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Indigenous worldviews and Western conventions: *Sumak Kawsay* and cocoa production in Ecuadorian Amazonia

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Abstract This article explores the role of conventions in the normalization of cocoa production in Ecuadorian Amazonia. Convention theory provides key theoretical tools for understanding coordination among agents. However, conventions must be understood as cultural constructions with a strong Eurocentric background that must be substantially modified in originally non-European contexts. A creative application of convention theory can partially overcome bifurcation among Western and non-Western rationalities. First, it shows that Western values and forms of coordination are heterogeneous, conflictive and opposing. Second, it provides key insight for understanding the transformation of subaltern subjectivities generated from non-Western rationalities that are closely associated with subjugated knowledges. Third, in applying the concept of compromise, it allows one to understand cognitive hybridization and coordination among indigenous and Western agents and thus the complexities of processes of resistance, subversion

and empowerment carried by indigenous communities. This article is focused on how cocoa production in Ecuadorian Amazonia serves as an example of the confluence and coordination of indigenous (using the concept of “Good Living” or *Sumak Kawsay*) and Western conventions. The assertion of *Sumak Kawsay* is understood as a relevant transformation of Ecuadorian post-colonial relations. It is shown that relevant industrial upgrading processes are justified by, among others, *Sumak Kawsay* repertoires. Additionally, dialogue on knowledge and compromise among conventions, and especially concerning *Sumak Kawsay* and the market, have been key facets shaping the development of a differentiated quality strand that has promoted relevant changes in the subaltern positioning of indigenous farmers in the cocoa commodity chain.

Keywords *Sumak Kawsay* · Indigenous worldviews · Convention theory · Subaltern relations · Agrofood chains · Cocoa

Abbreviations

CT Convention theory
EAR Ecuadorian Amazon region
SK *Sumak Kawsay*

Introduction

Global food relations have experienced dramatic changes in recent years. The most salient features have involved an increasing differentiation of diets, food production and demand, which has generated differentiated spaces of accumulation for quality production (Friedmann 1993, 2005; McMichael 2009a, b; Newman 2009). In Latin America, changing food relations are particularly evident in

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