking, which Acosta attributes to Descartes. The biblical “Subdue the Earth” order has been softened in some translations, but nevertheless mankind remains in unconditional rulership.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Acosta refers to the well-known Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano and quotes him with “the union of man and nature was considered an indigenous pagan habit and was in the name of God later in the name of civilization abolished.”<sup>75</sup> Acosta calls on Alexander von Humboldt as a witness, a man widely respected in Latin America. During his expeditions, Humboldt had observed that “progress in knowledge is being bought with the violence of the so-called civilized conquerors.”<sup>76</sup> All in all, it is only thanks to the resources and wealth of the American continent that the world’s centre of power shifted from Asia to Europe. With this the Gordian knot, the traditional union of man and nature was shattered. The French philosopher Bruno Latour argues the need for it to be reinstated.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben*. oekom: München. Original: Alberto Acosta 2012: *Buen Vivir Sumak Kawsay*. Ecuador: Abya Yala, p.35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p.36.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.58f.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p.58f.

<sup>74</sup> Bible Hub Genesis. URL: <https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-28.htm> [16.03.2022].

<sup>75</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben*. oekom: München. Original: Alberto Acosta 2012: *Buen Vivir Sumak Kawsay*. Ecuador: Abya Yala, p.96.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.98.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p.108.

But who can do this? Acosta credits civil society as a mover and shaker.<sup>78</sup> He commends its basic rule of working bottom-up, from the inside out, an organisational principle which Acosta calls “autocentrism.”<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, as he points out, this participative democratic element was an outstanding feature in the administration of villages in the Inca civilisation.<sup>80</sup> Public life was ruled by a whole series of collective grass-roots measures, some of which were:<sup>81</sup>

- “minka:” community efforts around the maintenance of public works such as sewerage and drainage [Which still exists in the rural regions of Colombia and is known under “Acción Comunal,” Community Action],
- “makipurarina:” similar to minka, metaphorically described as “merging/pooling hands,”
- “ranti-ranti:” the reciprocal exchange of goods based on “First you, then I” [Deeply entrenched in the hospitality and generosity of modern Latin American populations towards visitors and guests],
- “uyanza”: a system by which community work was rewarded with gifts and boni.

This indigenous catalogue reminds us of volunteering and charity work, which has become ever more popular in the Northern hemisphere in recent decades, especially in Europe, and which has become one of the columns of civil society. In North America, as Tocqueville observed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, volunteering had been a major social tool for the settlers.<sup>82</sup> It helped the colonisers survive in the new environment. Whether this social technique was prompted by the Indian communities in their vicinity is a topic of discussion for another paper. Acosta’s message is: Open debate about dichotomous asymmetric structures, inter- and pluri-cultural flows, overall heterodox views and, above all, “relearning” may make the difference.<sup>83</sup>

### 3.3 Nobel Savages under Anthropological Scrutiny

As these insights may show, ancestral societies have a large bandwidth of performance and engagement, which at least in Latin America, apparently relied very much on what we believe to be a Western or Northern feature: civil society. This argument will now be examined further. This is

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<sup>78</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben*. oekom: München. Original: Alberto Acosta 2012: *Buen Vivir Sumak Kawsay*. Ecuador: Abya Yala, p.121.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.147.

<sup>80</sup> Wikipedia. Aillu. URL: <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aillu> [16.03.2022].

<sup>81</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben*. München: oekom, p.166ff.

<sup>82</sup> Wikipedia. Tocqueville. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy\\_in\\_America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_in_America) [25.03.2022].

<sup>83</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben*. oekom: München. Original: Alberto Acosta 2012: *Buen Vivir Sumak Kawsay*. Ecuador: Abya Yala, p.196.

highlighted in a 2021 publication by the anthropologist David Graeber and the archaeologist David Wengrow.<sup>84</sup> Their findings change our perception of the American indigenous community. Their encounters with the Europeans and Americans in the Northern part of the continent are described as a profound “system shock.”<sup>85</sup> The Indigenous were used to a culture of freedom and equality and criticised the colonisers for their top-down command structure, greed, and their tolerance of misery and poverty. A debate on whether to fight or make peace with the invaders triggered this comment:

Why “does Maxixcatzin think these people are gods who seem more like ravenous monsters cast out by the unruly sea to corrupt us, who feed on gold, silver, stones and pearls, sleep in their clothes and generally behave like people who might one day be cruel masters (...) Why should we, who live without bondage and have never acknowledged a king, shed our blood only to make ourselves slaves?”<sup>86</sup>

In turn, the authoritarian Europeans were not accustomed to that freedom, but did not feel the need to respect the indigenous communities and appreciate their customs because they were not Christians. To have recognised something or someone as superior to Christianity would have been heresy and the perpetrator therefore prosecuted for having committed a capital crime. Besides, inequity seemed to be a universal human law, as in the Garden of Eden Adam was supposedly superior to Eva. That savages might be morally and intellectually superior, seemed inconceivable to the Europeans. However, the more educated knew from classical literature that in antiquity ideas like the *polis* and *res publica* had recognised equality, at least in theory. This wisdom had been forgotten in the Middle Ages, and barely resurfaced during the Renaissance. Interestingly, despite this rejection the supposedly heathen savages were baptised “noble,” – Indigenous men being engaged in hunting, which was considered the privilege of the nobility.<sup>87,88</sup>

A Jesuit missionary reported that he was ridiculed by the Indigenous because Europeans feared their superiors, while the only “authority of Indian chieftains was their tongue” and only skilful speech gave them power.<sup>89</sup> Culprits were not punished, but their entire family had to pay compensation to make up for losses and damages, a highly effective way for keeping order and educating offenders. The Jesuits were also puzzled, naturally, by the women’s sexual freedom, premarital relations and their right to a divorce. “Sinful freedom of the savages,” they commented. Equally unknown and

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<sup>84</sup> Graeber, David, Wengrow, David: *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity*. London: Allan Lane 2021.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p.31.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p.353.

<sup>87</sup> In German: „edle Wilde“ is derived from *Edelmann* (nobleman).

<sup>88</sup> Graeber, David, Wengrow, David (2021): *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity*. London: Allan Lane, p.152.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

suspicious to them was food production, a collective system not based on individual private ownership, to raise the crops to feed the entire community. Private property and money did not exist at all. In turn, the native leader Kondiaronk stated that “money was the devil of the devils, the Frenchmens’ tyrant, the source of all evil, blight of the soul and slaughterhouse of the living.”<sup>90</sup> These recordings, testimonies, and other derogatory opinions about the Europeans found their way to France. Theaters performed them as “Savage Critiques” and became the talk of French society. These plays were a mirror. They raised awareness among the intellectuals about the rights and wrongs of their own culture and sparked fierce debates throughout European society in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, thus summarised by the authors:

“Freedom and equality were deemed universal values (...) and not compatible for a regime based on private property. Did progress in the arts and science help to comprehend better the world and thus attain also moral progress? Or were indigenous critics right and were the power and wealth of France perverted side-effects of an unnatural, even pathological societal agreement?”<sup>91</sup>

Influenced by this debate and the promises of freedom, Rousseau became an early critic of European civilisation and phrased his famous quest “return to nature.”<sup>92</sup> As for the Indigenous, private property for him seemed the incarnation of the evil. The land and its fruits belonged to everyone in compliance with an unwritten natural law, he wrote in his *Discours sur l’inégalité* (Discourse on Inequality), even though he knew that there was no return to the primordial state:

“The first man who fenced in a piece of land and took it into his head to say: this is mine, and who found people simple-minded enough to believe him, was the true founder of the bourgeois society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how much hardship and misery and how many horrors would he have spared the human race who had torn out the stakes or filled

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<sup>90</sup> Graeber, David, Wengrow, David (2021): *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity*. London: Allan Lane, p.54.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p.51.

<sup>92</sup> Which, in sum, is a not completely truthful reduction of Rousseau’s more complex thoughts and which had been created as a rally cry by his opponents, but nevertheless has been picked up and so to speak recycled, again and again, by environmentalists, most recently by German science communicator Harald Letsch and co-authors in their most recent publication “Über dem Orinoco scheint der Mond” (The moon shines above the Orinoco), which is a call to say farewell to the Northern industrialised-economised way of living, also with reference to Alexander von Humboldt’s famous journey on the Amazonian river, which attributed along with his expedition through Hispanic America to his reputation of being the forefather and inventor of the environmental movement, which he was accredited to in the Humboldt 250 anniversary in 2019. Wikipedia. Jean-Jacques Rousseau. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques\\_Rousseau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau) [19.03.2022]; Random House. Über dem Orinoco scheint der Mond. URL: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.de/ebook/UEber-dem-Orinoco-scheint-der-Mond/Harald-Lesch/Penguin/e587348.rhd> [19.03.2022].

up the ditch and called out to his fellow men: 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all and the earth to no one.'<sup>93</sup>

While on the Northern continent the Indigenous tribes lived in loose structures and never joined to form empires, Mesoamerica and South America gave birth to such political structures. The authors take a close look at the kingdoms there and find similar societal features to the tribal Northern regions. Teotihuacán became a deserted capital, when at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán was established. Its former inhabitants remain a mystery. But the art they left discloses a lot about them. It indicates that, unlike the preceding Toltecs and the succeeding Aztec, both imperial and dynastic, the Teotihuacán inhabitants mostly governed themselves in a communitarian and egalitarian way.<sup>94</sup> No murals were found that depicted the oppression of residents. They do not show signs of a personality cult either. The city's design and layout reveal assembly halls, which the authors believe could have been used for townhall meetings. They were decentralised, spread all over the town, which may indicate that there was no single leader, but the administration was delegated to neighborhood councils.<sup>95</sup> Modern democratic terminology such as self-organisation, co-responsibility, and swarm intelligence might have been applied here. Technically, Teotihuacán was also very advanced. A sewer system set high standards for cleanliness, hygiene, and public health; standards far higher than in medieval European towns. Spacious patios and other installations indicate the existence of "public and social housing" for the inhabitants including comfortable living for their families.<sup>96</sup> This all suggested a well-developed civil society, which apparently was the tradition in this Mesoamerican period, with potentially long-lasting effects. Centuries later, Spaniards reported self-organised towns from other regions in Mexico: "From the European view, these indigenous cities must have been republics or even democracies."<sup>97</sup> To qualify for a political office in these indigenous republics, candidates had to express their willingness to work for the people. Little is known about the election process as such; however campaigns are reminiscent of an initiation act, which included public insults, a period of isolation, fasting, bloodletting.<sup>98</sup> The purpose of these exercises was to make the future representative humble

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<sup>93</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2008): Diskurs über die Ungleichheit. Stuttgart: Ed. Meier UTB, S. 173: „Der erste, der ein Stück Land eingezäunt hatte und es sich einfallen ließ zu sagen: dies ist mein und der Leute fand, die einfältig genug waren, ihm zu glauben, war der wahre Gründer der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Wie viele Verbrechen, Kriege, Morde, wie viel Not und Elend und wie viele Schrecken hätte derjenige dem Menschengeschlecht erspart, der die Pfähle herausgerissen oder den Graben zugeschüttet und seinen Mitmenschen zugerufen hätte: ‚Hütet euch, auf diesen Betrüger zu hören; ihr seid verloren, wenn ihr vergeßt, daß die Früchte allen gehören und die Erde niemandem.“

<sup>94</sup> Graeber, David, Wengrow, David (2021): The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity. London: Allan Lane, p.357ff.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.372.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.371.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.374.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.385.

towards the sovereign, the citizenry. This, indeed, was a contrast to the Spanish and European noble society and its imperious noblemen.

The authors conclude that the American indigenous societies had not only adopted a practice similar to Mediterranean communities in antiquity, but lived a forgotten philosophy of civility, also embodied by the ancient Greeks. They also practised modern statesmanship as outlined by Montesquieu in “The Spirit of Law,” (1748) which inspired the founders of the United States.<sup>99</sup> It may be considered both ironic and a tragedy that the Indigenous displaced by European immigrants had to some extent already adhered to this spirit, became indirectly the spiritual fathers of the new nation. One of the authors’ astounding arguments is that the indigenous communities, regardless of their location in the North or South, were more civilised than the Western conquerors and colonisers and that the Indigenous in turn looked upon their intruders and their habits as savages. This is backed up by historical records, e.g. detailed dialogues between indigenous American communities and Jesuit fathers, and disrupts conventional Northern thinking with an even more stunning proposition: The narratives in the French salons of the 18<sup>th</sup> century about the Indigenous and their social life, who were not aware of European hierarchies and submission to authorities, but adhered to democratic and civil societal principles, instigated or at least fertilised the era of enlightenment and eventually the French revolution. In reviewing Graeber’s and Wengrow’s book, the German “Philosophie” magazine described this as “dismantling the prevailing historic myths.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2008): Diskurs über die Ungleichheit. Stuttgart: Ed. Meier UTB, p.513.

<sup>100</sup> philosophie Magazin 02/2022: 83, Berlin: Philomagazin Verlag.



## 4. DISCUSSION

Following the presentation of three major agents of change, religious, indigenous and academic, the findings shall be discussed and evaluated in a pro and con scheme of evidence and educated guessing, what is a historic fact in interpreting the story. All too often in want of hard data, myths have prevailed and replaced reality as much as academic endeavors.

### 4.1 The Catholic Task Force

The reviewed Misereor publication meets many criteria of a new realistic view. It addresses the issue quite precisely, provides a voice for relevant sources in both hemispheres and even introduces exercises how to train for the good life and its principles in the North. Strangely, there seem to be missing links between the emergence and history of this philosophy in Europe, from its beginnings in Greek mythology and culture, through Christian reflections and customs in the Middle Ages to the enlightenment and the 20<sup>th</sup> century alternative designs of living style all the way to today's environmental movement: There is a plethora of various Northern approaches, which remind one of the Andean and ancient American good life, including, of course, Rousseau, who throughout his life pondered how to live well and which elements and qualities this entailed.<sup>101</sup> His assumptions were not much liked, violated the rules of society, and made him an outcast. But his unpopular stance also made him a pioneer of the European enlightenment which is still relevant today. So, there is a common heritage, which intellectually bridges the gaps between North and South and which needs to be uncovered again. While the inclusion of this historic context would definitely enhance the content and Misereor's mission, the unique advantage of its publication is that it was edited by a Bavarian Catholic youth organisation, members of which not only contributed several chapters expressing local views, but also, in practical terms, organises cross-cultural encounters.

The fact that the Pope favours a holistic concept and that he makes considerable efforts to reach out to the indigenous communities of Latin America should be counted as another high-ranking attempt to bridge the gaps or even rock the walls. However, the bloody history of the conquest with its colonial era and slavery is remembered in Indigenous societies, including the active role of the

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<sup>101</sup> A condensed version of Rousseau's perception of how to live well can be found in the volume with the German title "Die Kunst zu leben", content of which emerges also in his "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences": Random House. Die Kunst zu leben. URL: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.de/Buch/Die-Kunst-zu-leben/Jean-Jacques-Rousseau/Anaconda-Verlag/e586489.rhd> [19.03.2022]; St Mary's. Jean Jacques Rousseau. Discourse on the Arts and Sciences [The First Discourse 1750]. URL: <https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/arts.pdf> [19.03.2022].

Catholic Church.<sup>102</sup> Whether church officials, especially the higher-ranking ones, are willing to collaborate with shamans, male and female, and to recognise them as equals, as Misereor authors demand, remains doubtful in light of the controversial discussion on ordaining female priests, and their ongoing rejection of a more liberal European environment. Humanitarian interventions in the North-South dialogue tend to come from the Protestant Church. That Catholics take a lead is an important move by the Christian religion amidst a process of transformation and a general acknowledgement that religion is becoming an important civil society actor.<sup>103104</sup>

## 4.2 The Indigenous Conundrum

It has frequently been observed that the tribes in North as well as in South America lived in communities ruled by collectivism and communitarianism, comparable to modern cooperatives, for centuries. Some authors have ventured beyond this observation and believed they discovered paradise, the lost Garden Eden in the Americas, or in modern terms, an ideal communist society. Such interpretations, however, were influenced by wishful thinking, as there was no absence of warfare. The Indian warpath was not an invention of novelists, but a reality that frequently occurred between tribes, especially in Meso and South America over a long period of time. It brought about the creation of powerful realms. The Inca Empire, which had many historic predecessors along the Pacific coast and the Andes, was considered the largest in the world when it was discovered and invaded by the Spaniards, larger than China at the time and possibly at least as advanced in some regards culturally and technically as the Asian central power. What some Europeans observed at that time was that the empire may have been a confederation, a loosely knit network of tribes with autonomy and religious independence and quite liberal by modern standards. However, the successful plot of about one hundred conquistadores to kidnap the Inca emperor, resulted in an almost immediate collapse of the empire and overall paralysis.<sup>105</sup> Incidentally, a similar strategy worked for Cortés in Mexico in the conquest of the Aztec empire. This, in a Eurocentric or, more generally, Global North interpretation, confirmed the assumption that European individualism in

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<sup>102</sup> During a visit to Jamaica in March 2022, the British royals prince William and Kate were received with protests which urged the representative of the British Crown to officially condemn slavery and its societal conditions: CNN. Royal Visit to Jamaica. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/23/americas/william-kate-caribbean-royal-tour-intl/index.html> [29.03.2022].

<sup>103</sup> Strachwitz, Rupert Graf (2016): Kirchen auf dem Weg in die Zivilgesellschaft. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg. URL: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/fjsb-2015-0105/html> [26.03.2022].

<sup>104</sup> Strachwitz, Rupert Graf (Hrsg.) (2020): Religious Communities and Civil Society in Europe, Maecenata Schriften, Band 16, Vol. 1 and 2, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg. URL: [https://www.maecenata.eu/2019/08/19/religious-communities-and-civil-society-in-europe/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=einladung\\_zum\\_online\\_colloquium\\_religionsgemeinschaften\\_und\\_zivilgesellschaft\\_am\\_060921&utm\\_term=2022-03-19](https://www.maecenata.eu/2019/08/19/religious-communities-and-civil-society-in-europe/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=einladung_zum_online_colloquium_religionsgemeinschaften_und_zivilgesellschaft_am_060921&utm_term=2022-03-19) [19.03.2022].

<sup>105</sup> This had been researched in-depth by the author for a report published in the German P.M. science magazine and subsequently reprinted in the Spanish and Latin American edition "Muy interesante": Wolfgang C. Goede: Die letzten Stunden des Inkareichs. P.M. 04-1985, p.118-125; G+J/Bertelsmann Hamburg-Munich; El Ultimo Dia del Imperio Inca: Muy Interesante 07-1985, Madrid, pp.72-78.

conjunction with top-down command structures was superior to indigenous collectivism and thus reaffirmed the mindset of the North.

The Canadian John Hemming is considered an expert on Inca and South American indigenous history.<sup>106</sup> His findings from extensive investigations in Peru were compiled in the *Conquest of the Incas*. They have not been contested by new research in fifty years, including the conclusion. In the Inca religion the emperor was a god-like being, the representative of the sun and creation on earth, unconditionally worshipped. It was a ritual in the entire Andean region including Mesoamerica to sacrifice children on altars, which apparently was considered a great honour by their families.<sup>107</sup> That was incomprehensible for the invaders, particularly due to their Christian beliefs. This only increased their fervour and ambition to topple the barbarian regime, as they perceived it, and seemed to justify the ensuing exploitation and extractivism, slavery and missionary efforts. In hindsight, the civilisations of the Americas had underestimated their intruders, who had quickly discovered the Achilles heel of the empire, the vulnerable head of state. The popular belief that the Inca population mistook the Spaniards for “white gods” and therefore surrendered to them is scientifically improbable.

The culture of the ‘Indians,’ as they were called since Columbus believed to have reached India, has caused much debate, especially in political and academic circles. Were the American indigenous uncivilised savages or did they have highly civilised cultures and live in freedom, democracy, and harmony with nature? Should we be learning from them, seeing them as an archetype, possibly even as a prototype of an environmentally and governmentally sound world to come? Authors like Acosta, Solón, Galeano and many others in the Americas and elsewhere have been grappling with these issues for centuries without having reached a conclusion. Nonetheless, one point remains to be made in the wrap-up of this section. Military force is not always decisive in the encounter and clash of civilisations in the long run. If societal evolution is understood as a continuation of these encounters, they apply hard as well as soft powers as a means to an end. The lack of technology in terms of seaworthy vessels and advanced arms has not stopped the indigenous world from reaching out to the North. For centuries, the remedies of the shamans had been discredited as devilish. This is changing rapidly, since the so-called “magic mushrooms” have valuable mental properties, which help sufferers of depressions and anxiety to live healthy lives, as experiments at Zurich University

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<sup>106</sup> Wikipedia. John Hemming. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Hemming\\_\(historian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hemming_(historian)) [20.03.2022].

<sup>107</sup> Radiowissen Maya. URL: <https://www.ardaudiothek.de/episode/radiowissen/die-maya-mais-pyramiden-und-metropolen/bayern-2/10386399/> [29.03.2022].

demonstrate.<sup>108109</sup> According to Franz X. Vollenweider, proper medication might become available this decade. Expectations are high, as mental health disorders have become an epidemic disease in the North, and there is a lack of effective treatments.<sup>110</sup> Indigenous herbal medicine is losing its stigma and, more traditionally has been an integrative element of *Buen Vivir*. As documented, the indigenous philosophy impacted the European enlightenment in various ways two centuries ago and is currently intellectually amidst its second phase of reception.<sup>111112113</sup> But it does not only seep Northwest across the Atlantic, but straight across the Americas to the North and cannot be stopped by physical walls. The ones at the Southern border of the United States cannot contain the flow of immigrants from Latin America, many of whom are ethnically indigenous or mestizo. Throughout the United States, especially in the metropolitan areas, and in many parts of Canada, Spanish has become the second language, due to the unstoppable and significant growth of Latin American populations. The *reconquista* of the continent is underway.<sup>114</sup>

### 4.3 Science between Bias and Truth

The topic has raised the question of objectivity and truth, particularly regarding the latest anthropological evidence on American indigenous communities. Both the North and the South might agree on the point that the voice of the South in terms of authentic sources has found a channel, which helps to establish an equilibrium in the mostly Eurocentric or Northern-centered debate of the matter. The overall question in science remains whether the findings are objective. As communication scientists have established, all humans, including researchers, have an in-built bias system according to which they select their topics and apply their methods.<sup>115</sup> In light of this, the *Dawn of Everything* publication's note is helpful, as David Graeber is a self-confessed anarchist and

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<sup>108</sup> Hostels throughout Latin American report a sizeable tourism influx by backpackers to meet shamans in the entire region, where Northerners attend ceremonies around magic mushrooms and other psychedelic plants, in Peru called "Ayahuasca", in Colombia "Yahe", with Northerners in general "Mama aya".

<sup>109</sup> Zurich University. Psilocybin. URL: <https://www.media.uzh.ch/en/Press-Releases/2019/Meditation.html> [31.03.2022].

<sup>110</sup> Goede, Wolfgang Chr. (2021): Observatorium 55. URL: <https://www.maecenata.eu/2021/09/16/mentale-gesundheit-kein-tabu-sondern-selbstverstaendlich/> [31.03.2022].

<sup>111</sup> Acosta, Alberto (2015): *Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben*. München:oekom. URL: <https://www.oekom.de/buch/buen-vivir-9783865817051> [20.03.2022].

<sup>112</sup> Katholische Landjugendbewegung Bayern. Neue KLJB-Werkbriefe werden am 16.12. vorgestellt - mit Misereor! URL: <https://www.kljb-bayern.de/aktuell/neue-kljb-werkbriefe-werden-am-1612-vorgestellt-mit-misereor/> [20.03.2022].

<sup>113</sup> Freie University Berlin/ Latin America Institute, Cosmovision. URL: [https://www.lai.fu-berlin.de/forschung/lehrforschung/symbolische\\_repraesentationen/unku\\_und\\_altartuch/altartuch/religion\\_und\\_kosmovision/index.html](https://www.lai.fu-berlin.de/forschung/lehrforschung/symbolische_repraesentationen/unku_und_altartuch/altartuch/religion_und_kosmovision/index.html) [20.03.2022].

<sup>114</sup> Montezumas späte Rache. P.M. Das historische Ereignis, Nr. 5 1995, p.58-65. Wikipedia. P.M. History. URL: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/P.M.\\_History](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/P.M._History) [20.03.2022].

<sup>115</sup> See Dr. Brigitte Naderer, LMU Munich, communication faculty LMU Communication Science. Brigitte Naderer and bias. URL: [https://www.ifkw.uni-muenchen.de/organisation/personen/mitarbeiter/naderer\\_brigitte/index.html](https://www.ifkw.uni-muenchen.de/organisation/personen/mitarbeiter/naderer_brigitte/index.html) [21.03.2022]; see also her radio interview on biased-based distortions: Podcast Bias. URL: [http://podcast.lora924.de/static/media/episodes/lora\\_wiko\\_220303\\_verzerrungen\\_om.mp3](http://podcast.lora924.de/static/media/episodes/lora_wiko_220303_verzerrungen_om.mp3) [21.03.2022].

one of the foremost masterminds of the occupy movement.<sup>116</sup> His anthropological research is directed towards empowering the disempowered and this clarifies the perspective and the outcome, including the title wording.

Someone else who does not hide his bias is Lilian Thuram, born on the Caribbean Island of Guadeloupe, a former French colony, which is now a French overseas territory and thus the Western-most borderline of the European Union. After his career as a professional soccer player, the African-Caribbean engaged philanthropically with “Education against racism and for equality” and published among others “The white thinking.”<sup>117</sup> In this publication, based on numerous scientific sources, he claims that white thinking is deeply ingrained in Europeans and in their overseas colonies. Historically, in a sort of “whitewashing,” people of colour and different cultural origins have been compelled to comply with white European values and standards, whereas their own cultural roots have been eradicated.

It is hard to argue with many of the author’s examples of colonialism and racism, the historic sting of discrimination and open violence against non-whites. Thuram argues that if the old Egyptian Empires belong to the cradle of occidental civilisation, as Western history books claim, then it needs to be understood that the Nile region belongs to the African continent and that its inhabitants were not white, but partially of dark or black skin and thus have become an integrative part of the European landscape.<sup>118</sup> However, when Thuram goes into the history of slavery in depth, he misses one important historic fact: That African chieftains voluntarily and quite happily participated in slavery and sold their own people to the European slave traders.<sup>119120121</sup>

As Karl Marx had already pointed out, to the disenchantment of many, the ancient Greeks were a society of slaveholders. But slavery was not just a matter of white thinking or African tribal culture, but was in the past a universal feature, from China, to Polynesia, to indigenous American

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<sup>116</sup> Politico. David Graeber. URL: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/12/26/david-graeber-the-anarchist-provocateur-447090> [21.03.2022].

<sup>117</sup> Thuram, Lilian (2022): *Das Weiße Denken*. Hamburg: Edition Nautilus; German translation of “La pensée blanche”. Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey 2020.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p.29f.

<sup>119</sup> Washington Post. The History of Slavery. URL: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/an-african-country-reckons-with-its-history-of-selling-slaves/2018/01/29/5234f5aa-ff9a-11e7-86b9-8908743c79dd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/an-african-country-reckons-with-its-history-of-selling-slaves/2018/01/29/5234f5aa-ff9a-11e7-86b9-8908743c79dd_story.html) [21.03.2022].

<sup>120</sup> CNN. URL: [http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9510/ghana\\_slavery/](http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9510/ghana_slavery/) [21.03.2022].

<sup>121</sup> Guardian. Africans apologize for the slave trade. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/18/africans-apologise-slave-trade> [21.03.2022].

communities.<sup>122</sup> Hannah Arendt's axiom "there is only truth in two" cuts many ways and could help to eliminate cultural bias and the imminent walls.

Achille Mbembe, historian and political scientist from Cameroon and a representative of the post-colonial school, has adopted this theory. According to this theory, colonialism has not ended with former colonies gaining their independence, but it continues, distinguishing between superior and inferior people, the cultural centre in the North and the cultural periphery in the South. Post-colonialist theory emphasises the equality of all human beings and interprets the cultural diversity and plurality as a positive gain.<sup>123</sup> Mbembe's model which challenges the walls of segregation is an "ethic en passant," which is in motion and consists of concerned by-standers travelling to an unspecified destination. It does not split cultures apart but shares common values in an adaptable mode and makes "normative points of references for the prospective coexistence visible."<sup>124125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Serfdom and bondage as related to slavery is an outstanding characteristic of feudal societies and lasted until present times. Serfdom was abolished in German principalities only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but unofficially it went on in the rural regions until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wikipedia. Serfdom. URL: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serfdom> [28.03.2022].

<sup>123</sup> Mmembe, Achille (2021): Postcolonial constellations in modern democracies; originally: Postkoloniale Konstellationen moderner Demokratien. Ausgewählt und interpretiert von Simon Faets und Nicki K. Weber, in: Hubertus Buchstein, Kerstin Pohl, Rieke Trimçev (Hrsg.): Demokratietheorien. Frankfurt/M, 10., vollst. überarbeitete Auflage 2021: Wochenschauverlag, p.335.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p.342.

<sup>125</sup> See also Daniel Dettling 2021: A better future is possible. München: Kösel; originally: Eine bessere Zukunft ist möglich. Ideen für die Welt von morgen. The author is a futurologist and makes a compelling argument about encouragement and to move forward as opposed to remaining in fatalism and dystopia. In that context he proposes that Europe and Africa overcome their trenches and launch an African European Century, an "Afrotopia" in the meaning of the Senegalese social scientist Felwine Sarr. URL: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felwine\\_Sarr](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felwine_Sarr) [21.03.2022].

## 5. CONCLUSION

Walls dissect the globe and cultures. A major one, although ideologically not as visible as the former one during the Cold War, is the historic, metaphorical wall which divides North and South. The aforementioned literature makes this borderline at least intellectually permeable. More guidance and a handrail may be provided by a threefold closing.

In 2016, Hollywood celebrated the Oscar nomination of the Colombian movie “Embrace of the Serpent.”<sup>126</sup> Although it did not make it into the American hall of fame, it travelled around the world and received a multitude of awards afterwards. The film features an expedition in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to Amazonia and describes the classic wall: Scientists and Indigenous people, who do not understand each other at all. Both live in completely adverse worlds, one in cognitive intellectual analysis, Bacon’s and Newton’s clockwork universe, and the other one in emotional natural synthesis, as set forward by the Gaia model. Tragically, and unfortunately also ironically in this context, the indigenous main actor died from Covid-19 in 2020, a disease that originated in Northern metropolitan areas and spread to Amazonia.

This barrier has not been lowered, as most recent history underlines. When Colombia inaugurated its long-awaited science ministry in 2020, its first minister was an Afro-Colombian biologist from the Pacific coast, which represents the country’s traditional indigenous health knowledge. Mabel Torres did not last long in the newly created office. She had recommended traditional measures for cancer treatment, which were not accepted as evidence-based and caused a turmoil of opposition.<sup>127</sup>

The ultimate, closing argument comes from Tilman Steiner, who defined something which has become known as the “Steiner Code,” a fresh approach to evolution and the classic question of what holds the world together at its core.<sup>128</sup> His philosophical discourse about reason and unreason, irrationality and beauty herewith summarises the topic of this paper with a quadruple convergence or a simple rule of four:

- The world is principally entangled in antagonisms,
- which, as a starter, causes friction and resistance,

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<sup>126</sup> Wikipedia. Embrace of the Serpent. URL: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embrace\\_of\\_the\\_Serpent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embrace_of_the_Serpent) [23.03.2022].

<sup>127</sup> El País. Colombia Pseudoscience. URL: [https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/01/18/ciencia/1579315678\\_231018.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/01/18/ciencia/1579315678_231018.html) [21.03.2022].

<sup>128</sup> Steiner, Tilman (2016): Die Anschauung der Welt. Die Vernunft der Schönheit und die Unvernunft der Rationalität. Berlin: Europa Verlag; The view of the world. The reason of beauty and the unreason of rationality.

- which, in turn, generates attraction,
- and results finally in the fusion of opposite forces and thus drives evolution.

Or, in Charles Darwin's modest words, phrased differently many times by interpreters, but always with the same meaning: "In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate (...) have prevailed."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Quotepark URL: <https://quotepark.com/quotes/886675-charles-darwin-in-the-long-history-of-humankind-and-animal-kind/>  
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