

VORTRAGSREIHE DES INSTITUTS FÜR ETHNOLOGIE

LEITUNG: PROF. DR. EVELINE DÜRR

# Suma Qamaña in the 21st Century: Aymara Traders and Economic Well-being in El Alto, Bolivia

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## Abstract

This presentation offers a reinterpretation of the Aymara concept Suma Qamaña (commonly translated as Vivir Bien), based on the everyday practices of Aymara traders in the city of El Alto, Bolivia. Unlike state-driven formulations of Vivir Bien, which present it as an anti-capitalist and essentially communal philosophy, historical and ethnographic analysis reveals that Suma Qamaña originates and evolves dynamically, articulating with economic, ritual, and linguistic practices specific to the contemporary urban context. Drawing on interviews, participant observation, and semantic analysis of Aymara notions such as Qama (vital energy to exist), the study examines how traders reconfigure their understandings of well-being in settings marked by informality, commerce, and ritual. From this perspective, the presentation challenges dualistic readings that frame Suma Qamaña through oppositions such as Indigenous/non-Indigenous or capitalist/non-capitalist, as well as interpretations that assign it fixed and homogeneous meanings. Instead, it proposes understanding Aymara notions of well-being through their versatility, agency, and adaptability. This approach highlights how Aymara lifeways and contemporary urban realities are not mutually exclusive, but rather interwoven in complex forms of inhabiting, producing, and signifying life in the 21st century.

Hybrid Session in English. Please register for online participation via the link on our website.

AMERIKAS KOLLOQUIUM



Institut für Ethnologie  
Dienstag, 08.07.2025  
18 Uhr c.t.  
Raum L-155  
Oettingenstraße 67