

**An Anthropology of Well-Being:
Local Perspectives and Cultural Constructions
in the Bolivian Altiplano**



Plate i. El Alto/Carretera Oruro

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In memory of my friends

Serena Prosperi (1975-2003)

and

Emanuele Vagni (1975-2006)

'Sono solo sgusciata nella stanza accanto'
Cuore Sacro (Ozpetec, 2005)

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on individual and collective definitions of ‘the good life’ in the Bolivian plateau. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in the urban area of El Alto, the thesis explores potential contradictions between different orientations and models of well-being. The increasing interest amongst a group of Aymara intellectuals (GTZ) in an indigenous perspective on this topic provides the point of departure for an exploration of the complexity of ideas relating to this issue and an account of different definitions of ‘the good life’ among Aymara people. The thesis makes a contribution to debates regarding poverty and well-being and the problems attached to universal definitions, which tend to be based on simplified and economic criteria.

By considering what different people value and prioritise in terms of their own well-being and, where applicable, their children’s well-being and happiness, the thesis offers a contribution to Andean anthropology and to the understanding of ‘poverty’. This entails an exploration of the moments of tension and synergy that exist between Aymara and Bolivian identity. It offers a detailed analysis of different collective and individual actions adopted for the achievement of well-being. In particular, these include social protests, moments of fiesta, household cooperation, and the resort to supernatural forces and ‘making of luck (*suerte*)’ with a specific focus on gender and generational differences.

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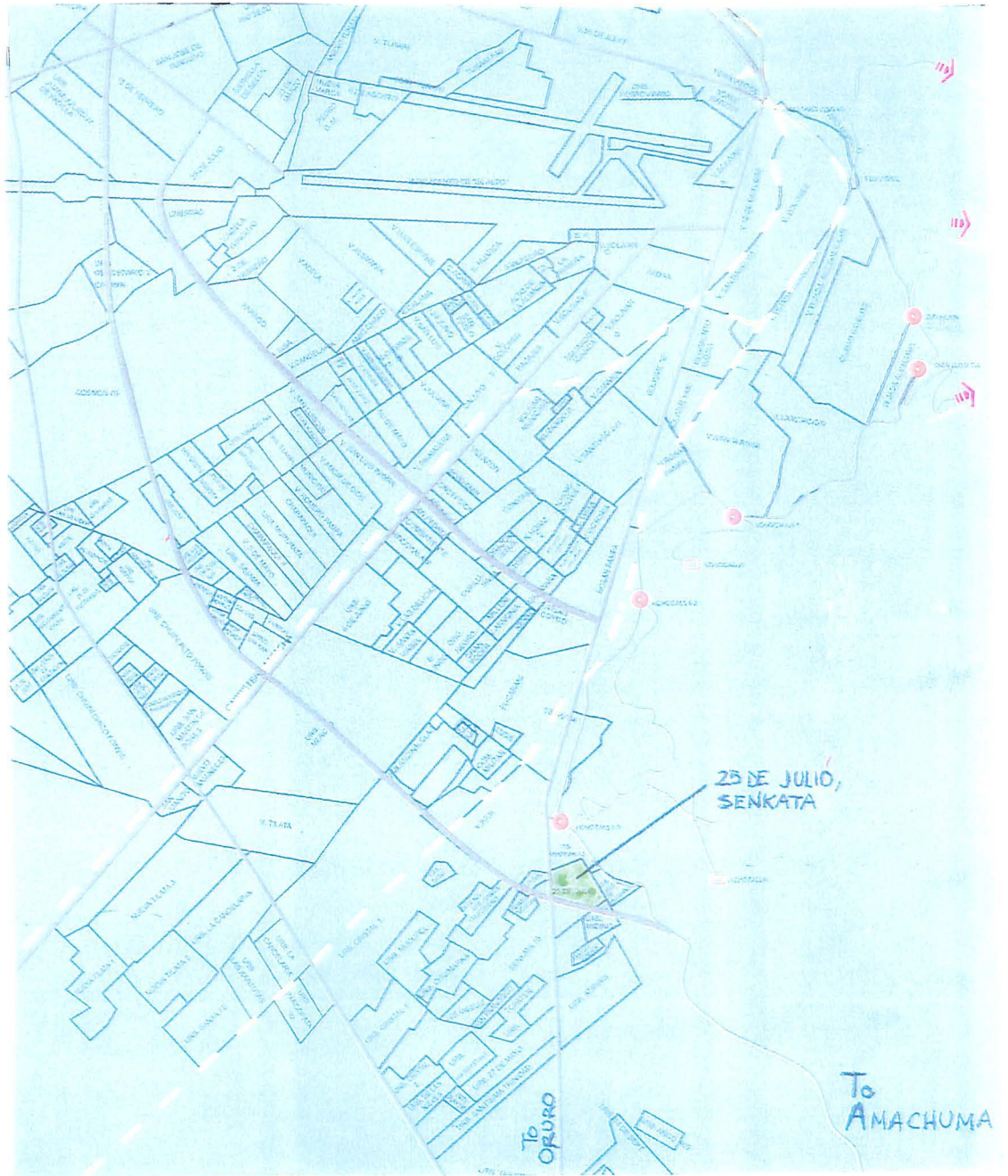
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Map 1. Bolivia and its departments

Source: <http://worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/samerica/bo.htm>



Map 2. El Alto
Palma Fernandez (2004), *Nuevo Plan Guia*



Map 3. Department of La Paz (division in provinces)
www.answers.com/topic/la-paz-department



Map 4. Senkata, El Alto
 Palma Fernandez (2004), *Nuevo Plan Guia*

GLOSSARY

Abuelos	Grand parents (Spanish term)
Achachila	Spirits located in particular features of the landscape, especially mountains. <i>Achachila</i> is the Aymara word for grandparent and usually associated with the mountain peaks themselves.
Aguayo	Spanish term used for woven textiles used as carrying cloth, usually for goods and babies
Ajayu	Soul (Aymara term)
Aka pacha	our time and space, but also present (Aymara)
Alasita	Aymara term referring to the Andean Spanish expression <i>Comprame</i> (Buy from me). It is also a traditional market of miniature amulets, held every 24 th of January
Alax pacha	Sky, but also present (Aymara)
Alcaldía	Town Hall (Spanish term)
Alma	Soul (Spanish term)
Alphiniki	Sugar sweets and important ingredients for ritual offerings
Alteño/a	Inhabitants of El Alto
Altiplano	Plateau
Amautas	Andean Masters, such as philosophers and priests (Quechua term)
Apachita	Aymara term meaning sacred place, highest point on a stretch of path, where spiritual forces such as <i>Pachamama</i> , and the ancestors are worshipped
Apthapi	Meal shared by the entire community or by a group of people
Autoridades originales ayllu	authorities
Awayu	Aymara term used for woven textiles used as carrying cloth, usually for goods and babies
Ayllu	Land-holding units (Abercombie 1986; Harris 1987)
Ayni	Aymara term meaning reciprocal and obligatory service, such as beer bought during <i>fiestas</i> . 'The ayni principle is as follow: I request or receive a specific service from my

kinsman or neighbour, on the understanding that on a subsequent, exactly similar occasion, I will render him/her exactly the same service' (Harris 2000: vi)

- Bartolina Sisa** Indigenous hero involved in the uprising against the Spaniards in 1781 and wife of Tupak Katari
- Bloqueo** Roadblock
- Bracero** Charcoal grill
- Caciques** Nobles
- Cambas** Bolivians from the departments of Santa Cruz, Pando and Beni
- Cambio de vida/** Ritual to change life and luck (Spanish term)
- Cambio de suerte**
- Campeño** Peasant (Spanish term)
- Campo** Countryside (Spanish term)
- Cargo System** Leaders remain in position usually only for a year
- Ch'alla** Aymara term meaning libation, usually to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth)
- Chachawarmi** Aymara term meaning man-and-woman, a heterosexual couple
- Ch'amakani** Lord of the Darkness
- Cholo/a, cholita** Ethnic term for a rural-urban migrant, most often used for women who work in commerce and wear a *pollera*, shawl and bowler hat. *Cholita* is the diminutive of *chola* and means young single women who dress in this way. However, during my fieldwork, I met several married women who defined themselves as *cholitas*.
- Chullo** Typical Aymara hat
- Chuño** Freeze-dried potatoes
- Ch'uta** Dance performed in the town square for Carnival
- Clavel** Carnation
- Comidera** Woman selling food in the market place
- Compadrazgo, compadre, comadre** Relationship between parents of a child and the godparent of that child: *compadre* refers to the men, *comadre* to the women

Comparsa	Dance group
Conquistadores	Spanish conquerors
Copal	Incense. Scientific name: <i>Hymenae</i> (Fernandez Juarez, 1999)
Dia del Mar	Day of the sea, 23 rd of March, when Bolivia remembers the loss of the sea coast in the Pacific War against Chile
Diablos	Devils
Diana	<i>Entrada</i> held on the second day of the <i>fiesta</i> , early in the morning and not in full costume
Dirigentes	Leaders
Dulces	Sugar forms and important ingredients for ritual offerings (Spanish)
Ekeko	Aymara God of Plenty, Fertility and Prosperity
Entrada	Procession of <i>comparsas</i> in the neighbourhood or village, in full costume and usually held on the first day of the <i>fiesta</i> , the Friday
Estar bien	To be fine (Spanish)
Ester mal	Not to be fine (Spanish)
Fiesta	Religious celebration
Golpe	Coup
Hacienda	Land estate
Illa	Amulet bringing good luck (Aymara term)
Istalla	Piece of cloth where yatiri usually 'read the luck' of their clients
Jaqi	Person (Aymara)
Junta Escolar	Parents' association for a particular school
Junta Vecinal	Residents' Committee for an urban zone
Katarismo	Aymara political movement, founded with the Manifesto of Tiwanaku in 1973
Kharisiri	Supernatural being and stealer of human fat, considered to be the cause of various illnesses
Kuti	Alternation, to turn over
Leyes/Decretos	Laws
Lote	Plot of Land (Spanish)

Madrina	Godmother
Mallku/Kurakas	authorities (Aymara)
Manqha pacha	world underneath, but also remote past (Aymara)
Masu Cruz	Important stone in the apachita, point of energy, usually covered with flowers and streamers
Maya, Paya, Kimsa	In Aymara one, two, three, but also the name of a cadastral tax for El Alto
Mesa	Ritual offering to the spiritual forces, such as <i>Pachamama</i> , <i>Achachilas</i> , and the Saints
Mestizo, Mestisaje	Intermediary category between indigenous and non-indigenous set of values, usually closer to non-indigenous ones in terms of working activities, social relations and normally identified as a higher social status in comparison with a <i>cholo</i>
Mink'a	Communal work
Morenada	Very prestigious dance based on the story of Africa slaves
Mujer de pollera	Woman who wears a <i>pollera</i> , another word for <i>chola/cholita</i>
Mujer de vestido	Woman who wears Western clothes
Mullu	White square piece of shell and important ingredient in ritual offerings
Mundo de abajo	World of below (Spanish), also underground
Mundo de arriba	World of above (Spanish), also sky
Nayracha	Literally 'the eye of the coca', but it also refers to the money paid to consult the expert and the coca to read the future of a person (Aymara term)
Paceño/a	Someone from the department or the city of La Paz
Pacha	Bounded Time and Space
Pachakuti	World Change
Pachamama	Mother Earth
Padrino	Godfather
Paro Civico	Civic Strike
Patron	Boss
Pepino	Carnival Character

Pollera	Gathered skirt worn over several petticoats by <i>cholitas</i>
Pongo	Hacienda serf
Prestamo	Loan
Preste/Pasante	Main organiser and sponsor of a <i>fiesta</i>
Pueblo	Village
Puesto	Stall
Pututu	Horn
Qamiri	A person who is well-off (Aymara)
Q'ara	White, but also disparaging reference to the ruling elite
Refresco	Soft drink
Retamas	White flowers (Spanish)
Santiaguito	Affectionate term for St. James. It means little St' James.
Saxra	Ambivalent and ambiguous being bringing bad luck and illness
Serpentina	Streamer
Sindicato	Trade Union
Suerte	Luck
Suma	Aymara term meaning good
Suma Jakaña	Good life at the household level
Suma Qamaña	Good life at the community level
Supay	Invisible being bringing bad luck and illness
Susto	Fright, considered a real pathology in Latin America
Tari	Small woven square cloth used for carrying coca (Aymara term)
Tata Inti-Willka	God/Sun
Thika	Small square white bricks made of sugar and used as an ingredient in ritual offerings (Aymara term)
Tio	In Spanish it means uncle, but it refers to the Devil
Tinku	It is a dance associated with a form of ritual conflict practised by local people in Potosí
Titi	Andean mountain cat. Scientific name: <i>Oreaiurus Jacobita</i>
Tobas	Dance that first originated in the Amazon region
Trago	Alcoholic drink
Tunta	Dried potatoes

Tupac Katari	Indigenous hero involved in the uprising against the Spaniards in 1781
Vecino/a	Resident of a neighbourhood
Whipala	Flag, symbol of the indigenous union
Wilancha	<i>Hacer sangre</i> -to do blood, special offering when a llama is killed and offered to the <i>Pachamama</i>
Wiraqocha	Supreme God linked with the sun (Aymara term)
Wira q'una	Plant from the altiplano (Aymara)
Wirijina	Virgin Mary (Aymara)
Yatiri	Aymara term meaning 'someone who knows' and used to refer to a ritual specialist
Zona Sur	The wealthy area of La Paz

ABBREVIATIONS

WB Well-being

Political Parties

MAS *Movimiento al Socialismo*, Movement Towards Socialism; Political party led by Evo Morales, elected president in December 2005

MNR *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, Nationalist Revolutionary Movement; political party of the popular revolution of 1952, but since 1980s in favour of neo-liberal policies and decentralisation. Also, party of GONI (Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada), president between 1993-1997. He was voted again in mid-2002, but had to flee the country during the Gas War in October 2003.

Organisations

FEJUVE Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto, Union of all the local residents' committees of El Alto

COB Central Obrera Boliviana, Trade Union of Bolivian Workers

COR Central Obrera Regional de El Alto, Regional Trade Union of Workers from El Alto

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In recent decades there has been an increasing interest world-wide in developing universal definitions of well-being in academic, governmental and non-governmental circles. However, little empirical research focusing on people's own perceptions of well-being has been carried out. This thesis outlines and discusses the concept of 'the good life' as practiced and articulated by my informants in the Bolivian plateau. The 'good life' can be approached through the local concepts of *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña*, which stress the importance of the social, such that well-being is largely attributed to harmonious relations.

The argument of the thesis draws on ethnographic research conducted in the urban area of El Alto. On the one hand, the thesis illustrates the value of ethnography in exploring issues such as well-being and demonstrates how relations play a fundamental role in people's abilities to choose the lives they have reason to value. On the other hand, through the ethnographic account, the thesis also engages with the complexity of issues emerging when dealing with relations, which are not only constituted through cooperation, ideals of unity and collaboration, but are also shaped through conflicts and sometimes contradictory moral obligations.

By considering different kinds of activity and different kinds of collectivities, the thesis explores what different people value and prioritise in terms of their own well-being and, where applicable, their children's well-being. Furthermore, the thesis offers a descriptive and ethnographic account of how individual dimensions of 'the good life' might contrast and potentially compete with collective ones. This also entails an exploration of the different collective and individual actions

adopted for the achievement of well-being. In particular, these include household cooperation, resort to supernatural forces through rituals, social protests, and moments of fiesta. In all of them I show how collaboration and cooperation coexist with conflicts and moral obligation, influencing people's decisions.

I spent one year in the city of El Alto, Bolivia, looking at definitions of 'the good life' among rural-urban migrants. This thesis provides an account of different models and orientations regarding well-being, and sheds light on the complexity of ideas relating to this issue. Social protests, the household, the resort to supernatural forces through rituals and religious celebrations are all regarded as important dimensions to overcome the difficulties of everyday life, also symbolising core individual and collective values such as unity, collaboration and faith. All of them are considered fundamental for El Alto inhabitants to achieve 'the good life'.

An anthropological approach to WB seems a relevant project at this historical moment when globalisation, migration and displacement are changing our comprehension and representation of the world. Notions of 'the good life' affect each one of us, in a constant re-elaboration of what it means to be a person, or a group and how we engage in relations with the state, the natural environment and other nations.

My personal interest in well-being among migrants and the reasons behind my choice in carrying out research on this topic have to be understood in relation to my personal history. As a migrant myself, neither fully assimilated nor fully

excluded in my place of origin and my place of residence, I share the same 'swinging' position between different models and orientations as that experienced by my informants. Like the majority of the rural-urban migrants I met in El Alto when they asked me if I would like to go back to my village, I would answer no. Yet there is always a nostalgic element towards the past and its associated places and, at the same time, a sort of 'guilt' in finding well-being or 'the good life' somewhere else. By migrating and choosing to live in another location, we subconsciously seem to reiterate that there is something missing in our places of origins.

As migrants, we also build a different concept of well-being, according to the new zones we are in contact with. Contextualisation in terms of space and time is fundamental. In fact, different generations desire different things, because our desires are shaped through our own experiences. My grandparents, who lived during the Second World War, enjoyed life when eating a piece of bread. My parents did so while organising the Trade Union strikes of the sixties and seventies in Northern Italy, and I enjoy mine by studying anthropology and living abroad. Generational differences are important and connected with the topic of this thesis, showing how individuals are in transition, constructing something new for themselves. This is why I decided to focus my attention on recent migrants and on young people in El Alto, two categories that share characteristics associated with transitions and interim stages.

Issues of temporality are also at the core of my investigation: there is a difference between the present and various imagined futures or pasts. To what

extent is well-being something which people experience in the here and now, and how far is it an aspiration for the future and inspired by the past? Everyday life is full of problems and difficulties that affect our perceptions of the present, the past and the future. How much 'ill-being' is considered normal, containable or predictable and at what point it becomes perceived as dysfunctional and abnormal is as an important question as the pursuit of well-being. For example, the context in which an individual lives will inform his/her evaluation of ill-being. What is important is not only how healthy they are, but also how much support they receive when they fall ill and how long their illness lasts. Also, what is important is not so much the money they do or don't have, but how much is considered sufficient to live well over a given period of time in that particular context.

As an anthropologist, I explore the relationships between different aspirations, orientations and models among urban migrants of the city of El Alto, proposing an ethnographic approach, in contrast to widespread 'measurement-obsessed' (Thin 2005:2) understandings of well-being that are often too far removed from everyday reality. In fact, much social policy work and applied research on well-being are often found guilty of the quantification bias (Thin 2005:14), since they focus their reports on statistical tables and graphs on, for example, demography, income poverty, school performance, employment and disability. While these data may be important to some extent to shed light on some aspects of well-being, they say little about how people live and define 'the good life'.

My research contributes to the exploration of a new perspective in the study of well-being, which tries to overcome the quantification bias by creating an account of 'the good life' in a specific place. Rather than numbers, this research focuses on local narratives, emphasising the urgent need to include a wider range of methodological approaches when engaging with 'the good life'. Although development economists such as Sen (1999) have also emphasised a need to incorporate a larger set of qualities into their recommendations, still today this hasn't become one of the priorities in well-being studies. Quantitative research still has a bigger impact and influence in comparison to qualitative findings.

Along the same line, this thesis also makes a contribution to debates regarding poverty. By considering what different people value and prioritise in terms of their own, and their children's well-being and happiness, the thesis offers a contribution to Andean anthropology and to understanding 'poverty' in this area. I decided to carry out research in El Alto, since this city is often seen as synonymous with poverty and marginality in national as well as international discourse. It has also been identified as the hotbed of political militancy that led to the road blocks and strikes that paralysed the department of La Paz in recent years, suggesting that the situation is so bad that people have nothing to lose if they go onto the streets to protest.

Yet, my research argues a different perspective from the ones proposed by the development world when talking about poverty and 'the good life'. This entails an exploration of Aymara as well as Bolivian identity, and, more specifically, the moments of tension as well as synergy that may or may not exist between the

two. Perhaps the most interesting aspect is the tension that is present when people use 'poverty' as a positive identity marker in order to highlight a contrast between their lives and those of the ruling elite and the wealthy social classes. On the one hand, my informants affirm their 'indigeneity' through denying any wealth they may have, but, at the same time, they desire to show their power and social status through opulent material displays in the *fiestas* (religious festivities) or through significant social relations and contacts in which the circulation of material goods is an important factor.

El Alto is a city predominantly populated by young people. In fact, in 2002 50% of the population was under 20 and 75% was under 40 (Lazar 2002: 25). Thus, El Alto is a particularly good field site to investigate generational issues in relation to well-being. Also, El Alto is often portrayed by inhabitants of other parts of the country as a 'poor and dangerous' shanty town. By contrast, *Alteños* describe their home as 'the city of hope', as a place where there are more chances to achieve well-being than in the countryside from which most of them originate. However, *Alteños* also depict 'the city'¹ as an immoral space where new models of behaviour and consumption undermine the traditions and customs of the past. These contrasting ideas lead to numerous conflicts involving individuals as well as communities; my ethnography will provide different examples of the tension that arises between dissimilar aspirations for the future, and various moral orientations and models.

¹ My informants refer to the general term 'la ciudad' when they talk about immoral space. In this case they do not call it La Paz or El Alto. It is the urban area in general that is seen as an immoral space, not the specific realities of their neighbourhoods in El Alto.

The following sections provide an analytical and theoretical framework for studying well-being, proposing a reflection on the value of ethnography in exploring concepts of 'the good life' as well as introducing relevant literature in anthropology in order to outline my approach and the contributions that my thesis will make. This will be followed by a section on local understandings of 'the good life', with reference to the Aymara terms *Suma Jakaña* - the good life at the household level - and *Suma Qamaña* - the good life at the community level. The final section of this chapter summarises the structure of the thesis.

The complexity of well-being: definitions and methodological approaches

The question of 'the good life' is one which modern philosophers, economists, psychologists, and epidemiologists alike have engaged with (Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban 2005: 23, Nussbaum and Sen 1993). While philosophy has searched for paradigms linked with morality and ethics, economics has largely based its research on quantitative methods and has looked for one, usually utilitarian or material factor. The idea of 'the good life' is central to economic and social assessment and also to public policy, social legislation, and community programs. However, the commonly used indicators of economic success such as per capita income are at best crude measures. There is a strong need for a systematic exploration of the content, reach, and relevance of the concept of 'the good life', and ways of making it concrete and usable.

Despite the numerous studies on 'well-being' (WB), this concept has often generated confusion. Many have used it as a synonym for 'development', 'progress', 'wealth' or even 'happiness', proposing a very ethnocentric approach²

² Mainly based on the 'Western' – European and North American, ideas of what WB is.

focused on 'measurement-obsessed' (Thin 2005:2) methodologies. Clearly these terms are polysemic. For example, the word 'poverty' can have multiple meanings: 'The fantastic variety of cases entitling a person to be called 'poor' in different cultures and languages is such that, all in all, everything and everyone under the sun could be labelled as 'poor', in one way or another' (Rahnema 1992:158). Yet, the focus of economics has often been the search for a solution for extreme poverty, affecting people whose lives are blighted by the lack of resources. These have usually been located by the discipline in the region of the 'Third World'. Local realities and cultural perspectives have often been ignored and the 'Third World' has often been represented as a homogenous area.

On the other hand, anthropology has engaged with this issue on a number of levels, showing, for example, how the 'Third World' has been produced by the discourses and practices of development. 'Developing countries' had to conform to the ideas and the expectations of 'the West' and to what the 'developed countries' judged to be a normal course of evolution and progress (Escobar 1995). 'The regime of representation' has created a universalization of the 'Third World', with cultures presented in an ahistorical fashion (ibidem:10). In this context, an unproblematic and universal definition of WB was produced by international development organisations in order to create appropriate forms of measurements.

After the Second World War and until the end of the 1980s, the well-being of a population was defined in terms of a country's economic wealth and, therefore, measured through calculations of economic growth such as GNP -Gross National

Product, and GDP -Gross Domestic product (Mancini Billson and Fluehr-Lobban, 2005). However, in the 1990s, an awareness of the limitation of these economic measurements among international development institutions gave rise to new research. The United Nations produced the HDI -Human Development Index, in 1990. This index is based on population averages for longevity, health, knowledge and standard of living of the population, taking into consideration per-capita income, adult literacy and life expectancy. Indeed, the HDI is an important step towards an understanding of the different dimensions that constitute a state of WB. It has affected policies on health, education, political empowerment, individual opportunities and the relation between these various aspects. Yet, the potential of qualitative research such as ethnography to explore these issues has not been explored fully, limiting the variety of advancements in the field of well-being and of Human Development Indexes.

Not all cultures define well-being simply in terms of wealth (Dasgupta 1993: 139-61; Layard 2005; Seligman 2001). In the Oxford Dictionary, for example, well-being is defined as 'a state of being healthy and happy'. Given this limited definition, which does not shed light on how people really feel and does not take into consideration important psychological aspects of human nature, we are introduced to the complexity of issues I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter when engaging with definitions of 'the good life' and with relations.

In particular, this complexity emerges when the individual relates with the outer world. In my ethnographic example this outer world is defined by the various persons and communities an individual can engage with (e.g. in the household,

the neighbourhood, religious congregations, peer groups,, the city, the nation, the state). The individual dimensions of happiness are hard to measure, since they represent an elusive, subjective phenomenon. This issue is well captured by the words of Sen, who describes the complexity of the definition of a 'good quality of life' by affirming that:

One could be well-off, without being well (due to health problems). One could be well, without being able to lead the life he or she wanted (due to cultural restrictions and bounds). One could have got the life he or she wanted, without being happy (due to psychological problems). One could be happy, without having much freedom (due to society's norms). One could have a good deal of freedom, without achieving much (due to lack of self-confidence or self-esteem). We can go on. (1985:3)

Values play an important role in definitions of WB (Brock 1999; Sen 1993) and assume importance in their sociological sense, that is to say that they are 'conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life' (Graeber 2001: 1). 'The good life' might revolve around money, material possessions and occupational status in certain cultures or classes, and around harmony, peace and positive family relations regardless of material status of well-being in others. Thus, social and cultural systems and differences such as class influence individual models and perceptions of what constitutes 'the good life'.

Diener and Suh³ (2000:4) define subjective WB as 'values that people seek', emphasising the importance of including people's ethical and evaluative judgements about their lives, in addition to experiences of pleasure and fulfilment of their basic needs. Therefore, subjective WB could represent the degree to which people in each society live in agreement or fulfilment of the values they hold dear, amplifying the limited vision of WB as satisfaction and

³ Influential psychologists in the study of WB.

hedonism, or the excess of pleasure over pain as Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarian theorist of the eighteenth century has defined it (Goldworth 1983).

This emphasis on values has also been discussed in a study conducted by the World Bank (Narayan et al. 2000), *Voices of the Poor*. In this investigation some 'poor' people have themselves produced a multidimensional definition of well-being or 'good life', involving material, physical, and social well-being, as well as security and freedom of choice and action. Despite the complexity of defining WB, there seems to have been a consensus among those who participated in this study at a certain level of generality, although how these values translate into everyday living raises other issues.

All spheres of social life, from the religious to the economic and political, may be relevant to the achievement of WB; different cultural contexts confer different emphasis or importance on certain aspects. For example, in a case from urban Bolivia reported in a World Bank publication (Narayan et al. 2000), a group of young people claimed that those who have a good life are 'those who do not lack food and are not worried every day about what they are going to do tomorrow to get food for their children'. They also added that 'some people have secure work, and if the husband does not work, the wife does'. In another example from urban Bolivia, young men said that food and work are not enough; they underline the importance of having friends and the support of the family and the community as well as having qualities such as 'to be patient, and above all happy' (Narayan et al. 2000). Nevertheless, the comments from urban Bolivia are not adequately contextualised.

For example, my research indicates that drinking and dancing in the *fiestas* of the neighbourhood were identified as important sources of 'the good life' (for some). This is supported by other ethnographic studies that have also demonstrated that these aspects of social life are central to achieving a state of well-being (eg. Lazar 2002). Yet, this aspect of 'the good life' is not mentioned in the World Bank publication (Narayan et al. 2000). Is this absence due to the fact that the well-being researchers haven't analysed the Bolivian urban context in detail or is it linked with the fact that defining and measuring WB is extremely difficult? Probably different factors were influential in this case, such as the methodologies used in the study -this aspect is quite important since I would like to propose an innovative methodological approach to the study of WB through the use of ethnography, but also the fact that researchers may only report what fits with their own conceptions or what can be generalised across different continents. Another important aspect may be the sample of population that had been chosen. Age, class and gender play a fundamental role. People belonging to the same community might have different perceptions of what well-being is, as my research will show.

There are potential contradictions between different strategies and orientations, emphasising the difficulties of outlining a universal definition of WB even within the same community. WB is a problematic concept requiring contextualisation in terms of time and space, because of its fluid nature influenced by individual orientations and social change. This is why the Capability Approach proposed by Sen (1999) becomes such an interesting

perspective to analyse these questions and to use as a starting point. At the core of his ideas lie freedom, responsibility and social commitment.

Sen emphasises the importance of being ‘a responsible human being’. At the same time, he claims that responsibility requires freedom or ‘basic freedoms’ (1999:284). ‘Responsible adults must be in charge of their own well-being’ (ibid: 289-290) through freedom, which is inextricably connected with the decision-making processes as well as the opportunities to achieve valued outcomes. He defines WB as a ‘human capability’, that is to say ‘the ability -substantive freedom- of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have’ (1999: 290).

Sen (1999) writes about *functionings* as various things a person may value doing or being, and capabilities as substantive freedom or any combination of *functionings* actually achieved by a person. His approach differs from the standard utility-based approaches in not insisting that we must value ‘*only happiness* (and see, instead, the state of being happy as one among several objects of value) or *only desired fulfilment* (and takes, instead, desire as useful but imperfect evidence –frequently distorted – of what the person herself values)’ (Sen 1993: 48). In addition to this, he proposes an innovative perspective among non-utilitarian approaches in ‘not placing among value-objects *primary goods as such (...)* or *resources as such* (Sen 1993: 48).

The Capability Approach has been thought as an evaluative framework of the standard of living, quality of life and well-being of people: the units of

evaluations are what Sen has called *functionings* ('doings' and 'beings'). As noted by Nussbaum (2000) this valuation exercise brings in different layers of complexity: a multiplicity of variables and a plurality of spaces. It also requires the solution of the complex issue of varying importance of *functionings* and of how people evaluate them. All these aspects are quite relevant for my work. Through my ethnography I try to show the effect of being in contact with a multiplicity of variables and a plurality of spaces, engaging with individual experiences and the many communities they are in contact with.

Sen also suggests that capabilities are best seen as objective properties rather than subjective individual preferences. Therefore, he thinks that the use of subjective measures to assess 'the good life' can be misleading (Sen, 1993). I can see his point: if we are trying to assess 'the good life' rather than 'happiness' or 'well-being' then it makes sense to talk about objective 'beings' and 'doings' (constructed by the community/ies); in many ways my research shows how the concept of 'the good life' is culturally and socially constructed as a shared notion.

However, Sen's theory does not engage with any analysis of how individuals may be affected by these objective conditions: I am here trying to argue that their subjectivity and capacity to choose what they hold dear may be shaped by their social interactions -by the groups and communities they are in contact with. Therefore, a clear division between subjectivity and objectivity may not be straightforward.

Sen (1993) seems to be worried about how objective conditions lived by individuals can influence their perceptions of their realities and, thus, prefers not to focus on the latter. On the other hand, my investigation shows the importance of those perceptions, at least in providing a picture of the complexity of issues to take into consideration when engaging with such questions. Sometimes objective and subjective conditions may merge together; yet at other times they may be in tension, becoming something different. Sometimes individuals may live in contradiction with what they say or think, but it appears difficult to affirm that individual perceptions do not shape our behaviour, action and, therefore, what we choose to do and be.

A person's capabilities reflect the substantive freedoms she enjoys or has access to in making realisable the *functionings* of her choice. Sen (1993:40; 1999:75) uses the example of the fasting affluent individual, who achieves the same *functionings* as the destitute person who has no option but to starve yet has access to a very different set of capabilities. Jimenez (2008:8) analyses this showing the distinction made by Sen between the respective places of 'achievements' (*functionings*) and 'the freedom to achieve' (capabilities), which have to do with the individual's agency towards her life goals. This may or may not have to do with well-being.

Like Sen, other researchers have tried to outline a model for WB from a multidimensional perspective, trying to define systematically the different aspects that may contribute to a definition or recognition of well being. Allardt (1993) defines well-being as 'having, loving and being', covering domains such

as economic resources, health, education, local community, family and kin, friends, associations, workmates, self-determination, political activities, leisure activities and opportunities to enjoy nature and meaningful work. Cummins (1996) arrived at a classification of life satisfaction, in terms of seven factors: material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy/friendship, safety, community and emotional well-being. Nussbaum (2000) identifies ten central human functional capabilities: *life* (a human life of normal length), *bodily health*, *bodily integrity* -being able to move freely from one place to another, but also being able to protect oneself against assault, and being free to choose in matters of reproduction, *senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason* -being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life, *other species* -being able to live in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature in general, *play* -being able to laugh, to play and to enjoy recreational activities, *and control over one's environment*.

Nussbaum claims that her most important difference with Sen is that 'he has never made a list of the central capabilities' (2000). Her point is supported by Gough (2000, 2003), who writes that Sen provides examples of 'functionings', but he does so in an unsystematic way, because he uses very general terms, confounding objective with subjective states. Sen's examples include being happy, being able to choose, having good health, having self-respect, being able to appear in public without shame as well as taking part in the life of the community.

Nussbaum and Gough's points are reasonable, but I don't completely share their views. First, I contest the need to make a list of factors, although I recognise that this is inextricably linked with the world of policy. The identification of basic universal human rights is important and it is undeniable that governments and international organisations need models to follow. However, classifying can also be dangerous, since there is a tangible risk of homogenising the entire world and imposing values and projects that are not produced by 'responsible free adults'.

In this sense, it is better to be unsystematic rather than systematic because this approach provides a starting point to portray that outside world of everyday interaction so difficult to represent in social theory –with a plurality of variables and a multiplicity of places, whatever the shortcomings for the world of policy and development. We cannot reduce the WB of people to simplistic descriptions, leaving a huge gap between theoretical models and reality. This is why I think that Sen's work can provide the basis for cross-cultural analysis and may be usefully applied to wider cultural conditions: 'being happy' is meaningful in different contexts, although diverse conditions and aspects constitute it.

Thus, the point of departure for my work comes from the field of development economics and was inspired by Sen's capability approach (1999). My qualitative methodology aims to shed light on some of the points highlighted above and to overcome some of the limits of previous WB studies, proposing an innovative perspective and outcome. Far from 'measurement-obsessed' methodologies my approach tries to create a descriptive framework closer to people's evaluations and their everyday life. The aim of my research is not to determine whether my

informants are 'happier' or 'more satisfied' than people living in other countries or neighbourhoods. The main objective is to show the value of ethnography in exploring 'the good life' and in shedding light on the values that my informants hold dear; I hope that one day this qualitative approach can integrate more common quantitative findings in applied research on well-being.

An Ethnographic Approach to explore WB

Sen (1999) focuses on individuals and their relation to a general social context, without entering into any detailed or empirical account of the interaction between individuals and specific collectivities/communities. My research begins here, in the lacunae of Sen's capability approach, emphasising how relations are fundamental to people's capabilities to choose the lives they have reason to value by analysing shared preferences.

Sen's perspective shows the relevance of an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to development. His work can be read as endorsing the assigning of explicitly evaluative weights to the different components of the quality of life or well-being, although he does not provide a specific methodology for this, rather highlighting the need to engage with various methodological approaches. My thesis addresses the methodological gap raised through Sen's work, by using ethnography as a methodological tool, and takes into consideration Bloch's call (1992:65): 'to learn about society as the people we study do, through looking at daily practices and at material experiences'. In addition, it is also inspired by Michael Lambek's profound reflection (2008) on the contribution that anthropology can make to the study of well-being through ethnographic description.

As a matter of fact, Lambek (2008:128) writes about how ethnography can contribute to describe what he calls ‘the art of living’:

‘We [anthropologists] analyse the various means societies have for maintaining or initiating passionate pursuits and practises that contain internal goods, including, most broadly, how cultural traditions produce and encourage scenarios of life worth living and how they often find ways of making the best of things in the face of considerable impediments (including, in the most general of cases, the inevitability of death). Indeed, it is remarkable how many people have asserted that they live in the best of all possible worlds’.

Lambek (2008:121) also emphasises how notions like ‘freedom’, ‘choice’, ‘capability’ and ‘achievement’ are all certainly culturally loaded and focused on individualism rather than ‘relationality’, ‘complementarity’ and ‘hierarchy’, as if people were not embedded in practices and engaged in social commitments. This is why I have affirmed above that it is important to demonstrate how relations are fundamental to people’s capabilities to choose the lives they do. I believe that shedding light on this aspect is only possible through ethnographic description, because well-being does not occur in the abstract: ‘As human life is culturally constituted, so well-being only makes sense with respect to the contours of a particular way of life; particular structures of persons, relations, feeling, place, cosmos, work and leisure’ (Lambek 2008: 125). He adds that any attempt to develop universal standards and measurements of well-being is misleading, ‘since the more abstract such standards, the emptier they are’ (Lambek 2008:126).

This does not mean that we have to apply a ‘naïve’ cultural relativism, but it is part of an approach that aims to demonstrate how attempts at measurements inevitably dissolve quality and propose ethnocentric views of what kind of life is

worth living for particular persons in particular historical contexts. This is likely to encompass elements and features that cannot be compared, evaluated or quantified, such as, for example, the recognition of values and of a moral dimension, as in Diener and Suh's work (2000).

This represents an important shift in anthropological research, where there is now a critical look at the notion and discursive field of well-being, exploring its valency and analytical purchase for social theory from the vantage of cross-cultural comparison (Jimenez, 2008). Anthropology has a long tradition of critique regarding assumptions about wealth and well-being.

Rousseau's idea of the 'noble savage' was invoked in Sahlins' account of hunter-gatherers (1972), where he portrayed as able to achieve affluence –in this case intended as well-being, by desiring little and meeting all their needs/desires with what is available to them. On the other hand, 'the culture of poverty' literature explained the cycle of poverty by arguing that the 'poor' have a unique value system that tends to perpetuate their social condition (Lewis 1966, Valentine 1971, Rodman 1971, Holman 1978).

The emphasis in anthropology on values and practices has always played a very important role, especially when it has been connected with issues of 'harmful' beliefs and customs that may compromise the 'progress/development' of a society or also defined as 'human well-being' (Edgerton 1992:1). The work by Banfield (1958) on Southern Italian peasants was written as an ethnographic account of customs and social institutions that negatively affected 'human well-

being'. Peasants were depicted as 'prisoners' of their 'family-centred' culture. Therefore, they could not fight for the common good of their 'community', showing 'the moral basis of a backward society'.

Yet, Banfield (1958), among others (Perlman 1976; Scheper-Hughes 1993; Day and Steward 1999; Francis 2000), has also shown how the 'poor' are actively marginalised by the system and the public policies, which deny them the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations. Research in urban environments showed that the 'poor' are not economically irrational, but they put care into the decision-making process for the expenditure of their households (Perlman 1976; Banteby Kyomuhendo 1999; Francis 2000). In particular, Perlman (1976) writes about the 'myth of marginality' regarding the urban 'poor', showing through her research that, socially, the residents of Brazilian shantytowns are well-organised and cohesive; culturally, they share middle-class norms and values; economically, they are productive; politically, they are neither apathetic nor radical.

It is in the context of new anthropological sensibility to the study of well-being (Jimenez 2008; Lambek 2008) that I would like to contribute to the debate by showing how anthropological methodologies can shed light on the complex topic of well-being, producing qualitative in addition to quantitative data. To Sen's question (2004) 'how does culture⁴ matter?', Appadurai (2004:59) answers emphasising the importance of the capacity to aspire and actually sees

⁴ Intended as a system of values.

this capacity as 'cultural'. My starting point could appear to conform with Appadurai's claim that (2004:67):

'Aspirations are never simply individual. They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life. As far back as Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead we have learnt that there is no self outside a social frame, setting and mirror'.

Appadurai also adds (2004:84) that 'culture is a dialogue between aspirations and between aspirations and sedimented traditions'.

My research contributes to the observations and the debates outlined above by providing a detailed analysis of everyday life. My thesis shows an empirical contribution to these theories, shedding light on the complexity of issues emerging when dealing with relations and the imagining and pursuit of well-being (WB). It also connects it to wider debates affecting the world of policy. Indeed there is a tension between empirical reality and theoretical discourse, and this research aims to bridge the former and the latter to inform more effective interventions and forms of actions.

WB is definitely connected with concepts and ideas about what it means to be a person and is also inextricably linked with morality and social control. Taylor writes that:

'People may see their identity as defined partly by some moral or spiritual commitment, as Catholic, or an anarchist. Or they may define it in part by the nation or tradition they belong to, as an American, say, or a Quebecois. What they are saying by this is not just that they are strongly attached to the spiritual view or background; rather it is that this provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable or of value. Put counterfactually, they are saying that were they to lose their commitment or identification, they would be at sea, as it were; they wouldn't know any more, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them' (1989:27)

He continues, 'to know who you are is to be oriented in moral space' (ibid: 28), a space where there is a sense of what is good and what is bad, what is worth doing or achieving.

Thus, well-being has to be thought of as 'a holistic notion' (Giorgi 1990:104), being the way an individual exists and functions in relation to the world and to himself/herself. Suh (2000) writes about the importance of self-actualisation and autonomy in North America for the majority of individuals; she describes a highly independent adult as someone able to transcend the influences of others and society. This contrasts with my findings in El Alto, where individuals stressed the importance of social relations for the construction of the self, for his/her aspirations as a human being. In El Alto a person exists and functions in relationship to others.

Suma Jakaña and Suma Qamaña

My research describes a specific historical moment in a specific place: the city of El Alto and its rural surroundings between November 2003 and November 2004. During this period, El Alto was a theatre of deep political change characterised by social uprising and important developments in the organisation of ethnic as well as national politics that influenced the emergence of specific 'collective' representations of WB. Starting from these representations of WB in the work of a group of Aymara intellectuals (GTZ Aymara intellectuals), this thesis draws on the data produced during 12 months of fieldwork to explore the complexity of ideas relating to this issue as well as to provide an account of different practices through which my informants live and manifest what they identify as WB or 'the good life'.

Interestingly, there is no local term in Aymara for happiness. On the other hand, as has been mentioned, there are two local terms that are used to talk about ‘the good life’: *Suma Jakaña*, and *Suma Qamaña*. The former is used on a daily basis by the members of the household, while the latter is only used in public speeches by leaders to invoke unity and collaboration of the entire ‘community’.

Suma Jakaña is ‘the good life’ at the household level; *Jakaña* means placenta. It also means to exist -existence, to live well: many conveyed a spiritual dimension when defining it and also added the importance of having harmonious relations within the household. On the other hand, *Suma Qamaña* is ‘the good life’ at the community level and it is the concept GTZ Aymara intellectuals discuss in their work

In Bolivia, it is fundamental to look at the influence of this group of Aymara intellectuals in the process of constructing a ‘collective’ image of WB. These intellectuals became part of a project sponsored by the GTZ -the International Cooperation Agency of the German Government in 2001 and that resulted in the publication of a manuscript titled *La Comprensión Indígena de la Buena Vida. Suma Qamaña*. They have been included in my research firstly because this is the only publication that deals with the concept of ‘the good life’ in the Andean plateau. Secondly and more importantly, I challenge their point of view from the perspectives, views and practices of my informants. Defining well-being is not just the opinion of a power elite, or an intellectual class, or psychologists who are experts on ‘mental health’, but it is through the standards and values chosen by men and women themselves that we can truly shed light on the ‘art of living’.

In the last six years there has been an increasing interest amongst this group of Aymara intellectuals in investigating well-being from an 'indigenous' point of view, and an attempt to verbalise a 'collective' concept for the indigenous 'community'. This shift is inextricably connected with the historical process that has affected indigenous people in Bolivia and beginning in the 1970s, the development of an indigenous movement, especially among Aymara speakers of the Department of La Paz. This movement played key roles in forming political parties and NGOs, as well as the peasant confederation. Interestingly, their view depicts 'indigenous' people as a version of Rousseau's 'noble savage': the countryside is idealised in opposition to the city, the place where 'the original community' and harmonious social relations are destroyed.

My work shows some significant contradictions, using the intellectuals' account, that emerge from everyday life and practices of my own informants. Indeed, the concept of 'the good life' as theorised by this group of intellectuals is an ideal. My informants know what *Suma Qamaña* means, but usually do not use the term in everyday life. I heard local leaders using it in political speeches to invoke the unity of all the residents. *Suma Qamaña* is identified by my informants as 'bienestar' -well-being- but also as 'permanecer' -to stay and to remain. Many have conveyed to me that this ideal concept is difficult to achieve, involving political and economic aspects. The inclusion of the work and views of intellectuals in my thesis allows a useful exploration of discrepancies between theory and practice that mirrors similar problems arising in the mainstream approaches to well-being.

GTZ Aymara intellectuals emphasise the existence of an opposition between the rural and urban space, claiming that ‘community’ does not exist in the city, because of the decline of historical forms of cooperative labour, such as *ayni* and *mink’a*. Little attention in the discussion of GTZ Aymara intellectuals is given to communal institutions in the urban context that have replaced or at least compensated for rural organisations. For example, both the *Junta Vecinal* and *Junta Escolar* are fundamental urban institutions. The former is the local residents’ committee, while the latter is the organisational committee for a school. Usually, both these institutions fight for the ‘self-construction’ of the area (Lazar 2000:69; Cottle and Ruiz 2000; Urton 1992), working together to gain benefits for the neighbourhood through communal work to pave streets, or protesting through roadblocks for access to basic services, such as water, electricity and gas.

Alteño life is negatively contrasted with, on one hand, the rural *ayllu* by GTZ Aymara intellectuals, and on the other, with middle-class white-mestizo Bolivia. Also, *Alteño* values and culture are undermined through the media, which show images of wealth, particularly in programmes from the USA and from other parts of Latin America. Such discourses and images deny the dignity of El Alto inhabitants and their sense of value, their ‘capability to lead a valuable life’ (Sen 1999).

Ethnographic work in El Alto

The ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Senkata and Amachuma –two neighbourhoods in El Alto, where I lived for twelve months between November 2003 and November 2004. My research has also drawn on

trips to Bolivia in 2002 and 2005, comprising a total of four months. I ended up in Senkata as a result of contacts established with ECO JÓVENES BOLIVIA, a local *alteño* NGO that promotes children's and teenagers' rights. They introduced me to the Catholic priest who used to work in the *Parroquia San Francisco*, Padre Modesto Chino, through whom I met my landlords, the Condoris, who became central to my research, along with other Senkata families and young people.

My fieldwork was mainly based on participant observation and informal talks, an essential tool to produce my ethnography. Through participant observation, I could grasp an embedded experience of El Alto, understanding and describing in the first person the tensions and collaborations typical of everyday life. I lived with a local family. In addition, I often attended the local market on Thursdays and Sundays, becoming a frequent customer and meeting women working there. I spent lots of time in the streets with children and young people as well as shopkeepers. I also participated in local religious festivities, as a dancer as well as a spectator.

I also carried out research in Amachuma, where I was introduced to the local Trades Union through the NGO CEPROSI from La Paz. In Amachuma, I met the Choques, who became another central family and source of insight for my research. I lived with Don Ernesto Choque and his family, and worked in the local restaurant owned by Doña Cristina, Don Ernesto's mother, in Ventilla. I also visited Doña Cristina's kiosk in the Waraño Apachita during the month of August. I often participated in the meetings of the Amachuma Peasants Trade

Union (*Federación de Trabajadores Campesinos*) and all the religious festivities of the community as well as the meetings organised by local women for the production of artisan goods/ products.

These experiences were very important to generate data that could complement the WB approach on the individual and emphasising the fundamental role played by relations within the household, in the neighbourhood, through friendship, through the fiesta as well as social protests and political activity. Living in the neighbourhood and sharing my life with the residents helped me to become very close to some of them and reproduce their views, practices and feelings in regard to the 'good life'.

My research was also based on a few formal interviews. When I quote these interviews, I have used my own transcripts from the tape recordings. The majority of people I worked with were bilingual (Spanish/Aymara) with the exception of young people in Senkata; they understand Aymara, but they don't speak it. I translated the interviews, but tried not to change too much the expressions used by my informants in order to give a real flavour and taste of the language adopted by Senkata and Amachuma residents.

My ethnography could not have been complete without my subjective perspective. Reflexivity was fundamental to shed light on the relations I have created with my informants and to grasp important insights on 'the good life'. I have tried to create a text that allows for continuity between life and theory. I thought of writing as a weaving process, and the Andean world provided a model

of inspiration: differently coloured strands form a unique picture, producing a piece of cloth that conveys 'collective' and individual memory, like the Andean *aguayos*. *Aguayos* are usually used by Aymara women for carrying their goods and babies, but they are also representative of the community's memory. Each community has its own specific design with symbols and stories, each community writes its own history through weaving. And I too wove my experience with that of my informants, emphasising how in order to approach something like well-being, which has a centrally important subjective dimension, it is important to conduct qualitative research in such a way that you can somehow access those subjective aspects.

My approach found inspiration in the work of Clifford and Marcus (1986). They attempted to address many issues related to fieldwork and the following writing up stage. They argued for the partial nature of reality as perceived from different points of view, emphasising the importance of a plurality of voices both in the field and the ethnographic text. The orthodox anthropological practice has always been based on objectivity, observation and thick description. However, the postmodern challenge showed that 'knowledge is not acquired through the abstraction of an autonomous subject from a separate object, but, rather, that knowledge, along with subjects and objects, is constituted collectively through forms of discourse' (Hekman 1990:63).

Thus, the presence of the anthropologist in the ethnographic account is fundamental to shed light on how knowledge was acquired and represented. Moreover, the anthropologist's engagement with his/her research may increase

the general level of understanding on the topic researched, providing an additional/further perspective on people's accounts and a positive addition to more orthodox anthropological methods (Greenwood 1997). As Young and Goulet (1994) argue, it is important to find a metamodel which is able to incorporate both the ethnographer and the informants' world views, connecting explanation with personal experience and bridging the gap between informants, anthropologist and the scientific community.

With regard to this, Samuel (1990:2) replaced the old idea of all branches of knowledge growing out of the trunk of a single tree with 'a new paradigm, more analogous to the many-centred, multiply interconnected underground network of a rhizome' or 'a multimodal framework'. This supports a context of multiple ways of knowing in social and cultural anthropology and attempts to overcome issues connected with relations between individual and society, mind and body, anthropology and biology. This process of bringing together subjectivity and objectivity represents a new attitude based on an interconnection between informal and formal knowledge. Informal knowledge rejects the mind-body dichotomy and see both of them as parallel aspects of a total system, incorporating different world views and beliefs and representing a possibility for the anthropologist to re-enter the real world (Escobar, 1995:16).

In the past, the emic reality of informants has been treated as interesting, but not a serious alternative to western scientific views of reality (Young and Goulet 1994). With this different approach, we realise that 'the construction of reality as intersubjective requires that the self must be seen as simultaneously the self and

the non-self or the other' (Das 1989:324). In this way, the self and the subject are characterised by an intersubjective relationship: the self is not external to, or different from the subject, whose life and being are often internalised and reproduced by the researcher (Thapan 1998:6). 'Self and other, subject and object are categories of thought, not discrete entities' (Hastrup 1992:117). We are ourselves in the field, dominated by the external world, trying to understand a social reality which fluctuates all the time and which is never fixed. As anthropologists, we are people experiencing that 'outside' according to our cultural, political and personal identities. Thus, the subjective is as important as what is considered the objective element in fieldwork, and this is why I decided to include some of my personal accounts in this thesis. This is also a way to provide a more grounded sense of the context in which the research took place, and propose to follow what Keith Hart (2005) has defined as a new 21st century attitude towards the study of world societies.

Structure of the thesis

In this chapter, I have emphasised the importance of contextualising the concept of WB in terms of space. WB in Senkata and Amachuma is considered a value, locally defined as *Suma Jakaña* or 'the good life' at the household level and *Suma Qamaña* or 'the good life' at the community level, an ideal often very difficult to achieve. I began my analysis with Sen's capability approach, emphasising the urgency for the inclusion of the impact of relations in his innovative theoretical background. This objective underlies the organisation of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I set the scene and provide information on El Alto, while also explaining my positionality, and my own network of relations in which the research took place. Relations are also the core of Chapter 3, where I consider both the tensions and forms of collaboration that exist within the household. I describe the importance of household harmony and the value of living well together (*Suma Jakaña*). The household is portrayed by my informants as ‘the cell of well-being’. Chapter 3 also introduces some of the main actors and adds more information about the research context.

Chapter 4 focuses on the fundamental role played by *suerte* (luck). *Suerte* is often conceptualised as fortune or well-being and is believed to take place through the protection achieved through mediations between supernatural forces and human beings –again another kind of relationship which involves issues of obligation and collaboration. My informants believe that they can control *suerte* by treating well the spiritual forces in the plateau. *Suerte* is fundamental for WB, and individuals have to work hard and make sacrifices in order to achieve it. Nothing is possible without *suerte*: no fiesta, no protest, no production, no work nor family harmony. *Suerte* is the essence of WB and the result of numerous interactions with supernatural forces: no *suerte* can be achieved without effort.

In El Alto, religious beliefs and practices have provided an important idiom for the expression of aspirations and the pursuit of ideals. The social role of emotions and its effects on well-being have been widely investigated in anthropology, especially in relation to issues of solidarity, feelings of confidence, and a sense of full personhood and empowerment (Barbalet 2001;

Turner 2002; Bandelow et al. 1998). The importance of faith is emphasised in my ethnography, especially in Chapter 4, showing how people's loyalty to their notion of self-worth and of the cosmological order is essential for their sense of fulfilment and empowerment.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyse two manifestations of communal values: the *fiesta* or religious festivity and the social protests. These two forms of group activity offer different but sometimes overlapping strategies. While social protests are joined by the majority of the households, the fiestas are attended in the majority of the cases by Catholics and a few Protestants. Differences between the various Protestant congregations have important implications. On one hand, orthodox Protestants, such as the ones in Senkata (who are Seventh Day Adventists) refuse to participate in the fiesta, pay tributes to the *Pachamama*, or become godparents. On the other hand, there are other Evangelicals, such as the ones in Amachuma who belong to the Baptist Congregation and embrace various religious beliefs, emphasising the importance of community rather than a strict adherence to a religious code.

Chapter 7 continues the discussion of the Protestants and Catholics, but also deals with the discussion of how 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' (for the explanation of this definition see section above) imagine, build and represent 'a collective indigenous theory of well-being' -an ideology of WB that finds its origins in an idealised (and rural) past in opposition to the ill-being of the present (urban) way of life. I argue that their representation appears frozen in time and space, and offers a static definition of 'the good life'. Moreover, Chapter 7

focuses on the issue of community values, and the tensions between these and individual desires and ambitions, which are important topics in the overall thesis.

The conclusions (Chapter 8) sum up the main themes of the thesis, discussing the relationship between anthropology and well-being and looking at some of the theoretical background used in this research, reflecting on the value of an ethnographic account that can convey diverse generational and gender perspectives, and provide a possible bridge between theoretical models and everyday life. In addition, Chapter 8 retakes Sen's theory into consideration, and shows how the ethnography outlined in the chapters of the thesis illuminates some of his ideas (e.g. capability approach as 'freedom'), but also highlights some of his lacunae. In particular, my ethnographic account emphasises how the circumstances of different informants varied; sometimes well-being could be attained, although more often it was an elusive but significant aspiration that could shape my informants' participation in different kinds of activities and communities.

CHAPTER TWO

SETTING THE SCENE: THE CITY OF EL ALTO

This chapter outlines the context in which the thesis was researched. I make the case that El Alto is an excellent field site to investigate the complexity of WB, to explore identity, and generational differences and continuities. I first give a brief general background to lead the reader to the context of the Bolivian highlands. Then I follow with specific sections on El Alto, the neighbourhoods of Senkata and Amachuma, also addressing an interview with a young Senkata resident, Guido. The choice of presenting his case study was made in order to give a more grounded sense of the place through the words and the descriptions of one of its inhabitants. Although Guido's words cannot represent the general *alteño* population, they provide a good example of shared feelings among young people, and also express a sense of the city.

Being Bolivian

'Um... unfortunately, people who don't know Bolivia very much think that we are all just Indian people from the west side of the country, it's La Paz all the image that we reflect, is that poor people and very short people and Indian people ... I'm from the other side of the country, the east side and it's not cold, it's very hot and we are tall and we are white people and we know English so all that misconception that Bolivia is only an "Andean" country, it's wrong, Bolivia has a lot to offer and that's my job as an ambassador of my country to let people know much diversity we have' (Gabriela Oviedo Sarrete, Miss Bolivia, Declaration at Miss Universe Contest in Quito, Ecuador, May 2004).⁵

Some might argue that a beauty pageant contestant is not a good representative of public opinion. However, Gabriela Oviedo made explicit the tensions existing between different regions, and expressed the cultural

⁵ La Razon, 28th of May 2004, La Paz.

and geographical diversity of her country. Bolivia is divided into nine administrative departments (see map 1). The tropical lowlands in the east are in stark physical opposition to the Western Andean plateau and peaks or highlands; in the centre, there are green valleys. The contrasts in the landscape are echoed by cultural differences as well: there are 34 ethnic groups that are officially recognised. Quechua and Aymara are the larger language groups, although it is questionable how far linguistic markers represent in themselves distinctive and identifiable ethnic affiliations.

Gabriela Oviedo's words suggest that the Bolivian national body is characterised by discrimination and misunderstanding between different regions which are also associated with different social classes and ethnic groups or in her words, 'poor' and 'indigenous'. Miss Bolivia 2004 is from the city of Santa Cruz, which has had an economic boom in the last two decades. It is in the richest region of Bolivia and, in June 2005, it attracted media attention because of racist attacks towards indigenous migrants from the highlands who had moved to the lowlands to work in factories. The use of the term *indios* -which carries derogatory connotations- also implies that the image of La Paz, and in general of the Western part of the country and the Andes, is associated with an idea of backwardness and racial inferiority, and that these are discursively linked.

Bolivia is classified as the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Two-thirds of Bolivians are considered poor; over 29% (2.4 million) of the population live on less than a US\$1 per day and over 51% (about 4.2 million) live on less than US\$2 (DfID, 2002). This status has, ironically, created advantages for Bolivia in terms of international aid, but has consequently contributed to Bolivia's dependence on foreign aid donors. This "label of poverty" also had the unforeseen effect of devaluing the internal resources and capacities of Bolivians. Specifically, it reinforces the bases of social differentiation within Bolivian society, showing a strong association between poverty and indigenous ethnicity. Bolivia has the highest proportion of indigenous people for any country in Latin America, estimated at 60-75% of the total population (Fretes-Cibilibis et al. 2006).

This thesis is about people who, by standard international criteria, are very poor. According to the Bolivian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper produced by the Bolivian government in 2000, poverty affects 81.6% of the rural population. However, there is a lack of detailed statistics and it is difficult to outline the poverty situation in the countryside. According to research organised by the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in La Paz, the dualistic structure of Bolivian agriculture has a profound influence on the present situation; an intensive export-crop model (involving 1% of the total farms with a coverage of 78% of the total productive surface) has expanded at the expense of traditional food-cropping and small farmers, who represent 81%

of the farms and share 3% of the productive land. They also represent 60% of the poor and lack irrigation, credit and technical assistance (Morales et al. 2000). Traditional labour-intensive agriculture occupies the majority of the population and has been characterised by ‘stagnation and low productivity’, resulting in an increase in food prices and consequent food insecurity. This has contributed to a further increase of poverty and produced dangerous consequences for the poor. A change in the price of a country’s staple food may be an issue of life or death for poor families, but is unlikely to affect people living in wealthier households (Kabeer 2003).

Urban poverty, on the other hand, is seen above all as a problem of insufficient employment growth (Vos et al. 1998). The structural adjustment programmes as well as the other reforms started in 1985, after the fall of the dictatorship in 1982, and the return to a multiparty democracy did not create employment opportunities. In fact, employment in the public sector decreased from 46% to 33% in 2000, while it increased very slowly in the private sector of the formal urban economy (Christian Aid 2001). On the other hand, employment in the informal sector rose from 45% to 55%, especially within low wage categories and among self-employed and home service workers (ILO 1999). 76% of workers were believed to have an income below the poverty line in 2000 – the poverty line of an income of 298.07 *bolivianos* per month as established by INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) in 2000. Apparently, basic education hasn’t positively

contributed to a decrease in poverty; in fact, even among those who have between 6 to 10 years of education, 64% are living below the poverty line. An important factor contributing to the distribution of people in the labour market statistics is ethnicity, with those classed as indigenous at the bottom of the poverty ladder. Ethnicity is a fundamental factor in terms of defying rates of educational standards, work and income (INE 2000).

Traditionally, Bolivia's economy was based on the export sector, principally the mining of tin, silver and zinc. Growth occurred not only in the export of minerals in the eighties, but also of gas and soybeans from the nineties onwards. This had the unforeseen effect of limiting employment growth and favouring a limited part of the population, revealing it to be an extremely risky development strategy. In particular in the last three decades, productive activity has diversified to large scale agriculture and agro-processing industries, together with some enlargement of the services sector as well as oil and gas production. Gas production is expected to receive a boost from the expansion of thermoelectric energy generation and the development of petrochemical industries (EU Report 2002).

During the 1990s, the country embarked on a privatisation programme which saw the transfer of major enterprises from government control. In the mid-1990s the major telecommunications, energy and public transport companies were offered to potential investors (EU Report 2002). In 1996

the Sanchez de Lozada administration sold the national railroad to Chilean investors and the airline LAB (Lloyd Aereo Boliviano) to Brazilian investors. These actions have raised important questions about the effects of privatisation, with many feeling that their country was in the process of being sold to foreign companies. Moreover, there was the belief that the sale of gas resources was generating funds that found their way into the pockets of politicians rather than Bolivian people in general. Bolivia is in 2008 still debating the question of gas: the Evo Morales administration, elected in December 2005, has been under pressure from international organisations and governments about the decision regarding the 52.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas currently lying dormant beneath Bolivian soil. On the 1st of May 2006, the government declared the nationalisation of the gas industry. This decision could provide a completely different direction to the economic development of Bolivia.

Another policy that saw public opinion sharply divided during my fieldwork was the controversial issue of joining the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Although the US government affirms that its main goal is to foster the economic and political stability of South American countries, in reality it has been feared that FTAA would primarily work to the advantage of the US agricultural sector and although the FTAA may have a negative effect on the less competitive sectors of the US economy, the gains in the competitive sectors would more than offset these losses. In other words,

public perception (and expert opinion) is that the main beneficiary of the FTAA is the United States. Many Bolivians and among them my informants feel that the FTAA will not deliver free trade at all, but rather would become an extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has been accused of causing many disadvantages for working families and the environment in Mexico and, in particular, contributing to the worsening of the condition of women. Therefore, my informants have often engaged in social protests to express their disagreement towards government decisions aimed, for example, at the selling of natural resources to foreign countries –see chapter 6 for a detailed account.

During my fieldwork, numerous large-scale protests against the FTAA were also organised. When talking about this agreement, young *Alteños* told Schultz that FTAA would mean “enslavement to an economic future that casts aside everything that is human and belonging to the earth, in favour of making the world safe for the movement of goods, dollars and synthetic values” (Schultz 2003:65). The Bolivian elites have always supported FTAA and, for this reason, they have been considered allies of the US government. There are, therefore, radically different perspectives on how to achieve well-being and development within the national arena, and different opinions on the appropriate strategies to improve the economic condition of the country, often influenced by regional interests. This is why, in the next

section, I introduce the context of the Bolivian Highlands with a specific focus on the city of El Alto.

Living in the Highlands

My story is an ‘Andean tale’ that took place at an altitude of 4,000 metres, on a dry plateau surrounded by snow-peaked mountains, a harsh region that farmers have cultivated for millennia, and where an imposing new city is growing today. This is El Alto, populated largely by Aymara migrants from the countryside and thus the ‘most Aymara’ city of Bolivia, and the most indigenous city of Latin America. Until 1985, it was part of La Paz, but since that year it has been an independent city. With a population of almost 800,000 inhabitants, it is a hectic hub with colourful markets where you can buy used and new goods from China, the USA and other South American countries..

El Alto is often associated these days with the demonstrations and roadblocks that have taken place during the last 14 years in Bolivia. Its geographical position makes it a strategic point; El Alto surrounds La Paz, which is positioned 400 meters lower down in a canyon. El Alto is therefore the only accessible point for goods and supplies in and out of the capital. Blocking the main roads, such as the *autopista* or motorway, that cross El Alto and link the two cities, means interrupting the flow of economic exchange towards the capital (see Chapter 6). However, El Alto’s reputation of combative endurance is not only favoured by its geographical position,

but is also due to the social characteristics and capacity of its inhabitants to organise.

The first time I visited Bolivia in 2002, I was fascinated by the Bolivian highlands. The Andean plateau with its overshadowing mountains is a place where each element is believed to be alive and to have a spirit. The snow peaks have names and personalities; the *Achachilas* -God mountains- are believed to love and hate as human beings do. They are considered to be active members of the community, holding positive and negative feelings as well as desires and appetites. The earth itself -Pachamama- is alive and has to be continuously fed, so that in turn it can feed human beings.

Life on the plateau is regulated by the cycle of agricultural production, cattle breeding, sheep farming, and the exchange of products in the market. *Fiestas* are numerous throughout the year. They indicate the passing of time and the celebrations for the harvest. The landscape of the flat plateau is suddenly interrupted by the red brick houses of the city of El Alto. In the last 25 years El Alto has become the most attractive destination for rural migrants. Many have left the countryside in search of a better life, because agricultural production was too scarce to support their families or because they felt attracted towards this large anthill of buildings and people. For such migrants, El Alto is associated with better work and education opportunities. This is especially true for young people, who are the majority

of the population. El Alto can indeed be seen as a city characterised by a strong presence of youth and a vibrant youth culture. It has also assumed an image as the ‘city of the future’ or ‘*ciudad esperanza*’ (city of hope) as many inhabitants and rural migrants like to define it. Nevertheless, this view is not shared by everyone. It is quite common to hear people in La Paz say that El Alto is a poor shantytown that should be avoided, picturing all *alteños* as ‘poor indigenous criminals’.

A brief history of urban space in El Alto: migration, marginality and identity

El Alto history mirrors and illustrates world trends. In 1800 only 1.7 percent of the 900 million people in the world lived in cities of 20,000 or over (Hauser and Schnore 1966). In the last 150 years this has changed radically. In the Third World many cities are growing at rates so high that they double their populations every ten to fifteen years. This constitutes one of the most important migrations in human history, creating an ‘overurbanization’ or ‘hyperurbanization’ (Perlman 1976). Comparative poverty in rural areas is a crucial factor as suggesting the ‘push’ theory of migration that focuses on the difficult conditions in the countryside and the changes in agricultural production, such as lack of good land or a low productivity (Gordonava 2004; Cortes 2004).

However, when the *campesinos* (peasants) migrate from their *pueblos* (villages) to El Alto, they do so for several reasons. Although there are differences between the various provinces, *campesinos* generally migrate

because they hope to acquire an economic stability that does not exist in the countryside, as many of them told me. But they also migrate because they want to join other members of their family who migrated previously or because they would like to have access to a better education or social status -all of them examples of 'pull' factors (Albó et al. 1981:58). These educational and social aims are an important factor of attraction towards the city. El Alto becomes 'la ciudad prometida'-'the promised city'- (Sandoval 1985), where Aymara migrants can improve their quality of life and can give shape to their aspirations.

The initial problems of the migrants are related to the difficulties in finding employment and accommodation, especially for those without family members who have migrated to the city before them (Albó et al. 1981:119). Young women between 17 and 25 years old usually work as domestic servants in the homes of families in La Paz. On the other hand, older women are most likely to be involved in market activities, as *comideras* (preparing hot food and drinks in the street) or as street market vendors.

Migrants are seen as being between two worlds; this peculiar position has been classified as *el mundo cholo*. *Cholo* means an Indian who has come to live in the city and is somewhere between being Indian and being *mestizo*. It is both a racial and a social category, signified by indigenous physical features plus particular clothes and economic activities, most especially commerce (Lazar 2002:35; Harris 1995). Usually, the term *cholo* is counter-

posed to the term *mestizo*. They both represent intermediary categories, but while the former indicates closeness to the indigenous set of values, working activities and social position, the latter underlines the adoption of a set of non-indigenous values and working activities, and a higher social status. Women working in the markets are always classified as *cholas* or *cholitas*, and wear the layered gathered skirt, called *pollera*, a shawl, specific pumps for their feet and a bowler hat. Such women do refer to themselves as ‘*mujeres de pollera*’ in opposition to ‘*mujeres de vestido*’, that is women in Western clothes. The boundaries of social categories are impossible to define in an absolute way. Ethnic ascription must be viewed as situational, as a social process, depending in part on circumstance. Thus, ethnic terms change their meaning according to the speakers and context and, as Weismantel argues, they vary in different parts of the Andes (2001). As Xavier Albó (1998) argues, it would be more accurate to describe the people of El Alto as urban Aymara, a term that I prefer. However, in some chapters, ethnic terms cannot be avoided, especially when they are adopted by my informants. Their use shows a subjective dimension that cannot be generalised (see the example of Leandro in Chapter 7), but also more complex and context-dependent elements that flavour ethnic terms with different nuances.

‘Migration emerges as a process of self-empowerment, or loss of power, and places become the symbol of embodied phenomenology of space and

time' (Napolitano, 2002:4). El Alto is one of those places. While it is pictured as 'la ciudad prometida' – 'the promised city' - by its inhabitants, on the other hand it is defined as 'ciudad en emergencia' - 'emergency city' - (Antezana 1993) by the people of La Paz. According to a document produced by the municipality of El Alto in 1997, the major needs of the population concern the lack of basic services, such as basic sanitation (78% don't have any), appropriate housing (73%), health (68%) and education (64%) (Lazar 2002). El Alto is also a city characterised by high levels of domestic violence and gang participation (Cottle and Ruíz 1993; Revello Quiroga 1996; Pérez de Castaños 1999).

The depiction of El Alto in terms of problems, violence and need has been correlated with issues of ethnicity as well as social and cultural factors; the majority of the migrants are Aymara (Albó 1998) and are employed in the informal sector, which has expanded since 1984 because of hyperinflation (Antezana 1993). Therefore, the image of El Alto as migrant and Aymara sits alongside the informality of the economy, not only implying that these problems are the inhabitants' own fault, but also highlighting structural issues of discrimination and internal colonialism (Cottle and Ruiz 1993; Lazar 2002). By 1995, more than 40% of the economically active population was working eight or more hours a day, but earning less than the minimum wage. Among those employed, women's pay was, on average, 50% less than men's (DFID 2002).

Still today the informal sector represents a fundamental, if not the only source of employment for the inhabitants of El Alto. In an informal economy it is quite difficult to calculate the earnings of workers: in the case of my informants, most of them said that they were earning less than the minimum wage. However, as I shall discuss in Chapters 3 and 4 these perceptions and comments may be connected with cultural factors, such as the fear of creating jealousy among neighbours and consequent conflict with the rest of the community. Therefore, while this indicator may be helpful for general discussions on the topic of poverty, it is difficult to calculate, not only due to the conditions of the informal economy, but also for cultural reasons which affect reporting of earnings. Moreover, earnings may fluctuate as well depending on the various moments and work opportunities.

Prospering in Bolivia's informal sector has always required a high degree of flexibility due to macro-constraints, such as changing governmental regimes and periodic monetary crises, as well as micro-constraints like illness, the consequences of laws and theft. Sofia Velasquez, a Bolivian market vendor and the main character of the books by Hans and Judith Maria Buechler, developed efficient and powerful strategies. For instance, she took advantage of international price differentials and her contacts enabled her to obtain staples in periods of scarcity. Moreover, she substituted the products she sold with other items in order to change unfavourable conditions. Nevertheless, in spite of her talents as a trader, she often felt vulnerable. The

desperation with which she reacted to the theft of her items was indicative of the importance and difficulties of maintaining a working capital (Buechler and Buechler 1996). This is true for all the sellers involved in the markets of El Alto in my experience.

During one of my visits to a local market, I observed that the hunting down of thieves represented a major aspect of market life. Two big puppets were hanging from one of the electricity poles. The bodies of both were covered with red spots, as a representation of wounds and blood. On their heads was a huge sign: '*Muerte al ladrón*' ('Death to the thief'). Later on, I witnessed an attempt to steal from a *cholita* walking through the market. A man snatched her hat and she started to run after him. She was panicking and evidently in a state of desperation. A younger and quicker man came to help her. He managed to stop the thief, but ultimately failed to detain him, though he did retrieve the woman's hat. These hats are part of the traditional dress of *cholitas*, and really expensive. They are important and valued goods in the market, since they are essential markers of status and well-being. (Most elements of 'traditional' dress today have recognisable European influence (including the large *pollera* and the hats).

El Alto is a city where many foreign and national elements are fused and locally reconstructed. Understanding *alteño* identity means engaging with stories not only of migration, displacement, and marginality, but also of

expectation, hopes, social advancement, and return. The choice of my two field sites was fundamental to show the intricacy and complexity of all these issues. Senkata and Amachuma provide important examples in this sense.

Amachuma is essentially a suburb of El Alto and people commute daily into the city to work, returning to the zone at night. Although nowadays they are also part of El Alto municipality, Amachuma residents like to define themselves as ‘peasants’ and see their village as ‘in the countryside’. It is interesting to notice how they identify their values as ‘rural’ and distinct from the urban space, from neighbourhoods such as nearby Senkata. Yet, at some points Amachuma and Senkata become the same world, a world in the process of forging a new *Alteño* identity. The construction of Amachuma’s ‘rural nature’ by its inhabitants, despite their commuting dimension and being part of El Alto municipality,, becomes quite important and sheds lights on the impact that some intellectual ideologies, such as the one of GTZ Aymara intellectuals, may have on ordinary people. I will come back to this topic in the following chapters, in particular in Chapter 7. First of all, I would like to give more background on Senkata.

A neighbourhood in the city: 25 de julio, Senkata

Senkata, which in Quechua⁶ means nose, is a neighbourhood in the south of the city of El Alto. It belongs to District 8 and has approximately 2600 households, and 18,000 inhabitants, or *vecinos* (a Spanish word that means

⁶ Interestingly, a Quechua name is used rather than an Aymara one. The origin of the name is unknown.

resident and neighbour). There are different residential areas in Senkata. I lived in 25 de Julio, where there are approximately 400 households and 2800 inhabitants. Senkata is divided in two by the highway to Oruro and it is bordered to the north by El Kenko zone, to the south and west by Provincia Ingavi, and to the east by Achocalla municipality. As Map 2 shows, the focal point of 25 de Julio is the football field and the market place of the Extranca. The main public buildings are organised around the Extranca: the church, the local residents' committee centre, the *Colegio 25 de Julio* and the main local shops, which are the main points of daily interaction between different residents. The Extranca gets very populated and busy on Thursdays and Sundays, when the main market takes place. On the highway to Oruro, at the level of the Extranca, there are 28 permanent kiosks, grouped in a sellers' organisation.

According to some informants, Senkata land belonged to Achocalla *hacienda* (landed estate). After the Agrarian Reform in 1953, the land was divided among the peasants who were attached to the landowner. In 1979, the first migrants began their settlements in what is today Senkata 79. The neighbourhood of 25 de Julio was formed later on, at the beginning of the 1980s. Senkata residents are first and second generation migrants: the majority of them (39%) have come from other areas of El Alto and La Paz, and 17.78% come from the nearby Aroma province. Others come from different provinces such as Pacajes, Loayza, Oruro, Ingavi and Inquisivi

(see map 3)⁷. Senkata residents work mostly in the informal sector. The most common professions for men are those of builder or bus driver.

Senkata roads are unpaved and very dusty, apart from the highway that goes to Oruro. Houses have access to electricity and water, but still lack a sewage system. The houses are predominantly made of adobe bricks with corrugated iron roofs. They consist of up to four one-room buildings arranged around a courtyard, where there is a tap that provides for the water consumption of the entire household. Everyday life begins quite early as people get up around 5 or 6 am. Streets become busy between 7 and 9 am, when children go to school and their parents to work. Dogs sit outside their houses during the day, menacing any stranger passing by. Some of them can be extremely aggressive, and extra care has to be taken when taking side roads that one does not know well. Everybody is scared of dogs in El Alto. Children learn very quickly how to defend themselves and, with particularly aggressive animals, to skilfully throw stones. Children get together at school either in the morning or in the afternoon and play together in the streets. Adults interact daily in shops and at the market place and get together occasionally when the local residents' committee or the *Junta Escolar* (parents' association) meet. Usually, adults also meet up in the weekly religious services of the different Churches (such as Asamblea de Dios de

⁷All this information was collected during a local census carried out by the NGO ECO JOVENES BOLIVIA in collaboration with the local Church San Francisco of Assisi.

Bolivia, Iglesia Adventista del 7 Día, Nazareño Church, Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana, Iglesia Católica San Francisco de Assisi).

Amachuma: ‘Rural’ El Alto

Amachuma was part of Achocalla municipality until August 2005, when it became the 10th district of El Alto or *Distrito Rural Número 10*. It is on the road that leads to Oruro, 20 minutes by bus from Ventilla. While in the past it was a *pueblo* or village, nowadays it is officially part of the city. Surrounded by fields, Amachuma has a ‘rural soul’; this is evident through its inhabitants’ daily life as well as through the landscape. The houses are scattered in the countryside, not neatly arranged as in Senkata.

The example of Amachuma also shows how the city is expanding towards the surrounding countryside and sheds light on the many *alteño* contexts, and the many nuances that form *alteño* identity: not a single identity, but many, depending on the area and its local history. El Alto, which the people of Amachuma call ‘La Paz’⁸, looks like a mirage in the desert, but its presence is always dominant. To the south of the village, there are other rural communities linked to Amachuma by a valley, and the Andean chain with the snow peak of the Mount Illimani.

According to the INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2003) there are 794 inhabitants living in the community and their mother tongue is Aymara. The majority of the population is children (0 and 9 years old) and young people

⁸ They don’t make distinctions between the two cities

(10 and 19 years old). However, when I refer to young people in my thesis I include people in their late twenties who are unmarried and therefore still seen as young, especially in Senkata, where marriage normally takes place when people are in the twenties. In Amachuma, young people tend to cohabit with their partners or get married in their teen years, becoming adults earlier. There are relatively few older people in Amachuma.

The main occupation of Amachuma inhabitants is agriculture, and livestock represents another important resource, including cows, sheep, chicken and a few llamas and pigs. Women usually sell milk and other agricultural products, such as potatoes and alfalfa, in the markets of El Alto. Men usually work as minibus drivers. Both men and women also earn money from handicrafts: women make wool gloves and *teijos* (woven cloth) and men make pottery (these products are sold in the market). The majority of the houses are made of adobe and *tapial* (mud) with an earth floor pavement in most cases. In very few cases, the floor is made from cement or is paved.

Amachuma inhabitants speak about their *entorno* (environment) as something that is very important for them and feel they are in contact with nature and with the rest of the community. Solidarity among the members of the community is also seen as very important, made manifest through the practice of Aymara cooperative work, such as *ayni* and *mink'a*. *Ayni* is a reciprocal and obligatory service, for example beer bought for weddings or

other festivities (Lazar 2002:11). ‘The *ayni* principle is as follows: I request and receive a specific service from my kinsman or neighbour, on the understanding that on a subsequent, exactly similar occasion, I will render him/her exactly the same service’ (Harris 2000:vi). However, in recent years, *ayni* as service has lost its importance because of lack of time, now devoted to activities in other neighbourhoods of El Alto. Yet, *ayni* as gift in religious festivities is still practised. On the other hand, *mink’a* or communal work is not remunerated and takes place in public spaces, such as, for instance, paving the main square. This practice is still quite common.

Amachuma men come together in occasional *mink’a*. Relations with kin men are also expanded when they meet in local shops to drink a glass of beer, while women meet in private houses to knit and weave together. Sometimes, the officers of the Peasant Trade Union, which is the most important local administrative unit (see the following section for more details) invite the community to regular as well as occasional special meetings organised to talk about political activities, such as the protests of October, or other issues concerning communal life. The ‘community’ also meets on the days of *fiestas* (religious festivities), and at the occasional meeting organised by the *Junta Escolar*. In contrast with Senkata, weekly religious services are not attended by Amachuma inhabitants. During my fieldwork, the Catholic Church was always (even during the fiesta) closed and the Pentecostal weekly events at the Baptist Church were rarely

attended. On the other hand, Amachuma inhabitants often organise rituals and offerings for the God mountains *-Achachilas-* and the Mother Earth *-Pachamama-*.

Rural and Urban El Alto

The peasant community with its territory and rules is a colonial creation aimed to organise and manage natural resources. Some of these communities were created on the basis of the original *ayllus* (pre-Inca and Inca administrative unit), also known as ‘original communities’ (*comunidades originarias*). In highland Bolivia the term *ayllu* refers to land-holding units (Abercombie 1998; Harris 1987), sometimes dispersed over a wide area occupied jointly with other *ayllus*. Other communities were the result of the transfer of people to territories away from the original ones. At the end of the 19th century, the shift to the term *comunidad* (community) occurred with the expansion of the *hacienda*. Again after the Agrarian reform in 1953 came the notion of the communal property of a territory with defined borders, and the beginning of conflicts between communities and *haciendas* (land estate) over the right to use resources (Rengifo Vasquez 1998).

Being a member of the *ayllu* means that people have to perform certain rituals and practices (*costumbres* as Amachuma peasants call them). These practices are communal and involve participating in the local *fiesta*, in the

ayni (reciprocal work and gift in a fiesta), in the *mink'a* (communal work), and in rituals aimed at the communication with supernatural forces.

After the Agrarian Reform in 1953, the *ayllu* structures were replaced by the Trade Union, especially in areas that have been dominated by *haciendas*. In Amachuma, peasants possess their own plots of land and they also have access to communal land, if they are part of the Trade Union. There is rotating cultivation and the community decides what crops will be grown on which communal fields allocated to individual households each year. Communal land can be cultivated, used for grazing or for engaging in other ritual and social activities, such as the *apachita* (sacred place where supernatural forces are worshipped; see Chapter 7). If a household wants to sell the land to someone who does not belong to the community, the head of the family has to contact the Trade Union and ask permission for the sale. However, there is a tendency not to sell to people outside the kinship network. Even when people decide to migrate to other areas, they prefer to keep their land and to return there once in a while or to leave other members of the family to take care of the property.

The Trade Union decides the rights and obligations of its members, such as participation in communal work, rotation of responsibilities (*cargos*), payment of fees, as well as the rituals related with agricultural production (see Chapter 7). The Trade Union in Amachuma intervenes in infrastructural

works, such as the maintenance of roads, access to drinking water, the maintenance of the school building, but does not actually take part in agricultural production, which is carried out by individual households.

On the other hand, in Senkata the *Junta Vecinal* or residents' Committee plays the role of local administrative unit; there are important differences between the two zones. In fact, in Senkata there is no use of common land with the exception of the market place and no agricultural production, since it is too densely populated. Women who work in the market place have to pay fees for their *puestos* (stalls) to the *Junta Vecinal*.

Moreover, in Senkata, the majority of my informants own the house where they live and the land on which it is built -their *lote*, and do not have to ask for the *Junta Vecinal's* permission when they wish to sell. A few people who do not have enough money to buy a house usually work as caretakers of the building in which they live. In this way they do not have to pay rent. Owners of the houses are scared to leave second houses empty because of thievery, although sometimes they may also leave young members of the household to take care of the house rather than contracting someone who is unrelated. Because of thievery, sometimes young people have also to sleep in the local shops that belong to their household to make sure that no-one breaks in. This is the case of Guido, the main focus of the next section,

which addresses the question of what constitute *alteño* identity and why it is necessary to consider the case of younger generations.

Being an ‘authentic *alteño*’⁹

What does it mean to be young in El Alto? This section addresses the category of *alteño* youth, who are the most affected by the transition from the rural traditions of their migrant parents/family and their own urban identity. Young people who were born and raised in El Alto represent not only a new generation, but also the birth of a new *alteño* identity. In this section I focus on the relationships of young people with their family and parents to show how they negotiate their identity, between the values and customs of the countryside and the influences of the city. This is true not only in the market place, where they experience foreign goods and clothes, but also in the world of their peers, where foreign music, Hollywood movies and foreign dance styles are the basis for the reproduction of teenage culture. The cultural environment of El Alto also gives me the opportunity to discuss terms and distinctions such as traditional/modern, foreign/local, cultural/uncultured, old/young.

It is not easy to represent El Alto and *alteño* identity. My attempt has been influenced by my own experience and my contact with the worlds of young people. Through an interview in 2004 with Guido, a 24 year old *alteño* from Senkata, I emphasise some of the generational, political and identity issues

⁹ The information in this section was collected through informal talks during the entire fieldwork as well as through an interview on the 10th of August 2004.

directly linked with well-being in the city. He was born in 1980 in the *16 de Julio* neighbourhood (in the centre of El Alto), the son of two first-generation rural migrants from the Department of La Paz, and moved to Senkata around 1992. He proudly defines himself as an ‘authentic *alteño*’, because he was born and raised in the city. He is the leader of one of the youth groups of Senkata.

The members of the group chose him unanimously as a leader. He explains that he cares about ‘his people’ and he has power in the decision-making process. Young people listen to him, and it can happen that they ask him to talk to their parents if they have problems communicating with them. He is slightly older than the others. Parents like him, because they see him as a responsible and honest boy. He is a generational intermediary and representative, and the glue of his youth group, able to solve conflictive situations and to ensure cohesion.

Guido is the eldest son in his family. He has 5 younger sisters and a brother. He works in an electrical shop in Senkata, repairing televisions and radios. After High School, he wanted to go to university to study electrical engineering. However, there was not enough money so, because he is the eldest son, he had to sacrifice his dreams and start work. Being the eldest child in a family in El Alto is not easy. There is a difference in terms of authority: eldest sons usually experience a greater deal of control from their

parents. By contrast, youngest sons have greater attention and more opportunities, not only because they are the ones who are going to take care of their elderly parents, but also because they are generally born when the family has more resources. Guaygua et al. (2000) have written about the role of the eldest sons in El Alto, emphasising that they are usually born when first generation migrants first move to the city and before any economic capital has been consolidated. This is why eldest sons are always expected to contribute to the income of the family and have fewer opportunities to study. Sometimes they are expected to study part-time, because their economic contribution is essential for the household. By contrast, the youngest sons and daughters have easier access to full-time university education and as Guido told me: ‘they can be spoiled. I worry about my brother, because he doesn’t have a clue what sacrifice and poverty are. He arrived when things were starting to get better’¹⁰.

Guido continued by emphasising how the migration of his family from 16 de Julio to Senkata changed his life and how difficult it was to live in this neighbourhood when they first moved here: ‘When we came here, there was nothing. It was like living in the countryside. There was no water or electricity. 16 de Julio was very different. Senkata was a radical change’¹¹.

¹⁰ ‘Pueden ser mimados. Estoy preocupado por mi hermano, porque no sabe qué es el sacrificio o la pobreza. Llegó cuando las cosas empezaban a ser mejores’.

¹¹ ‘Cuando hemos llegado aquí, no había nada. Era como vivir en el campo. No había agua y no había luz tampoco. 16 de julio era diferente. Senkata fué un cambio radical en comparación a 16 de julio’.

Senkata was founded at the beginning of the 1980s, and therefore up to 10 years ago was closer to rural lifestyles. Guido added:

I was not well-informed [lack of a radio as well as electricity]. Studying was difficult too and you had to do it early in the morning. Water sellers were selling water in containers, which cost 2.50 *bolivianos*. Electricity came at the beginning of 1993. After 3 years, the water came too. In any case, we still do not have a sewer system.¹²

Nevertheless, he recognises that Senkata has become his home now and that he feels emotionally connected with his neighbourhood: 'It wasn't easy to get used to this area. It changed my way of thinking, but now I don't regret it. Senkata is a good area with a future, as well as being intercultural [referring to people coming from different regions]. Young people are quieter: they are not aggressive or rebellious'¹³. When I ask him more about the neighbourhood and whether there is solidarity among people who live there, he replies:

The community is not united because they have to worry about their families and they can't do anything to develop the area. The things that mostly interest people are owning a house and a car. Solidarity and the union could be seen only in October¹⁴, when we had a progressive uprising unfolding gradually, from the 12th onwards. The gas was the initial cause. Behind it there were other requests...but the situation didn't change a lot.¹⁵

Adults in Senkata are usually busy working all day and do not come back home until 8 or 9pm. Children and young people go to school either in the morning or in the afternoon according to their age. When they get home, the eldest ones are in charge of the youngest. In the afternoon, before it gets

¹² 'No tenía información. Estudiar era difícil también y tenías que hacerlo temprano. Los desaguaderos te vendían agua por recipiente que estaba a 2.50 bolivianos. La luz llegó al principio del 93. Después de 3 años llegó el agua. No tenemos alcantarillado todavía'.

¹³ 'Me costó acostumbrarme. Ahora no me arrepiento. Senkata es una buena zona, con futuro, intercultural. Los jóvenes son tranquilos: no son agresivos o rebeldes'.

¹⁴ Reference to October 2003.

¹⁵ 'La comunidad no es unida porque tienen que preocuparse de la familia y no pueden sacar la zona adelante. La gente quiere tener casa propia, un auto. Sólo en Octubre se vió la solidaridad y unión de la gente. Octubre fué un levantamiento progresivo. El gas fué el inicio. Atrás había más demandas, pero no cambió mucho'.

dark, kids and young people populate the streets of the neighbourhood. They meet up to play or talk with their friends. It's also the moment when teenagers flirt with each other. These encounters are fundamental to creating a network of solidarity that can compensate for the absence of adults in their daily life. Youth networking acts as a substitute for the family, and it is informally organised on the model of the *Junta Vecinal* (local residents' committee and main administrative authority). For example, there are recognised leaders and there are meetings to have discussions about issues that concern them, or at least this is what I experienced with the youth group I knew in Senkata.

However, despite the importance of the peer group, the household still represents a fundamental aspect of young people's lives and is integral to their idea of well-being. Guido, for example, says that *Suma Jakaña*¹⁶ (the good life) for him is 'to have a balanced household without economic problems, to have a job and an income as well as being able to study, but the most important thing is to have a household in harmony and peace, without fights'. He also says that he sees no difference between *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña* (the good life at the community level) explaining that a *qamiri*¹⁷ is an individual who has everything -a car, livestock, his own house, children studying at university and a shop. The only problem that a

¹⁶ A detailed discussion of the use and meaning of *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña* will be provided later on in this chapter.

¹⁷ Aymara term that indicates an individual 'que está bien' - that he/she is fine, living the good life.

gamiri may have is related to love. Money can also be a cause of fighting within the household and a reason for living separate lives.

Fortunately, his household is not like that, he says. They fight sometimes because of money, but it's a minor aspect of household life. I ask him what his parents do: 'my dad works as a doorman in a building close to Senkata and my mum works in the market'. He goes on:

The idea of a woman going to sell is more acceptable (...) A lady can convince you and promote the product. Selling is a light job and that's why women do it. It would be offensive for men to go to sell food or other things. Selling is a good activity, because it is the most accessible way: you need goods and some capital (1000/1500 *bolivianos*). My mum sells cocoa (cocoa butter cream used as a body lotion), Ace (detergent used to wash clothes and dishes), soap and toothpaste. She does not produce anything. This is not a good business, because the only thing that she is doing is selling for big companies, really she should produce and then sell. My mum is like a sales person for the big companies. It's the company that is going to make a profit.¹⁸

These last sentences are indicative of the conscious knowledge that some young people and adults have about global economic processes and how these impact on the local/regional sphere and the world system. They know that their behaviour can influence larger structures of power, recognising that their buying and selling contributes to the cyclical process of enrichment of transnational companies. Despite their political involvement in social uprisings against these structures of power, they are also conscious that, in some cases, market selling represents the easiest and most accessible way to be part of the informal sector and to earn an income to support the

¹⁸ 'La idea que venda una mujer es más aceptable. Una mujer puede convencerte y promocionar el producto. Vender es un trabajo ligero. Sería ofensivo vender para los hombres. Vender es lo más accesible. Necesitas un capital y la mercancía. 1000/1500 bolivianos. Mi mamá vende cocoa, ACE, jaboncillo, crema dental. No fabrica mi mamá. No es un buen negocio porque lo único que está haciendo es vender para las grandes empresas. Tendría que fabricar para vender. Mi mamá sería la vendedora de la gran empresa. Es la gran empresa la que gana más'.

entire family. Guido also underlines how mass media and education have influenced youth in their consumption choices and behaviour:

Youth these days has lost many values, such as greeting your neighbours. Parents and grandparents say that youth has lost respect and the custom of greeting. It's not as it was before. A young individual doesn't respect the elders. A young person from the countryside is more polite, he always greets you. It's a way to express themselves. Here, in the city, you lose this kind of behaviour. With this I don't want to say that you need to go back, that you need to live in an old-fashioned way, that you can't be modern, but we have to recuperate our culture (...) You need to work on this as it was something scientific: if we don't work on these values of our own culture (...) that we are native, none can deny this (...) We all know that someone is Aymara, no matter if s/he has dyed hair or wears American clothes. Deep down a culture is always what it is... Aymara, Bolivian and has [a distinctive] origin. Means of communication have had a profound influence thanks to fashion advertising, imported goods, but also because of the education that they give you in High School.¹⁹

I ask if he could explain to me how school can influence young people in this way and he answers melancholically:

At school you can't speak Aymara. To use a poncho is seen as backward. Dressing with a suit is seen as progress. To use pollera is seen as backward. They don't say this to you, but you understand it. You need to wear a suit. Teachers put you to shame. You speak Aymara, because since childhood you were listening to your parents, it's your language and you learn to speak it unconsciously, so you know already how to speak it. You go to school and you realise that you're the only one that speaks Aymara and you see that the teacher teaches you Spanish and you feel confused, you go into a trance, in shock (...) You learn Aymara first of all, but then you are made to learn Spanish. You get confused when you speak: you mix up Aymara and Spanish (...) and you feel ashamed and you stay silent. Your friends speak good Spanish and you don't, you make mistakes and you say to yourself 'This is serious! I make mistakes!'.²⁰

¹⁹La juventud de ahora ya perdió muchos valores, como el saludo a tus vecinos. Los padres y los abuelos dicen que la juventud ya ha perdido el respeto y el saludo. Ya no es como antes. El joven no respeta a los mayores. El joven del campo es más educado, siempre saluda. Es una manera de expresarse. Acá en la ciudad se pierde eso. Con eso no quiero decir que hay que retroceder en el tiempo, que hay que estar a la Antigua, que hay que vestirse, que no hay que actualizarse, que hay que recuperar nuestra cultura (...) Hay que rescatar eso como algo de científico: si no se rescatan esos valores de nuestra misma cultura (...) que somos originarios, nadie puede negarlo (...) sabemos bien que él es Aymara, por más que se haya teñido el pelo o se ponga ropa americana. En el fondo siempre es lo que es. Es boliviano, es Aymara y tiene su propia origen. Los medios de comunicación han influido bastante, propaganda, moda, productos que importan, y también la educación en el colegio'.

²⁰ 'En la escuela no tienes que hablar Aymara, usar el poncho es atraso. Si te pones traje es progreso. Utilizar *pollera* es atraso. No te dicen pero te dan a entender. Tienes que ponerte vestido. Los profesores te hacen avergonzar. Sabes hablar Aymara porque desde chiquitito escuchabas a tus padres. Es tu idioma y aprendes a hablarlo inconscientemente. Entonces ya lo sabes hablar. Vas al colegio y te das cuenta que eres el único que habla Aymara, y ves que el profe te enseña a hablar en español y vos estás confundido. Ya entrás en un trance, en un shock. Empiezas a hablar Aymara, pero tienes que aprender castellano a la fuerza. Combinas los dos y te da vergüenza. Empiezas a callarte ósea tus amigos hablan bien español y tú no, tú te equivocas 'Que grave. Me equivoco Che'.

Guido emphasises his difficulties at school and his sense of 'cultural rejection', feeling discriminated by the institutions (see also Cottle and Ruiz 1993; Guaygua et al. 2000) as well as by his peers for speaking Aymara and emphasising how singing the national anthem and marching are perceived as an imposition:

You feel repressed and rejected and you just keep silent. You just listen, because you're worried about making mistakes (...) They say 'small tree' or other diminutives [the use of diminutives in Spanish is typical of Aymara]. There are always words that they use to imitate how a peasant talks, an Aymara talks like this (...) At school they teach you to march like on military service, all marching, to keep in order, but I think it shouldn't be like this. It should be freer. You shouldn't close yourself in this way. You have to sing the national anthem. It should be something that is born from you, not something imposed. They have neutralised you and now you are as you are. Only recently they have started to open their eyes and this is because people have realised that they cannot live like this any more. From one master [the Spanish], Simon Bolivar has transferred us to a new one, the power of the Americans. The dollar is everywhere here in South America and this is why social movements are developing.²¹

Guido also says that it is easy to exploit Bolivians, because they do not read as much as they should and they do not educate themselves. The system has always wanted them to be ignorant, so that the *patrones* (bosses) could dominate them:

In the hacienda they were always giving coca and tobacco. They never gave out books. In this way it is easier to dominate Bolivian people. Now there aren't bosses, but there is a new type of slavery. Now poor people work with banks. You are working for the bank, for your boss.²²

²¹'Te sientes reprimido y rechazado y piensas solo en callarte. Escuchas nada más porque tienes miedo de equivocarte, a hablar. Te dicen un 'arbolito', siempre hay palabritas donde imitan al campesino, el Aymara así habla. En el colegio te enseñan a marchar como en el cuartel, todos marchaditos, en manera de orden, pero pienso que no tendría que ser así. Tendría que ser un poco más libre. Tienes que cantar el himno nacional. Tiene que ser algo que nace de tí mismo, no algo que te impongan. Te han neutralizado y ahora estás como estás. Recién están abriendo los ojos, es porque la gente se ha dado cuenta que ya no podemos estar así. De un dueño, Simón Bolívar nos ha trasferido a otro dueño, el poder americano. El dollar está en todos los lados aquí en Sur América. Es por eso que hoy día hay movimientos sociales que se forman'.

²²'En la hacienda sólo daban coca y tabaco. Nunca han dado libros. Es fácil así dominar a los bolivianos. Ahora no son los patrones, pero hay una nueva esclavitud. Ahora los pobres trabajan con los bancos. Estás trabajando por el banco, tu patrón'.

‘The only possible way to be rescued is through your own culture. It’s the only thing that they left us’, whispers Guido, believing that it’s a young person’s duty to assure ‘el rescate de la cultura’ (rescue/freeing of culture). He then goes back to talk more about young people in Senkata and their problems:

Young people in Senkata are still deciding whether to go for a good or bad path. They are deciding if they want to be good or bad. They should not be ashamed. Sometimes there is racism as it occurs in the Zona Sur²³. I was working there as a cleaner and if your surname is Aymara - Condori, Quispe, Mamani - they tell you that you aren’t useful, because you are Aymara, that you are not welcome...they realise that you are from El Alto, that there’s a difference in the way you speak...They speak differently. There is discrimination against *alteños* and it makes you feel bad and you don’t want to be what you are. This makes you lose your identity; you want to change because you want the other person to accept you.²⁴

And he also adds:

In my opinion, the most important Aymara values are: don’t be lazy, don’t lie and don’t steal and the thanksgiving to the *Pachamama*. Young people don’t want this anymore. They sully the city. They don’t pay respect to nature, look at the rubbish everywhere in El Alto. Before it wasn’t like this if you read in books. There weren’t poor people. They all had a job and there wasn’t poverty. Now there is inequality and poverty. It’s the fault of corrupted governments. The present government²⁵ is quieter, but it always depends on the decisions of the US embassy. There are rebellious movements that say ‘we have a free and sovereign nation. They cannot impose anything on us [...] There is no leader today, someone that can talk for everybody [...] even in the referendum, there are no facts, only words so far.’²⁶

²³ The richest part of La Paz.

²⁴ ‘Los jóvenes en Senkata todavía están antes si van al camino bueno o malo. Están en decidir si son buenos o malos. No tienen que avergonzarse. A veces pasa que hay racismo, como en la Zona Sur, sólo por el apellido, Condori, Quispe, Mamani, te dicen que no sirves, que no eres bienvenido. Se dan cuenta que eres de El Alto, que hay una diferencia. El mismo lenguaje. Ellos hablan distinto. Hay discriminación y eso te hace sentir mal y ya no quieres ser lo que eres, te hacen perder tu identidad, quieres cambiar porque quieres que el otro te acepte’.

²⁵ He is referring to Mesa and his government in the months following October 2003 up to November 2004.

²⁶ ‘Para mí los valores más importantes para un Aymara son: no sea flojo, mentiroso o ladrón y el agradecimiento a la *Pachamama*. Ya los jóvenes no quieren eso. Ensucian a la ciudad. Ya no respetan la naturaleza, mira la basura en El Alto. Antes no era así si tu lees en los libros. No había pobres. Todos tenían trabajo y no había pobreza. Es culpa del gobierno corrupto. El presente gobierno está siempre pendiente de los EEUU. Hay movimientos rebeldes que dicen que nosotros tenemos una patria libre y soberana. No nos pueden imponer. [...] No hay un líder ahora, alguien que hable por todos. [...] También en el referéndum no hay hechos, solo palabras hasta ahora’.

When I ask about music, he answers that he listens half the time to Bolivian music and the other half to foreign music (Argentinean Cumbia, Rock Latino and Latin American genres). He cannot understand US songs, because they are in English, and this is a limitation. He says that even if he likes the rhythm of some songs, he is worried they can mean something completely different from what he thinks. Later on, he starts to talk about cinema and movies. It's difficult to get hold of Bolivian movies, but it's very easy to find pirate DVDs and videos of Hollywood movies:

Most movies here are from the States. I watch them in my free time, to have fun, to have a moment to relax. It's not something you can learn from and then put into practice. It's not possible to learn. The only thing that they teach you is violence or a world full of fantasy. A world you will never live in. (..) A movie I really liked is *Brave Heart* with Mel Gibson, because you have people who are fighting for their freedom. They are people who would like to be liberated. Scotland would like to be liberated. I like this kind of movies, *The Patriot*, *The Last Samurai*. All these movies where there is a fighting against a central power. Samurai had such cultural delicacy and they fight for freedom.²⁷

The idea that Guido has about Bolivia is of a State composed of different nations, emphasising the enormous cultural variety in the advertisement of a popular drink (*Simba*):

There are different girls from different regions, a cochabambina (from Cochabamba), a paceña (from La Paz), a cruceña (from Santa Cruz). They make a comparison with a Japanese person: "In your country is there any difference? They are all the same. There are no differences; there is no possibility to choose. Even the food is the same, let's say. Here there is a variety, there is plato paceño or cruceño."²⁸

²⁷ La mayoría de las películas son norteamericanas. Son para divertirse, para pasar un momento [...] no es algo que se va a aprender y después lo practicas. No se puede aprender. Lo único que te enseñan es violencia, un mundo fantasioso, un mundo que nunca vas a vivir. Me gustó *Corazón Valiente* con Mel Gibson porque hay un pueblo que lucha por su liberación. Es un pueblo que quiere sobresalir. Escocia quiere ser liberada. Me gustan películas de este tipo como *El Patriota*, *El Último Samurai*, todas películas donde hay la lucha de un pueblo contra un poder central. Los samurai tenían una delicadeza cultural y luchan por eso'.

²⁸ Hay chicas de diferentes regiones [...] Hacen una comparación con una japonesa; 'en tu país qué variado hay? Allí todas son chinitas iguales. No hay variedad, no hay para escoger. Hasta el mismo platito de comida, digamos. Aquí hay variado, plato [...]'.

It's common among young *alteños* to use movies or TV ads to express their ideas and feelings: the topic of discrimination is always present, whether subtly hidden or clearly expressed. Wearing a suit with a tie and speaking Spanish is seen as progress, while wearing a *pollera* or a poncho and speaking Aymara is to refuse that progress. The majority of young people in Senkata speak only Spanish and they wear second-hand American clothes, because they are very cheap. However, as Guido underlined, there is also pressure from the official educational institutions to leave 'old customs' and embrace a new 'modern' identity, to transform the country in a more homogenous one through the new generations. Actually, this ambition of the ruling elites has been in place since the mid-19th century. *Alteños* and, especially young people, still experience this national project of homogenising the country as a new process, and feel caught between different models and orientations, called upon to make a decision between individual drives and motivations and the collectivity.

Indeed, El Alto embodies a new Aymara identity, based on a positive sense of belonging built through adversity and discrimination. Inhabitants are proud of the place where they live and this would also explain why Guido is honoured to call himself 'an authentic *Alteño*'. Living in the urban space automatically evokes ideas of sophistication, better education and freedom in comparison to rural life. This is also why *Alteños* do not wish to go back to their villages for good (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion).

Going back means to fail and to go backward. But rural-urban migrants and *campesinos* also associate this city with the successful social protests of the last 15 years; protests embody the strength of the ‘new Aymara man’²⁹ to endure in their collective struggles. Many *Alteños* would often tell me: ‘Our people suffered for so many centuries, and they kept calm and silent for a long time. But now everything is changing. We are different, now we are making our voices heard and we are not scared anymore’.

El Alto is also an important site for *fiestas*, with magnificent material displays of wealth. The ruling elites have tried on different occasions to abolish them (Harris 2006) because of the celebrations’ anti-utilitarian nature, but they have not managed to do so. These religious celebrations have actually conquered the urban space, infecting all the different social classes and becoming nowadays a national symbol.

At the same time, El Alto is portrayed as ‘dangerous’. Indeed, violence is considered one of the most serious problems of this area. Although there are no reliable statistics on this topic³⁰, people are worried about their personal security. Some of the most important advice I was given when I began my fieldwork was to avoid walking on my own at night. In Senkata, the dangers are particularly true for women and girls, who are at greater risk of being

²⁹ The Aymara equivalent would be the gender-neutral *jaqi*, but that Spanish usage still typically uses the masculine as a generic term.

³⁰ Police are not reliable. *Alteños* avoid them because of their corruption and threat for their security.

assaulted³¹. By contrast, men and young boys are free to move around the area. During the day, the risk decreases and I have always felt safe and comfortable moving around on my own. At night, I always walked with other people. Although Senkata is generally perceived as a safe neighbourhood and people trust each other, at night streets are deserted and neighbours retreat into their houses. Inhabitants are much more worried about people coming from other neighbourhoods and often mention cases of girls being abducted. Despite these rumours, I never met any girl who had such an experience. The real issue is not in the neighbourhood, but more specifically La Ceja, El Alto's main market and business area.

La Ceja is located at the end of the motorway that leads to La Paz and it is a point of connection of the various roads that go towards different destinations of the altiplano. All the minibuses from any *alteño* neighbourhood go to La Ceja. It is also the interchange point to continue your journey to La Paz. It is characterised by hectic commercial activity in shops and street stalls and by nightlife in bars and clubs with high alcohol consumption and 'immoral' lifestyles³². This area is often portrayed by *Alteños* as very violent. Many of my informants have been robbed and one of them was also killed there. Here, one always has to be vigilant even in the daytime.

³¹ Sexual assaults are often mentioned rather than theft or crime of any other nature. In Senkata this was the main worry for parents with young daughters.

³² Definition given by my informants.

I remember that once I found myself in La Ceja at around 7-8 in the evening with a group of young people from Senkata. They knew which streets to avoid and always walked quite quickly. When we had to take a bus to go back home, they decided to board one that was completely empty and still queuing to enter one of the main streets before beginning the journey towards Senkata. They told me that they felt safer in the minibus and preferred to wait a bit longer instead of walking around La Ceja and looking for free seats at the busy corner where the minibuses normally leave from. This is in a street reputedly frequented by ‘thieves and criminals’. Nevertheless, El Alto is often associated with the violent and dangerous image of La Ceja.

Conclusions

In this chapter I outlined what it means to be *alteño* and presented a description of the city. I also hope to have shown the differences among the various areas and neighbourhoods of El Alto and why I chose these specific two field-sites. In particular, I have explored the meanings that my informants attach to the terms ‘urban’ and ‘rural’, which inform the differences and relations between Senkata and Amachuma, in spite of their administrative and geographical proximity. The ‘rural-urban’ framework is also evident in Guido’s account, showing how these ‘rural-urban’ constructions and classifications assume a very important role for my informants and are often invoked in narratives of modernity/backwardness as well as of morality/immorality.

This is evident in both field-sites. In Senkata people emphasise the theme of modernity versus backwardness, while in Amachuma they talk more of morality versus immorality. Therefore, Senkata residents picture their neighbourhood ‘as modern’ in opposition to the ‘backward countryside’. On the other hand, Amachuma inhabitants reproduce an account of their *Distrito Rural* as ‘morally nuanced’ in opposition to the ‘immoral urban space’. This is why the choice to live in Amachuma and Senkata provided me with an opportunity to include different perspectives. On the one hand, that of Amachuma ‘peasants-commuters’, highly dependent on the city and part of it, but also particularly proud to affirm their rural roots and the consequent adoption of certain values in opposition to Senkata and the urban space in general. This also raises clearly the constructed character of urban-rural distinctions showing how they are constructed discursively in spite of proximity. This relates to questions of *Alteño* identity, and to ideologies of Aymara-ness that will be addressed in chapter seven on GTZ Aymara intellectuals.

On the other hand, the perspective of a Senkata young person who talks about *alteño* identity and what it means to live in his neighbourhood suggests the importance of focusing on the case of young people. Being young has meant ‘seeing’ and experiencing change and being between various categories. In both field-sites, there are different layers of identity

that emerge from people's narrative and many contradictions between what people say and do. Thus, a straightforward dichotomy between urban and rural stands for other oppositions: past/present, indigenous/non-indigenous, modern/backward. Despite the fact that the latter are often invoked in my informants' narratives, I hope this chapter has shown that everyday life in El Alto is more nuanced and that the borders between opposites often merge together, creating *los alteños*, who are not at all a homogenous category. The chapter shed light on the complexity of identity and on how someone like Guido learns how to read situations and how to deal with them: e.g. language and indigenous identity on one side, and Bolivian and Latin American on the other. In the following chapter I will continue to shed light on some of these issues, providing details regarding the back ground in which this thesis was researched and specifically looking at the importance of the household for my informants.

CHAPTER THREE SUMA JAKAÑA

This chapter focuses on *Suma Jakaña*, ‘the good life’ at the household level, also providing some details on the importance of having harmonious relations with kin and with neighbours. The main aim of this chapter is to emphasise how the household (*la casa*) is seen as the core of ‘*estar bien*’ -being well. Harmony or the lack of conflict within the household constitutes the basis for ‘the good life’, which can only be pursued through co-operation among different members of the household and sometimes with kin who do not necessarily live under the same roof. The chapter also introduces some of the main subjects involved in the research and provides information about the context in which this thesis was researched. By touching on the division of work as well as the organisation of the household, I shall also analyse gender roles within the domestic sphere.

Household, kinship and neighbourhood relations were identified by my Senkata and Amachuma informants as very important to them and inextricably connected with ideas of ‘the good life’: sustaining harmony is central to a fundamental value, that of living well together. This living well together takes place in the house in the majority of the households in El Alto, but also through relations across households, with kin and with neighbours in the neighbourhood. These relations frame everyday interactions as the case studies selected in this chapter will show, providing an insight into the different circumstances.

In contrast, Senkata and Amachuma residents often stated that a ‘bad life’ is when ‘you have conflicts with your husband/wife or your children’. Marriage,

or more generally forming a couple or generating a new household -although sometimes the couple becomes part of an already existent household- is identified as an important step towards becoming a *Jaqi*, a person. In Amachuma I observed a tendency to marry or to begin to live together in the teen years, at around 16 or 17. On the other hand, in Senkata, marriage or cohabiting is delayed until the twenties. Senkata residents always emphasise the importance of becoming *profesional*³³ (obtaining some qualifications), adding that marriage or cohabiting has to be delayed in order to pursue a career. Younger generations should in general aspire to social mobility and a better quality of life than that of their parents.

Married life which is inextricably connected with the importance of having children is not always easy and conflicts within the household were often described by my informants as the main cause of '*estar mal*' -being unwell. José, a peasant from Amachuma, told me that a good life is 'when you live in peace with your children and you have a good understanding with your wife', adding that a young couple should always consult a diviner (*yatiri*) before getting married to read their luck (*suertes*), and see if they are compatible or not. Each household member has a specific and defined role: for example, older siblings have to be an example to inspire their younger brothers and sisters.

By looking at the role of teenage children within the domestic sphere, I aim to shed light on issues of sacrifice and responsibility. In fact, individual commitment to the household is fundamental to achieve family harmony and is

³³ My informants identify different *profesionales*: secretaries and technicians are *profesionales*,

part of the moral duty to get ahead (*'sacar la familia/ los padres/ el parentesco adelante'*). Household members have to put lots of effort and commitment to have positive influences on the well-being of the household. Yet, there are also cases when a preference is given to individual aspirations or desires rather than household ones. Moments of conflict emerge as a consequence. This chapter will shed light on a few examples that explore this individual-household tension, engaging with individual well-being and the complexity of issues emerging in cultural contexts in which relations become the cell of 'the good life'.

In this chapter, I will focus on four different families and their approaches to well-being. I have selected these particular families to illustrate different orientations and situations, providing a sense of everyday household life in El Alto. I also think that these four case studies provide a valuable insight into the tensions between individuals, and between individual desires and the needs of the household: the first two examples contribute to an account of the kinds of conflicts that occur within the household, while the last two are examples of co-operation among household members and relatives to overcome problems that may arise in the neighbourhood.

The household in the Andes and the implications of the four case studies

The first example (the Condoris³⁴) shows how an individual tries to break away and acts without consideration toward other household members; it also shows how the same individual comes around to behaving appropriately in the end. The same cannot be said of the second example, in which the fracture in relationships leads to tragic consequences; not everything can be solved and

but they are considered at a lower level than doctors, lawyers or bankers.

sometimes individuals have to move away because of the breakdown of household relationships. For instance, in Amachuma, I remember that one of the few people who told me that she was very unhappy was a single mother (I will call her Marta) living with her brother, her sister-in-law and her mother.

Apparently, her brother mistreated Marta and her child, because she did not have a partner. Marta got pregnant after a *fiesta* in the neighbourhood; she knew who the father was, but he never took responsibility for his child, saying that he was too drunk when he slept with her. Marta often expressed the desire to leave Amachuma for good with her child. Finally, she managed to find a job in La Paz as a domestic worker and never came back to live with her brother. The model of household harmony is not always attained in practice, and some individuals have to leave the household for good to survive and give a better future to their children.

However, there are also examples of household members who co-operate to overcome the difficulties of everyday life, and do not mistreat each other. For instance, the third and fourth case studies show how a solution to problems can be found through not only household collaboration, but also through kinship solidarity. In particular, the third case study shows how family can help to provide an income and a better future for all the households involved.

As the third example demonstrates, kinship appears to be fundamental for the economic as well as the social organisation of the family. Kinship can also be

³⁴All the household names and individual names have been change in order to assure privacy and

created through the establishment of relationships with a child's godparents, known as *compadrazgo*, literally god parenthood, as the fourth example demonstrates. Through the creation of these bonds, there is a formalisation of previous friendship ties and the beginning of a new relationship based on mutual economic and social support. It can be established between people of the same class position or with someone of higher status or class than the parent (Lazar 2002; Bolton and Mayer 1977; Mintz and Wolf 1977; Long 1984). All the four case studies are important to show not only how the household is considered the core of 'the good life', but also how the well-being of the household is inextricably connected with kin and neighbours' relations.

In the Andes, the household is the basic unit of social and economic organisation (Bourque 1995, 1996), and it is through material practices that gender roles and age identification are determined (MacCormack 1980, Harris 1980). However, this chapter also emphasises the importance of the extended family and wider relationships that constitute forms of community/ies and which frame everyday life, such as the *Junta Vecinal* or local residents' committee and the *Junta Escolar* or parents' association for a school. Broader kinship relations, and ties within and between households are maintained through producing (working) or consuming (commensality) (Bourque 1995). Through work people do not only produce material objects, but they also produce their own identities (Bourque 1995, Harris 2007), defining who they are within the household and the community/ies. In this chapter I will show through my ethnography that it is not only through work that identity is reproduced, but

confidentiality.

also through individual commitment and effort toward the household. Effort and commitment in all relations are fundamental and constitute the core of each chapter of this thesis.

As Vulpiani (1998) has also shown, the individual is inextricably correlated with his/her social context in the Bolivian altiplano. The pathology or illness of one of the household members is often extended to the entire household, sometimes affecting the larger community as well. Individuals are affected by tensions or unresolved conflicts between the household members or the people of the community, including supernatural forces. Health, harmony or, I would say, *Suma Jakaña* could be reacquired only through a secret ritual involving the sick person, the household and the spiritual world. Usually, this takes place inside the house.

The inside of a house is considered to be private and opened only to the members of the household. One of the first things I learnt during my fieldwork was to enter a house only if invited. When visiting a family in Amachuma, I had to stop in the courtyard in front of the house and shout to attract the attention of the household members. It is not considered polite to stand in front of the main entrance of a house. On the other hand, in Senkata, I had to wait in front of the entrance that leads to the courtyard. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was mainly invited to sit in people's courtyards. By the end of my time in the field, I was often invited inside the house by the various families I got to know well, illustrating how my role changed throughout the year I spent there.

The house with its different spaces also represents the oppositions and complementarities of men and women and their work activities (Arnold, 1997). Usually, the floor or the bottom section of the house is indicated as the female sphere (women work in this part of the home), while the upper section of the building or roof is identified as the male sphere (Arnold, 1998:36). These oppositions and complementarities are also reflected in the way the roof is built: in the countryside the straw used to cover the upper part of the roof is lighter and placed on the outside of the building. On the other hand, the straw put on the bottom part or on the inside of the house is heavier and mixed with the eaves of the roof. The former stands for the male component, while the latter stands for the female one. Finally, the male and the female spheres join together at the top of the roof (ibidem: 62, 95).

Andean spatial and temporal organization is often compared to the idea of 'un anidar de cajas, una dentro la otra' (Arnold, 1998:37). Literally, this means that reality is conceived as a 'nesting' of different boxes, one inside the other. Each structure appears to be part of another bigger structure; all the structures are connected. They are all part of the same unique universe and they influence each other, in a constant and mutual relationship. The individual house is part of a wider system, such as that of the ayllu, and it is seen as a symbol of 'envolturas anidadas' or 'nested wrap' (Arnold 1998:87). It is compared to a mother who protects the new-born baby and wraps him/her in her blanket, and is identified as a female sphere.

However, at a level of higher spatial organisation than the house, there is the patrilineal household, the male sphere that permeates and, thus, ‘wraps’ the female one. After this dimension, there is a female sphere, which is personified through the idea of the ‘madre comunidad’ -the mother community-, and that of the ‘virgen cabildo’, which includes the entire ayllu. On the other hand, at the national level of the modern State, the male sphere appears to be the one that is embracing the female one. Consequently, the organisational structure of the Andean community appears to be a ‘nest’ of concentric and gendered ‘wraps’ (Arnold 1998). Each wrap has a certain degree of authority over the one embraced. The chachawarmi or man-and-woman (heterosexual couple) ‘wrap’ their children; each wrap is connected to the next one, constituting mutual influence, embodying the core of ‘the good life’ through connection and harmonious relations.

Four households

(i) *The Condoris*

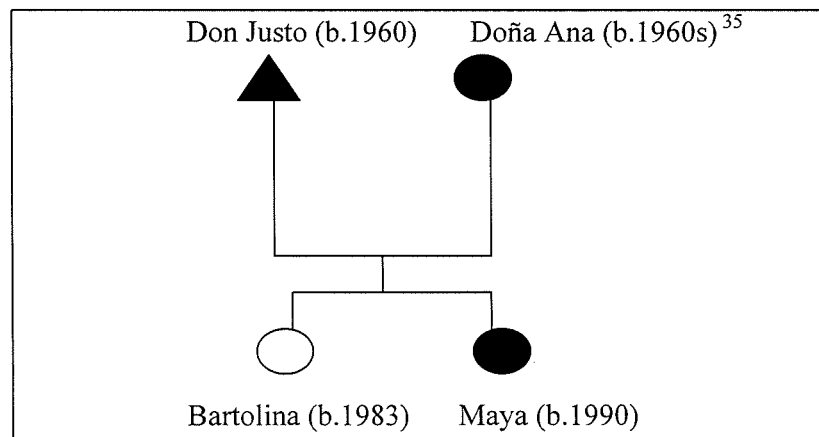


Figure no. 1.- Condori Household Diagram

³⁵ Older generations are vague about their date of birth, since it was considered unimportant to record them when they were born. In my experience, this was true for older generations born prior to the 1970s and coming from the rural context. From the 1970s onwards, people seem to know more precisely the year in which they were born, as identity cards and birth certificates have become more important in everyday life.

Black = Living under the same roof

The Condori household is nuclear. Kin and relatives come to visit it, but only occasionally, since they live far from El Alto. Don Justo is 45 years old and a first generation migrant from a village in the province of Sud Carangas, in the department of Oruro, while Doña Ana is from a small village close to Coroico, in North Yungas. Don Justo and Doña Ana met at the beginning of the 1980s in La Paz and started to live together in Villa Primero de Mayo, one of the oldest neighbourhoods of El Alto. They have two daughters: Bartolina and Maya. Bartolina was born in 1983 and Maya followed seven years later. Doña Ana had two miscarriages between the birth of the first and second child. It was only in 1994 that the couple decided to marry officially. Late marriage, following a period of cohabitation, is a common practice in the urban as well as rural context.

Don Justo left his village because of the agricultural crisis that followed years of drought:

In my village there was drought. There was no production. There are five of us and my father couldn't support us, not for studying nor anything else.... so as a young boy I had to find a job and I came here. First, I did the military service in Sucre and then I went to live in the city of Oruro for a while. I used to work as a hat seller, and then I also pounded salt and work as a bricklayer too. Nowadays, since I came here (El Alto), I have been in the police academy. My father couldn't support me. I had to support myself. The work supported me, so I stayed there. Migration has brought me here.³⁶

The Condoris moved to Senkata in 1982, when it was still a 'pampa', countryside, or 'una sembradilla de cebada', 'a barley field', as Don Justo likes

³⁶En mi pueblo había sequía. No daba producción. Nosotros somos cinco hermanos y mi padre no podía ayudarnos ni con el estudio ni con nada más...entonces yo jovencito tenía que encontrar trabajo y vine a encontrarlo. Antes estuve en el cuartel en Sucre y después en la ciudad de Oruro por una temporada. Trabajaba como sombrerero, posteriormente me he dedicado a moler sal y he hecho también el albañil. Ahora desde cuando he venido estuve en la Academia en la policía. Mi padre no podía soventarme, yo me soventaba con mi propio. El trabajo me soventaba, así que me quedé allí. La migración me ha traído hasta aquí'(Don Justo, August, 2004).

to recall. He is proud to recall that they were among the first residents to move to Senkata, in the area of *25 de Julio*. He often talks about the difficulties of that time, when water, electricity and transport were very scarce. His wife, Doña Ana, is a *cholita*³⁷ who opened her kiosk in the Extranca of Senkata –the main market place of the neighbourhood and on the Avenida Seis de Marzo, after the birth of her first daughter in the 1980s. She sells coffee with bread in the mornings and evenings at 1.20/1.30 bolivianos or 2 bolivianos when it comes with powered milk. Every morning she wakes at 5am to go to the bakery to buy bread for the kiosk. She starts work early, when the Extranca is full of people waiting for transport to go to work, and normally finishes at 10am. She then comes back home to prepare lunch and returns to the kiosk in the afternoon, around 3 or 3.30pm, finishing at 7 or 7.30pm.

The Condoris also have a small shop in one of the main squares of Senkata, where their house is. There they sell bread, soft drinks, sweets, biscuits, notebooks, pencils and pens. In the past, Doña Ana was in charge of the shop with an employee, usually a young *cholita* from the countryside, working in the kiosk. Today this is no longer possible, because ‘you cannot find an honest *cholita* these days’, as Doña Ana explained to me on several occasions. The last one they employed was very dishonest: she went out with men, drank a lot and stole money. This is why Doña Ana has decided not to have employees anymore. Nowadays the family prefers to share the work and the shop has become the responsibility of the younger daughter, Maya, who opens it every

³⁷ Ethnic term for a rural-urban migrant, most often used for women who work in commerce and wear a *polliera*, shawl and bowler hat (Lazar 2002). *Cholita* is diminutive of *chola* and, in theory, young single women who dress in this way. Nevertheless, I found many married women defining themselves as *cholitas*.

morning at 6.30am. She works until midday and then goes to school between 2 and 6pm. Apart from selling in the shop, she has to prepare food for their dog and clean the house. Her mother is the one who is in charge of preparing the family meals. Lunch and dinner are carefully prepared after she comes back from her work in the kiosk. Once a week Don Justo takes care of the shop too, when he is not in his police job in La Paz. On those days, Maya is allowed to sleep in or spend more time on her studies.

Working in La Paz means that Don Justo is often out of the house; some evenings he does not come back home, because of night shifts. Doña Ana takes care of the household as well as of the kiosk and the shop³⁸, managing the money she earns and dealing with the expenses for the family and for her work. Her earnings are used to maintain the household, while Don Justo's wage supports Bartolina, her elder daughter, who is studying economics at the UMSS (Universidad Mayor de San Simón), in Cochabamba³⁹. Doña Ana told me that Bartolina always says that once she finishes university, she will be able to find a good job and support her parents, so that they will not have to worry about anything.

Their most important goal in life is seeing their daughters become professionals and giving them the opportunities of gaining a university degree. Don Justo told

³⁸ The Condori example illustrates the observations of Valdarema and Escalante. 'La mujer es el cimiento de la casa (...) no debe repartir sus bienes. Si una mujer no se empeña a progresar, tampoco el hombre se empeña en adquirir cualquier cosa. Ambos deben adquirir de mutuo acuerdo' –'the woman is the foundation of the house (...)she does not have to disperse her goods. If a woman does not put an effort into progressing, the man will not put an effort into anything. Both have to work together to obtain something'. (Valdarema and Escalante 1997:161).

³⁹ The cost of enrolling in public universities is around 27 bolivianos –about 3US\$, per year.

me: 'I have to go on working for my family. They need help so that they can study and become professionals. I have to keep working. This is the inheritance that I'm going to leave to my daughters'⁴⁰. And he added:

Living well with the family is the most important thing. Affection and love as well as trust are the most important things. And I was very lucky, because I found a woman like Doña Ana. Every day I thank the Lord for her and for my daughters.⁴¹

Six years ago Don Justo and Doña Ana converted from Catholicism and joined a Protestant congregation (Seventh-Day Adventists). Their conversion was particularly the result of concerns about health and a desire to avoid alcohol, but also because they think that the new congregation is more united and helpful than the Catholic parish where the Codoris used to go. Don Justo thinks that there are problems within the Catholic parish and that members over there are not free to take their own decisions. In the Protestant congregation people really care about each other and help one another in times of hardship. As Catholics, they had to participate in the fiesta of *25 de Julio*, performing traditional dances, acting as *pasante/preste* (sponsor), and drinking alcohol. 'This is fine if you don't have kids and you are still young' Don Justo told me, but 'once you get older and your health is not as good as before and you need to think of your children, and give an example of how to lead a good life...then you cannot get drunk and lose money'.

Before Don Justo and Doña Ana joined the Protestant congregation, they were among the best dancers of the confraternidad Morenada in Senkata. They showed me pictures of when they danced Morenada in honour of San

⁴⁰ "Tengo que aguantar por mi familia. Necesitan que les ayude para que estudien y salgan profesionales. Tengo que seguir trabajando. Es la herencia que les voy a dar a mis hijas"

Santiaguito -Saint James, every 25th of July. Today they have to think about their daughters, saving money for their university studies, and about their own health. Don Justo recently suffered from cancer and he had to have an operation, which was successful. He often repeats that he survived thanks to the will and mercy of God. He said that many people asked him: 'How strong is your God? How come you survived?'. He replies that 'his' God is the most powerful one and that he was protected because he had faith.

While Don Justo and Doña Ana are Seventh-Day Adventists, their two daughters remain Catholic. Doña Ana sometimes participates in the celebrations of the Catholic Church as well, because she says that in the end 'He is always the same God'. When Don Justo fell ill, the family contacted a Catholic priest they are close to and asked him to pray for his health. Thus, despite their conversion, they still maintain some connections with the Catholic Church. This is very common in El Alto, as the work of Gill (1993) has also shown.

I enjoyed living with the Condoris for a while and also rented one of their two houses in the year I was in Bolivia. In this way, I came to know them very well and observed some aspects of their lives relevant to the topic of well-being. In the local context of Senkata the Condoris correspond to the description of *Qamiri*, that is to say that they are well off. They own two houses, one in which they live, which is *de piso* (two floors), and another which they usually rent out. They own a car, a shop, a kiosk and one of their daughters studies at university. The present situation is the result of years of hard work. In fact, Don Justo and

⁴¹ 'Vivir bien con la familia es la cosa más importante. El cariño y el amor así como la confianza

Doña Ana both come from humble rural backgrounds, and they went through a time of hardship when they first arrived in La Paz. They represent an example of success in improving their material condition and accumulating resources, as many Senkata residents emphasised. Nevertheless, accumulating resources in the urban space is not easy and success is not automatic nor is it seen unanimously as a fundamental aspect of well-being, and as I will show in the next chapter, it can also lead to ill-being through neighbours' jealousy. In fact, Don Justo often told me that the most important thing is household harmony (*la armonía en la casa*) or *Suma Jakaña*, and not how much you own.

Their accumulation of resources has probably been helped by the limited number of children they had and the fixed monthly income Don Justo receives from his police job –and also probably by the fact that they are Protestant and, therefore, not obliged to sponsor the local *fiesta* (see Chapter 5). In comparison to other families who do not have fixed monthly incomes, this represents a big advantage in material terms. Having a small number of children means that they can send them to university, so that later on their daughters can find a good job as *profesionales* to support their parents in their old age.

'*Estar mal*', being not fine within the household, is manifested through conflicts or illness. When one of the household members has health problems, as in the case of Don Justo, everybody in the household is affected, and members think that they are unlucky and that they need to find a way of getting back their *Suma Jakaña*. Interestingly, when talking about the household, only positive aspects

son las cosas más importante. Y yo tuve mucha suerte porque encontré a una mujer como Doña

are emphasised in public. Usually, bad luck and illness, caused mainly by the evil eye, and domestic violence linked with drunkenness and lack of cash and resources are silenced or shared only with the family members. The latter secretly get in contact with supernatural forces in order to turn their bad luck through *cambio de suerte*, and transform their ill-being into well-being. This transformation happens in silence too, because the surrounding environment is considered to be alive.

The rituals adopted by Amachuma and Senkata residents to change their luck are usually only open to members of the household and exclude the rest of the community. In fact, the house is commonly the place where rituals for *Suma Jakaña* take place. The practice of creating well-being for the household, *Suma Jakaña*, is in opposition to the practice of generating well-being for the community, or *Suma Qamaña*. While the former is carried out in secret and private, the latter is openly and publicly performed. The former is embodied in spiritual rituals in the house, while the latter is materialised through social protests, public ceremonies with devotional connotations for religious forces as well as fiestas in honour of the patron Saint.

Through my daily work and living in the household, I became part of it. With the passing of time, the Condoris considered me to be their third daughter. By becoming fully a household member, I had an obligation to share the problems affecting the family and to find a solution to them in collaboration with the others. The following incident took place in the month of August 2004, when

Ana. Cada día agradezco al Señor por ella y por mis hijas’.

conflicts began to appear in the Condori household because of a tension between individual and household well-being.

'On Sunday I'm going to get married': the story of Maya

The first time I met Maya, she told me that she wanted to become a nun. However, her parents said to her that she was too young to go to a Convent. "First of all, finish high school and then you can decide what to do!", they would repeat to her. A few months later, Maya stopped talking about the Convent. On a June Sunday, during a questions/answers game, she explained to the rest of her friends' group that her biggest dream was to go to university, become a doctor and get married. I knew she was in love. Every afternoon, after school, around 5pm, she would stop in the main Senkata Square with her girlfriends. Juan, born in the same year, would arrive soon afterwards with some friends. They would talk and talk until Doña Ana came looking for her, wondering why she had not returned back home yet.

One day, at the beginning of August 2004, I moved to the Condori's second house in exchange for a small monthly payment (US\$13), which was refused in the last months of fieldwork. The fact I moved there did not change my position within the household. Two weeks later, Maya came to visit me with one of her friends. 'On Sunday I'm going to get married to Juan', she said. I was very surprised. I knew it could not be a real wedding. 'Well, it's a promise of love, it's common to do it among young people here in El Alto. You promise to love and respect your partner in front of your friends. It's a beautiful 'celebration'. I did it too, a month ago' announced her friend, Ana Maria. Maya was coming to

ask me if they could carry out the ceremony in my place, which was actually the property of her parents.

On the chosen Sunday, around 1pm, everything was ready in the courtyard of my house. Maya came out from my bedroom with her friends, wearing a beautiful long white dress. Juan took her hand and they walked together towards a small table. Guido, whom I described in Chapter 2, was standing on the other side of the table, and he made a speech on the importance of loving as well as respecting, protecting and taking care of each other. Then he asked Juan: 'Do you, Juan, promise in front of all of us that you are going to love, respect, and protect Maya?'. 'Yes, I do'. 'And do you, Maya, promise in front of all of us that you are going to love, respect, and protect Juan?'. 'Yes, I do'. They exchanged two gold coloured rings. Juan started to cry and Guido added: 'Let's ask God to protect you and your promise, and let's hope that in 8, 10 or 12 years, we will meet again to celebrate your wedding. You never know, but I really hope that it can last and that you can get married'. We toasted with sweet wine and four witnesses went to sign the 'official document' of the promise, a yellow page in a notebook. Then the dances began. Time passed very quickly and around 4pm the majority of the guests had left for their homes.

Later on, when Maya and Juan's families found out about their promise of love, they were very angry and forbade the couple to meet and participate in the activities of their youth group. Juan's father went to see Maya's mother and they had a big discussion: he accused her of not being able to control her daughter and not being a good mother. On the other hand, Doña Ana accused Juan of not

leaving her daughter alone, putting the responsibility on his father: 'You should teach him not to bother a young girl like my daughter'. Things got worse when Don Justo also accused his wife of not being a good mother and threatened her to leave the family. 'Either you control her or I go forever!' he said.

Doña Ana contacted Guido and me. She wanted to talk to us. She trusted both of us and wanted to hear our version. Maya had told her lots of lies, saying that she had never made a promise of love, and that, on that Sunday, we were actually celebrating the birthday of one of her school teachers. We told her the truth and had a long talk about teenagers and adolescence, and how there should be a mutual understanding between parents and children. She asked us if Juan was a good boy, and we assured her that he was. Finally, we agreed that I would have to talk with Maya (concerning the lies she told her parents and since I was her fictive older sister), and that Guido would talk to Juan and his father to solve the conflict between the two families as soon as possible. Things settled down slowly and everything went back to normal. Maya and Juan continued to meet after school in the main Square, and were allowed to go to the meetings of their youth group. When I left in November 2004, they were at the airport in El Alto to wave goodbye, holding hands and crying because I was leaving.

However, when I went back in August 2005, they were no longer together and were not even speaking to each other. Maya told me that Juan was always jealous, and that it was impossible to be with him. At the same time, she admitted that she had lots of problems with her parents and she couldn't handle the pressure they were putting on her, but that she was happier now because her

school grades were back to normal. Last year, when she was with Juan, she had the worst year of her school career and her grades had dropped drastically. 'School comes first', she told me.

There are several reasons why the Condoris were furious because Maya had a boyfriend. First of all, they were extremely concerned that she could become pregnant and by the fact that she might stop studying. At the same time, I suspect that they were not at all happy with her choice of boyfriend, because Juan was from a family of a lower economic and social status. By not informing her parents and by taking her own decision, Maya was also challenging and not respecting their authority. This story raises important issues related to individual effort, obligation and status, and implications regarding questions of ethics and responsibility of the researcher.

Both Don Justo and Doña Ana often praised Bartolina's good character in contrast to Maya, adding that Maya is a real rebel, while Bartolina is a very good daughter. The older daughter is often mentioned as an example to follow and as a model of good behaviour. They would often refer to me as well, indicating how good I was because I was doing a Phd. A university degree automatically guarantees approval and gives value to the person that holds it. There is no critical evaluation of the real capacities and of the personality of people: as *profesionales* (professionals) they 'cannot be bad'. Education presupposes a higher degree of intelligence and morality. Having a university degree and becoming a *profesional* is a symbol of status, regardless of people's real capacities of the people and, indeed, an opportunity for social advancement.

Maya's story is also indicative of the fundamental role of individual effort, obligation and the influence of parental authority; she had to sacrifice her love and focus on her education as her parents wished. It did not matter whether she was really interested in going to university or not. Her desires and aspirations were not taken into consideration. She was asked to think of the implications in the long-term and, she complied, accepting the wisdom of her parents' or of 'the older generations'. Moreover, courtship and marriage are serious affairs that have an important influence on the harmony of the household and that can negatively affect the different 'wraps' an individual is involved in, from the household to the community. The possibility that the Condoris could begin serious and long-lasting conflicts with Juan's family was feared from both sides, since this would also undoubtedly have an effect on the larger community, involving extended families and different networks, and possibly involving supernatural forces as well. Some people use the evil eye against their enemies when there are some conflicts.

As I noticed through this incident, each individual belonging to the household had to collaborate when conflicts arose. As an adopted child, I had to give my contribution as did the other household members. Bartolina, who was in Cochabamba at that time, was asked to participate as well, and had to talk to her sister on the phone to correct her behaviour. I also realised that it is the household that teaches the meaning of obligation to younger generations. The latter have to be respectful and obedient, following the principle of Aymara

authority (see also Lazar 2002). This is true in the rural as well as in the urban context.

Grootaert (2000) indicates that the ownership or earning of capital might constitute an important element in selecting who can take decisions within the household, regardless of his or her gender. This is true in the case of the Condoris. Don Justo is the head of the household and the decision-maker and also earns a stable income. He is the one who also decides the punishments for the children; when Maya's story with Juan took place, Don Justo decided to forbid her to attend their youth group and to see Juan again.

Suma Jakaña is not easy to achieve. It involves the obligation, work and effort of the entire household. It is lived in the here and now, but also entails an aspiration for the future and the fundamental value of living well together. Also, it is not continuous in the sense that it might be only momentary; conflicts, envy and illness might arrive unexpected. A solution can be found with the collaboration of all the household members. However, what happens when this is not possible? In the next case study, I analyse a different household and a different reaction to issues related to family harmony and conflicts.

(ii) *The Quispes*

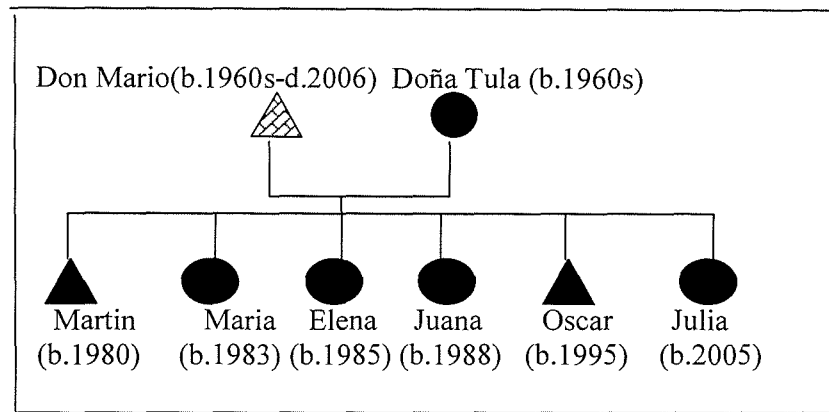



Figure no. 2 - Quispe Household Diagram
Black = Living under the same roof /  = Deceased

The Quispe family moved to Senkata with the urbanisation of *25 de Julio* neighbourhood in 1994, that is to say twelve years after the Condoris moved into the area. Before that they lived in the area of *16 de Julio*, one of the oldest areas of El Alto. Don Mario was a first generation migrant from the Aroma province, while Doña Tula is from the neighbouring province of Gualberto Villaroel, also in the department of La Paz. They both came to El Alto to look for work and met in the city. Don Mario committed suicide in his home in April 2006. Since I was not there during that period, it is difficult to understand the reasons for his action. Rumours among the neighbours suggest that his suicide was connected with debts and family conflicts. This tragic event took place after my fieldwork and this section is based on material collected during 2003 and 2004.

After Don Mario and Doña Tula married at the end of the seventies, they had their first child, Martín, who was born in 1980. ‘It’s bad luck when the first

child of a couple is a boy'⁴², Martín told me once. I asked him to explain why and he added that the economic situation of the couple will never be stable and that the household will always have difficulties in securing its livelihood.

As Mamani Bernabé (2000:58) also writes: 'a baby girl as first child means full house (...), a baby girl means fertility, abundance and good luck'. 'The woman is *taqe*, that is to say larder: she is a being that accumulates things, takes care of them and stays in the house'⁴³ (ibidem: 154). This idea of good fortune associated with the birth of a baby girl as first child appears to be connected with the division of labour within the domestic sphere and the fact that a girl will always help her mother with domestic duties. A boy's role is different because of cultural taboos on the roles of men and women. Therefore, a female first child will allow the mother to spend more time on the working activities outside the household and can also care for younger siblings.

A corollary of this is that although there are no differences in terms of educational opportunities, boys usually have a higher degree of freedom than girls. Martín admits that his mother allows him to stay out as late as he wishes and does not impose any restrictions on his free time. On the other hand, his three sisters, who were also born in the 1980s, have to stay at home or help in the family business, and are not allowed to stay out for long. 'It looks like my house is like a convent. Sometimes I ask my mum to give my sisters a little bit of freedom', Martín commented one day.

⁴² 'Es mala suerte cuando el primer bebé de una pareja es un niño'.

Interestingly, male dominance and authority in the households of El Alto are reproduced with the support of women, who are the ones who decide the division of labour among their children, as in the case of the Quispes. Since women in El Alto are usually outside the house, working in the markets or in the shops of the area, daughters are in charge of the domestic activities (Guaygua et al. 2000). So brothers have more time to relax and to study, and contribute to the welfare of the family by earning money through occasional jobs.

Like Doña Ana, Doña Tula was in charge of the household, since Don Mario used to come back home only for one or two nights a week. He worked in the nearby neighbourhood as a porter in a parking lot. The Aymara house is always seen as a feminine space (Mamani Bernabé 2000; Arnold 1997). When Martín speaks about the role of fathers and mothers, he says: ‘The dad has to go to look for a job to support the children and the mum has to go to sell to take home a bit of money’⁴⁴. Despite the fact that both women and men work to support the household, there is a distinction between the importance given to their work outside the home. In Senkata and Amachuma men’s contributions are considered to be much higher than those of women, who just take a little bit of cash home. Also selling in the market is identified as a ‘light’ job that only women can do. Men have to do other heavier activities in order to support the family.

⁴³ ‘(...)la mujer es *taqe*, es decir es despensa: es un ser que acumula cosas, las cuida, y permanece dentro la casa’.

⁴⁴ ‘El papá tiene que irse a buscar la vida para mantener a los hijos y la mamá tiene que ir a vender para llevar un poco de dinero a la casa’.

Doña Tula started to work in the market of Senkata when she moved to the area in the mid-1990s. She said that you need capital of 1000/1500 bolivianos (125/188US\$) to start selling in the market. Until she had her last baby, who was born in May 2005, she sold personal hygiene products (soaps, toothpaste, washing powder) almost every day of the week. Usually, one of her daughters helped her to carry the goods to the selling place and to arrange the merchandise on the piece of cloth on the ground. She was out of the house for the whole day, going back home only for her meals. The preparation of meals, the cleaning of the house, the laundry and the care of younger brothers and sisters were duties of the older daughters, Maria and Elena.

On the other hand, like most men Martín had to look for a job outside the household. He gives all his income to his mum who is the one that decides how to spend it (all the money of the household is managed by Doña Tula). For a while Martín worked in a workshop, repairing televisions and radios. He often emphasised that it is very important to have ‘a balanced household without economic problems’. ‘When there is a conflict within the house it is always due to lack of cash. The most important thing is harmony and peace among the members of the household’, he admitted. He also said that he would love to go to university, but there is no money to study. Since he is the older brother, he has to contribute to the family income as well as give an example to his siblings. Therefore, as in the case of Maya, Martín must suppress his own desires and aspirations for the well-being of the house.

Two years ago Don Mario and Doña Tula were the sponsors for the Morenada group for the fiesta of *25 de julio*. Martín had to help them, because there was not enough cash. Apart from his job in a repairs workshop, he had to ask for a bank loan in order to open a *tilin* -penny/amusement arcade- very close to their house. He received 500US\$ (4000 bolivianos) from the bank and with that money he rented a shop and bought eight machines with various video games. He was supposed to finish repaying the loan with the interest in March 2006.

Since he was usually busy working during the day, the penny arcade became the responsibility of his three sisters, who took turns to work in the house and the arcade. Martín went back every evening to the penny arcade and usually slept there, since he was worried about thieves. He said that if something were to happen to the shop, he would not be able to pay back the bank loan and he was always very worried about it. Martín wished he had the chance to go to university and to get married. However, before this could happen, he had to support his family and make sure that his sisters were married.

The Quispes had less economic security than the Condoris. They had only one house and no car, nor did they own the shop. Their *Suma Jakaña* had in part relied on a larger number of children, material investment in new businesses and the creation of capital/cash through labour that helped the support of the family as well as the creation of urban-based social relations through their participation in the fiesta as dancers and sponsors, since they were Catholics.

Whether Don Mario's suicide was due to economic instability, or conflicts with the other members of the household, it was definitely a moment of ill-being, desperation as well as failure. This shows how success in the urban context is not automatic, and how difficult it is to accumulate resources and to prosper. Success is also a difficult aspect to measure, since there is always a subjective dimension that eludes universal definition. Even in the dramatic case of Don Mario, no-one can say that the ultimate reason for committing suicide was economic instability or conflicts within the family. Don Mario's suicide reveals the complexity of ideas relating to this topic and represents only the tip of an iceberg.

Recently, further residents' rumours were communicated to me on the phone and they suggested that Don Mario had had serious problems with his wife. For a while, they had been sleeping in separate rooms, and the night before his suicide they had a serious argument. Apparently, Don Mario was waiting for his daughter Juana in the Extranca for a very long time. Juana is now working in downtown La Paz and comes back home every evening when it is already dark. Don Mario used to go to pick her up, because, at that moment of the evening, walking around on your own can be dangerous. However, on the evening before his suicide, Don Mario waited for a long time, while Juana was already at home, since she had finished her work earlier. None of the members of the family had thought of going to the Extranca to let Don Mario know, and he waited in vain. When he returned home, he was furious and he had an argument with his wife. In the account of their neighbours, the conflicts in the Quispe couple were identified as the main causes for his action.

The suicide of Don Mario is the expression of a clear dissociation from the other members of the household. Instead of looking for a group solution as in the case of the Condoris, Don Mario opted for an individual one. Resorting to such a dramatic action implies that Don Mario did not feel part of the household anymore and, therefore, made public and explicit what was considered secret and private. Before, the conflicts menacing household and community harmony were kept behind the house walls in absolute silence; now, with Don Mario's suicide, they came to surface and became visible. Rumours began soon after and some relatives of Don Mario, especially his brother, called the police to ask for an investigation into the case, provoking fear, worry and shame among the household members. Don Mario's action also suggests his loss of hope for the future. Thus, there is an emphasis on his personal conviction that it was impossible to aspire to *Suma Jakaña* in the near or distant future. The kind of ill-being experienced by Don Mario was not considered normal, containable and predictable, becoming definitely dysfunctional and leading him to extreme action.

While I write about this case study, I think about the movie *The Secret Nation* by the Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines. The main character, Sebastian Mamani, a rural migrant who moves to La Paz and decides to change his name to Maisman to conceal his indigenous origins, is exiled by his rural community after some corruption issues during his mandate as community leader. He is not only separated from the community, but also from his mother and wife, who take the decision not to follow him to the city. He is left completely on his own

and lives in a constant state of unhappiness and ill-being, since he is away from his wife, family and community. He decides to go back home to die after participating in a dancing ritual. In the movie as well as in the case study of the Quispes, when *Suma Jakaña* is denied for different reasons, individuals resort to extreme actions to avoid solitude and loneliness, and to change their lives. The centrality of the heterosexual couple and ideas of gender complementarity have played a very important role from Inca times (Silverblatt, 1987) until the present (Carter and Mamani 1989; Abercombie 1998; Harris 2000).

(iii) The Choques

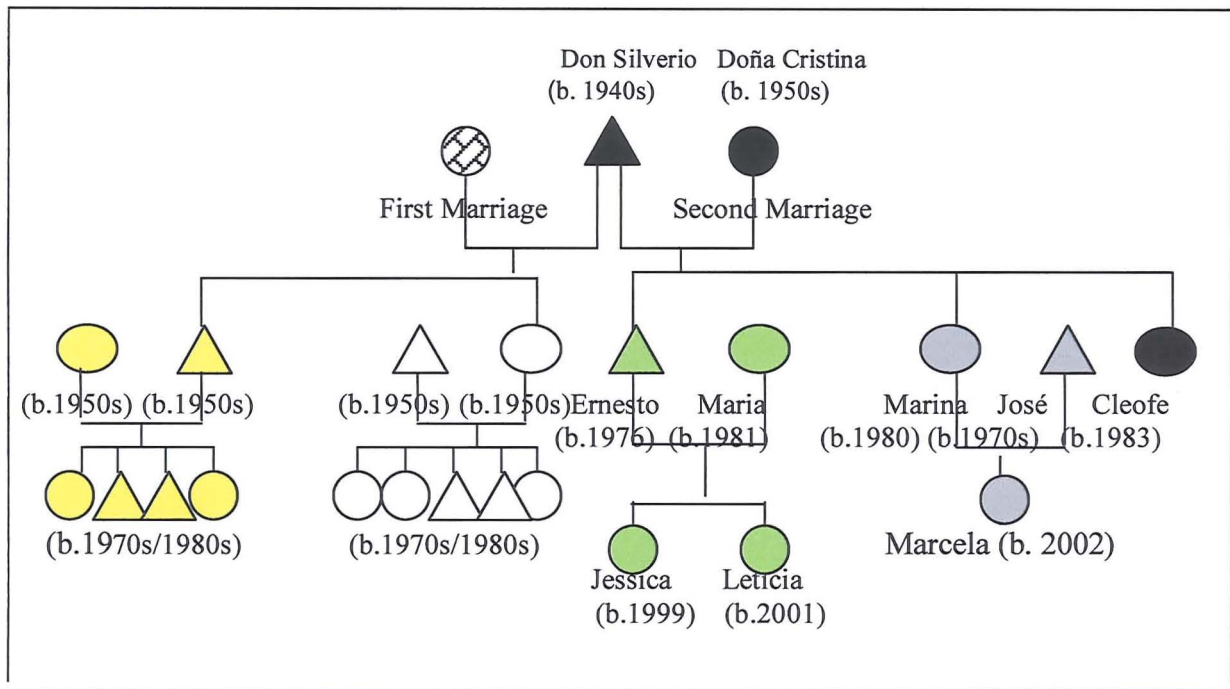


Figure no. 3 – Choque Household Diagram
 Black = Living under the same roof in Ventilla
 Green = Living under the same roof in Amachuma
 Grey = Living under the same roof in Villa Fatima
 White = Living under the same roof in Amachuma
 Yellow = Living under the same roof in Amachuma
 ☉ = Deceased

Don Silverio is from Amachuma, but he has been living in Ventilla, El Alto, since the mid-1990s. He has been married twice: some years after his first wife died, he married a younger partner, Doña Cristina, who is also from Amachuma. They lived in Amachuma for nineteen years, working as farmers, and then they decided to move to the neighbourhood of Ventilla on the Oruro highway, just beyond Senkata. The reasons for moving to Ventilla, which is only 15 minutes by car from Amachuma, are mostly connected with their need for a cash income. They told me that they liked living in Amachuma, but there they had only *chuño* (freeze-dried potatoes) and potatoes to eat. Therefore, Doña Cristina decided to open a small shop selling food supplies at the Cruce in Ventilla, as well as a *comedor popular* (very cheap restaurant). The restaurant is frequented

by regular customers who come for lunch almost every day. In the majority of cases, they are minibus drivers on the route from Ventilla to La Ceja or from Ventilla to Amachuma. Lunch costs five bolivianos, less than one US\$ and includes soup, main meat dish and bread.

Doña Cristina starts to cook at 6am every morning because at this altitude the large quantities she needs to prepare take a long time to cook. Vilma, a cholita who lives in Ventilla, comes to help her. For a while, I worked there too in exchange for my daily lunch, washing dishes and serving customers. The restaurant remains open until 2pm with the highest concentration of customers coming around 11.30am and 12pm. Doña Cristina and Vilma work between the kitchen and the courtyard in order to prepare the meals and, sometimes, they have to work in the shop as well. This is often the case when Doña Cristina's younger daughter, Cleofe, is busy with her studies. Cleofe, who is 22 years old, is attending a course to become a secretary and three days a week she has to go to La Ceja for her classes. Sometimes, Don Silverio works in the shop, but he has recently had heart problems and needs to rest.

Doña Cristina closes her restaurant only in August (the month of the Pachamama), when she moves to the Waraq'o Apacheta on the carretera Oruro. She usually works and lives there with Vilma until the beginning of September. Doña Cristina owns a small kiosk in the Waraq'o Apacheta, which she converts into a small restaurant during the Pachamama month. The Choques represent an interesting example of a strategy that spans different *alteño* districts -this is very

common in El Alto. In Amachuma they still own some fields and a house⁴⁵, where at the moment their son Ernesto is living with his wife and daughters. They are in charge of agricultural production and caring for the livestock (3 cows, 5 chicken).

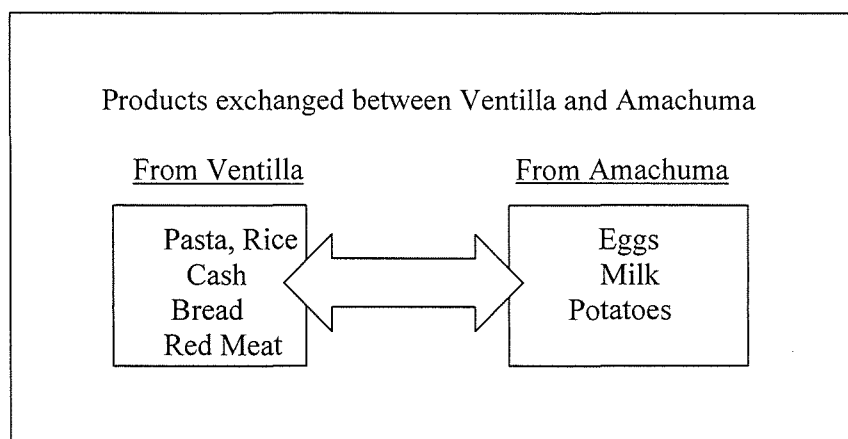
More specifically, it is Doña Maria's duty to take care of the livestock and of the milk production: every day a van from the PIL -milk factory, come to Amachuma to collect the milk, so she has to wake up at 5am to milk the cows. She is the one responsible for the household and the children: Don Ernesto works in the city as a bus driver and, when he finishes very late, he spends the night at his parents' home in Ventilla, where he also goes to have lunch every day. Don Ernesto is a local leader on the residents' committee of Ventilla, although he lives in Amachuma. When it comes to the organisation of agricultural work, it is important to note that all the household participates in the various phases of the production cycle: Doña Cristina, Cleofe, Don Silverio (when he was in good health) return to Amachuma for the harvest or the planting to help their son and daughter-in-law.

The Ventilla cell is just an extension of the one in Amachuma. While the Amachuma household unit has to focus on the production of food and the sale of milk, the Ventilla one has to intensify the commercial activity (for instance, through the shop and restaurant) in order to generate a cash income (the profit from the restaurant and the shop is around 9US\$ a day). They are in constant

⁴⁵ When I lived in Amachuma, I rented a room in this house and lived with Ernesto, his wife and daughters.

contact and exchange their products on a regular basis. Don Silverio and Don Ernesto travel by car to Amachuma or Ventilla to exchange products and cash.

There is a sense of generalised reciprocity between the different units; that is to say that there is a long-standing and established connection and exchange. This also takes place in relation to specific needs, for instance, if the roof needs fixing or a new cow needs to be bought. In the following picture, it is possible to observe the main products exchanged by the two sites. The products from Ventilla are usually bought, while the ones from Amachuma are part of local production.



Normally, younger generations would be expected to leave Amachuma to go to the city to work. However, in the case of the Choques, the opposite is true: the older generations left Amachuma to live and work in Ventilla. Selling is considered to be a 'lighter' job and this is why it is left to elderly people or women. In addition, I suspect that Ernesto's parents also moved to Ventilla because of Don Silverio's health, to be close to hospitals and health centres.

The rest of the Choque household is not really involved in this daily exchange pattern, although sometimes there are occasional gifts –food and work: Marina

lives far from her parental family and she tries to visit them once every second week. On the other hand, Don Silverio's children from his first marriage live in Amachuma, but they are closer to their affinal families, with whom they have developed daily collaborative strategies and exchanges.

The work marks the roles of the members of the household and allows them to plan long-term survival strategies together. The Choque household has two houses, and two main sets of economic activities around which work roles are organised between the city and the countryside. This could imply a redefinition of the term household, where movement, interchanges, and different locations would appear as fundamental factors in delineating it, especially in El Alto, where, as mentioned before, this is quite common. Co-operation is fundamental for the survival of the different household units, who are also very involved in the celebrations of the community/ies.

The Choques are Catholics and enjoy participating in the different celebrations that take place in Amachuma. In Ventilla, their relation with other residents is tense and difficult. When I asked why, they answered that other residents are envious of their wealth and of their access to agricultural products. Other residents in Ventilla wish they had the same exchange opportunities and possibilities. But they live far from their communities of origin, while the Choques are only 15 minutes away by car from Amachuma. This is a great advantage that helps them to overcome the difficulties of urban life and to survive in times of hardship.

The tensions with other residents arose when the Choques claimed a piece of land that they had bought a few months before and that the *Junta Vecinal* (local residents' committee) had decided to sell to new buyers. As the work of Lazar (2002) has shown, the *Junta Vecinal* and the *Junta Escolar* (parents' association for those who have school-age children) are the main local community authorities in El Alto. Adult residents are represented through the local committees that meet every month and that take the most important decisions concerning the area: which works to carry out, how to improve the zone, how to organise community events, such as social protests and religious festivities. Residents get together at these meetings, which are usually well-attended. Having issues with the *Junta Vecinal* or the decisions taken by the community/ies can be problematic.

Conflicts arise in the household as we have seen in the previous examples, but they can also arise in the community/ies, as in the case of the Choques. Both cases are seen as examples of everyday ill-being. In August 2005, when I returned to Ventilla, the Choques were so worried about these community tensions that they decided it was time to move to Tarija, another city in the far south-east of Bolivia. The situation had become unbearable: physical assaults, oral abuses and fear of being affected by the evil eye. The Choques felt they had lost their *Suma Jakaña*, since they felt vulnerable, unsafe and insecure. Also, they felt isolated by the rest of the community, and took the decision to leave.

They could have gone back to Amachuma, where they always had excellent relations with the other members of the community. However, the prospect of

returning was not considered, because going back meant to fail, and the Choques did not wish to be associated with failure in their community of origin. They wanted to maintain their image as successful migrants. Another important factor in their decision not to go back was Don Silverio's health: his heart was weak and he needed to live at a lower altitude. Doña Cristina saw Tarija as a possible new place to develop her restaurant. Last time I was in Bolivia, the Choques were still living in Ventilla, but their hope to move to Tarija was a driving force for the entire household. They were all collaborating in saving money to fulfil their dream, looking for a collective solution to their present ill-being, so that the latter could be containable and not dysfunctional.

(iv) *The Mamanis*

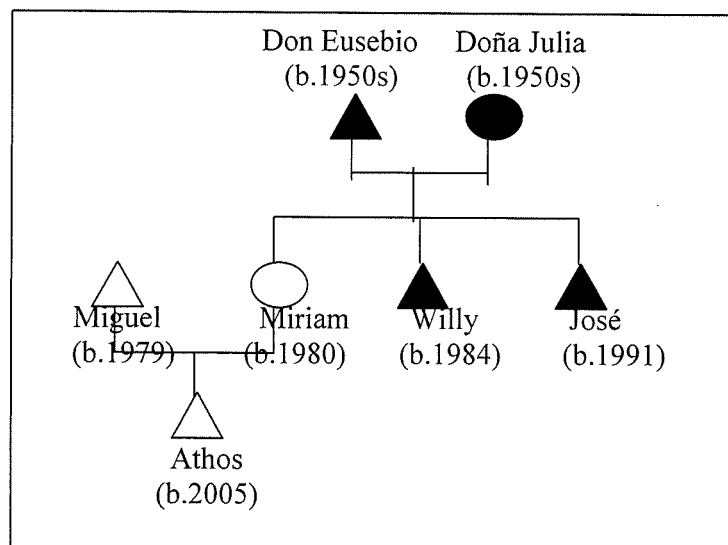


Figure no. 4 – Mamani Household Diagram
 Black = Living under the same roof in Senkata
 White = Living under the same roof in Villa Tunari

Don Eusebio and Doña Julia arrived in Senkata at the beginning of the nineties after living in *16 de Julio*, another area of El Alto. They are both from Loayza province to the south of La Paz, from the communities of Cairoma and Huchambaya. In 1996 the couple and their youngest son migrated to Argentina for a period, while their eldest daughter and their other son continued to live in

Senkata on their own. In Argentina Don Eusebio learnt how to sew. They lived in Buenos Aires for six years and worked in a garment factory. However, after the Argentine crisis in 2001, they decided to return to Bolivia. Nowadays Don Eusebio has a small workshop in his house, based on the skills learnt in Argentina. He owns two knitting machines with which he produces sweaters that his wife usually sells in La Ceja or in Oruro. Doña Julia travels once or twice a week to Oruro, especially during the winter, because she says that it is colder there and there is more demand for these clothes. Their household is organised around this productive and commercial activity.

Willy, the second child, studies mechanical engineering at the UMSA (Universidad Mayor San Andrés, the public university of La Paz). José attends high school in 16 de Julio and Miriam gave birth to a baby boy in February 2005, so she had to interrupt university where she had been studying for a degree in economics. She met her partner at university and once she got pregnant, they both had to withdraw from their courses due to lack of income. Miguel, her partner, now works as a builder in a private company in charge of paving public roads for the Bolivian government. Miriam moved with Miguel to Villa Tunari, another area of El Alto, but often comes to visit her family and spend days with them, especially over the weekends.

Don Eusebio has always been willing to expand his business and often asked me how to develop it. More specifically, he was interested in seeing whether it would be possible to export his products abroad. However, he admits that this is very difficult and that he does not have money and contacts to do so. Expansion

of commercial activity is a common topic of conversation, especially among the members of the extended family.

As a good friend of Miriam and Willy, I was chosen as the *madrina* - godmother⁴⁶, of baby Athos, who was born in February 2005 and was given my father's name. When they asked me which name I would prefer for the baby, I said that I would love to call him Emiliano, in honour of the Mexican revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata. Unfortunately, they did not like the idea and opted for Athos. Miriam often says that she wanted me to be his godmother, since they believe that godparents pass on their personalities to their godchildren.

As well as potentially passing on character traits to their godchild, godparents have the moral obligation to take an ongoing interest in their life, contributing to the general well-being of the child and to that of their parents. As Athos' godmother, I was first of all asked to be his *madrina de bautizo* -godmother of baptism, and, therefore, I was expected to contribute to the expenses of the religious ceremony. The ties of *compadrazgo* are first established informally, when the parents ask the godparents if they want to accept this duty. Once they have accepted, the tie is officially announced through a formal lunch.

⁴⁶ Kinship appears to be fundamental for the economic as well as the social organisation of the family. Kinship can also be created through the establishment of relationships with a child's godparents, known as *compadrazgo*, literally co-paternity. Through the creation of these bonds, there is a formalisation of previous friendship ties and the beginning of a new relationship based on mutual economic and social support. It can be established between people of the same class position or with someone of higher status or class than the parent (Lazar 2002; Bolton and Mayer 1977; Mintz and Wolf 1977; Long 1984).

The Mamanis prepared a *watya* for me, a special lunch cooked in an earthen oven in the courtyard of their house, and invited some of their neighbours. I was given the biggest portion, because the lunch was in my honour and it was a welcoming ritual as a new member of the family. My dish was full of potatoes, yam, salad, chicken and pork. Food and its preparation are always central markers of an event and the degree of involvement of both the guest and the host; production and consumption of food are fundamental among household members (see also Bourque 1995) and important in ties of god parenthood when the household gets extended. The abundance of food is a metaphor for future prosperity in the exchanges between godparents and parents, but also a way to thank the godparents in anticipation of their future contributions.

As Athos' godmother I paid for the religious ceremony (25 bolivianos -around 3US\$); I also bought a white dress for the baby, some clothes and toys plus the decorations for the Church. On the other hand, my *compadres* were in charge of the reception. Another *watya* with abundant beer was offered to all the guests, other *compadres* of the family and friends. Two weeks later, I was asked to cut baby Athos' hair for the first time, becoming *madrina de rutucha*⁴⁷. Although this ritual is usually carried out when the child is around two or three years old or even a little bit later on, I was asked to do it before I left Bolivia, when baby Athos was only six months old. This was because they believe that only the godmothers can cut the children's hair for the first time to wish them good luck. They also were not completely sure about the date of my return. Therefore, they thought it was better to do it immediately, in case I was not able to come back

soon. There was also another important reason. Before the *rutucha*, girls and boys have the same hairstyle (Spedding, 1998:126), but, after it, they are taken to the hairdresser to get a cut appropriate to their gender. This was a very important issue for Doña Julia, Athos' grandmother. She said that the baby looked like a baby girl and she wanted to be able to take him to the hairdresser to have an appropriately new 'masculine' hairstyle.

During the *rutucha* ceremony, every time I cut a wisp of the baby's hair, I had to say '*para que tenga suerte*' ('for good luck'). The hair has to be conserved and the godmother has to leave some money with it in order to increase prosperity, good luck and economic stability for the godchild and the family. Relatives and *vecinos* can also be invited, but, on this occasion, the Mamanis decided to have a quiet ceremony. This is understandable since they had recently invested so much effort in the baptism and in the formal lunch they prepared for me. Even the Choques (household iii above) decided to do the same with Ernesto's daughter, Jessica, who was born in 1999. Her aunt Marina, who was also her godmother, cut her hair at home on a Thursday afternoon after the small restaurant had closed. A few members of the family and I witnessed the event and were offered a few glasses of beer to celebrate. As Spedding (1998:126) has also demonstrated, the degree of elaboration of the ritual and the celebration can vary considerably and can go from small domestic events to big parties that involve all the community/ies. In this last case, participants have to contribute a sum of money, proportionate to their social status.

⁴⁷ This is the Quechua term, commonly used in El Alto and Amachuma. In Aymara, it is usually

This is considered to be a form of *ayni* and, normally, people take note of the amount of money guests have given. Later on, at other *rutuchas*, the family of the child needs to participate with the same sum of money that was donated by each participant in each different party. It is not only the bond between the child and the godparent that is important, but what assumes relevance is the bond between entire households. It is the creation of a larger community that lives in harmony, providing an escape from vulnerability, insecurity and isolation. Indeed, harmony within the extended family guarantees *Suma Jakaña*.

Conclusions

The chapter has described *Suma Jakaña* or ‘the good life’ at the household level. The different case studies have revealed how harmony within the household, and to an extent with kin and neighbours, constitutes one of the most important aspects of well-being in the here and now, and also in anticipation of the future. Conflicts with children, partners, kin or neighbours are identified as forms of ill-being. Ill-being becomes dysfunctional when it is not possible to find a collective solution, when the individual feels isolated and lonely, unable to be reintegrated in the various social networks of which he or she is a part, as the examples of Don Mario (case ii) and of the Choques (case iii) have shown.

In the descriptions of the four case studies presented in this chapter, the household unifies aspects of mutual feeding, of collectivity, and authority (Guaygua et al., 2000), as can be seen in the roles played out by its members. The household is an everyday community, a source of collaboration and harmony, but, it is also a site of conflict and ill-being. All the household

called *muruchico* o *murucha* and it comes from the word *muru*, that means “rapado” –shaven,

members have to compromise and sacrifice for the common good. A successful household is a household that lives in harmony.

The condition of well-being is significant at all time, because change and ill-being in forms of conflicts and illness can always affect the security, the safety and the harmony of everyday life. Thus, the creation of ritual kinship through god parenthood is often adopted as a form of consolidation of harmonious relations within the neighbourhood and with the *Junta Vecinal*, so that situations of conflict such as the one shown through the Choques' case can be avoided.

Social status and economic stability can affect the *Suma Jakaña* of a household, but it is not automatic that the household members will live in harmony if they are wealthy. On the contrary, prosperity can be identified as a source of envy, and envy by other neighbours or supernatural forces is considered to be one of the main sources for ill-being (see the examples of Don Justo and the Choques, and Chapter 4 for more details). This is why secrecy is always required when engaging with household matters (this can be extended to the kinship in case they need to ask for help), whether it is in relation to the amount of money owned or when there are other important issues at the stake.

Individual desires and aspirations should be kept secret as well; they have to be suppressed unless approved by the other household members (see the examples of Maya, Martín and Don Mario). This is considered a moral stance that should be adopted by all with no exceptions in terms of gender or age differences. If an

(Spedding, 1998:126).

individual decides to follow his/her desires and aspirations, and if these are not compatible with those of the other members, then he/she is often expected to give up his/her aspirations or to leave the household for good. This sheds light on how the idea of Aymara personhood is linked to the household and defined through obligation or work within it (Harris 2007).

The individual has to conform to what is required from him/her: unless he/she does so, he/she will not be considered as a morally sound person. And if you are not morally oriented, you cannot live 'the good life'. Relations with other household members and *vecinos* are so important that individuals have to put a lot of effort into 'feeding' them through their work, through exchanges, food, and appropriate decisions, as the four households described in this chapter have shown. There is a moral obligation to contribute to the well-being of the household, a contribution that is projected in the long-term (Bloch 1973; Carsten 2004) and that affects the harmony of the household as well as the community/ies' social order (Fortes 1969).

Maya and Don Mario's stories have also shown that marriage and courtship are very important elements that should not be underestimated. Women tend to work closer to home in order to facilitate combining the tasks of selling goods and caring for the family, whereas in at least two cases the man travels so far for work that he may not return to his home to sleep at night. The wife is responsible for the education of children, and for the division of labour within the domestic sphere. Daughters have less freedom than sons and need to stay at home to take care of younger siblings.

Parents from El Alto usually give preferences in terms of investments to younger children and, more specifically, to the youngest boy (Guaygua et al. 2000: 47). This is due to the fact that investing in the younger son is seen as a investing in the future; he will support his parents in their old age, so he is the one who is allowed to continue his education, because education is considered one of the primary means of upward mobility out of the working classes (Nash 1979).

The decision-making process within the household is indicative of the system of dominance and authority. Usually, parents, that is to say the older generations, decide how to allocate resources and how to spend the money. Sometimes, the refusal to spend money for the consumption of certain goods becomes a form of punishment of the younger generations who are thought to lack respect towards their elders. In my experience, this was true in the case of the fiesta. Young people would ask their parents for the money to pay the fees to rent the dancing costumes. They would receive the money only if they behaved properly towards the head of the household, who is also in charge of the decision-making process. Gender does not play a crucial role in the decision-making process, since both husband and wife take decisions together. Yet, when the husband is away because of work, the wife is in charge of all household decisions.

In this chapter I have tried to show the complexity of issues when engaging with relations that affect the household and the kinship network, providing an insight into four different case studies from El Alto. While the first two have addressed common conflicts within the households of El Alto, the last two have shown

widespread situations of co-operation with kin and household members in *Alteño* neighbourhoods. Moreover, an emphasis has been given to how individuals may break away and act with no consideration toward other household members, and on how the same individuals may come around to behave as expected in the end. Yet, some fractures are unavoidable, and some individuals leave for good. The following chapter will continue to shed light on the topic of harmonious relations, by focusing on those created between humans and supernatural forces; these are as fundamental as those with household members, kin and neighbours.

CHAPTER FOUR

'SUERTE' (LUCK): RITUALS, DIVINATION AND DESTINY CONTROL

'Dicen que los gringos acostumbramos a resolver cualquier tipo de problema y circunstancia con tan sólo introducir nuestra mano en los bolsillos; (..) atesoramos plata, dinero y fortuna sin el más mínimo esfuerzo (..) Ellos son los *jaqi*, las 'personas'. Su razón es el trabajo, el esfuerzo continuo; nada se les ha dado fácil. El éxito depende de su enconado empeño...y de que, finalmente la *Pachamama* quiera recompensar tanta entrega.'

'They say that we *gringos* -foreigners- are used to solve any kind of problem and circumstances merely by putting our hand in our wallet. (..)We accumulate money and fortune without effort. (..) They are *jaqi* , 'people'. Their aim in life is work and continuous effort; nothing is easily given to them. Success depends on their hard work...and that finally the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) decides to reward their huge commitment'⁴⁸

Gerardo Fernández Juárez (1999:23)

The above words by Juárez, a Spanish anthropologist, focus our attention on the relationships between hard work and supernatural interventions in the pursuit of well-being. I shall focus on the importance, for my informants, to seek harmonious relations with supernatural forces. Their sense of well-being depends on a commitment to their shared values and respect for their cosmological order. First of all, I would like to clarify the use of the term *suerte* in the *alteño* context, which is central to the discussion.

In both English and Spanish languages, luck typically implies that there is some abstract good or bad fortune that affects people, that is beyond human beings' control, being 'an unknown and unpredictable phenomenon that causes an event to result one way rather than another'⁴⁹. Until I went to Bolivia, I never thought of luck as playing an important role in my life. Sometimes I found myself

⁴⁸ My own free translation. In reality *entrega* means 'to give to someone else, but I here translated it in a different way.

⁴⁹ Collins English Dictionary, 2006.

speaking about it, while I was talking with friends, underlining positive events that had affected our lives. However, I had never perceived it as an important force shaping my existence. Luck for me was not a condition or a state I could change or modify, or wish to discuss. However, fieldwork in Bolivia showed me a different perspective, an idea or a conceptualisation of luck that goes far beyond my initial understanding of it. The term used is the Spanish *suerte*, which is usually translated in English as luck. However, arguably in Andean Spanish people also use the Aymara term *swirti*, which means something rather different, being actually closer to fortune or well-being. In the rest of the chapter, I shall therefore use the term *suerte*, more often used by my informants, conveying local meanings and perspectives.

My informants believe that *suerte* can be controlled and changed by treating the spirits properly. It can be bought and acquired by asking for protection from the spiritual forces living in the altiplano. *Suerte* is inextricably connected with ideas of protection, destiny control and future aspirations. Thus, trying to define *suerte* in El Alto involves presenting my informants' vision of the world, and outlining the occult and spiritual forces at the basis of it. As Fortes (1987:4) argues, '(...) the occult can only be known about indirectly by its effects (...) in routine existence'. *Suerte*, or the lack of it are both effects of the occult world, interventions by supernatural beings that can affect human daily life with accidents, disease or health, misfortune or fortune, influencing the well-being or ill-being of individuals, families or entire communities.

During my fieldwork, I realised that *suerte* (which implies good fortune) and *mala suerte* -misfortune- are two sides of the same coin. It is necessary to go through a moment of crisis -*mala suerte*- to understand what is important in life, what you should really focus on and whether there is an imbalance of forces in your life. *Mala suerte* is a moment of passage that leads you to *suerte*. However, this is not a simple process. It requires a complex involvement of people, who carefully have to invest their time and money in changing their situation through various cultural practices of divination and control of destiny. My informants believe that humans have the ability to appease spirits who are the controllers of people's fortune, finding a way to affect and change their destiny. This is possible only through effort and labour.

According to my informants, unless you are a breech baby, you are not born with *suerte*, but you can acquire some if you invest your resources in nourishing the forces that support the world. In exchange for your efforts, these forces will assure and control your prosperity and fortune. This can be achieved through a ritual performed by a *yatiri*⁵⁰ or through other means, such as participating and dancing in the fiesta of the patron saint or engaging in regular acts of faith that will be explored below. As a number of people said to me: 'it is like the rationality of bank investments'. People have to take into account risks that are similar to that of a banking transaction: an individual is never sure about the

⁵⁰ *Yatiri* is a noun that means "the one who knows" in Aymara and comes from the verb *yatiña* (to know). According to my informants, it usually indicates a wise woman or men that have been elected for this position by supernatural events. One of these is being stuck by the lightning during a storm: in theory that person dies and he/she is born again with new powers. The second one is when the person is born with a physical deformity, such as a six-fingered hand. The third one is due to a breech birth. These signs indicate that that individual has some special power.. However, I also met some *yatiri* who hold this position through family inheritance. Their parents or grandparents held the position before them and, therefore, their ancestors taught them

outcome. Yet, unlike banking if he/she is confident, the result will not be disappointing. The essential ingredients to gain *suerte* are faith and circulation of money.

In the Bolivian plateau, where well-being is largely attributed to harmonious relations with both other humans and with spiritual forces, relations have to be continuously fed through the circulation of money. Money and what you can buy with it (e.g. objects and offerings) are obtained through effort and labour; thus, they become precious and are offered as special gifts to maintain those contacts so fundamental for 'the good life'.

In this chapter, I shall therefore deconstruct the concept of *suerte* as it is expressed by my informants and analyse the combination of multiple elements and issues connected with it, deepening its link with the idea of 'the good life' in the region. To do so I shall take the reader through the same process of discovery I went through. Therefore, the sections that follow also give a chronological idea of the various moments of my fieldwork and the personal experiences I lived in order to investigate this specific topic. The first section is about the importance of the circulation of money/objects to ensure *suerte* and shed light on the complexity of the issues that emerge when engaging with local ambivalent perceptions of wealth. The second section deals with the role played by objects for my informants. The third section deals with the *Alasita*, the fair of fortune and happiness, which happens once a year in La Paz and El Alto. The fourth one looks at the world of *yatiri* (ritual specialists). The last section

'the profession'. In the past *yatiris* were called by non-indigenous people 'brujos/as', that is to say sorcerers and witches.

addresses Aymara Catholicism and analyses some of the rituals that have been incorporated into daily life. The chapter then continues with the analysis of some issues discussed in chapter 3, in the discussion of *Suma Jakaña*, that the evil eye and envy are considered the major source of ill-being.

In addition, my discussion will show that people's sense of well-being depends on a commitment to their shared values and respect for the cosmological order. Religious beliefs and practices provide an important idiom for the expression of aspirations and the pursuit of ideals. Furthermore, commitment to shared values and religious beliefs has a positive effect on emotional states, promoting solidarity, feelings of confidence, and a sense of full personhood and empowerment as various anthropologists have argued (see Barbalet 2001; Turner 2002; Bendelow and Williams 1998). All these aspects appear fundamental when analysing concepts of 'the good life' in El Alto.

Ambivalent perceptions of wealth

During the first days of my fieldwork, I visited the crowded streets and the colourful markets of La Paz. Calle Linares is just above Plaza San Francisco in the historical centre of the city. People who do not belong to the indigenous population or who want to mock indigenous beliefs call it 'Calle de las Brujas', (Witches' Street). It is usually full of tourists, searching for souvenirs to take back home. Between one souvenir shop and another, you can find other shops: their 'magic' goods carefully organised along the wall, expanding vertically and horizontally. There is everything a *yatiri* needs for his/her rituals, but not only that.

It is here that it is possible for visitors to get in touch with the world of the urbanised and enriched Aymaras and observe the configuration of a new class identity with its interesting constructions; among them, there is the desire to show their economic power and their social status through material display in the fiestas or through forming important social relations and contacts with foreigners or people who are perceived as belonging to higher social classes. Material abundance is indeed a distinct characteristic of this part of the city, just above the Church of San Francisco: food shops are overwhelmed with goods, and display huge sacks of rice, pasta and flour. Shops and stalls are also bursting with clothes, shoes, electrical equipment, and everything you would like to buy.

Displays of wealth are quite important in this part of the city, especially for *cholos/as* (see Tassi 2008). *Cholos/as* is a term that ascribes an ethnic identity to rural-urban migrants, most often used for women who work in commerce and wear the *pollera*, shawls and bowler hats. In her study of *cholo* identity in the Andes, Weismantel (2001) writes about how wealth is likened to the ill-gotten gains of the *kharisiri*, a supernatural being that steals human fat and blood, and how the *chola* selling in the market place has often been associated with this spiritual force (see also Spedding n.d.). Indigenous people see not only an accumulation of profits in the prosperous, well-dressed and well-fed *chola*, but also 'a record of their own exploitation in the past and a visible sign of her willingness to cheat them again' (Weismantel 2001: 248). As successful sellers accumulate money in their bank accounts, they also build a white identity (ibid, 2001), because race and ethnicity in the Andes are inextricably related to economic inequalities and can be fully understood only through this specific

perspective. 'Race becomes visible every time an Indian places some grubby bills in the soap chaffed hand of a white-*mestizo* shopkeeper' (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999: 185-206).

However, my fieldwork provided a different perspective. For my informants there is a moral obligation attached to the circulation of money and objects, flows of things which are at the basis of their idea of 'the good life'. In order to become a 'good' person, oriented in a moral space, you are supposed to give (*entregar*⁵¹) what you can to others –both household members, residents of the same neighbourhood, and supernatural forces. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, when describing the Condoris, wealth is dangerous, since people who accumulate money feel not only more vulnerable to robberies and assaults, but they are also classified by their peers as 'immoral' because they are not believed to share their cash with others. For example, during my fieldwork, my informants were very careful in not giving any information about how much they really owned. This was kept as a secret, because people feared the envy of their neighbours or of supernatural forces. Envy and evil eye produce *mala suerte*, affecting the *Suma Jakaña* of a household in different ways (e.g. illness, lack of cash, lack of food, lack of work, conflicts between partners, conflicts with children etc.).

In fact, you should never reveal how much money you have, unless you are prepared to share it with others. 'Wealthy' neighbours that share their cash in the fiesta or other collective activities are identified by my informants as 'good'

⁵¹ This is usually used to refer to intangibles such as love, devotion, and work. During fieldwork, my informants also included material objects and money in different forms of *entrega*.

people. Sponsoring a fiesta or making an offering to one of the supernatural forces are some of the most common actions to guarantee harmonious relations with neighbours and/or the supernatural forces. Protestants offer money to their Church in return for a 'reward' that they will get from God. For example, in the case of Don Justo (Chap 3, the Condoris), the household offered some money to their Church when they discovered that he had cancer. Then, after a while, he was cured ('thanks be to God').

There is, therefore, a fear connected with the accumulation of wealth. This fear is also well expressed when dealing with cash transactions as Weismantel (2001) also notes; when buying in a market place, it is always important to have the exact change and it is almost impossible to buy something with big bills. Big bills stand for 'rich' people and, usually, my informants do not want to be classified as such.

So, as we have seen, accumulating money is seen as problematic, since it leads to vulnerability and consequent ill-being: only by spending the cash accumulated and sharing it with the household members, the *vecinos* -residents of the same neighbourhood- and the spiritual forces, it is possible to overcome this state of insecurity. Circulation of wealth through relationships, and the role of objects in mediating these relations are fundamental for *alteños*. But a further dimension here is that, for my informants, a self-identity as being 'poor' is quite important.

Pocock (1981) among others has shown in his work in India that fear of the evil eye is linked to tensions within the caste, in particular in relation to issues of wealth and status. Ideally members of a single caste should enjoy a similar level of wealth, but in practice this is not the case. Fear of the envy of a poorer kinsman helps to ensure that wealth is enjoyed modestly rather than ostentatiously, and places the wealthy under an obligation to help caste members who are less well off (Pocock 1981)

These observations apply also in Senkata and Amachuma, where considerable wealth differences exist. Thus, there is a tendency to be secretive about the amount of cash owned because of a fear of evil eye –in El Alto it is identified with *embrujar*, and jealousy. On the other hand, in Calle Linares an abundance of goods for sale are on display and a kind of balance between the different sale corners - ‘equal cash, equal display of wealth’ appear to be achieved. This contrasts with the Senkata market. Here only a few goods are publicly displayed, because there are sellers who cannot afford to buy more and they set the standard. Those traders who could afford to offer a greater range or quantity of goods prefer to conform to this standard in order to protect themselves from accusations of being too wealthy.

Equality (*igualdad*) with others (neighbours and supernatural forces) is a common topic in Senkata and Amachuma residents’ informal talks; as I will show in Chapter 7 on Aymara intellectuals, it is a feature that is often mentioned in their writings as an example of the indigenous communitarian model. People should aspire to this, as the intellectuals write, as the ‘good’ ancestors did in the

past. This is why it is morally so important to circulate money in order to contribute to an equilibrium model that my informants would also call '*la buena vida*' (*Suma Qamaña*), an ideal which is quite difficult to reach in real life. But some commodities are especially significant for the pursuit of *Suma Qamaña* because they allow humans to manipulate *suerte*.

Small objects, big desires

One afternoon, walking in Calle Linares, I decided to stop and talk with some sellers about the items they were displaying. I started a conversation with one of them who was very talkative and who of course wanted to sell me something. She showed me some amulets for *suerte* (the small ones cost 1Bs, while the bigger ones were between 3 and 5)⁵². I pretended I didn't know what she was talking about and asked some questions, inquiring about their meanings and their importance: a condor made of stone for *suerte* on a journey, a sun (always made of stone) for *suerte* at university, and a frog to bring good fortune⁵³). Among the other amulets, I could see the representation of *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) that assures protection and prosperity, a stone turtle, symbol of long life, a snake for general protection, a face as well as two people hugging are both amulets to bring *suerte* in love, and a ceramic llama for *suerte* on an overland journey. I bought a figurine of the *Pachamama* and the lady put some multicoloured yarns around it. I later learnt that the yarns were spun from llama wool and they were another means to bring good luck.

⁵²1US\$ equated to 7.91 bolivianos during my fieldwork (November 2003- November 2004). In the last months it shifted from 7.91 bs. to 8.01bolivianos.

⁵³ Another lady who was selling the same items told me that the frog is used for protection in general. I always tried to talk with more than one seller. In the majority of cases, the information given was similar. The main difference I found was in the meaning of the frog.

Other small items she was selling caught my attention: there was special red wine for *ch'allas*⁵⁴, small sugar squares representing different objects (a house, a car, a shop, a frog, etc.) used by the *yatiri* during their *mesas*⁵⁵ (between 10 and 25 bolivianos according to the size), incense sticks, bottles filled with multicoloured forest seeds and gold images⁵⁶ and entire mesas wrapped in transparent paper and ready to be burnt. One of the sellers underlined that people usually bought these parcels for offerings when they were going to live in a new house.

Protection is built through buying these sacred amulets displayed along Linares Street. As argued above, spending money is deeply connected with *suerte* and buying is essential to the fulfilment of ideas of well-being. Luck is the gift that spiritual forces offer to humans to thank them for their offerings, as can be observed in the case of mesas. The amulets stand as symbols, as 'receipts' of an investment or as evidence of belief. People who buy them feel that these magic objects will influence their lives, and a simple commercial object becomes a precious sacred amulet, suggesting a non-materialistic perception of it. The act of buying them brings *suerte* even to the foreign tourist who does not believe in

⁵⁴ Usually, alcoholic offerings are made to the Pachamama during rituals and these are called *ch'allas*. Normally, Aymara people also make daily offerings to the Pachamama with fizzy drinks during meals, feasts or when a guest visits. Every time they drink, the Pachamama drinks too.

⁵⁵ *Mesa* means table in Spanish. However, in the Aymara context, it also identifies the offerings made to the *Pachamama* and other spiritual forces during rituals. The *Pachamama* is pictured as a person who needs to drink and eat. Her personality has human characteristics and needs. The Mother Earth is subjected to reciprocal ties with people: this is why it is very important to make offerings to her throughout the year. If you give, she will give in return.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, the images are always the same. The symbols of wealth, health, money and love do not differ. The only differences are in the size, colour and material they are made of. Gold or gold colours are frequent when talking about the relationship with supernatural forces. Usually, it is associated with the Devil. *Cholitas* and Aymara men usually have gold teeth as an expression of their economic power. However, when they die, their families ask to remove them, because they belong to the Devil. God would never accept them in paradise if they kept them.

it, as if their notion of protection goes beyond the cultural world that has given them shape and meaning.

I also realised that it's not only the object you buy that is important, but also the person you buy from. The seller plays a very important role: if she⁵⁷ is a lucky person or she has a wider knowledge of the spiritual world, she will transmit these characteristics to her goods. It is as if the objects can absorb the energy/essence of the person who is selling them. This transmission is fundamental: far from a commercial relation and detachment from the object, it proposes a very personal involvement of both the seller and the buyer, creating an empathetic relationship between the two, and also between them and the object itself.

24th January: the fair of fortune, happiness and the *Ekeko*

'La Feria de Alasita' is a yearly market of these miniature amulets, held every 24th January in the Department of La Paz and it has magic and religious connotations. The miniatures are usually intended to represent what people would like to achieve during the coming year and can represent different objects including money. Images of dollars, bolivianos, euros, houses, cars, university diplomas, roosters (to get married and to find love), work contracts, food, luggage (to travel), passports, babies (to get a child), computers, TVs, electrical and kitchen equipment occupy the stalls of the fair (see picture 1 in the appendix). This market is held in honour of *Iqiqu* (*Ekeko*), the Aymara God of

⁵⁷ I use 'she' because the majority of sellers in Calle Linares are women. This is important, because in Aymara culture there is a cultural taboo that does not allow men to sell. In addition, it has some practical reasons (see chapter two). Men are usually involved in heavier activities and women are also thought to have greater ability in attracting people and in persuading them to buy their products. This was true in the market place in Senkata, El Alto, where I lived during my fieldwork.

Plenty, Fertility and Prosperity (see picture 2). Nowadays, the *Ekeko* is linked not only with the idea of Plenty, but also with that of good business, fortune and happiness. According to Cuentas (1984), this tradition derives from the Tiwanaku culture, becoming an important part of the Aymara culture as well as of colonial times, but it has been subjected to many changes⁵⁸. In former times, the miniatures were exchanged as an act of reciprocity, while today they are bought and sold as goods, although there are still a few cases when they are given as gifts -girls usually give the rooster as a present to their girlfriends.

It is interesting to analyse how the representation of the *Ekeko* changed with Spanish colonisation. Before the Spanish conquest/colonisation process, the *Ekeko* had indigenous features and was naked (Ponce Sangines 1969) and was associated with fertility, rather than with wealth. However, during colonial times, the *Ekeko* became the God of Abundance and started to be represented wearing nice clothes in order to symbolise its changed role. Nowadays his features are very close to those of a *mestizo*, with white skin, a moustache, well-dressed (sometimes with tie and suit, and the *chullo*, typical Aymara wool hat) and carrying lots of things. Usually, he carries not only food and coca, but also a TV, dollars and electrical equipment. His role is dual: he is seen as a symbol and 'dispenser' of *suerte*, but at the same time he is feared, since if people do

⁵⁸ The *Ekeko* or 'el hijo bastardo de Wiraqocha' (the illegitimate son of Wiraqocha -the Supreme God linked with the sun-) is considered a protector of luck. In the past, people offered the *Ekeko* their products during the summer solstice -21st of December- in order to obtain protection. The date of the celebration was changed to the 24th of January by Don Sebastian de Segura y Machain, governor of La Paz, who saved the city from Indian attack in 1781. He wanted to thank the Virgin Mary for his victory and, therefore, decided to postpone the fair to the 24th. Indigenous people as well as mestizos, who wanted to make fun of the governor, devoted the celebration to the *Ekeko* and changed the way of representing the Aymara God of Plenty and Fertility. They started to represent him with Segura's features, just to make fun of him (Cuentas, 1984). Nevertheless, I think that there is more to it. In fact, the *Ekeko* seems to personify a

not take good care of him, he will take away from them what they have. Taking care of him means to give him a cigarette to smoke every Tuesday and Friday as well as to offer him beer and coca.

I bought an *Ekeko* and one of my informants told me that it was a great responsibility to buy it. 'I'm not going to buy an *Ekeko*. I'm scared, because if you don't take good care of him, he is going to take everything away from you. He is like a jealous husband. If you don't take good care of him, he will take your partner away', she told me. The informants I was with bought food, houses, cars, miniature diplomas, but no one dared to buy the *Ekeko* except me. We all went to the Church courtyard to bless all the objects we had bought to give them 'life'. A priest was blessing all the objects including my *Ekeko*, although I think the priest did not see it, since the Church usually does not bless the *Ekeko*. They bless the miniatures, but not the Aymara God of Plenty. This is probably because the *Ekeko* is today described as a god in Spanish and Aymara, and so represents a degree of polytheism unacceptable even to liberal-minded priests. Close to the priest, people were giving their *alasitas* a 'special baptism'. We did this too. A *yatiri* passed all our miniatures over the fire where the incense was burning and then put drops of wine, and alcohol and flowers on all of them: another way of feeding luck and animating the objects.

The fair was so full of people that it was almost impossible to move. The tradition is that you should buy all the objects you want to acquire during the coming year between 12 and 1pm on the 24th of January. The division of the

symbol of *cholo* identity: he is fat and loaded with goods, displaying material abundance and giving it away.

hour symbolises the months of the year. For example, if you buy a 'house' at 12.15, you should be able to get a new house in March. However, this can only happen if you have 'lots of faith, if you believe in it' as some of the people I was with told me. The celebration is very important in the urban context. People from different social backgrounds actively participate into it. The then President of Bolivia, Carlos Mesa, was in Plaza Murillo completely covered in dollars and people were asking him for money. He went away distributing money. It seems that personal luck as well as that of one's family depends on participating and on buying the right things at the right time. So luck is not something that happens, but something that you need to feed by buying, and by giving to supernatural forces at the right moment.

Interestingly, the rooster was bought by women who wanted to get married or cannot find a new love, whereas men did not have an object they could buy for this purpose. This can be indicative of two different aspects: one is that women are more interested in getting married and in finding love than men. The other one is that men have more obvious agency in choosing a partner. Men have to act and go in pursuit of the girl, while women's cultural role is that of resisting and running away (Harris, 2000). Therefore, girls have a more passive contribution and need an amulet to be chosen.

Alasita proposes interesting observations on the structure of the economy as well as on how religious practices and ideas can be influenced by political economy. Nash (1979), and Abercombie (1998) have suggested that religious rituals can be seen as creative responses to European impingement on

indigenous lives and that worshipping of both the *diablos* (devils) and the Saints can be identified as a channel for protesting against foreign and class domination. Nash (1979) shows how the logic of religious rituals and street protests can be combined together. This insight probably still holds some truth but, in addition, the ritual of *Alasita* can be seen as an investment, effected through the purchase of a figurine that accesses supernatural forces. It is a process of generating wealth by taking risks. The miniature is a symbolic object, but it also has a practical value. Through the miniature that enters into a specific network of communication with supernatural forces, the buyer may achieve what he/she wishes for. In this way, buying miniatures represents a pragmatic action as well as an expressive one. Therefore, consumption in the Fiesta of *Alasita* seems to present both sides of utilitarian (being a useful investment in luck) and expressive value (being a expression of desires and beliefs), becoming fundamental for reaching a condition of well-being, where the materialistic sphere is deeply connected with the spiritual one.

Alasita (Aymara for the Andean Spanish 'cómprame'-'buy from me',) is a happy celebration, a time to laugh about life and politics, the latter generally perceived in negative terms. Miniature newspapers are printed on the 24th January. The articles make fun not only of national politicians, but also of international ones. For example, the titles of some articles were saying: 'Bush (...) se da que Saddam es su alma gemela' ('Bush (...) understands that Saddam

is his soul mate’) or ‘Chile cede Lagos a Bolivia para que tenga un mar de lagrimas’ (‘Chile gives Lagos⁵⁹ to Bolivia so that they can have a sea of tears’).

In Amachuma, I asked some friends if they went to buy something at the *Alasita* fair. They responded: ‘No, we are good Christians’, but I soon discovered that they had actually gone to the fair in El Alto. They did not buy anything, because one of the women was robbed of her hat (that costs 200 bolivianos) and they were concerned about how to get 200 bolivianos to help her buy another hat. However, they were interested to know what I had bought. When I told them that I bought an *Ekeko*, they asked me to take it with me next time I went to Amachuma.

When I next visited I took the *Ekeko* as a gift to one of the families I used to visit. They agreed to accept him, but asked me for cigarettes and coca leaves to offer him every Tuesday and Friday. ‘We are going to accept him, but you are going to bring us coca and cigarettes, because we don’t have money to support him’. I felt as though I was leaving a child or a person with them, and that they were asking me for money to support and feed him. It was not a statue that I was giving them, but an animated being, with needs and desires, and who could become fickle too. ‘If you give him a lot, he is going to become spoiled and will always want more and more. You need to give him the right amount, so that you don’t spoil him’, as Amachuma peasants told me.

⁵⁹ Chilean Prime Minister. They were referring to the difficult political relations with Chile, due to the fact that Chile is not willing to give back the sea coast that Bolivia lost during the Pacific War. The play on words is that Lagos also means lakes.

It is interesting to note how worried people become when it comes to the creation and maintenance of their relationship with spiritual forces, which must be nourished with commitment. The material world appears to be inextricably connected with the spiritual one and is the means to the immaterial and spiritual dimension, the only way to engage in an empathetic relation between both gods and people. In addition, the figure representing the *Ekeko* is not only a symbolic image, but it is alive, especially after it has received an alcohol baptism.

Three *yatiri*, three stories

In the previous section, I suggested that miniatures and figurines are inextricably connected with the agency of people, and can also be seen as the basis for the creation of a relation between people and spiritual forces. In this section, my main aim is to focus on the cultural importance of the *yatiri* in the Aymara world as an intermediary between the world of humans and the world of the gods, contributing to people's well-being. *Yatiri* know how to deal with the supernatural world, and can be compared to priests, doctors and psychologists, because they assure the well-being of their clients by making sure that they are holistically healthy and by addressing all the human spheres of interest (luck, love, family, work, money, physical and psychological health, good relationship with the supernatural world).

According to my informants, there are three groups of *yatiri*: '*los curanderos/as*' -they have healing powers and they assure luck to their clients in all areas of life-, '*los que hacen mal*', those who have abilities in black magic rituals that can damage people, and '*los que encuentran las cosas que se pierden*', those who can find things that had been lost. However, they also told

me that a *yatiri* can have abilities in all these areas of expertise, although they will never admit that they use black magic powers. This is kept secret. It is publicly condemned and considered immoral, although practised in private.

In theory, a *yatiri* will help people for a small payment/gift, asking money only for the ingredients required in the offerings. In practice, it is clear that a payment is always expected, as a demonstration of the effort and work that humans have to invest in nurturing their relations with supernatural forces. Being a *yatiri* is also a 'profession': in a country where it is always more difficult to find work, there are examples of women and men who decide to become *yatiri* to survive. They haven't been selected by supernatural forces and none of the three signs I discussed above had become manifest in their case. Nevertheless, some individuals take the initiative to become professional *yatiri*, inventing a way of living in the informal sector. Hence, there are people who are *yatiri* through vocation, and others because they want to make money or find a way to survive. Therefore, it is important to be extremely careful in the choice of your personal advisor⁶⁰.

Becoming a *yatiri* is good business, that is to say that there is a demand for these experts. People are very interested in going to visit them and in discovering how they can improve their luck. But what is luck? When are people lucky? It is very difficult to converse about it. Luck is something secret, something you struggle for without talking about it. People sometimes speak

⁶⁰ See also Fernández Juárez, G. (1995) 'Modelos Aymara de Salud: Ajillata Grande (Provincia Omasuyos). Etiología, Terapia e Identidad en el altiplano Aymara' in *Reunion Annual de Etnologia. Tomo I. Anales de la Reunion Anual de Etnologia*, La Paz: Museo Nacional de Etnologia y Folklore.

about it with very close friends or relatives, but not with others. If you talk about how lucky you are, people can become envious and damage you with magic. Envy, and the risk of the evil eye is one of the major causes of ill-being and is present in much conversation between *yatiri* and their clients⁶¹. In the following paragraphs, I will look at the *yatiris*' world and at the category of luck by focusing on three personal experiences.

1)'You need to change your luck'⁶²

My first meeting with a *yatiri* was in Villa Fatima, a neighbourhood on the hills of La Paz. Thanks to a Bolivian friend, a middle class young woman from Miraflores⁶³, I was introduced to Doña Nieves, a migrant from the Pacajés province in the Department of La Paz. Doña Nieves became a *yatiri* late in life when she was hit by lightning at her birthplace, and she was given special powers. She always tries to hide the fact that she is a *yatiri* in her local community. My friend also assured me that Doña Nieves is a very good and honest lady, whom I could trust completely.

Nevertheless, the first day I went to visit her with my friend, I felt very uncomfortable. As the minibus was climbing the steep streets to get to her small shop, I became increasingly nervous. I don't know why, but the fact that she was going 'to read my luck'⁶⁴ (see picture 3 in the appendix) was not something I was looking forward to, knowing how this could influence my own perceptions and also fearing that she might tell me negative and frightening

⁶¹ Interestingly, secrecy is fundamental: for instance, *illa* -amulets for good luck- and indeed to a lesser extent all the household sources of prosperity lose their power if outsiders see them or even know about them.

⁶² It is interesting to notice that the same ritual is also defined as "cambio de vida" or change of life.

⁶³ Middle-class neighbourhood in La Paz.

things about the future. At the same time, I felt excited, because I knew that it was going to be an interesting experience.

We arrived at her small shop. There was a stall outside her house with eggs of different sizes. A ramshackle shelter protected the merchandise from the strong sun. Each egg size had a basket and each basket had a frayed handwritten sign, giving the price. Prices ranged from 37 centavos per egg to 42. The egg display was in front of a window from which Doña Nieves was attending her clients. When we arrived, we could see her through the window talking with someone in the room. The inside looked dark. She saw us too and asked us: 'Please, can you wait for me outside a moment? Yes? Yes, please'.

After 5 minutes, a lady came out and we entered. In the darkness of the small room, there was not a lot of space: it was full of grey egg boxes, a few plastic fabric sacks and a chair. Close to the window, the only source of light, there were some wooden platforms covered with an *aguayo*⁶⁵ on which a *cholita* was sitting cross-legged, with a dark *pollera*, a big apron, gold earrings and rings. Doña Nieves smiled at us and asked my friend, who is an old client, to introduce me. After the preliminary talks, she started 'to read my luck' with coca leaves. On the *tari*⁶⁶ she placed 5 coca leaves and close to them some money I gave to her. The client decides the amount of money or *nayracha* he/she wants to pay. Usually, it needs to be an even number and it's around 4 to 6 bolivianos⁶⁷. She

⁶⁴ 'Leer la suerte'.

⁶⁵ Square woven cloth used for carrying loads on the back.

⁶⁶ Small woven square cloth mainly used for carrying coca.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, *nayracha* means "su ojo de la coca" ("the coca's eye") and it's the money paid to consult the expert and the coca. If the *nayracha* is too small, the coca cannot read easily and can also give incorrect advice (Fernandez Juarez, 1995). Probably, the fact that it must be an

put on top the bunch of coca that she was going to use for the reading⁶⁸ and she closed the *tari*. Then she started to do the *ch'alla* in four different corners with alcohol, invoking the *Achachilas*⁶⁹ and the *Abuelos* (ancestors), and repeating my name. Finally, she opened the *istalla* or piece of cloth where *yatiri* usually 'read the luck' of their clients. She took a bunch of coca in her hands and started to shake it and see how the coca leaves were falling. She did not look very happy and she immediately asked me: 'Do you have pains in your body?' I replied: 'No, I'm fine'. She asked me again: 'Are you sure, completely sure?' 'Yes, I'm sure, completely sure'.

Every time a client came to buy some eggs, she quickly covered the *istalla* with the *aguayo* to hide what she was doing. My friend told me that she was scared that people living in her neighbourhood might discover that she was a *yatiri* and could call her 'bruja' -witch. So her reading was often interrupted by her clients, and between half a dozen and two dozen eggs she went on carefully looking at how leaves were falling⁷⁰. Then she told me: 'It looks like something has grabbed you or frightened you'. And she added: 'It's serious, really serious, but I cannot understand where it's coming from. Someone is trying to damage you because he/she is very envious. They are trying to do something to you...actually, it's two people: a man and a woman. Maybe an old boyfriend and his new girlfriend...let me see' and she started to read more in depth. 'Yes, it's them. Why didn't you tell me before we started? You have to talk to me and

even number is linked with the idea of the pairs of eyes belonging to the coca. My interpretation is that if there are more pairs of eyes (more money), the coca has less difficulties in reading the luck of a person. The coca can see things easily.

⁶⁸ Usually, the client has to come with the coca, but we forgot it and she gave us some of hers.

⁶⁹ Spiritual forces immanent in the landscape, in mountains, rivers, lakes, etc., depending on the locality.

tell me what problems you have, if you are suffering for love or for something else'. Your *yatiri* is your personal adviser and you need to be confident in his/her abilities: you need to trust him/her as a person and, in theory, you should tell her/him all your secrets. In a way, a *yatiri* acts as a psychologist/therapist, taking into consideration all the issues that affect an individual (family, love, fortune, money, psychological and physical health, your relationship with God and other spiritual forces). Talking is essential for both the client and the *yatiri*, in order to start or continue a relation based on mutual trust and understanding.

'Well' I replied to her, 'actually, I'm not suffering any more. It was quite a while ago. I'm fine now'. She looked at me, trying to comprehend whether I was honest or not: 'Do you have a partner now?' 'Yes, I have, and everything is fine with him'. She checked whether it was true or not. She nodded and added that love was not my problem. She also told me that my family was fine, and asked if my dad had a lover or not. When I responded laughing that I didn't know and that everything was possible, she actually denied it, saying that there was someone with negative thoughts that was secretly talking about him, nothing really serious and important though. The problem was with me: she repeated her reading several times and told me that the situation was not looking good: 'Necesitas un cambio de suerte' ('You need to change your luck').

It was the first time I had heard that expression. She continued, saying that '*un cambio de suerte*' is one of the most difficult rituals and that she couldn't do it on her own because my case was too desperate. She needed the help of some

⁷⁰ Each *yatiri* has a personal way of reading coca leaves. Some say that the darker side is good luck and some others that it's bad luck. It depends on each *yatiri*.

other *yatiri* (apparently she was in contact with a *yatiri* group that met up in Alto Munaypata, a neighbourhood on the opposite side of the city, every few weeks). She said that it was a very expensive procedure, and it would cost me at least 100US\$ -a lot of money in Bolivian terms. She also asked me where I was living and, when I answered that I was living in Senkata, as well as in Amachuma, she screamed: 'I cannot believe it. Anything can happen to you in Senkata. It's a very dangerous place. If you don't change your luck, you can even die. They can kill you. You will keep finding difficulties in your life if you don't change your luck!'

When I left the egg stall, I started to ask myself if I should do this change of *suerte* or not, and I realised I needed more information about the ritual and its consequences. At the same time, I began to think about my 'misfortune'. Was I really unlucky? Were there any cultural reasons that could have led Doña Nieves to say that I was unlucky? Maybe, this was related to the fact that I am a foreigner and that my community and family were living far away? This would imply that they were not able to support me materially and emotionally. Could she see that I had more money than local people? Was this why she was charging me so much money for the ritual? Or could it also be linked to my limited knowledge of the spiritual world and its forces? As a consequence, I could be exposed to all possible dangers. In addition, was this also connected with the fact that I am in my late twenties, unmarried, without kids and still studying? In a way, I represented a challenge to their model of appropriate female behaviour. Or was it because I was living in Senkata, generally perceived as a poor and dangerous neighbourhood by people living in La Paz?

On the other hand, was there an issue with my limited faith? Was she feeling that I had to change my spiritual attitude? Was my own cultural framework not allowing me to see the truth and to engage completely with the experience of going to consult her? Or was it because of anxiety? Anxiety to admit that I was unlucky, because admitting would mean believing it and asking for the protection of spiritual forces. My mind was absorbed by all these questions and I realised that I could not answer them on my own. I had to talk with my informants to seek clarification and to understand why the *yatiri* was so important for them.

Later that same night, when I was back in the village with the family I was living with, I had dinner with Doña Catalina, a single lady in her forties who was also my roommate, and who lived sometimes in the city and sometimes in the countryside, and Doña María, in her early twenties and mother of the family. Holding a warm cup of milk, I told them what happened to me. They listened carefully. Then Doña Catalina decided to tell me her personal experience with another *yatiri*.

She explained to me that a few years earlier, she had fallen very ill; her body temperature would rapidly shift. She would suddenly feel very cold and then start sweating, feeling very hot and then again very cold. She went to see different doctors in El Alto, but none of them could explain the cause of her illness and, in addition, none of them gave her an effective treatment. She was desperate. She did not know what to do and thought she was going to die very soon. One day her older sister advised her to go to see a famous and apparently

excellent *yatiri* in her neighbourhood, in the northern part of El Alto. She agreed. The *yatiri* read her *suerte* and said that she needed a change of life. He also explained to her that the cause of her illness was the fact that she went out very early in the morning so that fog entered in her body. I asked her if she finally did change her *suerte*: she nodded and started to explain what happened.

As she told me, her *yatiri* passed a black rabbit over her entire body, and in that moment her illness was passed to the animal. From that day onwards she was fine: the rabbit had taken her *mala suerte* and she received the animal's *suerte*. It was a life-changing experience for her and the only way she could have been saved. Doña Maria, who hadn't spoken until that moment, explained to me that *cambio de suerte* is the same thing as *cambio de vida*. In a way, you give away your present life and you exchange it with that of an animal or a person. If someone is trying to damage you, you do this exchange with his/her life.

A few days later, I had a chance to talk with Guido from Senkata. He explained to me that a few years earlier his father also did a *cambio de suerte*. His case was desperate: he was extremely ill. The doctors decided to accept him into a hospital in El Alto, and told his wife that he was going to die very soon. There was no possibility of recovery. Nevertheless, Guido's mother decided to consult a *yatiri*. The *yatiri* read the coca leaves and told her that there was a last chance to save him with a change of life, so they went to the hospital at night time and carried out the ritual. The following morning, his dad started to recover, although he needed some time to get back to normal. The doctors talked about a miracle. Guido, recalling those days, added that what really saved his dad was

his mother's faith: he said that even if a *yatiri* performs a ritual for you, this does not mean that he/she will solve your problems. You have to believe to be saved. This is also what Doña Nelly from Amachuma told me; when someone gets very ill in her household, she always visits her personal *yatiri*, because she has faith in him and in all the supernatural forces, and she knows that everything will be fine with him. She also once told me: 'yo no soy una mujer de hospital, soy una mujer de yatiri!' (I'm not a hospital woman, I'm a *yatiri* woman!).

In all these cases, the person's situation was desperate. People went to see a *yatiri* when they had serious problems, and they invested their money only in extreme cases, when it was a matter of life or death. But they were never sure about the final outcomes: believing was the only possibility for a last chance to change 'esta mala suerte' (this bad luck). On the other hand, I was consulting Doña Nieves more out of curiosity than out of desperation and she may have assumed that no one would spend money coming to see her unless they were deeply worried about something.

It was only later in my fieldwork that I had another chance to visit Doña Nieves. It was the beginning of October and she kept advising me to change my luck. I asked her if I could change my life with that of a famous Italian politician who was in power in those months. I was not very enthusiastic about the idea of changing it with a little rabbit that could live only for 7 years. She replied that I was not allowed to know the animal or the person I was going to make the change with. This was a secret and only the *yatiri* could select who was the most appropriate for me.

I finally decided to do it, but I couldn't. November is the month of the Dead and October is a month of preparation for this celebration: therefore, they are not allowed to do a change of *suerte* during this time. Doña Nieves advised me to do it in December, but, by that time, I was not going to be in Bolivia anymore. Therefore, she asked me if I would be going back some time in the future. I said yes, probably the next July or August. She read the coca leaves and told me that I could do the change of luck then.

This event certainly helped me to get closer to people. By listening to my experience, they felt comfortable talking about topics that they would have never touched on before. I think that in a way they felt I was like them, because I had problems too, and I made the choice of solving them with the same means as them. At the same time, this section raised thought-provoking reflections on the meaning of luck, interpreted more as 'protection' than anything else. The *yatiri* felt there was a lack of sufficient commitment from my side towards spiritual forces: I should have accepted her diagnosis and her ability to solve my situation. Yet, my doubts were made explicit by the long time I waited before I went back to see her and tell her that I had decided to do it. This is not considered an appropriate response to issues of *suerte*, protection, and rituals to control and change people's destiny.

2)'Let's do a special little *mesa*'⁷¹

At the beginning of July I was attacked by two dogs in the neighbourhood where I was living. I immediately went to a health centre to clean and disinfect

⁷¹ *Mesa* is table in Spanish, but in this case it stands for offering.

the wounds. They advised me to have a vaccination against rabies. After all the medical procedures, I was fine and went back to my normal life, as if nothing had happened. However, one day I went to visit Doña Cristina, Doña Maria's mother in law (see chapter 3 on Choque family). Doña Cristina was like a mother to me and was always concerned to make sure I was fine and happy. On that day, I arrived extremely tired at her place. I hadn't been able to sleep the night before, because I was not feeling very well. Doña Cristina quickly glanced at me and said that something was wrong. My eyes were different: 'What is happening? Your eyes seem different. I think the dogs scared you and now you need to call back your soul'.

Her words reflected the belief among some Aymara people that fright can cause you to lose your soul and you need to get it back through a ritual, otherwise you can become very sick. *El susto*, or a fright, is considered as a real pathology that is documented in the literature on Latin America (Rubel 1986). Rubel et al. (1984:31) underlines in his Mexican case study that illness -lack of well-being- can derive either from the loss of vital substances (such as blood, semen, heat or the essence know as *alma* -soul) or from the intrusion of foreign substances (spirits and their representations -winds, breezes-, worms, insects). These concerns are compatible with Rubel's suggestion whereby health is equated with 'systemic harmony or homeostasis': the balance between hot and cold humours can be disturbed by supernatural forces or by evil humans that manipulate them.

These concepts of thermal balance (hot/cold) and systemic harmony are also present in Aymara medicine (Ortega 1980; Fernández Juárez 1999). The imbalance is an effect related to disease. Diseases are distinguished between ‘enfermedad de la gente’ (disease of the people) and ‘enfermedad del doctor’ (disease of the doctor) (Fernández Juárez 1999:130; Alba 1989:22). The *yatiri* has to analyse the cause and the origin of the disease carefully and decide the most appropriate treatment: this analysis is done through the reading of luck.

El susto is considered to be ‘una enfermedad de la gente’ and, therefore, the *yatiri* is normally called to recover the *ajayu*⁷². However, since it is very common among children⁷³, Aymara mothers usually know how to recover the souls of their children should something happen to them: they go to the place where the child experienced the fright and give the child some earth to eat. Meanwhile, they call the soul back⁷⁴.

Nevertheless, their knowledge is insufficient to deal with serious cases. This is when a *yatiri*’s intervention is needed: for instance, when a child falls very ill, and the mother cannot do anything to help him/her, she asks the *yatiri* to come to her house to call back the soul. The *yatiri* will need the favourite clothes and toys of the sick child. After having prepared a fire, he/she will go around the fire and the house calling for the soul of the child and holding his/her favourite toys

⁷² One of the different entities that constitute the human soul (Fernández Juárez, 1999:139).

⁷³ They represent a weak group in society, not having yet developed resistance which comes with maturity.

⁷⁴ Once in Senkata, the daughter of my neighbours went for a school trip to the Lake Titicaca. They had an accident on the boat and some of them fell into the water. The girl got deeply scared. On the following day, her mum was very upset and she told me that she was going to talk with the director of the High School to ask for economic compensation. She said that it was the school’s responsibility to cover the *yatiri*’s expenses. She was extremely worried that her daughter could become sick.

and clothes (it can also be another place if the frightening moment had happened somewhere else).⁷⁵

The most common symptoms of *susto* are lack of sleep and appetite, red eyes and general fatigue. This is why on that day Doña Cristina advised me to consult a yatiri, because I was extremely tired and not hungry. Actually, I was not really worried about my health, because I knew it was nothing serious. Nevertheless, I was keen to know if another yatiri was going to tell me that I needed '*un cambio de suerte*'. Therefore, I decided to contact a professional yatiri, but this time someone from Senkata.

Doña Francisca, a funny, smiling cholita from Viacha, lived not too far away from my house, and has a small *puesto* (stall) in the Ceja⁷⁶. She became a yatiri after the death of her granddad, who passed on to her his wisdom. Furthermore, she had been delivered in a breech birth, another indication of her supernatural powers.

She came to my place for our first consultation on an early morning at the beginning of August, and read my luck with coca leaves. She told me that everything was fine and that the dogs had not affected me. According to her I was lucky, but my economic situation was not very good. She advised me to do *una mesita especial*. The cost would be around 200 bolivianos -around 26 US\$-

⁷⁵ Once I was supposed to visit a family in Amachuma. One of the kids fell very ill: she was coughing, vomiting and seemed to have high temperature. Her mum came to my house asking not to visit them on that afternoon. She consulted one of the *yatiri* of the village. He was going to go there in the afternoon for the ritual. People who do not belong to the family are not allowed in the house during and after the ritual. They should avoid the house for at least 24

(a bit overpriced if you look at the average prices: it's normally around 100/80 bolivianos), but 'it is worth it. You think that you are going to lose these 200 bs., that you are going to throw them away, but in reality you are making an investment and I assure you that it's worth it. The money will multiply and come back to you, if you do this *'mesita especial'* with lots of faith to the *Pachamama*. It seems expensive, but this is because I buy the best ingredients, and they cost a lot', she told me. I accepted and we fixed a date indicated by the coca leaves.

On the 14th of August she came to my place around 6am. Despite the cold weather and my tiredness, I was very excited. When she started to prepare the *mesa especial*, she opened a large piece of paper on which she put some alcohol and *thika*⁷⁷, the basis of the mesa. After that, she started to lay over the *thika* some square sugar sweets -*alpiniki*- representing the *Pachamama* (but also Virgin Mary), the *Tio* -Devil that gives money-, Mount Illimani (one of the most important *Achachilas*), a truck, a book and a graduation hat, a house, a shop and Santiaguito (Saint James). In the middle of all the images she positioned an object representing a bottle of wine, while she was praying in Aymara, asking the *Achachilas* and the Saints⁷⁸ to listen to her.

The first *mesa* (see picture 4 in the appendix) was the most complicated one and the quantity of ingredients she was using seemed never-ending. She also added

hours after the ritual has taken place. This is another good example of how the household has to maintain strict secrecy about its rituals to preserve their efficacy.

⁷⁶ Main market in the centre of El Alto.

⁷⁷ Small square white bricks made of sugar.

some white flowers -*retamas*- around the mesa and, on the top of it, a dried skin of the *titi* (Andean mountain cat -*Oreailurus Jacobita*) and *mullu*⁷⁹. She finished the mesa with *copal*⁸⁰ incense, llama fat, multicoloured llama wool⁸¹, and shining gold pieces of paper. She asked for good luck, while she rang a small bell⁸² with a rooster on the top. Then, she wrapped everything up in a parcel and left the bell on top of it.

Soon after, she prepared a second *mesa* (see picture 5 in the appendix), for the ancestors. She placed *wira q'una* (plant from the altiplano) on a large white piece of paper, and then some coca leaves and cigarettes. On top, she added llama fat and multicoloured llama wool. She wrapped it as a parcel and left it on the left side of the mesa with a small bell with a sun on top.

Then she arranged the last *mesa* (see picture 6 in the appendix). Again she laid out a large sheet of white paper and blessed it with alcohol. With some copal incense, she drew a cross in the middle and she also put small portions of incense at the four corners. Later on, she asked me to pour incense around the cross and to wish for good luck, fortune, and happiness. Then, she added flowers (*clavel* -carnation- and *cantuta*), copal and multicoloured llama wool. She closed the parcel and again positioned a small bell on top.

⁷⁸ It looked like the Saints and the *Achachilas* were the same thing. Arnold has written about saints being a transformation of the ancestral mummies worshipped before Christian conversion (1997).

⁷⁹ White square piece of shell.

⁸⁰ Scientific Name: *Hymenaea* (Fernández Juárez, 1999; Girault, 1987:243).

⁸¹ For good luck it's very important to put llama in the mesa.

⁸² The use of bells in the rituals is an allusion to the power of the priest during the Eucharistic Service. Bells are also means to make contact with supernatural beings and to call back the soul of a client (Fernández Juárez, 1995).

Before she started burning the three mesas⁸³, she had to read the coca to see if the *Achchilas* had given their permission to start the ceremony and, more specifically, to check if the time was suitable⁸⁴. After a positive response, we moved to the patio of the house and she arranged some wood on the earth⁸⁵ as well as on a small black rounded charcoal grill -*bracero*. On the top of the small charcoal grill she placed the '*mesa de los abuelos*', and on the wood on the earth she put the other two mesas.

Later on, she made a *ch'alla* (libation) with alcohol and invited me to kneel down and to hold 2 bolivianos in my left hand. She also put a llama wool thread around my neck and blessed me. Then I had to kneel down a second time and she passed the *bracero* around my head, praying to the *Achachilas* in Aymara, and singing a hymn to the Virgin Mary in Spanish. She addressed God, always in Spanish⁸⁶, and invited Him to forgive our sins. She blessed me again and then she started to do the *ch'alla* with a bottle of beer. I had to copy her, and according to how I was doing it, she said that she could understand if I was going to have good or bad luck. She was satisfied by the way I performed and assured me that I was going to have a future full of luck. She also added that '*la casa estaba de hambre*'⁸⁷.

⁸³ Interestingly, Doña Francisca prepared three mesas (offerings). My interpretation is that the first one was offered to the *Pachamama* (I arrived at this conclusion because of the ingredients used in the mesa; for further information see Fernández Juárez, 1993). The second one was offered to the *Achachilas -abuelos/ancestors-*. The third one was symbolically used to ask for luck, happiness and success.

⁸⁴ Time plays a fundamental role in the control of luck and destiny. It is important to start a ritual at the right moment.

⁸⁵ She arranged the wood in a square shape. '*Para que salga bien y no se caiga!*' ('So that the mesa has a good outcome and does not fall down!').

⁸⁶ Linguistic shifts are also very important. The *yatiris* communicate in Aymara with the *Achachilas* and the *Pachamama*. However, when they address God, they do it in Spanish.

⁸⁷ 'The house was hungry', pointing out that it has been a long time since they did a similar ritual in my place, and adding more alcohol to the fire.

We entered my house, waiting for the *Achachilas* and the *Pachamama* to finish “eating” their *mesas*. I offered Doña Francisca some food and *refresco* -soft drink-, and then she read the coca to see if my offering had been positively accepted by the Gods. She also prepared an *illa*⁸⁸ for money: a small plastic bag with money and coca in it. She blessed it and advised me to carry it always in my bag. That way, I would acquire lots of money. She gave me some *retama* stalks to preserve in a corner of the room where I was living and then she went away, saying that everything was fine and that another client was waiting for her. However, before she left, she made sure that I understood I had to wait for the mesa to burn slowly, so that the *Achachilas* could eat well. When the fire had burnt out and the ashes were cold, I could bury them in a corner of the patio, asking the *Pachamama* to listen to my wishes, and to give me luck for all my projects.

Feeding the landscape is important. The altiplano is ‘alive’ (Albó 1992:93) and populated by supernatural beings that need to be fed with different offerings (*mesas*) at various moments of the year (Fernández Juárez 1993:85). Both men and Gods have to take care of each other to subsist, creating a culinary reciprocity between them (ibid 1993:115). In exchange and as a reward for these ritual offerings, people may receive abundant crops and fertility for their livestock as well as good health. When these reciprocal ties are broken (that is to say when humans do not offer any *mesas*), misfortune, illness and lack of

⁸⁸ *Illa* is an amulet.

production are the price they pay. Therefore, communities in the altiplano make sure that supernatural beings constantly receive their offerings.

The most venerated are the *Pachamama* -Mother Earth also associated with the Virgin Mary (*Wirijina*) (Harris 2000), as well as earth fertility and material sources of prosperity such as money (Harris 1987) -and the *Achachilas* (ancestors). However, the invisible beings that populate the altiplano are numerous and some of them are ambivalent and ambiguous (for instance, *supay* and *saxra*, which have a tendency to scare people and to cause illness). Well-being appears to be connected not only with the category of luck, but also with that of protection. In the following section, I aim to throw more light on the concept of protection and, more specifically, on its process of negotiation.

3) 'He gives me power'⁸⁹

Don Daniel, a man in his sixties, has been working as a *yatiri* for 18 years. He loves talking about his family and how *sabio* (wise) they have all been. His father was a *yatiri* as were his three brothers, who had recently passed away. He was struck by lightning on a stormy night, while he was walking with all the family on a hill path in Alto Munaypata, in the area of Pura Pura. After that, he and his brothers all became *fanáticos* (enthusiastic) about 'el mundo de la sabiduría de nuestros tata abuelos' (the world of ancestral wisdom) and they all acquired supernatural powers.

When I asked him the most common reasons for his clients to visit him, he replied to me: 'Customers come because I'm the Master and the healer. I

⁸⁹ This material was collected during an interview on the 11th of September 2004 in Alto Munaypata, La Paz.

prepare people: to explain to them what they do not know, I'm going to explain to them. They look for me, because people talk about me. I don't have any advertising, but people talk and they look for me'. While he was saying this, he took out a very professional-looking business card, on which there was a list of all his services (reading of playing cards as well as coca, cigarettes and alcohol, change of luck, healing of transport businesses in case of bad luck (especially for bus and taxi drivers), healing of diseases concerning kidneys, lungs and bladder) and his name, followed by two faces of the Devil.

He went on, explaining the main causes that bring his clients to visit him: problems at work, disharmony in the household because of the increasing number of separations and divorces and *cambio de suerte* if someone has damaged them. He added that he only did 'good' things. He would never send 'bad luck' to anyone. Nevertheless, he admitted that, when someone else had been malevolent with one of his clients, he had 'protected' them by performing black magic rituals in return. 'People who are not well prepared'⁹⁰ damage people too, because they do not have a wide knowledge of the spiritual/supernatural world. However, hurting someone is not a *provecho* - benefit- for anyone. Since he was not making lots of money out of it and he was not hurting many people, he said that he was more blessed than all the others ('I'm more blessed -*tengo más bendición*, [that is to say that he is more

⁹⁰ Don Daniel argued against people from the countryside, saying that they did not know about rituals and the supernatural world. The fact that he was *paceño*, that is to say from La Paz, was for him an indication of his superior knowledge. He gave examples of the most common mistakes made in rituals: the use of a lamb foetus instead of llama (the result will be the opposite of what you are wishing for) and the burial of a black llama instead of a white one, which could lead to a series of unfortunate events. See Fernández Juárez, 1995.

protected than others]. The others do it to make money. I don't. I always do the cheapest price and I take little money from poor people').

When I asked him where luck comes from and who gives it to people, he replied: 'I give luck, because I have blessings (protection) from everywhere. I go to each Calvary⁹¹, but more to Pachiri, close to Achacachi, Copacabana⁹² and Bonbori, and I have my person⁹³. He gives me power'. Although he underlined the importance of being in contact with all the supernatural forces, he also admitted that you have to choose a protector. In his case, his protector is the *Tio* -the devil associated particularly with the mines and precious metals (Nash, 1979). *Tio* means uncle in Spanish-. He also added:

You have to choose. I don't go inside Churches and I don't pray. I ask the Saints for wealth, but I don't pray because I did a deal with the Devil. Saints give to my people. I only ask for my people [his clients] (...) there are people that know and explain (...) those who do not work with the Devil, they can enter into the Church and they can pray. The Devil gives me power. My energy is well charged. I have been supported by every corner. I receive from all the forces, but more from the Devil...here you are in paradise, there is everything [referring to his place]. (...) Some people say that they hate the Devil, because he is bad, but this is not true. He is not bad. He is good. He gives money, work, everything (...) He lives underneath (...) above, on the earth, God dominates, underneath he does.

When he was talking about his own house, where he works and lives, he said: 'here you are in paradise, because you can find everything'. His home is bursting with mesas wrapped with white paper, alcohol, two altars with images of Jesus Christ and the Saints, the *Ekeko*, some human skulls, figurines of white elephants, Buddha, Egyptian deities and the *Tio* as well as all the ingredients required for different mesas (see pictures 7 and 8 in the appendix). It is

⁹¹ There are places on the altiplano that are considered to be populated by supernatural beings. The Aymara experts (*yatiris*) usually need to visit them and to make offerings in order to be protected and to be given power.

⁹² Don Daniel told me that he often went to Copacabana and offered a *saumerio* (offering) to the *Pachamama*. Copacabana is a very famous sanctuary in Bolivia devoted to the Virgin Mary, and the site of a Catholic pilgrimage.

interesting to notice that despite his deal with the Devil, he still has to continue to pay attention to other spiritual forces to maintain the balance. I asked more in detail about his relationship with the Devil. He replied:

It's not possible to talk a lot about it. You don't talk about it. It's occult science, you know, no? At midnight I make contact with him at the Devil Mouth, on the Sucre Road, because it is when it opens [referring to the earth]. (...) I'm a *ch'amakani*⁹⁴, that is to say that I speak with the Devil (...). It's a risk too for a Master. The days of your life are counted, not everybody can do it.

He did not want to add anything else about this topic, as if he had already revealed too much, but he said something later on that showed his emotional involvement with the Devil and added something more about their relationship. 'Have you seen the Devil in Oruro? [he here refers to a representation that can be found also deep inside the mine. Usually, there are offerings (coca, cigarettes, alcohol) that are made to the Devil]. Have you seen how they treat him? He is so sad (...) Can they not do something a bit better for him?'. Religious images are not only representations, but they are personifications of the spiritual world they stand for. Therefore, a statue or an image of Jesus Christ, Saint James, the *Ekeko* or the Devil are not only icons, but they are Jesus Christ, Saint James, the *Ekeko* or the Devil in person. They are alive: they have needs and desires and they need someone to take care of them. If someone takes good care of them, he/she will receive good luck in return. It is also interesting to notice how the balance between different supernatural forces has to be constantly maintained to ensure harmony between *el mundo de arriba* and *el mundo de abajo* (the world of above and the world of below), and how people constantly seem to shift their identities. The example of the gold teeth is very

⁹³ He referred to a specific supernatural force that gives him power: in his case the Devil. He used *persona* (person), but he meant 'supernatural force'.

⁹⁴ A *ch'amakani* is *dueño de la oscuridad* (lord of the obscurity) and he belongs to the highest category of the Aymara *maestros* -experts- (Fernández Juárez, 1995:79).

interesting: it is a representation of economic power, but it is also associated with the Devil and what he offers to human beings.

The *ch'amakani* is an ambivalent local figure and an interesting metaphor when talking about negotiations of protection. He knows white and black magic, *ambos caminos* -both paths- (Fernández Juárez, 2002:104) and he will oscillate between different white and black magic practices in order to solve the problems of his clients. In addition, he will negotiate his own protection with different supernatural forces, without denying a higher degree of devotion and involvement with a particular one (such as the *Tio*, for instance). It is also clear that the *ch'amakani* does not have personal power, but produces it through his interaction with his protector. Consequently, his degree of involvement with a supernatural force determines his degree of protection/luck, his power level and his success with his clients.

Don Daniel is in contact with Jesus, the Saints, and Virgin Mary (as he literally told me: 'I have to ask them things for my people [his clients]'), although the *Tio* is his protector. However, when it comes to going to Church, he says that he cannot enter and pray. It looks like he can be in contact with all the supernatural forces apart from God; God appears remote and inaccessible, but also dreaded and, therefore, there is a need to avoid Him (Tschopik 1968:356). Basically, Aymaras imagine God as an old man who has everything⁹⁵ (Monast 1972: 24) and who does not get involved with human daily life (Montes 1999:237,

⁹⁵ Interestingly, God is not perceived as good (Montes, 1999), because people do not receive anything from Him. While the *Tio* is considered very good, because he gives.

Goudsmit 2006). Little Andean literature has been written about this topic, underlining the absence of the Christian God from rituals and conversations.

This could also suggest that there is a supernatural hierarchy (as has been proposed by Arnold, Jimenez and Yapita, 1992) and that God is the unreachable top of the hierarchy. Nevertheless, Harris (2006) describes how peasants in Northern Potosí believe that God is present in material form and directly talk to Him. They communicate with God by participating in the Mass, and feed Him and the Saints by paying for the Mass. This is probably why Don Daniel does not pray or go inside churches; this would put Don Daniel in contact with God, which is something that he fears because of the *Tio*. The *Tio* allows him to be in contact with all the other forces (Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Saints), but not with God. This would also suggest that God is not the unreachable as mentioned above. People actually communicate with Him on a daily basis. In the following sections, I shall throw light on this issue by using some ethnographic examples I gathered during my fieldwork.

‘Thanks to the sun, the sky and the Saints’

‘*Suma Jakaña* es cuando Dios bendice la comida y la casa’ (‘*Suma Jakaña* is when God blesses the food and the home’)
Don Tito, Amachuma, 13th May 2004

In addition to the associations of the *Pachamama* and the *Achachilas* with the Virgin Mary and the Saints, Aymara Catholics also identify God with the sun (*Tata Inti-Willka*). They usually worship him⁹⁶ with daily small rituals: for example, every morning, when they wake up and they come out from their houses, they get on their knees, facing the sun, and they pray, asking for daily protection and for good luck. It is very common to hear expressions, such as ‘Si Dios quiere’ (‘If God wants’), ‘Estamos en las manos de Dios’ (‘We are in God’s hands’), and ‘Que Dios te bendiga’ (‘God bless’). I know that these are very usual phrases that can be heard in different countries, but in the Aymara context they are deeply connected with the conception of luck and protection.

On the 21st of June, the winter solstice in the Southern hemisphere and the beginning of the Aymara New Year, people gather around the Puerta del Sol in Tiwanaku to wait for the rising of the sun. The new sun arrives and people lift their hands to the sky to absorb its energy. In this way they are going to have good luck for the New Year. And two days later, on the night of San Juan (Saint John), on the 23rd of June, all El Alto as well as the surrounding countryside is lit up by many fires in the streets of the city, in the patios of the houses as well as in the fields in the countryside. People burn old things in order to obtain new ones in the Aymara New Year and they ask for protection and luck from Saint

⁹⁶ The sun was always identified with the Supreme God/energy during the Inca Empire. Aymaras were deeply influenced by the Inca (Montes 1999). Christianity also affected

John. The cult of the Saints⁹⁷ is very important, as mentioned in the previous chapter: each community in the countryside as well as the urban neighbourhoods have a patron Saint, which usually corresponds to the day of its foundation (see also chapter five).

Something very interesting also happens on Good Friday: you are supposed to visit 12 different churches, expressing the 12 stations of Jesus' ascent of mount Calvary. In each church, you make a greeting to a representation of Jesus Christ and you pray for your protection as well as for that of your family. Each statue of Christ is dressed with real clothes. Here again a religious image is a personification of the spiritual force it stands for.

This also happens on the 6th of January, when people take their baby Jesus miniatures to church to be blessed by the priest. The patio of the church is full of sellers advertising new clothes and shoes for baby Jesus. Being used to almost naked Italian baby Jesus, I was impressed to discover that each year you have to buy new clothes and shoes for your statue. It is a way to pay your respects to the baby. In return he will protect your family. After the figures have been newly dressed, they are taken inside the Church for the blessing of the priest, and then out again in the patio to be held over a fire on which they burn some incense. While each owner passes baby Jesus over the fire, he/she repeats: 'For the health, money, work and love of the entire family'.

worshipping practices. However, this does not necessarily mean that God is now perceived as closer and as more accessible by people.

⁹⁷ For further information, also see Buechler and Buechler (1996) and Montes (1999).

There are other rituals you can practice during the week in order to ask for luck and protection from God, on three specific days: Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, when the sky is supposed to open⁹⁸. According to Aymara beliefs, in these 3 days, God takes a rest from his work and you have more chance of being listened to. Therefore, you make a special offering to Him. I performed it in the patio of my house in Senkata. A Catholic Aymara priest offered to come to my place to show me how to do it. It was a Thursday night around 11pm. He started by preparing the fire with coal, alcohol and paper in the small charcoal grill that Doña Claudia -the *yatiri*- had used. Then, he moved into the house. With normal white paper, he made six boxes (they can be six or twelve) and put them on a dish. Then he put incense in each box, and while he was doing that, he was saying: 'For her studies, for her family, for her work, for her trip, for her health, for her friendships'. Later on, he invited me to follow him to the patio. He knelt down in front of the charcoal grill and asked me to do the same. He put two boxes on the charcoal grill and I had to place the other ones on the fire. Then, he asked me to hold the *bracero* and to point it in the direction where the sun rises with it. Meanwhile, he was praying aloud for me, asking God to receive all our prayers.

Soon after, he walked around the charcoal grill and invited me to do the same. Then, he asked me to go inside the house and he said that I was not allowed to say good bye to him. I also had to stay inside the house until the next morning. I could come out only after sun-rise. He went away without saying anything and

⁹⁸ The sky is also supposed to open during Holy Week, when people have to reach the *Apachitas* and burn incense. Apparently, in this way, the relations between relatives and the dead is reassured. During this week, the dead visit their families (Fernández Juárez 1996:220). God is not the centre of the rituals and is not mentioned.

left the *bracero* close to the main door, facing the direction of the rising of the sun. On the following morning, I had to bury the ashes in a corner of my patio. The ritual had many elements in common with that of the *yatiri*, and time again played a fundamental role. You are supposed to finish everything before midnight, because Friday does not belong to God, but to the *Pachamama* (Tuesday too), so you have to do rituals in her honour.

Interestingly, the Catholic priest is the only religious figure I witnessed who mentioned God during his rituals and to communicate directly with him. While the *ch'amakani* and the *yatiris* both need to be in contact with all the supernatural forces with the exception of God, who is not explicitly addressed, but sometimes may be represented by *Santiago*, Saint James (Harris and Bouysse-Cassagne 1988), the Catholic priest seems to push aside all the other forces and goes directly to God. It seems that each expert has exclusive access to certain supernatural forces. However, in both cases, there are certain similarities. The rituals have some traits in common and are done with the same final aim: achievement of protection (luck) and success. An Aymara has to pay respect to all the supernatural forces, asking for the support and ability of specific experts. This way they need a combination of multiple religious elements to assure their well-being. On the other hand, individuals like the Catholic priest, the *ch'amakani* or the *yatiri* are personally guarded by a specific supernatural force that has selected them. Therefore, they need to create an exclusive relationship with their guardian in order to be assured a superior degree of power in comparison to ordinary people.

Conclusions

Different experiences during fieldwork have shown me how important commitment to cosmological order is for my informants to create a sense of well-being. Harmonious relations between humans and supernatural forces are considered the foundation for 'the good life' and expressed through the use of the term *suerte*. *Suerte* is perceived as tutelary protection coming from supernatural forces. Everything that is out of control is negative. Therefore, there is a need to lead chaos towards order and harmony. Nothing can be left to chance, otherwise anything could happen.

Authority and power in the spiritual world are very important: supernatural forces are there to help people overcome their difficulties, but they cannot do it for free. You have to pay respect by making material offerings: the process of consumption of sacred practices and objects is fundamental. This is considered as a sort of 'culinary' pact based on 'commensality' between humans and gods. The offerings made by humans are going symbolically to be 'eaten' by supernatural forces through the burning of the objects offered. This allows one to enter in an empathetic relationship with them as well as with the rest of your 'community/ies'.

Through my ethnography, ambivalent perceptions of wealth emerge: my data show an emphasis on the importance of work and effort in 'feeding' relations with supernatural forces. This happens through the circulation of money, which is fundamental, at least to aspire to the ideal of *Suma Qamaña*, a search for equality both with humans and supernatural forces. This is rather difficult to

achieve, so often people prefer not to explicitly say how much cash they own. It is also important to recognise that there is some variation in the degree to which people embrace these ideals of equality expressed as *Suma Qamaña* in their everyday life.

Circulation of wealth and buying and selling of objects is central. But spending money is ineffective if not supported by faith and it is therefore important to shift one's identity between multiple religious aspects that appear intertwined together (for example those of the Catholic priest and those of the *yatiri* and *ch'amakani*). Faith appears embedded in material practices, such as commensality and exchange of money and objects.

Suerte also informs health, and in part includes all the different human spheres, which are not limited to the body or the psyche. Illness is one way in which things go wrong, as in the case of *susto*. This can be interpreted partly in moral terms (see Lewis 1975:333). This is why my informants are extremely careful to pay respect to all the different forces, with exceptions according to religious affiliation. Their spirituality has to be inclusive of all the multiple religious elements they are in contact with, because only in this way can they be fully protected, assuring their own well-being as well as that of their household and community and avoiding the evil eye, often connected with jealousy both from humans and supernatural forces.

Suerte is also about protection and success. Yet, these values are not distributed randomly as is sometimes assumed. *Suerte* takes place only after the individual,

the household or the community have carefully engaged in rituals and practices that all imply individual or community commitment and offerings. Faith is believed to be fundamentally the all-powerful force that always allows for success and survival, as happened for Don Justo (see Chapter 3). If you don't believe, you will not be protected by supernatural forces.

In fact, Senkata and Amachuma residents believe that nothing can take place without the influence of supernatural forces: no fiesta, no protest, no production, no work nor social advancement. Don Miguel once told me: 'You can pay lots of money, but nothing will change if you don't have faith'. Faith is the essence and one of the most important ingredients for well-being. It does not matter how ill you are or how much you lack: what matters is the capacity to overcome a critical situation. For my informants this capacity comes with the personal ability to believe and their beliefs are also the means that allow for the circulation and flows of things in various spheres, constantly recreating relations that represent 'the good life', also defined as equality or *Suma Qamaña*.

CHAPTER FIVE FIESTA AND DANCING: THE FULLEST EMBODIMENT OF SUMA QAMAÑA

In this chapter I shall focus on the importance of the *fiesta* -religious festivity- for the maintenance of collective well-being, compared to the social protests discussed in chapter five. This chapter represents a passage between the first part of the thesis and the second. In the previous chapters, the household has been at the core of my analysis, shedding light on rituals aimed at the creation of *suerte* and carried out secretly. The following chapters will look at public sources and displays of community well-being, such as the *fiesta* and social protests. These are manifestations of communal values and identified by my informants as *Suma Qamaña*.

Yet, my understanding of community is far from utopian; my ethnography will provide evidence of how recognition and social status are created among the members of the community through the *fiesta*. In fact, these moments of social togetherness also involve expressions of distinction and competition, connecting the different households, but also organising them through a hierarchical system based on conspicuous consumption and dancing. In Chapter 4, I mentioned how wealth is seen as a potential source of ill-being and how it is important to spend and share the money with other members of the community. Also, dancing in the *fiesta* with other members of the community has been invoked by my informants not only as an important experience in the creation of a collective conscience, but also as another individual act of faith. *Alteños* dance in honour of the Saints, asking for their protection. Thus, the *fiesta* becomes an individual

as well as a collective experience and this chapter creates a connection between these two dimensions.

Different authors (Block and Kissell 2001; Cowan 1990; Thomas 1996) talk about dance as ‘the fullest meaning of embodiment’, becoming ‘the embodied way of being-in-the-world’ as well as ‘the embodied way of being in a world of others’. Dance has also been analysed as an expression of relations of power, protest, and resistance, raising issues in areas of ethnicity, national identity, gender and class. Desmond (1993) shows how social identities are negotiated through bodily movement, constantly changing and signalling group affiliation and difference. This is particularly true in El Alto, where dance appears to be a fundamental mechanism for renewing a sense of community, embodying commonality and togetherness as well as distinctions and hierarchies with other residents and supernatural forces (Lazar 2002, Strobele-Gregor 1996:79).

Thus, the *fiesta* involves multiple aspects essential for well-being: physical, emotional, cognitive, collective, and religious. The sense of community embraces not only the local level, the physical space of the neighbourhood, but also the national one. *Fiestas* are very important for Bolivians of all social classes. During a trip to Northern Argentina, some Argentineans commented to me on how many *fiestas* Bolivians have. ‘They (Bolivians) are always celebrating. You cross the border and you are in another world’.

Fiestas are religious as well as social moments that the community experience as sacred. These special days are organised in honour of the Saint of the

neighbourhood or village; through dancing and the consumption of alcohol, individuals and the collectivity ask for the Saint's blessing for the coming year. *Fiesta* can be seen as a major motor for consumption in Aymara communities, both in the countryside and in the city, involving not only festive food and drinks, but also new clothes, and elaborate gifts to the *fiesta* sponsor. Some observers have analysed the exchange of goods during the *fiestas* and have denounced an apparently irrational expenditure of personal resources (Buechler 1980), and some have also converted to avoid what they considered to be a burden. However, sponsors usually made a concentrated effort to collect the necessary reserves (usually by increasing household productivity and by cutting household costs) after they have accepted the office. In fact, sponsors are appointed in advance so that they have time to save. Indeed *fiesta* motivates people to save.

In my year of fieldwork, I participated in many *fiestas*, as an observer as well as dancer. My personal experience as a dancer gave me an insight into the physical effort and the emotional power of dancing. My ethnography will explore the different aspects of the *fiesta*, dealing with power, protest, resistance, national identity, ethnicity, class and gender. All of these are inextricably connected with issues of well-being, and shed light on what people mean by success and how they try to achieve it.

The first section of this chapter gives some theoretical background on the *fiesta* and on dancing, emphasising the importance of this practice for collective and household well-being in the Bolivian context. The second section deals with my

own ethnography, while the third one analyses expressions of power and resistance through dancing. The fourth section looks at youth and the importance for young people of dancing and participating in the fiesta, especially when there is an 'objectification of dance as national culture' (Handler 1988). This is inextricably connected with issues of national and ethnic identity. In the conclusions, I compare the similarities and differences between social protests and fiestas to lead the reader to the next chapter.

Dancing and Consumption: the Value of *Fiesta*

Anthropologists have repeatedly argued that economy cannot be properly studied as an isolated system, but is an integrated part of a social and cultural totality. Therefore, consumption as it takes place in the *fiesta* cannot be disconnected from the cultural categories of the specific group in which it occurs. Were the world made of free autonomous individuals, it is arguable that people would be the only source and judge of their desires and they would not be subject to constraints other than those they would accept voluntarily. However, even in this case it would always be important to understand the meanings hidden behind the explicit choices people make, and to throw light on the interconnection between economics and culture. Why is it, for example, that people want to eat food A instead of food B, if it can be shown that both are equally nutritious and even that food B is less expensive? The answer must be found in an analysis of the cultural aspects of the society in question, not in an analysis of 'rational choice' and maximisation of value in any simple sense (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1995; Marshall 1972). What is considered valuable varies cross-culturally and between individuals, although it may be that people

try to maximise value everywhere. In Bolivia the conspicuous consumption behind the *fiesta* plays a very important role.

Consumption not only satisfies needs, but does so in ‘culturally circumscribed ways’ (Eriksen 2001:177; Miller 1995), as in the case of the *fiesta*. In a way, consumption can be seen as a mode of discourse or a language, that is to say a way to communicate and converse with one another, as many anthropologists such as Douglas and Isherwood (2002 [1979]) have argued. Thus, it would also be possible to apply ideas derived from structural linguistics, such as sign, signifier, signified and code.

The implication of this is that consumables acquire sign-values (Sahlins 1972). Commodities are defined by what they signify and what they signify is not defined by what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs (Baudrillard 1998). In addition, commodities may also be reflective of the social relations within a specific society, becoming a material as well as symbolic representation of the group as it takes place in the case of the Bolivian *fiesta*. As Miller affirms:

Consumption is a process of objectification, that is to say, a use of goods and services in which the object or the activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understandings of ourselves in that specific world. (1995:30)

Miller shows how people appropriate objects in order to create their own ‘moral projects’, which may be dissimilar from that of the producers. Objects, things, items and goods unify the sphere of economics and culture, becoming material culture (Miller, 1983).

At the same time, Bourdieu (1984) implies that analysing patterns of consumption can shed light on relations and, more specifically, consumption could be a key to the understanding of class distinctions. The social status of people is expressed through patterns and practises of consumption, so that consumption comes to represent the very site of class struggle conducted through culture. Bourdieu (*ibidem*) represents goods as no more than ‘symbolic utilities’ without mentioning the role of producers as well as the symbolic meanings of the goods prior to their arrival in the hands of consumers.

On the other hand, Miller (1987) stresses this aspect, underlining the importance of the specific context in which the commodification process takes place. The emphasis is not on the commodification process *per se*, but it is on the goods, the producers and the consumers. Therefore, every commodity is different from other commodities. Each one of them is unique, because people ‘reappropriate’ goods in different forms in order to create culture and identity (Miller 1995). Although the anthropological tradition seems to focus on the cultural aspects of consumption, often represented as a ‘theory of culture’ or ‘of social life’ (Douglas and Isherwood 2002 [1979]) or as ‘a reappropriation of goods’ in order to create identity (Miller 1995), not much has explicitly been written on consumption as a process for the achievement of individual and collective dimensions of well-being. This chapter emphasises what people identify as important and why this is connected with that ‘capability to lead a valuable life’ (Sen 1993), a worthwhile existence which is inextricably related to people’s consumption patterns, but also to the activities and performances embedded in these practices.

In fact, some of my informants claimed that they acquired a sense of well-being when they feel, experience and embody every component of the *fiesta*, becoming not only a capable and full person (Taylor 1989), but also part of a skilled and satiated community. Hence, the *fiesta* is inextricably linked with collective and individual/household dimensions of well-being, in which law and morality are essential ingredients. Everyday chaos is transformed through a highly ritualised collective celebration that unites people and gods in a specific space and time. This also suggests that a full and totalising sense of well-being might be momentary.

The ways cyclical and ritual time are built into people's understandings are fundamental. While the past inspires and enhances the organisation of social protests, the future is a source for practises chosen for destiny control. On the other hand, the perception of the present is embodied and enacted through the *fiesta*. All these dimensions describe a culturally specific response to the occult world, to the unknown, to those supernatural forces that may or not influence human daily life with accidents, disease, misfortune, affecting the well-being of individuals, families or entire communities.

As Poole (1990) claims, *fiesta* in the Andean highlands is a form of 'devotion' that takes place within the space of Catholicism and the church. Dancing is accompanied by the ingestion of alcohol, in honour of the Patron Saint. The *fiesta* is a social event that allows for the reaffirmation of community ties with other residents as well as with spiritual forces, considered as part of the

collectivity. In Bolivia, the consumption of alcohol takes place through the drinking of beer: whoever has bought the bottle or had bottles given to them will pour a small cup of beer for everyone. When everybody has a full cup, people are invited to consume it. This will happen only after everyone *ch'allas Pachamama* by pouring a few drops on the ground. This is a fundamental sharing of alcohol with other people and supernatural forces. Sharing is central to the *fiesta* and the reproduction of collective well-being, creating a sense of communality of experiences.

Alcohol has the power to mediate all kinds of relations, not only between people and the spirits, but also between kin and community. Alcohol consumption in Aymara communities 'almost always occurs in a social context' (Carter and Mamani 1989: 320). In the Andes, drinking is an art and it is fundamental, because it is linked with the memory of origins (Arnold 1998: 32). Through the consumption of alcohol, and the words produced in their drunkenness, people return to the original elements of the Andean universe (Abercombie 1998). So they sing and say: 'Now we drink for this and now we drink for that' (Arnold 1998: 32), and by doing so, they repeat different libations to the spiritual forces of the landscape. Alcohol allows for the creation and recreation of continuous bonds between humans and the supernatural world, because drinking is a sacred moment shared with all the members of the community (Carter and Mamani 1989; Lazar 2002).

Drinking and ritual offerings of money and food to the various deities are closely identified with a long-term order based on feeding and fertility. Through

offerings of alcohol and money, people celebrate and entreat fertility for the whole universe of which they form part (Harris 1989: 253). The libations are carried out for all sources of wealth. The money is the channel through which prosperity is symbolically reproduced. The sources of wealth are the spiritual forces. Hence, money is associated with fertility and allows for libations to the different deities, assuring the ritual cycle of honouring all forms of increase and well-being.

Fiestas are also seen as expressions of hierarchy: there is a hierarchy of ceremonial positions determined by *cargos*, which can be identified as different kinds of sponsorship. A network of obligations and consequent exchange of food, money and beer sustains each *fiesta*, so that *fiestas* become an integrative force acting upon groups of individuals to engage them in face-to-face contact in a joint activity. It is a way of confirming affiliation to a community. However, the kinds of exchange relationships in the Andes are based on commensality or 'fellowship at table' rather than reciprocity (Harris 1982; Harvey 1996; Lazar 2002). Feeding relationships are connected with ideas of power and obligation, but they are more complex than the Maussian idea of reciprocity (1990 [1924]). The importance of sharing with all the members of the community is fundamental for the well-being of the entire group. It is this act of commensality that allows for the reproduction of fertility and prosperity.

The sponsor of a *fiesta*, the *pasante*, has to spend lots of money buying beer and food, assuring in this way affiliation with other members of the community and with supernatural forces. Not only do the dancers in the *fiesta* become a

collectivity, but so does the audience, since by watching and drinking they participate in the devotional ritual in honour of the Patron Saint. All the relations involved in the *fiesta* (with peers and gods) are reinforced by the consumption of alcohol. This is true not only in the *fiesta*, but also in other types of rituals, such as the offerings for the *Pachamama* made during the month of August (see Chapter 4 and 7). As Allen (1988) argues, through *ch'allas* or libations, life force is passed to objects. Alcohol is the channel through which to pass life not only to objects, but also to humans.

During *Alasitas*, the festival invoking luck and prosperity in the month of January, miniatures come to life with a special ritual that ends with the passing of alcohol over the objects (see picture 9 in the appendix for the special blessing). In this way, objects like my Ekeko become alive and need to be nurtured as humans do. Alcohol consumption makes objects alive and seems to imply a regeneration of people as well. It is a life embodiment, becoming the fullest dimension of well-being, transforming people and things to a new life (see Chapter 4).

Alcohol consumption is also in accordance with the moral obligation to provide a material contribution or a gift to the other members of the community and the supernatural forces. As in the case of social protests, people have either to be physically present or to pay a quota. The sponsor, who usually does not dance, has to make a material contribution by paying the expenses of a *fraternidad* (dancing group, literally brotherhood). In this way, there is a partial redistribution of economic resources among all the members of the community

and a materialisation as well as an embodiment of well-being or the emergence of a common value or good (Munn 1986; Layard, 2005).

Similarly, among the Gawa in Papua New Guinea, public events and the distribution of food are fundamental moments aimed at fighting the threat posed by witchcraft (Munn 1986). The pursuit of fame itself tends to subvert equality, so witches attack those who are too successful to suppress this ‘destructive hyperindividualisation’ (Graeber 2001:84). The same can be found in the mechanism of Bolivian *fiestas*.

The individual who is too successful is symbolically ‘attacked’ and has to give up what he/she has achieved by becoming a sponsor. The members of the household selected for this *cargo* have the moral obligation to share their resources; failing to do so is regarded as selfish, individualistic and therefore reproachable. Bloch (2004) argues that in ritual the most common way of representing a social value is by embodying its opposite.⁹⁹ Thus, even the *fiesta* as ritual is characterised by this aspect. Don Carlos from Senkata once told me that the *fiesta* was ‘a celebration of the entire community that allows us to share with the others’.

Yet, it is also an expression of hierarchical organisation of the households, and distinction and recognition for the sponsors and the dancers are highly appreciated. Similarly to the example of the Gawa, these public events embody different values which are sometimes in contradiction with each other, but that

⁹⁹ Bloch (2004) suggests that witchcraft is an affirmation of certain moral values through a representation of utter immorality.

are both embraced by the group and by individuals, fluctuating between collectivity and individuality, past and present. I suggest that *fiestas* also represent the construction of a positive Aymara identity based on previous histories of discrimination and adversity. The ruling elites have unsuccessfully tried to abolish these religious celebrations. Nowadays they are not only a source of ethnic prestige, but also a national symbol. In the following sections, I shall illustrate all the different aspects of this argument in detail through my ethnography.

The power of dancing

When I was 7 years old, I had to decide whether I wanted to attend a ballet or a music class in my free time. I went for the former with no doubts or regrets. I enjoyed myself and put lots of effort into it. My teacher was impressed by my work and emphasised that ‘if only I had the right body’ I could have achieved a high standard, but I didn’t! Her words came back to me in Bolivia, while rehearsing *Tinku*¹⁰⁰ in preparation for the fiesta of the *Virgen de la Natividad*, on the 8th September 2004, in Senkata 79. I was taller and fatter than all the other dancers; this was undoubtedly a limit in terms of uniformity and homogeneity of the group, and I also didn’t have their physical memory, since it was the first time I had danced *Tinku*, which is considered a difficult dance, usually performed by young people, because ‘they are more athletic’. Some friends in Senkata refused to join our *Tinku* group (see picture 10 in the appendix) and

¹⁰⁰ The *Tinku* dance takes its origin from the ritual fight between two or more communities, found in the departments of Oruro, Cochabamba and Norte de Potosí, which involved ownership of territory and livestock between different ayllus -basic social units, assuring right and access to agricultural, social and cultural spaces (Contolini 2003:227).

opted for the *Diablada*¹⁰¹ one, saying that *Tinku* was too demanding even for them, who were ‘Bolivians’. They asked me if I wanted to join them, but I preferred the *Tinku* costume, since it is longer than the one used in the *Diablada* (see picture 11 in the appendix), and also cheaper. The dancing fees for the renting of the *Tinku* costumes are the cheapest ones of all the *fraternidades* (dancing groups, literally brotherhood).

The group I was dancing with was called *Jiwasampi* -the Aymara term for ‘with us’. The preparation started at the beginning of August: every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening we rehearsed from 7 or 7.30pm to 11 or 11.30pm. In the last two weeks, we had to rehearse every night, because the coordinators of the group said that we were not good enough and we had to put more effort into it. We rehearsed in the street in front of the house of one of the members of the group, where we could have access to electricity for the stereo, under a sky full of stars. Although it was winter, I was never cold. The rehearsal was intense for me; jumping for four and a half hours a day at an altitude of 4.000 meters was very tiring, but during that time my sleeping was excellent and I felt fit, healthy and content.

We danced on Friday and Saturday for the entire day (3rd and 4th September), because the 8th fell midweek and, usually, in the urban context, *fiestas* are postponed or celebrated in advance in order to avoid the loss of important working days. On the 3rd September, the civic parade started around 9am with the local residents’ committee at its head, followed by associations of local trade

¹⁰¹ It is a traditional Andean dance that represents the fight between the Archangel Saint Michael and the devils.

people, taxi and bus drivers. At the front of the dancing parade was the *Morenada* dance troupe from the main sponsor of the fiesta (Union Central 2). *Morenada* is about African slaves, and the name *moreno* refers to people of dark skin, who were brought to Bolivia during the colonial period to work in the mines of Potosi.

Morenada is considered to be the most prestigious dance in El Alto, due to the high expenses connected with its preparation (see also picture 12 in the appendix). Bands who play this music charge more, and higher costs are demanded for hiring the men's costumes, which are very elaborate (see also Lazar 2002). Women also need to buy new outfits, consisting of a *pollera* (voluminous multi-layered skirt), shoes and a shawl, and a different set for the following day, which can cost up to 250-300US\$. The *pollera* and shawl are more expensive than Western clothing and represent a symbol of wealth (Buechler and Buechler 1996; Salazar de la Torre 1999; Weismantel 2001; Lazar 2002).

For all these reasons, *Morenada* is usually danced by successful sellers, who are married and have acquired adult status. Being still a student, unmarried, not cohabiting with a partner and childless, I was generally considered a young person. Thus, I had to choose one of the youth groups to dance with in the fiesta. The options were *Tinku*, *Kullaguada* or *Diablada*. Young people usually perform more difficult and tiring dances, as if their lack of prestige has to be compensated through physical activity and effort. Each age group has to offer something special to this ritual festivity and to the supernatural forces. Wealth

substitutes for youthful skill and energy as people get older. When physical performance is less acrobatic, money and expensive costumes are more important. As Guido told me in August 2004:

Before, participation in the patron feast was because of devotion, but now it's losing its original meaning and it is just for dancing. If before you were dancing for Jesus -el Señor del Gran Poder, now you are dancing because you have money and you can dance. Before it was a way to thank God, now it's not, because you have to have money. Dancing is a way to have fun and I like it. If we dance it's because they (ancestors) have always done it. You cannot dance every day. It's a way to celebrate.¹⁰²

Dancing in the *fiesta* of the patron Saint has always been associated with religious reasons, to thank the Saints, Virgin Mary or Jesus for their protection. Today the meaning has shifted slightly or assumed different connotations, especially in the urban context. In fact, in many cases, it is seen as a way of expressing social advancement as well as material enrichment. You dance if you have money. However, this is not always true. Religious reasons remain quite important. In addition to them, for example, among young *alteños* the main motive is to enjoy the dance, to reproduce that cultural richness that seems far away from everyday life, to feel 'your own identity', to feel 'you are Bolivian' as my informants would tell me, but also to be recognised as a good dancer by your peers and neighbours. Being a good dancer means being able to move well, knowing choreographic steps, moving in harmony and uniformity with the rest of the dancing group. Also, being a good dancer allows for the recognition of the other members of the community and of the supernatural forces. By being a good dancer, an individual actively participates in the creation of individual and collective well-being. This is an important form of social commitment.

¹⁰² 'Antes la fiesta patronal era por devoción, pero' ahora se está perdiendo, ya es por bailar y no más. Si antes se bailaba por el Señor del Gran Poder, ahora se baila porque tienes plata y puedes bailar. Antes era una manera de agradecer, ahora no, porque tienes que tener platita. Bailar te hace divertir y te gusta. Si bailas es porque siempre lo han hecho. Tampoco se puede bailar todos los días. Es una manera de hacer fiesta'.

Commitment to the zone/neighbourhood is felt and constructed through movement (Lazar, 2002: 129). As Jane Cowan has noted:

Participating in the *fiesta* can provoke that sense of recognition –which though not inevitable is still by no means rare– that one is morally part of, just as one is now corporeally merged with, a larger collectivity, a recognition that, as a profoundly visceral knowledge, carries the force of absolute conviction. (1990:132)

Different scholars (Radcliffe-Brown 1922; Bigenho 2001; Lazar, 2002; Kealinnohomoku 1979; Lange 1975; Spencer 1985) have emphasised the importance of dancing for individual as well as collective well-being and harmony. The self is expressed individually and in relation to the others: ‘being-in-the world as being-with-others through dance’ (Tamisari, 2000). Uniformity and conformity to the rest of the group are essential elements and are usually maintained by the guides in front of each group. They are usually the best dancers and the ones dictating the steps to the other dancers. Yet, this sense of togetherness and collectivity is juxtaposed with the the need for distinction and recognition. This is usually achieved not only through dancing ability, which should be the same for all the different dancers, but also through the choice of the costumes or specific accessories. This was clear in the *Tinku* group in which I danced in Senkata 79.

The costumes for the *Tinku* were rented by the co-ordinators of *Jiwasampi*, José and Juan, dancers themselves in our group or *bloque*¹⁰³. They had received the money from the *preste* -sponsor, of the *Tinku* (in the case of youth the ‘sponsor’ is usually the final year students of the local high school). In our case the

¹⁰³ The *Tinku* fraternidad was formed by various bloques -blocks. A bloque is usually formed by 15 to 50 people. The number of bloques can vary and is usually between 10 and 20. All the bloques together form the fraternidad of *Tinku*. There were 15 of us in the bloque *Jiwasampi*.

sponsors were only some of the final year students of the *Colegio España*. These students voluntarily offered to become *prestes*. In addition to a fee from each dancer (25 bs. –around 3US\$), the money from the sponsors was used to rent the Tinku costumes, and to buy food and drinks to feed the entire *bloque* after the performance.

The costumes arrived on Friday morning, a few hours before the beginning of the performance, and the members of *Jiwasampi*, especially the girls, started to fight each other over the best costumes. Because the costumes are rented some of them are not in very good condition and lack important decorations. Some of the girls also wore special accessories so that they stood out from the others. Dancing *Tinku* or *Tobas* in the fiesta is another important practice for young people to reproduce a sense of community as well as to value their cultural richness and symbolic capital. However, the dance is also a space in which young people can distinguish themselves for their individual dancing abilities and their beautiful costumes or accessories. This is the same for adults, although for young people it is more important, since they could be noticed by possible future partners.

Each dancing group has to perform well, because the *Junta Vecinal* -local residents' committee- will judge the best one and give them a trophy (cup) that goes to the *preste* (sponsor or also called *pasante*). The importance of the *Junta Vecinal* is fundamental. It usually opens the *Entrada* and is given a special position, sitting on a podium, in order to have the best view of all the dancers. Our performance lasted around 10 hours on Friday the 3rd of September, and

continued for 5 hours on Saturday the 4th, when people participated in the *Diana* (procession of all the dancing groups held on the second day of the fiesta, early in the morning) in more casual clothes (jeans and navy blue jumper for our *Tinku* group). On both days, we ended our performance in front of the podium. These last moments were extremely difficult: the rhythm got faster and faster, and I began to feel an acute pain in my kidneys; it was not only the need to dance very fast, but also to sustain such a rhythm with lots of physical effort and endurance. The music was very repetitive and seemed everlasting: the beginning and the end of each sequence were exactly the same. It was the last chance dancers had to impress the audience and they wanted to make the most of it. After the performance in front of the *Junta Vecinal*, it was finally time to relax.

On Friday evening, we all went to dance *Cumbia Villera* an Argentinean genre very popular among young people in El Alto in 2004 for a couple of hours, despite our exhaustion. On Saturday afternoon, all the *bloque Jiwasampi* went to the house of José, one of the co-ordinators of the group, where we had a delicious *sajta de pollo* (chicken with potatoes), abundant *chicha* (home-brewed corn beer) and *refresco* (soft drink). After the food and drinks the future co-ordinators for the fiesta in 2005 were elected: one boy and two girls were selected by the 2004 co-ordinators. José put a necklace around their necks and gave each of them a jar of *chicha*, saying: 'In the name of our traditions, I nominate the three of you responsible for next year's dance'. Everybody applauded and the three new co-ordinators had to drink down the whole jar without stopping. The three future co-ordinators were chosen because of their

dancing abilities. It was evident to all the members of the group as well as to the audience that they were the best dancers.

Becoming co-ordinator of a dancing group or *bloque* is a great honour for young people. Nevertheless, it also involves a great deal of responsibility, and, although it is a prestigious recognition, there also are lots of difficulties and problems in finding resources to organise the dancing group. Issues of corruption and morality are always related to these positions and are good experiences for the youth in order to practice for the future responsibilities of local leadership, as Guido's story demonstrates.

Guido, one of the co-ordinators of the *Tobas* group at the fiesta of 25th of July (Santiago, Saint James) in Senkata 25 de julio, told me that last year he asked the help of one of the local leaders of the *Junta Vecinal* -local residents' committee and main administrative structure- to find a band for his group. Don Victor decided to help him. He went with Guido to the military headquarters of Ingavi to ask the military band if they were available on the relevant dates. The band agreed to perform and asked for a fee of 300 bolivianos (around 40US\$). Guido was already very worried, because that year they didn't have an official *preste* and were limited to the contributions of young dancers. Don Victor replied that it was a very good deal and told Guido to ask for more money from the *Tobas* dancers, so that "we both (Guido and Don Victor) can get something out of it". He advised Guido to tell the other members of the group that the band actually wanted 400 bolivianos, so that they both could get 50 bolivianos each. Guido was very upset with Don Victor's behaviour and refused to overcharge

his friends. This shows how difficult it can be to be selected as a youth coordinator of a dancing group, and how young people experience some of the difficulties and problems related to the world of adults.

Supervising the fiesta is one of the most important responsibilities for the *Junta Vecinal*. However, plans relating to the festivities can go wrong, as occurred in July 2005. In 2004 the celebrations in honour of St. James were organised in great style in the neighbourhood. They began on the 23rd of July, and ended two days later. The local residents' committee, residents, schools, confederations and Trade Unions, including all the active population of the zone participated in the civic parade or *desfile civico* organised for the Friday morning. They continued on the Saturday morning with a Mass in honour of St. James and the *Entrada* (procession of dancing groups along the defined route of the fiesta, in full costume and usually held on the first day of the fiesta, the Friday). Only two groups were involved: the *Morenada 25 de julio* of the wealthiest adults and the *Tobas* with 25 young people.

But in 2005 Senkata residents did not celebrate. They were supposed to have a parade similar to that of 2004. Friends from the zone asked me to go back to dance with them. However, a few weeks before the planned celebration, residents became very upset because there were rumours that one of the two *prestes* (Don Mauricio) had not saved enough capital to cover the costs. Some of the inhabitants (especially those active in the organisation of the fiesta and sponsors in past years) protested, saying that it was his duty to ensure that he had enough money to cover all the expenses. Others (mainly those who were

less actively involved in the fiesta organisation and participation) replied that this was a difficult economic and political time due to the social protests of June 2005 -the second water war. They could understand that the *preste* had not managed to save enough, because they were in a similar situation and did not have enough money to participate as dancers in the fiesta.

This was the first time in the 25 years since the foundation of the neighbourhood that Senkata residents were not getting together to celebrate St. James. The second *preste* (Don Gregorio), who had managed to save the necessary capital, became very angry with his colleague and decided that he was not going to pay either. If Don Mauricio was allowed not to get involved due to lack of money, he too could avoid spending so much money. Some residents suggested that the *Junta Vecinal* should hold a special meeting in order to consult all the residents on a possible solution. Other rumours were circulating, for example, about the possibility of each family being asked for a quota payment to cover the shortfall. There were concerns that other zones in El Alto, such as Santiago II, would achieve a better reputation and protection from the Saint due to the successful efforts of its residents to organise great celebrations for St. James. However, the suggestion of a general quota was not approved by residents. In the special meeting held by the local residents' committee, they came to the conclusion that it was a difficult moment for all of them and that they could not afford to pay extra after the social protests of the previous month.

On the 25th of July, Don Ignacio, one of the first settlers in Senkata, decided to pay the priest in order to hold a special Mass in honour of *San Santiaguito*. He

felt somehow responsible; since he was quite well-off and the owner of the biggest restaurant in Senkata, he told me that he had at least to pay for the Mass. He was worried about the possible reaction of the Saint towards the entire community, because of their failure to celebrate his day, adding that St. James can be very kind, but also mean when residents do not make enough offerings to his devotion. Dancing *Morenada*, for example, evokes his calmness and protection, since it is the Saint's favourite dance. Because he had money, it was morally unacceptable for Don Ignacio to let the 25th of July pass without a proper Mass for the Saint. He had at least to try to help his community to get out of this chaotic situation and do something that showed him to be a 'capable and valuable' person as well as a respectful resident, who was willing to sacrifice some of his wealth for the well-being of his *vecinos*. In fact, participation in the fiesta had been sacrificed for another manifestation of communal values: the social protests of June 2005. While participation in the fiesta would involve only Catholics, the participation in the social protests had involved the entire community, uniting Evangelicals and Catholics. However, the sense of moral obligation and fear expressed by Don Ignacio sheds light on the constant worry people have when dealing with supernatural forces, such as Pachamama, Saints and Mountain deities (*Achachilas*) (see also Chapter 3).

Dancing *Ch'utas* is dancing the power of politics?

In the altiplano countryside festivities mark a change from daily life in which each family farm lives isolated from others¹⁰⁴. During the fiesta, all individual and family activities are temporarily suspended in order to participate in the intense communal activity (Vargas 1993). As we have previously noted, all

¹⁰⁴ This scattered residence pattern is true for La Paz, but does not apply elsewhere.

community festivities are characterised by music and dance, which are fundamental aspects of Aymara communal life. In the cities and in the rural areas of the department of La Paz, Carnival in particular is the moment when *ch'utas* dance (see picture 13 and 14 in the appendix). In the Andean context different meanings can be attached to the word *ch'uta* (see for example Urton on Peru 1984 and Harris on Northern Potosi 1984).

In La Paz the word *ch'uta* refers to an Aymara of provincial origin born and raised in the city and the dance represents this specific social group (Vargas 1993). The *ch'uta* is accompanied in the dance by a *cholita*¹⁰⁵; his mask is made of pink wire mesh with a beard and moustache of twisted horse-hair. He wears the *lluch'u* (native woollen cap), a shirt, but also a tie and suit that represents the white man. Although the *ch'uta* dancer is the typical *paceño* (from La Paz) of Indian origin, his costume and his falsetto voice suggest that the 'Indian' is mocking 'the white man' through the dance. However, while in the city the *ch'uta* represents an Indian of rural origin raised in the city, the dance of *ch'uta* is also performed in the rural areas, where dancers dress in the same way and stand for the *pongos* of the land estate.

In fact, the *ch'uta* as a character has a predecessor, the *pongo*, and a successor, the *cholo* (Vargas 1993). While the *cholo* is usually dressed in European-style, the *pongo* was a hacienda-based Indian dressed in indigenous clothes. In some cases his work took him to the city, to the Master's house there. All hacienda workers on large land estates were called *pongos*. A *pongo* usually slept beside

¹⁰⁵ Women brought up in the city by Aymara parents.

the door (door is *punku* in Aymara and from here derives the word *pongo*), and was subject to the worst treatments. According to Costas Arguedas (1967) the *pongo* was the indigenous servant with certain kinds of duties or obligations towards his Master. In the haciendas these obligations were seen as rent to the Master for the use of the land. This is why the newspaper La Prensa (15th of February 2004, La Paz) defines the dance of the *ch'utas* as the 'dance of the slaves', although *pongos* were servants and not slaves.

With the Agrarian Reform of 1953 and the abolition of the *pongo* system, the *pongos* were free to go to the city and find new forms of employment. As ex-servants of the haciendas, *ch'utas* also started to represent sales people who had migrated to the city after the Agrarian Reform. This may be why *ch'utas* is such a popular dance in El Alto and La Paz as well as in the rural areas of the department of La Paz. The diffusion of the dance from rural to urban areas is linked to and indicative of the social history of the *pongos* who went to work in the city.

Carnival was not only a moment of celebration of the first fruits of the harvest, but it was also an occasion to mock 'the white man' or, more specifically, the Master of the hacienda, the Spanish, the aristocrat, the upper classes, in a similar manner to European Carnival traditions. Today the Carnival dancing tradition of *ch'uta* continues in the city as well as in the rural area. In Amachuma, for example, the celebration is used as a moment of community reunion where all the political, economic, social, gender relations are recreated and reassured as well as the relationship with the *Pachamama*. Despite all these fundamental

aspects of the celebration, the dance of *ch'utas* performed nowadays suggests that dancers are still making fun of the ruling class.

Nowadays the category of politicians and the more abstract idea of the national government take the place of the old Master of the hacienda, of the Spanish and of the aristocrat. A man from Amachuma told me: 'If we do not go out to protest, we will die of slavery and poverty', referring to the protests of October 2003 as well as to those organised for the future. It looks like the shadows of the past are still present, although they assume different characteristics. People in El Alto as well as in Amachuma continue to dance *ch'utas* and this may be interpreted as a way to mock the ruling elite. Mocking is sometimes the only way to empower and to free oneself from oppression.

Interestingly, in Amachuma men who danced *ch'utas* were not always dressed in the same way. Local men wore the typical costumes, identifying themselves as proper *ch'utas*. However, men who came from El Alto (usually kin who had migrated to the city) as well as men who were not working as farmers dressed as *pepinos* (the *pepino* is a Carnival character and indicates a higher social status in comparison to the *ch'utas*, see also Paredes Candia 1989). They performed the same dance, but they differentiated themselves through their costume. This is also indicative of the fact that they are believed to belong to a different social class and that they usually define themselves as *mestizos*. In Amachuma I was invited to dance by a local young man who moved to the city few years ago (see also Chapter 6). Despite his rural Aymara origins, he defined himself as *mestizo*, because of his business success, his university course and engagement in

important urban social relations. During Carnival celebrations he was dressed as a *pepino*. This is also true in El Alto, where there are professional and educational differences between those who usually wear the typical *ch'uta* costume and those who wear that of *pepinos*. Curiously, local children participating in the celebrations of the Carnival also dressed as *pepinos*. Children are thought not to be *ch'utas* or, at least, this costume is not perceived as an appropriate one for them.

Dancing *ch'utas* also has another important role for the formation of new couples and interactions between men and women within the community, which is evident in the way the dance is performed. Couples dance together in a line. Usually, the man and the woman initially run slowly, holding each other's hand. Then they exchange their hands by inverting their positions. When the music becomes faster, men start to *dar la vuelta* (to turn) the woman one way then the other. The woman needs to put lots of energy in this moment of the dance, because her *pollera* (voluminous multi-layered skirt) needs to fly in the air, rotating in one or the other direction. The dance of *ch'utas* can be seen as an important reference to the gender division of the population, but it also works as a means for social interaction as well as social organisation, and it is indeed a powerful metaphor for the differences between various social classes.

Dancing as Embodiment of Cultural Heritage

As Reed (1998:511) argues, dancing is a powerful tool in shaping nationalist ideology and in the creation of national subjects, often more so than are political rhetoric or intellectual debates. Dancing embodies cultural heritage, becoming an emblem of an authentic precolonial past. The emotional power of dance

becomes a nationalist symbol. In particular, this aspect arose when I began to interact with youth in the city of El Alto.

Some young people in Senkata identified culture, their parents' culture, as the only solution to the discrimination to which they are subjected because they are from El Alto. Young people see themselves as caught between their parental roots and the new models offered by the city through the educational system, the TV and their peers. One possible reaction to the alien urban world is to organise themselves in a network of solidarity where together they can blow away loneliness. In this way, they can overcome the daily absence of adults who are often busy at work, and the public and social pressures of living where they live and being who they are. Both, the parents and the State, are in a way trying to shape youth identity, and 'reproducing community in the name of our traditions' (José from Senkata, 4/09/2004) can be a shared search for an answer to the question of who they are and where they are going.

It is the search for a different kind of identity, from that of being simply Bolivian or Aymara, or a member of the Quispe, Condori or Mamani family. There is much more and that more is taking form between dusty unpaved streets at 4.000 meters of altitude, adobe walls, latrines, polleras, mini skirts, jeans, make up, school wood benches, Spanish, Aymara, foreign soap operas, Hollywood movies, *cumbia villera* (Argentinian music), street rubbish, *chuñu* (dried potatoes), stereos, rice, penny arcades, fizzy drinks, aggressive street dogs, family, sisters, brothers, hip hop, groups of friends, girlfriends or boyfriends and *salchipapas* (french fries with sausages). It is all happening in a

specific place, and as Guido from Senkata said, 'we are still deciding if we want to be good or bad', if they want to follow their parents or the models offered by the city or the media. As young people often say in Senkata, the model offered by their parents is described and represented as 'good' and 'morally rich', while the one offered by the city is 'bad' and amoral. However, there is a tension. If they decide to follow the model of their parents, they will be excluded and discriminated against in the national context. This is why they are still deciding who they want to be, undecided between past and future, reinventing a communal present to face the world.

It is the generation of 'entiendo, pero no hablo' ('I understand, but I do not speak') as Guaygua et al. (2000) have also noted. They understand Aymara, but they cannot speak it; even when they go back to their parents' villages and they interact with relatives and friends who speak in Aymara, they always answer in Spanish. Despite the fact that they theoretically associate the well-being of their people with the world and values of their rural migrant parents, in practice they have built their identity on the basis of the new models offered by the media, the school, their peers and the city. The use of language is indicative of this as well as the embodied experience of dancing and their consumption trends.

To be able to dance (*el saber bailar bien*) is fundamental. Dance is imagined as culture, the culture of our parents. Young people often dance in a *fiesta* because in this way, they believe that they embody their cultural heritage. However, adults often say that young people are forgetting their 'Andean culture' (term used both by adults and young people), and this happens because they do not

know how to dance national dances, preferring new dance styles. They also often repeat that 'their cultural richness should not be lost', so youth has a duty to continue to reproduce the traditions of their ancestors through dancing in the fiesta.

As 15 year old Natty from Senkata told me: 'For me it's very important to know our cultural roots, to get united among young people, to feel like in a family. The cultural aspect is very important. Young people do not know traditional dances; they only know how to dance cumbia and this is very bad'. José, 23 years old, also explained: 'We have to get involved in cultural activities, such as participating in the fiesta, because young people are forgetting about cultural aspects. They are valuing the culture of other countries, from the way of dressing, everything is changing. What TV shows, people copy'.

Marco, 17 years old, always wears a second-hand American t-shirt on which is written SPACE JAM, wide jeans and a baseball hat. He is very keen on hip-hop music and likes to compose new hip-hop texts in Spanish. Usually, through his music he talks about the problems of young people in El Alto and, more specifically, about the lack of freedom and the authority of the family and the school. He told me:

Globalisation is influencing our culture. Our country sometimes does not know which culture it has, but we, the youth, we have to value it. There are no places where we can share all together what is culture and how to appreciate it. The US influences South America more than any other country. Japan and Korea too. The US influences us through music, clothes, and way of thinking. Young people see it as attractive because of TV. The majority of the movies are from the States. Young people identify with who they see on TV and then they try to wear the same clothes or be like them. We have to value a bit more our culture and to express what Bolivia is and to create an opposition to foreign culture. I would love to organise Theatre plays about how life was before and how it is today, and a newspaper to tell young people about our culture.

When I asked Marco more about this, he added: 'We know our culture, but what is happening is that it's there, but we do not practice it. We should cultivate our own culture more', for example through dancing in the fiesta.

One of the adults from Senkata, former member of the JV commented on this topic:

I'm an ex-leader of the neighbourhood. It's important to have cultural activities, such as fiestas, because it's a good way to motivate young people. Youth is a bit rough nowadays. There are not institutions that promote cultural acts. You have to teach them Andean culture. In practice, young people are forgetting Andean culture. When they are not involved in Andean culture, young people learn other things, such as, for example, rock music, but for us, dads and mums, young people should not lose our culture. It's important to cultivate it. More than anything else the music and the national dance. Youth should lead the area now more than other times. Parents should educate them in the responsibilities of being an elected authority. Youth should be more prepared for this and motivated now that the municipal elections are coming.

The words of this adult suggest that young people should continue the traditions and customs of their parents: there is a moral duty attached to it. They need to be enlightened by their parents on the importance of sharing economic resources with their peers and the supernatural forces and of continuing the organisation of the fiesta. Their choices should continue in accordance with the traditions of their ancestors.

Alteño youth seems very keen on participating in the cultural events of their neighbourhoods. It appears as if their preference to dance *Tinku* in the fiesta is also a metaphor for their position and for their search of identity. It is a fight between opposites, but also an encounter between the two. New music genres, such as *Cumbia Villera* and traditional rhythms, such as *Tinku*, meet together, creating a mixed cultural space where old and young, modern and traditional clash and fuse in the fiesta. As I mentioned above, the *Tinku* in the fiesta was

followed by two more hours of Cumbia Villera on the 3rd and 4th September. Also, I should make clear that the steps we adopted in our *Tinku* were considered not to be traditional. It was rather a modern reinterpretation of the *Tinku* steps.

Therefore, dance is expressive of new/old forms of embodied identity. ‘Identity is national music and dances’, as one of my informants once described to me. Interestingly, when young people talk about *cumbia villera*, they often told me they consider it a rediscovery of their national music production. The texts of the songs used nowadays by Argentinean musical groups are originally from Bolivia and would belong to ‘old’ songs of the *musica chicha* or *cumbia boliviana*, or at least this is what young people say. Boris, a boy from Senkata, once told me: ‘These songs are the ones that my parents were dancing when they were young, but the Argentinians have added new rhythms to them, they have re-explored them’.

This valorisation of their own culture is also related to the historical process of recognition of its beauty by European countries since the end of the seventies (Contolini 2003:15), when the attention shifted from political and social songs (*nueva canción*) related to the Chilean dictatorship to the authentic traditional music of the Andes. It’s from the beginning of the eighties that Quechua and Aymara music groups were invited to Europe to perform in various festivals and when Andean music and culture acquired more prestige. Music and dance have always played a very important role in the definition of the Aymara self and community. They have to be understood as fundamental rituals through which

the community is continuously created, and through which individuals embody and express their identity. Music and dance are also a way of being accepted and appreciated by outsiders.

Identity is not a bounded category. It shifts between different elements, being constantly in evolution, but sometimes also changing abruptly and dramatically. Identity is situational, or so it appears for young people. Their selves and, in particular, their perceptions of the self vary in relation to the family, the group of peers, the school, the State, the Church, the way they embody the experience of dancing, their consumption trends as well as their love life. What they are is inextricably connected to the territorial space they live in and to the constructions in the imaginary of inhabitants and non-inhabitants.

Music and dance are experienced by young people as a possible means for the social advancement of their own culture, for the recognition of their symbolic capital and cultural richness. This would mean being accepted as Aymara within the national context as well as as Bolivian within the international one. Becoming an object of pride in the international arena through music and dance can change the perceptions and conflicts between different social classes and ethnic groups. Being Aymara and Bolivian means being able to dance well and to appreciate one's own symbolic capital, which is a fundamental aspect of well-being. Interestingly, when talking about this topic, people would often state that it is important to dance national dances so that the Andean culture will not disappear, identifying themselves as Andean rather than Aymara or Bolivians. It was quite common for people to identify as *andino* (Andean). This suggests that

alteños would identify more closely with Peruvians rather than Bolivians from the Eastern tropical lowlands.

However, inhabitants of El Alto also tend to define themselves as Aymara and as such they find pride in dancing, conquering that urban space that in the past was the site of previous attempts at repression by the ruling elites. Yet, it was not successful. The Aymara music and dances are still there, reminding adults and young people about their ancestors and traditions as Guido also said: ‘if we dance it is because they (ancestors) have always done it’. My informants clearly express their attachment to music and dance, as a sort of link with their past. No matter if their steps are authentic or ‘experimental’,¹⁰⁶ what is important is performing. As Stobart (2006:6) argues, playing music and dancing give an opportunity for people to work on the quality of their relations with the surrounding environment and community, stressing empathy, closeness and communication, as well as assuring well-being and (re)productive potential. This happens in El Alto as well, although not the entire neighbourhood participates in the religious celebration. In the following section, I shall talk about the Evangelical community and their absence from the fiesta.

Being Evangelical in El Alto

Darkness falls. It is the end of the winter in Senkata and people are getting ready for the fiesta of the *Virgen de la Natividad*. Maya (see Chapter 3) stops playing her panpipe. She has been rehearsing for a while for her music class and now her favourite Argentinian soap opera begins on TV so she decides to have a break. Each young person I know in Senkata watches daily his/her favourite

¹⁰⁶ See Bigenho (2002:18).

soap opera on TV, usually from Argentina or Brazil. There are many of them at different times between 5 and 8pm, portraying fashionable young girls with difficult love lives.

The main character of Maya's favourite soap opera is a young girl who lives in a very rich household in Buenos Aires. She dreams of becoming a famous rock singer. She has her own band, composed of her friends and boyfriend. But she is not in love with her boyfriend and she suffers for this. She loves another man. She is very confused about her emotional life, as am I with the plot. I can never remember their names and Maya gets upset because every time she has to explain the story to me again and remind me of the characters' names. Maya would like to share her excitement with me about the progress of each episode, but I am not really good company. I always leave before the end to go to my *Tinku* rehearsals. Outside the house I am back in El Alto, far away from Buenos Aires, the world of rock and difficult love stories. The air is fresh and the members of *Jiwasampi* are plugging in the stereo, ready to learn new steps and to be 'experimental'. Maya would love to join me and would even give up her favourite soap opera, but her parents (see Chapter 3) are Evangelicals and do not want her to participate in the fiesta.

Numerous authors have written about the growth of Protestant (usually Pentecostal) Churches in Latin America since the sixties (Stoll 1990; Martin 1990; Bastian 1992; Garrad-Burnet and Stoll 1993; Lehmann 1999). In Bolivia this growth has happened in recent years: only 1% of the population was Evangelical in 1960 (Bastian 1992). In 1992 the percentage rose to 10%

(Canessa 2000) to reach 25% in 2001 (Lazar 2008). Pentacostalism and Evangelicalism are taken here to mean more or less the same. Evangelical was the term most often used by my informants, but sometimes they also called themselves Christian.

In Senkata, Evangelicals refuse to engage with some practices such as, for example, to become *compadres* (godparents), to participate in fiestas, or to engage in rituals in honour of the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), associating this latter practise with paganism. In all these three cases, a conspicuous consumption is expected. Being a godparent means sharing economic expenses with the child's parents. Participating in a fiesta as a sponsor (*preste* or *pasante*), or as a dancer requires a certain amount of capital to spend on food, alcohol and costumes. Rituals in honour of the Pachamama also involve a series of expenditures for the ingredients which are going to be offered. So the choices made by evangelicals in Senkata are linked with the embracing of Protestant ideological values, based on the importance of wealth and the notion of accumulation. Formal education becomes a very important aspect for social climbing and the family capital has to be used for this specific purpose as the Condoris case shows in Chapter 3.

Conversion to evangelism can be attributed to different reasons. Yet, the avoidance of the *fiesta* can be seen as an important aspect at its basis. Don Justo Condori emphasised the fundamental role played by his health issues in his conversion. After being diagnosed with cancer, he decided to convert and to avoid alcohol. Becoming evangelical gave him the opportunity to decline any

possibilities of participation in the *fiesta*. Other neighbours in Senkata, especially women, explained the necessity to avoid the consequences of religious celebrations, often ending in drunkenness and domestic violence for them and for their children. The pleasure of the *fiesta* was not enough in comparison to the physical and psychological constraints they had to endure afterwards. Women were often more worried about their children than themselves.

I remember that once in Amachuma I had a conversation with Juana and Justina¹⁰⁷, both 13 years old. They remarked how much they hated the *fiesta*. When I asked why, they both pointed out that each time there was a celebration they were severely beaten up by their parents, who came home completely drunk. This had taken place since they were both very small and went on year after year. Juana also mentioned how hard it was to save the money needed to sponsor the *fiesta*; she also added that, when her parents were chosen as sponsors, they had a difficult year and they quarrelled all the time because of the economic hardship. Beatriz and Guido¹⁰⁸ from the urban context told me the same. Beatriz, a young woman, also added: 'I always hope my dad will not be chosen as a sponsor. When this happens, I think that it will be an unlucky year. All of us¹⁰⁹ are affected by this. It is difficult for a family to save all that money'.

There are important differences between the urban and rural context in relation to the experience of evangelism as well as that of education and young people.

¹⁰⁷ They both come from Catholic families.

¹⁰⁸ They are both Catholics.

In Amachuma peasants do not embrace strict evangelist orthodoxy, maintaining their traditional practices of being a godparent, participating in the *fiesta* and paying tributes to the *Pachamama* (see Chapter 7). In their view, these aspects are not in contradiction with each other. On the other hand, in the city, the two sets of beliefs cannot coexist. This is due to the pressure of the evangelical community on its members in the urban context, where the definition of the religious group is very important, but also to some other reasons that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Bolivia is experiencing an increase in the proportion of Evangelical Churches and communities are said to have started a process of internal factionalism perpetuated by religious institutions. This internal division is not only experienced through religious discrepancies, but also through cultural ones.

The spread of Evangelical Protestantism in Bolivia began in the 1970s, more or less at the same time indigenous movements and parties started to organise their political action. In fact, as Canessa (2000) claims, the insurgence of indigenous political movements, such as *katarismo*, and the spread of evangelism are different reactions to the same historical process and actually have many points in common. Both movements were born in post-revolutionary¹¹⁰ Bolivia as a reaction to the new economic and social context, characterised by ‘a perceived tension between Western-oriented modernisation and Indian culture’ (Canessa 2000: 139). *Katarismo* tries to overcome this tension through ‘revitalising a (mythical) indigenous past’ (ibid. 2000:139). By contrast in Canessa’s argument, evangelism emphasises the importance of formal education and

¹⁰⁹ The entire household.

¹¹⁰ 1953: Agrarian Reform.

modernity, and rejects traditional 'pagan' rituals. They are both against the hybridity which is at the root of Bolivian state ideology. However, my ethnography suggests that the opposition or dichotomy between the *katarista* model and the Evangelical one is not always so neat. There is a tension between narrative and practice, and not all evangelicals refuse traditional rituals or fiesta, although in theory they should. As Graeber (2001: 88) argues, 'the politics of value is (...) the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what it is that makes life worth living'. Chapter 7 will look at this topic in more detail and will add more ethnography on these issues.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed the importance of the fiesta in terms of the manifestation of communal values, showing how dancing and alcohol consumption are an important experience shared by the members of the same community, peers and spiritual forces alike. Also, the emotional power of dancing has an important influence when dealing with issues of power, protest, resistance, ethnicity, national identity, gender and class. In particular it is quite interesting to notice how dance is considered a symbol of national identity and how youth is pushed to embrace this communal action for the creation of community well-being.

However, fiesta is sometimes in contradiction with the also-important collective strategy of social protests. As it occurred in Senkata in 2005, people have to make a decision between these two community-oriented actions. In July 2005, social protests were chosen rather than the annual fiesta on the 25th. This would suggest that the fiesta might not always be explored as a positive expression of

communal values by all the members of the community, since people embrace different religious beliefs and moral orientations. The opposition between Evangelicals and Catholics is indicative of this. Catholics participate in the *fiesta*, while Evangelicals refuse such a thing, considering it to be in contradiction with their religious protestant beliefs. This would suggest that only social protests are embraced as the all-embracing representation of communal values that will allow the community to live fully their *Suma Qamaña*. Catholic or Evangelical, one has the moral obligation to contribute to the success of social protests.

Nevertheless, I am cautious about proposing such an argument. In fact, I do not want to dismiss the importance of the *fiesta*, since it mediates all kinds of relations, those with the kin, the community, and the spiritual forces. This is also why young people are asked to preserve their cultural identity through their participation in the religious festivities. The *fiesta* becomes the link between the past, the present and the future, embodying the communal values of the ancestors, but also the reaffirmation of the latter in the here and now and an aspiration for the future. On the other hand, social protests acquire a completely different meaning, being a collective solution embraced when ill-being becomes abnormal, uncontainable, unpredictable and dysfunctional, as in the case of the conditions seen to arise neoliberal policies and the Gas War in October 2003. While the *fiesta* is a manifestation of communal values and collective well-being, the social protests are generated through collective ill-being. Yet, even in the case of social protests, there is a connection with a past that inspires the here

and now as well as future aspirations. The next two chapters will explore this specific topic more in detail.

CHAPTER SIX

TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN: SOCIAL PROTESTS, COLLECTIVE SACRIFICE AND THE PROMISE OF A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

This chapter focuses on the importance of social protests as a manifestation of communal values and as moments in which the community is constituted in its fullest and most intense form. In particular, it looks at *Suma Qamaña* ('the good life' at the community level). Although Bolivian protests have often been claimed by global social movements and intellectuals as successful anti-capitalist rebellions, I'm going to argue that there are more complex implications to this issue. In this respect, I will debate that social protests in El Alto are not only anti-capitalist revolts, but rather that they are part of longer term trajectories and actions aimed at securing communal well-being.

This chapter also addresses issues in relation to the individual dimensions of well-being and how people may or may not feel constrained by the group and its decisions concerning public political action. Frequent street demonstrations against the national government have mobilized many people in El Alto since the nineties. I will argue that these demonstrations are fundamental to creating 'a united community'. At the same time, there are certain matters arising in connection to individual choices to join or not to join the group and the impact that this has on the whole community and on the individual.

Starn (1999:25) suggests that many left-wing scholars have studied protests in the 'Third World' as an example of an alternative society and as a congenial

vision of the 'right kind' of activism. However, during my fieldwork, it was clear that peoples' narratives also suggested the possibility of manipulation as well as confrontation, interdependence as well as mistrust, co-operation as well as conflict between protesters and their leaders. By saying this, I do not dismiss the relevance of social protest, which historically throughout the Andes has allowed for better access to water and roads, free schools and improvements throughout the twentieth century (ibid 1999: 27).

As Thomson and Hylton (2005) illustrate, the Andes has been a theatre for indigenous revolts from the end of the eighteenth century, especially the popular movements led by Tupak Katari and Bartolina Sisa, who are invoked in Bolivia today as indigenous heroes. 'Native American peoples nourished their own ideals of liberty and self-determination and brought about effective and enduring practices of communal democracy and sovereignty that differed from Western liberal principles' (2005:276). This observation has considerable relevance in the Bolivian case.

The protests that took place between 2000 and 2005 have been regarded as the third major revolutionary moment in Bolivian history, after Katari's indigenous rebellions in 1780 and the Agrarian Revolution in 1952-53 (Thomson and Hylton 2005). Social protests in Bolivia have often been identified by the indigenous population as a means to express sovereignty, but also as actions expressing the force of 'community'. Yet, protests have also embodied 'the tension-filled connections between indigenous and national-popular political expressions' (Thomson and Hylton 2005: 2), creating alliances between

different social classes and ethnic groups. For instance, in October 2003, Aymara rural and urban protesters were supported by *mestizo* and creole middle and upper-middle class neighbourhoods from La Paz. This took place in response to Sanchez de Lozada's decision to repress the protests with tanks and open gunfire. It was a reaction against what was felt by many as a denial of national sovereignty, not only with regard to adoption of violence by the State, but also in relation to the role of the creole elites in handing control over natural resources to foreign companies. As Bolivians, citizens were expressing their disengagement with their government.

This chapter does not provide a national overview of the relation between citizens and government in Bolivia. Instead, it focuses on how my informants felt constrained in their daily life because of political disempowerment and lack of participation in government decisions. This account is based on the perceptions of the informants living in Senkata and Amachuma. Starting from an analysis of the uprising of September-October 2003, I would like to analyze these moments of collective effervescence (Durkheim 2001 [1912]). As Touraine (1981:77) claims: 'the historicity of a society represents the stakes in the most important conflicts. Society is conflictual production of itself (...) the social movement is the organised collective behaviour of a class actor struggling against his class adversary for the social control of historicity in a concrete community'. Again, issues of temporality are relevant, not only in respect to the here and now, but also as expressions of aspirations for the future and as inspired by an idealised past.

The first section of this chapter looks at the ethnographic material I collected during my fieldwork. Particular attention will be given to the uprisings of 2003. The second section addresses the months following 'red' October, while the third one looks at history and politics in perspective, analysing my informants' perceptions of the past, present and future. The final section focuses on the relevant literature on social movements as well as on international politics, giving a theoretical framework to my analysis as well as offering a different interpretation in relation to the topic of well-being. The chapter also emphasises some of the tensions that may exist between collective and individual dimensions, orientations and choices.

Reversing the direction of history: new century protests, a new *Pacha Kuti*?

At the beginning of October 2003, I was getting ready to leave London and begin my fieldwork in Bolivia. I was supposed to arrive in El Alto on the 17th of October. However, the political and social events of those days changed my plans and I had to postpone my departure. On the 13th of October, the protests that had begun a month earlier intensified, after the Army violently repressed the protesters, killing more than 25 people. World news depicted the situation as very serious, with many suggesting the possibility of civil war. I was in contact with friends in El Alto and La Paz, calling them everyday to understand whether it was wise to fly to El Alto or not. Sometimes, I could hear the voices of protesters through my friends' mobile phones, a mass of people screaming slogans with energy and anger.

In those days, it was very difficult to find petrol and few cars were circulating. Two friends who live close to El Alto's airport offered to come to pick me up by

foot on my arrival. However, on the 15th of October, they changed their minds, adding that it was too dangerous, and advising me to postpone my flight. Also, they explained that they were too busy with the increasing number of victims. They had to support their neighbours and help them to bury the bodies.

A month earlier, on the 15th and 16th of September, El Alto began their first *paro civico* (civic strike) against the imposition of a new cadastral tax called *Maya, Paya, Kimsa* (in Aymara this means 'One, two, three'). Inhabitants refused to spend so much money on a law that they perceived as an imposition rather than a free choice. The main aim of the tax was to organise a valuation of all buildings in the city and would result in charges to *Alteños* from 250 bs. (around 31.25US\$) to 5000 bs (625US\$).¹¹¹ I pointed out in the previous chapter that my informants were willing to pay up to 250 or 300 US\$ for new clothes for the *fiesta*. This is important since people have to dress up for a special occasion in honour of the patron saint, and they save money all year to do so. On the other hand, *Alteños* do not see the point of paying so much money to comply with law that will not help them. In fact, their capacity to lead a valuable life (Sen 1993), such as participating in a *fiesta*, was undermined by the governmental enforcement of cadastral fees.

When people organise civic strikes in El Alto, they usually paralyze all communications by using a system of roadblocks. Paralyzing the country, and, especially, paralyzing the communication routes that link El Alto to La Paz means leaving La Paz without food and petrol. Initially, the protests took the

form of marches, with some residents of El Alto blocking the strategic points. However, in October 2003, the Army received the order to attack the protesters. This was the beginning of further violence. The decision of the government to use force against civilians resulted in the label of ‘black or red month’¹¹² applied to October 2003. By the end of the conflict, 80 people had lost their lives and more were left injured. As Goldstein (2005, 2004) has pointed out, this was taking place in a week that marked the anniversaries of both the discovery of the New World and 21 years of Bolivian democracy. According to the Bolivian Permanent Human Rights Assembly, the Bolivian state killed more people in 2003 than during any year of dictatorship.

When people in El Alto were describing the experiences of October 2003, they would explain that the soldiers that attacked the civil population were *cambas*, Bolivians from the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando, and *gringos* – from the US. In both cases, they were *blancos* (white people) and, as Doña Ana, a seller from Senkata, told me: ‘some of them did not look Bolivian at all’. The question then emerged about the *Alteños* who were doing their military service in those days.

René, a boy from Senkata who was doing his military service at the time, told me that he and other conscripts from his area were left without any news of what was going on. The military command forbade them to watch TV or to read newspapers. They had to stay in a room with no chance to go out. The only

¹¹¹ This is considered to be a huge amount of money by Bolivian standards. *Alteños* usually live on 1 or 2 US\$ per day.

¹¹² The term was used by civil organizations, and the general population as well as the Catholic Church.

thing they could do was watch videos. Meanwhile, outside, his family and friends were blocking the Extranca¹¹³ in Senkata, one of the most strategic points of El Alto, because of the presence of a petrol deposit that serves La Paz (the YPF, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos).

The reason for this uprising was initially attributed to the *Maya, Paya, Kimsa* tax, which mobilised only the city of El Alto, but later on shifted to people's opposition against the selling of gas to the USA through Chile, including a larger number of places and social groups. The neoliberal model and its various manifestations through different policies was the main reason behind these mobilisations. After 18 years of unsuccessful reforms aimed at changing the country through structural adjustment and privatisation of public companies in favour of foreign multinationals (Escobar de Pabón 2003:47)¹¹⁴, the protesters expressed their discontent through a massive insurrection. This outbreak united different groups with multiple interests (miners, farmers, bus and lorry drivers, workers, teachers, sellers, students), affected in different ways, but in the majority of the cases concerned with the return of property rights regarding natural resources, in particular gas and oil, to Bolivian people.

The nationalisation of the gas was one of the main objectives of the majority of protesters participating in this revolt, and indeed this was connected with the rejection of a specific political and economic model, the model of privatisation

¹¹³ The market place of Senkata and central part of the neighborhood.

¹¹⁴ From 1985, the four different governments that ruled Bolivia proposed to solve the economic and social issues that characterized the country by orienting the entire nation through exportation. The main slogan was *Exportar o morir* (Export or Die). Exporting was seen as the only possible way to improve the social and economic conditions of the country (Villegas Quiroga, 2003:27).

and capitalisation through foreign investments or, as my informants called it, 'the selling of our country!'. People were expressing their discontent towards a system that had deeply impoverished them and that had gone through a massive process of privatisation of public institutions as well as resources. At the same time, they were opposing a national government that was perceived as deeply corrupt and ruled by politicians who take advantage of their position, especially the MNR party and the president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. The words of Don Carlos are a good example of people's sense of alienation and disillusion:

Recently, we live in very bad conditions. We do not live well. All these people have always sacrificed for this, they have always contributed to the State so that it could improve, they have always paid their taxes so that the city could develop, they have always given and these people who have given now are tired (...) tired of governors, politicians that have exploited the population. El Alto was tired, every time it's the same, every time they are stealing (...) your kids go to school and there are no good teachers, and there are no blackboards or desks, you have to buy a desk so that your son can study there. It's not possible (...) and meanwhile in the Town Hall, in the central and local government, people continue to steal and to make the most of it, living in luxury, travelling to Miami with your money, with the money of the people and we stay in debt (...) The moment to say "stop" has arrived, no more, it's the moment for us to go out. The gas was a reason, because people thought to sell it in order to develop the country (...) this was not possible with the previous government (...). The government thought that people would stay quiet and they also paid the leaders to keep them quiet (El Alto, 24/08/2004).

Interestingly, the October protests were not carefully planned. Suárez (2003) analyses the causes of this successful insurrection and brilliantly underlines the relevance of death in the creation of a common identity. The view that 'Nos están matando como a corderos' (Suárez, 2003:19) –'They are slaughtering us like lambs'- created a sense of unity, solidarity and identity not only among the victims, but also among other Bolivians (intellectuals, the middle class) who did not approve of this kind of repression. All of them felt strongly about the national government and decided to march in opposition to the use of this 'illegitimate and amoral power'.

Martin, a young man I talked about in Chapter 2, told me that he had thought that solidarity did not exist in his neighbourhood until the events of October. It is in the difficulties, in their negative relations with the State that *vecinos*¹¹⁵ get together and become a community (see also Lazar, 2002:276). Whether it was because of solidarity in mourning the victims, or ethnic identity or communal sacrifice in the *bloqueo* (roadblocks), people built their protest not only through collective actions and organisation to ensure basic distribution of food in each neighbourhood¹¹⁶, but also through the sharing of general feelings of loss, fear, disempowerment, and anger towards a government that was killing them as if they were animals, not people. This disengagement with the government was felt by other Bolivians as well, although they themselves were not victims of the state violence. It was a collective disengagement, especially in the department of La Paz: citizens belonging to different social classes, religious groups (Evangelicals and Catholics fought together in the protests) age groups, professional categories and ethnic backgrounds felt united.

The same feeling of dispossession, expressed during the *Día del Mar* (Day of the Sea, on the 23rd of March, when Bolivia remembers the loss of the sea coast in the Pacific War against Chile) was again re-expressed through collective action and oral disapproval of the government's reaction in October 2003. The word sea was substituted by the word gas in the many slogans used by protesters, as if it was similarly another fight of all Bolivians against 'foreigners' who illegitimately wanted to take away their precious natural

¹¹⁵ Residents, people living in the same neighbourhood, or local citizen. Hence, the *Junta Vecinal* is a local citizen body.

resources. Even the President, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (Goni), was considered a 'foreigner'. In fact, it was often possible to read graffiti on many walls in La Paz and El Alto: 'Goni, go home!' [the sentence hasn't been translated. It was originally written in English -see also picture 15 in the appendix]. With his US accent, his US upbringing and education, Goni was often identified as 'the foreigner'. Again, there is an idea of individual and collective sacrifice to fight against 'amoral foreigners', whether US or Spanish, who are trying to dispossess Bolivians of their natural resources, affecting the 'collective well-being'. This has historical reasons and is connected with issues of temporality that will be discussed in the following sections.

When I asked Don Ernesto, a community leader from Ventilla, who was in the front line of the roadblock in Ventilla, if he was afraid to die, he replied: 'It's better to die of hunger while you are fighting than simply dying of hunger, don't you think?'. Don Tito, the general secretary of Amachuma, thought the same and added that death is part of life and that sometimes it is inevitable that you die in a protest. You have to sacrifice and, despite all the dangers, the communities actively participated in the uprising because 'for an Aymara, leading a good life means improving the conditions of his/her people' (Vilma, Amachuma, April 2004). Sacrifice for the collectivity in the protests is very important and can be seen as a fundamental aspect of the Aymara moral and behavioural code, whether in the rural or urban context. Sacrifice was also a common theme in Chapter 3 and 4; whether sacrifice for the household, the

¹¹⁶ Because of the roadblocks, food and water were scarce in some areas of El Alto between 10 and 18 of October 2003. People from different neighbourhoods were helping each other for the distribution.

family, the community or in defence of the Bolivian nation and its interests (all united for the common good of all ‘Bolivians’).

Collective action is promoted through the local Trade Union¹¹⁷ in the countryside and the *Junta Vecinal*¹¹⁸ in El Alto. Both these institutions play a fundamental role in the decision taken by people to participate or not in a *paro* (strike) or *bloqueo* (roadblock). However, community leaders have not always served the interests of the collectivity. Accusations of corrupt practices and dissociation from them are regularly used by leaders at all levels to reinforce the notion of common good. Corruption creates a parallel and a shared concern, uniting the zone, and the municipal and national levels of government (Lazar, 2002:78). When leaders call for a national strike or a roadblock, people sometimes feared they were being manifested by hierarchical structures of power that secretly work together to take advantage of their positions, to fool the people in order to enrich themselves. For instance, Carlos Mamani, an Aymara journalist, told me during an interview that in October 2003 the national government unsuccessfully tried to pay the community leaders to keep the people quiet. This link between different levels of power is clearly experienced by Alteños and Amachuma farmers through practises of manipulation and they are thus very aware of them and vigilant.

During my fieldwork, there were a couple of occasions on which people had to decide if they wanted to join a national civic strike and a roadblock that had been organised by different social sectors. When I asked some of them whether

¹¹⁷ Main local authority in the countryside.

they were going to participate in the protests or not, they all answered in the same way: 'Let's see what the *dirigentes* -leaders of the Trade Union in Amachuma and of the Junta Vecinal in Senkata- will decide. If they decide to go, we have to go'. In March 2005, various roadblocks and strikes were organised in El Alto against Agua Illimani, a multinational that since the neoliberal capitalisation of the 1990s controls the distribution and price of water in the neighbourhoods of El Alto. I called friends in Senkata to hear how they were and one of them told me: 'You know how it is. We have to participate. If we don't, we need to pay 50 bs'. It is a moral duty to participate in the protests and there is a general perception that, if you don't, you are going to be classified as a 'bad' *vecino* (resident), as if you are doing something illegal. Hence, you have to pay a penalty. The penalty is usually collected by the residents' committee in the city or by the Trade Union in the countryside and can be used for community works, such as paving the streets or improving local facilities. A material contribution is a substitute for a physical presence in the protests, but in both cases there must always be a contribution. An individual and his/her household have always to sacrifice and give something to the community.

Foreigners who work for international co-operation and with whom I was in contact during my time in Bolivia were very critical of this kind of behaviour, implying that people were not protesting willingly but were forced by local authorities with the threat of fines. However, their criticism fails to recognise that Trade Unions and Junta Vecinales are the only local committees that fight for the 'self-construction' -providing facilities to the zone- of their areas (Lazar

¹¹⁸ Residents' committee; community authorities for a specific neighbourhood.

2002:69; Cottle and Ruiz 2000). Most of the inhabitants of a zone in El Alto or a village outside the city have experience of working together to gain benefits for their neighbourhood, whether this means using communal work parties to pave streets (Urton 1992), or protesting with civic strikes or roadblocks to have access to basic services, such as water, electricity and gas. Therefore, I believe that when Senkata residents and Amachuma peasants tell me that they have to go, they feel more constrained by the moral duty of participating than by the threat of a fine.

They would often tell me: ‘Tenemos que sacar la zona adelante’ –‘We need to improve the zone’. This is another very important value for them; not only it is fundamental to live well together as described in previous chapters, but it is also essential to work and fight together to improve the conditions of the entire community. If they don’t, they are open to the accusation of being passive. As in the case of notions that one produces luck by paying material offerings to the supernatural forces, so too one has to participate in collective actions of protest with a material contribution (money or physical presence) in order to embody well-being through appropriate moral behaviour and to act as a full and respected member of the community.

Authors contributing to the Andean literature stress there is a more individualistic and less collective orientation amongst the inhabitants of El Alto as a result of the urban environment (Altamirano 1984; Roberts 1995; Rivera Cusicanqui, Arnold et al. 1996; Gill 1997; Canessa 1998; Llanos Layme 1998). Nevertheless, it has also been shown that *Alteños* need to organise collectively if

they want to survive (Lazar 2002; Sandoval and Sotres 1989; Gill 1997) and as suggested by their moral values and cultural tradition, which encourage collective organisation. They need to draw on ties and feelings of solidarity, such as *ayni* and *mink'a*, to overcome the difficulties of everyday life and to conduct successful protests. October 2003 illustrated the capacity of the 'community' to display social cohesion; because of this, it was considered an outstanding event, despite the loss of human lives.

The protests that have taken place in Bolivia in the last five years have a common root. Interestingly, these social mobilisations were led by indigenous people and movements, and represented an open opposition to neoliberal policies perceived as the main cause of their impoverishment. For many Aymaras, this indicates the beginning of a new *Pacha Kuti* (Mamani Ramirez 2004)¹¹⁹. *Pacha Kuti* or time of war, as it was described by Bertonio (1993 [1612]), is defined by Andean intellectuals and writers as the 'overturning of the world', indicating the beginning of a new age or era with the ending of the previous temporal cycle. *Pacha* (time and space) *Kuti* (alternation/to turn over) was described to me by Ricardo Huanca¹²⁰ as '*el espíritu reordenador*' ('reordering spirit'). According to him, people, individually and collectively, go through different *Pacha Kuti*: individuals begin every nine years (at 9, 18, 27, 36, etc. years old). On the other hand, the Aymara community as a whole starts a new *Pacha kuti* every 500 years (in 492, 992, 1492, 1992). Therefore, the year 1992 marks the beginning of a new temporal phase for the Aymara people, a

¹¹⁹ See also the article *El movimiento campesino en su pachacuti* (The peasant movement in its pachakuti), La Prensa, La Paz, 7th of August 2004.

new cycle in opposition to the previous 500 years characterised by the Spanish colonisation and the birth of the Bolivian Republic.

However, this conceptualisation of *Pacha Kuti* is not shared by everyone. Previous studies have shown that there are different interpretations of it. For example, Guamán Poma de Ayala (1980 [1615]) linked the *Pacha Kuti* with the Christian idea of punishment and miracle, connecting it with the Christian Final Judgement. As Harris and Bouysse-Cassagne (1988) have demonstrated, the translation of this term is very difficult and could be closer to that of a “cosmological event”, that is to say an event able to change everything: literally, a powerful phenomenon that can turn the world upside down. Therefore, it could also be associated with a radical change in terms of political power, as Cobo (1964 [1565]) has shown in his chronicle of the Inca Pachacuti: ‘They gave him the name of Pachacuti, because with his good government things improved so much that it looked like they bartered the times and turn the world upside down’ (Bouysee-Cassagne 1988).

This sense of overturning of the world is fundamental to understanding Aymara temporal and spatial divisions. There are three pachas: *aka pacha*, which is our time and space (earth) or the present; *manqha pacha*, which is the world underneath and stands for the remote past, where the dead are, and *alax pacha*, which is the sky and always personifies the present (Harris and Bouysse-Cassagne 1988). When there is a Pacha kuti, there is an inversion of time/space or an alternation between different ages: *‘lo de abajo estará arriba y lo de*

¹²⁰ An Aymara intellectual I had a chance to interview in La Paz on the 23rd of September 2004

arriba abajo – ‘what is underneath will be on top and what is on top will be underneath’- (ibid, 1988:246). Therefore, the *aka pacha*, the present, will be replaced by the *manqha pacha*, the remote past, and the future will find its source in the past and in the dead/ancestors (ibid 1988).

This is a powerful image that carries hope for the future, especially when you glorify the past for its positive connotations and you despise the present because of its inequalities and injustice. Hence, the future and the past are united, they are the same thing; the *Pacha Kuti* corresponds to the turning of the world upside down, so that hierarchical structures of power will also be overturned. Those who do not have power today will have power tomorrow and those who have power today will lose it tomorrow. However, this exchange is not an easy process. It always implies a confrontation between opposite forces.

The civil uprising of October 2003 took place in the same area as that in which Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa¹²¹ built their headquarters in the outskirts of La Paz -in what is today called El Alto- in 1781 in order to surround the enemy (Del Valle de Siles 1990). This has been interpreted by indigenous movements as suggesting a new *Pacha kuti*. Whether they are marking the beginning of a new *Pacha kuti* or not, the events of October 2003 have unquestionably a profound historical and political significance.

and promoter of the magazine *Sariri: Caminantes de Los Andes* and of events aimed to the diffusion of Aymara culture.

¹²¹ Indigenous heroes who became leaders during the uprisings conducted in 1781 against the Spanish colonisers.

Roadblocks

I arrived in Bolivia soon after the end of the protests that took place in October 2003. Goni had fled to Miami (17th October) and Carlos Mesa, the vice President, had taken his position. During the following year, I had a chance to observe and talk about the effects of the uprising. Generally, people in Senkata and in Amachuma told me that things had not really changed, despite the attempts of the national government to satisfy the demands of the protesters. The organisation of a national referendum for the nationalisation of the gas in July and the ongoing project of a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the Constitution became the main objectives of 2004.

After the excitement of the first days, people became sceptical about the capacities of the new government, implying that politicians did not really know how people live in El Alto or in the surrounding countryside. They could never understand the reality of their lives, because politicians are thought to live in a privileged world. Meanwhile, scattered marches of protests began to reappear in March. On the 17th, I wrote in my diary:

Today the protests began again. COB -Central Obrera Boliviana-, miners and trade unions were marching in the Prado¹²². I went to see the march. The sound of firecrackers was everywhere. The multitude was screaming 'Mesa y Goni son la misma porquería!' ['Mesa and Goni are the same rubbish!'], 'Fusil y metralla no vencerán al pueblo!' ['Rifles and machineguns will not defeat the people!']¹²³, 'El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!' ['People united will never be defeated!'].

Further demonstrations were organised during the following months. However, *Alteños* and *campesinos* (farmers) did not actively participate. They were still

¹²² Centre of La Paz.

¹²³ Reference to October 2003.

suffering the effects of October 2003, economically¹²⁴ and psychologically. Yet, on the 2nd of June 2004, the FEJUVE (Federación de Juntas Vecinales) of El Alto organised a 24 hour strike to ask the national government for the nationalisation of gas and the installation of domestic gas connections in the city. In addition, this protest was seen as a means to express *Alteños*' opposition to the Referendum of the 18th of July and their disappointment with President Carlos Mesa.

The Referendum was believed to be 'a trap' to fool people laid by government and multinationals, who were interested in the buying of gas. From this moment onwards, the nationalisation of gas became a major issue; 'nationalisation or nothing'. The questions asked in the Referendum were very difficult to interpret and people thought they would only slightly improve the overseas earnings from gas. Nationalisation was not an option in the proposals for the Referendum, and this was not enough for the leaders of the FEJUVE. The message that came from FEJUVE to the residents of El Alto was the following: 'All the people have to sacrifice in order to defend the natural resources. If not, we are destined to live in misery and hunger'¹²⁵. The President of FEJUVE, Carlos Barrera, talking about the organisation of the strike, declared: 'On the 2nd of June, not even a fly will walk'¹²⁶.

I remember the 2nd of June because, when I woke up, I was immediately surprised by the lack of noise coming from Avenida 6 de marzo, which is

¹²⁴ Going to march or to block the roads means that you cannot go to work and earn the "daily bread" for your family. "Nos perjudica" ("It jeopardizes us") was a repeated sentence.

¹²⁵ La Prensa, La Paz, 2nd of June 2004.

¹²⁶ La Prensa, La Paz, 2nd of June 2004.

usually full of vehicles. At the same time, I was struck by the tannoy of the residents' committee in the main square. Every 5 minutes the same announcement was repeated. I couldn't understand what they were saying, but they were clearly inviting residents to participate in a public action. On that day, I had to be in La Paz for an important interview with an Aymara intellectual I had unsuccessfully tried to meet several times. I went to the Avenida 6 de marzo, to catch a bus, but when I got there, it was clear that there were none. A few seconds after I realised that there were no cars or any other vehicles. I arrived at the Extranca, Senkata's main area, to find out that residents were blocking the *carretera Oruro* (the part of Avenida 6 de marzo that goes to Oruro).

A line of people with wooden sticks and rocks in their hands were blocking the road. On the ground, there were more rocks and tyres. Suddenly, I saw a bus coming out from a side road and going towards La Ceja. A few people began to run towards it and more were joining in, while the bus continued to move. It did not stop. I had quickly to evaluate the situation: to go or not to go, losing probably the possibility to meet the interviewee. I decided to go. I began to run as well, while the bus was still moving, surrounded by a group of people who were doing the same. We jumped on the bus, which became full quite rapidly. After few minutes it was packed: I was standing with the majority of people, squashed like a sardine. The people on the bus were Senkata residents going to work in La Ceja or in La Paz. Some asked the driver for some information on the situation in the rest of the city. The driver reassured everybody, saying that there were no roadblocks on our way to La Ceja. I started to talk with a lady.

She was not worried: if the protest intensified and there were no buses, she would walk home no matter how long it took her.

I managed to get a bus to La Paz and to interview the Aymara intellectual I was supposed to meet. In the afternoon, I asked a taxi driver how much he would charge me to go to Senkata. He refused to take me to El Alto, adding that no vehicles were circulating. The strike had intensified and the city was paralysed. I called Martin in Senkata to ask for advice: what the taxi driver told me was not true. There were a few buses from La Ceja and it was possible to travel to Senkata. However, Martin told me that I could arrive by bus only up to Planta Senkata, where the Yacimiento Petrolifero was. Then, he advised me to walk, because residents were still blocking the Extranca, and could get very angry with anyone driving or coming by bus.

It was not difficult to find a mini bus from La Ceja, although it left from a different place from the usual one, since the main road was deserted due to the blocking of some strategic points. The driver had to go along side roads and, after a while, went back to the main road. He drove slowly, just in case we found a roadblock on our way, and had to evacuate the mini bus quickly.

After the Planta Senkata, the driver began shouting to leave the bus. A group of residents had attacked a mini bus in front of us, smashing one of the window seats. The passengers and I began to walk towards the Extranca. When we arrived people were still blocking the main area. New residents had joined the protest and others had left. The strike was over by the evening, but was an

important experience for me to have a real taste of the collective and individual (household) tensions involved in social protests. Almost every household I knew was represented in the social protest by at least one of its members. Each household usually is provided with a card on which the *Junta Vecinal* put a stamp to prove that that specific household unit participated in a protest or in any other kind of public action. However, I also know a family that did not participate in the social protests and did not pay any fine. This is due to the fact that some of its extended family was in the *Junta Vecinal* and, thus, they stamped their presence card the day before the roadblock.

The obligation to participate in the protests is juxtaposed to the need to go to work: you need to take a bus to go to work and this could be seen as contrary to the aims of roadblocks. The aim was to interrupt the general movement in order to give a sense of paralysis and disruption, affecting circulation and having a long-distance impact. This tension between individual/household and collectivity is solved through a division of work and responsibilities, as we have already seen in Chapter 2. Usually, at least one person for each household has to be present in a protest the residents' committee has decided to participate in; if not, the household will be charged with a fine. It is up to the members of the household to decide who is going to join the protest and who is not: people who work in other areas of El Alto and La Paz are allowed to go to work, since the household cannot survive without their income. This is why on the 2nd of June I was able to find a bus going towards La Ceja. Buses take side streets, so that they do not affect the public actions that take place in the main streets and also

because bus drivers are afraid of the strikers' reactions. Yet, despite the fear of being beaten up, bus drivers have to go to work to support their households.

The strike of El Alto on the 2nd of June was partial. In fact, only four districts out of a total of nine actively participated in the protest. The main roadblocks took place in Rio Seco, Senkata, Ventilla, Cruce Villa Adela and Avenida Bolivia (see map). The lack of success of this public action was attributed to the division in the FEJUVE and also in other institutions of El Alto. For instance, Juan Melendres, the Executive Secretary of COR (Central Obrera Regional de El Alto), disagreed with the organisation of the strike, emphasising the fundamental role that the July Referendum was going to play and adding that the Referendum was 'a social conquest' resulting from the October massacre. At this point, El Alto was undoubtedly divided.

In Bolivia, marches as well as roadblocks have been the most powerful and widely used means of opposition to the decisions of the government. Nevertheless, during the year of my fieldwork, they were not always perceived by people as positive and powerful means to make their voices heard. Despite the fact that organisations, such as COB -Central Obrera Boliviana-, Trade Unions, University students as well as *Asociación de no videntes* (association of Blind) were actively using these forms of protest, I noted that in my two field sites there was a fear that even their own local leaders could manipulate residents through the protests and that this situation of continuous strikes and roadblocks could seriously affect the well-being of the different households. This was a common feeling shared by some residents in Senkata; they felt

trapped by the obligation to participate in the protest and, in some cases, manipulated as well by their leaders.

At the same time, some people were also afraid of going to a march or blocking the city again because of the consequences of the October demonstration. In particular, Amachuma women often wondered what would happen to their children if they (women) were killed or injured in a protest, since they would not be able to support their household. While Amachuma women stressed this worry in their conversations, Amachuma men, particularly community leaders, emphasised the need to protest and die, if necessary, in order to free Aymara people from the subordination and oppression they have been subjected to for centuries.

When asked, both men and women in Amachuma answer that they have *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña*. They express a certain satisfaction with their lives, emphasising the importance of having a house, a good partner, family harmony and good children. Clearly, they live the 'good life', which for them is an important ethical and moral value. Living well together at the household and at the community level is fundamental. Whether there are conflicts within the household or the community, they are not publicly expressed. But, when confronted with outsiders, men would emphasise how poor they are, how they lack everything, and would always define themselves as 'slaves', comparing their situation to that of the rich ruling elite.

The economic aspect comes into play only when outsiders are present. The fact that Amachuma peasants are satisfied with their lives means that well-being for them is not connected to wealth. Wealth is usually not accumulated. It has to be spent and circulated in order to assure *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña*, which are more important values. All the members of the community as well as supernatural forces have to share wealth equally. It has to be redistributed. In the past, wealth was associated with the Spaniards who came to their land to steal natural resources. Those natural resources attracted ill-being and envy. Thus, this suggests that wealth is a dangerous category, like a chaotic supernatural force, that has to be controlled, brought to order through the action of giving away, but also of returning. Exchange is fundamental and the core of *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña*. For instance, through the *fiesta*, there is a rebalance between households living in prosperity and households living in deprivation.

When Amachuma peasants say that they are ‘slaves’, they suggest an inability to act as they wish. However, what is this inability related to? It may be related to the impossibility of exchanging wealth, but also their inability to express their values freely and thus behave as they wish. This may also relate to contemporary models and lifestyles that may interfere with traditional values and thus affect the aspirations of individuals. However, the word ‘slaves’ may also suggest dependence, emphasising how Amachuma peasants feel trapped and dependent on this new system, since, for instance, old values such as *ayni* and *mink'a*, fundamental for *Suma Qamaña*, are sacrificed for work and employment in the city. Thus, poverty, wealth, *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña* are morally charged categories that cannot be disconnected from the historical

experience. Participation in manifestations of communal values becomes a struggle between contradictory models, with the moral obligation to sacrifice, and to be morally oriented individuals.

Men and women emphasise how well they live since this is what is expected from both of them. Otherwise, this would mean that they are people who are not properly morally oriented. However, tensions arise especially when new categories and models are brought in or new interpretations are embraced. Despite their fear, women and men have to be united during social protests as an expression of their moral stance. Social protests are a collective dimension, often positively portrayed by leaders at all levels in order to represent 'indigenous people' as 'a united, homogenous and strong group'. Yet, there is always a worry of being manipulated and exploited, even by local leaders who should be the authority most trusted. The next section addresses this topic, with particular reference to ethnographic material collected during the month of July 2004.

Manipulation, rumour and gossip

The Gas Referendum took place on the 18th July 2004, with 60.062%¹²⁷ of voters participating nationally. In El Alto, the referendum took place without interference and the yes vote won. Yet, a few days before the gas referendum, Doña Maria (from Senkata) expressed a commonly-held feeling of distance from the national government:

This government does not know how people live. They do not know if we use the gas or not. The gas is not enough and we have to pay 22 bolivianos for a cylinder¹²⁸. The government has

¹²⁷ <http://www.bolivia.com/especiales/2004/referendum/resultados>, 12/07/2006.

¹²⁸ One of the demands of October 2003 was to introduce gas domestic connections in private houses, so that people did not have to buy cylinders.

all the money and what about us? I do not support the referendum (Doña Maria, Senkata, July 2004).

Senkata was the only place where they tried to boycott the referendum. A group of 100 people blocked Avenida 6 de Marzo and tried to burn the ballot boxes, asking for the nationalisation of gas. The leader of the group was said to be 'Captain Osama', a man who lives in the neighbourhood. Captain Osama is not always in Senkata. He is believed to come and go continuously and to be unemployed. He is also thought to be paid by 'a big fish'. Residents in Senkata assume that this 'big fish' is in the US and probably working in a multinational company and representing someone who has no interest in seeing the gas returned to Bolivia, after being exploited for so many years by 'foreigners' who made lots of profit out of it.

This is what the people I knew generally expressed when commenting on the referendum. The rumours and gossip suggest that, even in the protests, people feel or fear that they are being manipulated. In this case, the attempt to boycott the referendum was not successful. Residents from Senkata started to beat up the boycotting group, themselves from the same area, saying that in October they had fought to have the opportunity to vote and now no one could stop them from exercising their right.

It is evident that manipulation is always present for my informants and considered as a danger; this is so because of a generalised mistrust towards the official and unofficial structures of power. Even in the case of the Constituent Assembly, people are afraid that 'politicians with money' and multinational companies will affect the process of writing the new Constitution, annulling the

possibility of real innovation. They think that the Assembly will be another way, explored by political parties, to manipulate people. 'It should be one of us that writes the Constitution, someone who speaks and thinks as we do, someone who has suffered as we do, someone who has lived what we lived, one of us!' (Doña Juana, May 2004).

As Lazar (2002:212) has demonstrated for Rosas Pampa, through rumour and gossip *Alteño* residents try to control their leaders' behaviour, 'establishing a sense of public good, and, hopefully, an obligation on the part of their leaders to serve that good'. In connection with social protests as well as with the topics of previous chapters, it is evident that corruption is believed to happen in a different place from the one of the two interlocutors who are involved in the creation of rumours. Their gossip is the all-powerful means to 'assert their collective identity as citizens' (Lazar 2002:213) or as residents of the same neighbourhood in opposition to 'politicians' and 'foreigners' who steal public resources. Whether it was true or not that Captain Osama was paid by 'a big US fish', residents who disagreed with the boycotting of the referendum skilfully nurtured this rumour in order to create a collective consensus and consciousness, and enhance the sense of public good and morality. They portrayed Captain Osama as a dishonest, unemployed, and, therefore, lazy individual, far away from the model of a good leader, and undermined his leadership by suggesting a connection with 'a US big fish'. This is a way to create political alliances and a means to convince residents either to participate

or not participate in public actions¹²⁹. Also, this idea that a connection with a ‘foreign’ power implies embracing immoral behaviour can be understood by looking at social memory, as I explore in the following section.

History and Politics in perspective: Spanish colonisation and the birth of ill-being

An analysis of the words of Amachuma peasants and Senkata residents makes it clear that the birth of ill-being is related in their narrative to a specific historical event: the arrival of Spanish conquerors. It is indeed confirmed in daily conversations: it is clearly stated and widely perceived that ill-being did not exist before the arrival of the Conquistadores. In reality, well-being and ill-being seem to fragment my informants’ constructions of history into four main periods: before the Spanish conquest, after the Spanish conquest, before the Agrarian Reform and after the Agrarian Reform. It is interesting to notice that, again, only men refer to the past when questioned about concepts of well-being and ill-being. Women, by contrast, do not mention any historical events and talk more about the present and their family’s conditions. Men are more inclined to express their concerns about national issues and, therefore, include political and historical debates in their conversations.

The only historical period described with positive connotations is the time before the Spanish conquest: the world of the past ruled by the Aymaras (they do not mention the Inca Empire) is seen in opposition to the subsequent

¹²⁹ It recalls Scott’s idea (1985) of everyday undercover resistance of poor farmers through gossip, evasion and petty thievery. Scott claims that, for instance, peasants are never passive even in periods of apparent calm; this is also due to the high costs of open protests. Those costs have to be compensated through everyday resistance.

historical moments as well as the present¹³⁰. The Spanish conquest marked a moment of rupture with the ideal well-being of the ancestors, with dramatic consequences of exclusion for indigenous people in the political as well as economic context. In particular, the current political context was perceived as deeply connected with the ill-being of people and as part of a continuum in terms of historical structures of domination, power and resistance. The economic sphere was also seen as affected by the corruption of the system: in the past, there were the Spanish *conquistadores*¹³¹ who ‘contaminated’ the society by stealing resources and wealth. Today politicians (*q’ara* white, but also in disparaging reference to the ruling elite as well as to *mestizo*) helped by foreign powers, such as the USA, assure the same nepotism. Interestingly, I took a picture of a very intriguing sign in the city of El Alto, made by the Town Hall, and put in the centre of the city at an important cross-road: this could summarise or be seen as a metaphor for Amachuma and Senkata mens’ perceptions. The sign says: ‘Ya les hemos advertido, el hombre Aymara es mejor que el sistema’ (‘We have already told you, Aymara people are better than the system’).

Indeed, politics is an abstract structure that has practical and negative repercussions on the lives of people. Once you get in contact with it, you become ‘contaminated or infected’. Politics is corruption and corruption is politics. There is no distinction between these two categories. At the same time, both politics and history are perceived as continuously influencing people’s

¹³⁰ This allows for a simple, indeed, mythical opposition between good and bad. The pre-Conquest era is described as the era of ‘good’ government, while the subsequent ages are described as the eras of ‘bad’ government.

¹³¹ Interestingly, Don Oscar told me that he does not think that all Spanish people are corrupt. He makes a distinction between the ones who live in Spain and the ones who came to conquer

daily lives: the decisions taken by the ruling elite have always affected the survival of their households.

Hence, history is not a chronological record of events belonging to the past. It still has a powerful impact on the present; it is alive, as if people are continuously reliving the same 'painful' events. 'It looks like we are still living on the wounds of the past'¹³², Don Modesto told me once, showing how talking about history is related for Aymaras to talking about present ill-being, which is something that they continuously experience not only in their daily lives, but also as a consequence and as an aspect of memory of the historical process they went through as a people. In my opinion, this connection between history, politics and ill-being could be analysed as an important element of definition of their own self (they build their identity in opposition to it) as well as a powerful legitimization for the actions that they take today. Without a convincing historical legitimization, they would not feel authorized to participate in protests against the national government as happened in October 2003 as well as in January and March 2005.

As Lazar (2002:78) argues, 'occasionally, the collectivity itself defines itself against, or despite, the actions of its leaders, through accusations of corruption which in turn reinforce a notion of common good that can be violated by corrupted practices'. Corruption is a serious problem not only at the local level, but also at the municipal and national ones. Leaders are supposed to work for the benefit of the community rather than for personal interest. Accusations are

South America. The *conquistadores* are the corrupted ones. They were so bad, that good

made when this does not happen, especially through rumors and gossiping, implying that leaders 'are stealing money' from the community for their personal enrichment.

Andean ethnographies tend to view leadership in the countryside as an obligation that is usually very expensive, emphasizing the importance of prestige and duty over material interest (Carter and Mamani 1989; Abercombie 1998). Leadership positions rotate between households and this is true not only for the rural context, but also for the urban one. Circulation and exchange of duty, prestige, and material ends represent a fundamental role in all Aymara spheres. When this does not take place, people complain at the local as well as municipal or national level. Regarding the national level, a widespread disillusionment with politics is expressed through narratives of politicians' corruption, highlighting people's powerlessness with regard to political elites. These narratives of corruption describe *Alteños* expectations of the State and their attempt to control them (Lazar 2002:93), distancing themselves from the political elites and expressing lack of representation in the political system.

The unequal distribution of resources and power that *Alteños* and Amachuma farmers perceive in their relationship with the government undermines their own values of reciprocal ties, fundamental not only in their relationships with their peers, but also in their interdependence with spiritual forces in the natural and supernatural context¹³³. *Alteños* and Amachuma farmers feel dispossessed,

Spanish people decided to send them to South America.

¹³² "Parece que continuamos a vivir de las heridas del pasado".

¹³³ This is a rather different perspective from the one proposed by Goudsmit (2006), who worked with Northern Potosí peasants. In his study, he highlights the importance of God and

because they are convinced that the national government or the political elites are acting as a *Kharisiri* rather than as *Ekeko*. The former is a supernatural being identified as a stealer of human fat and as cause of illness for people. During the *Alasita* fair, on the 24th of January 2004, President Mesa arrived in Plaza Murillo completely covered in fake dollars, as a persuasive personification of the Aymara God of Plenty. However, being *Ekeko* means to fulfil a series of functions, such as assuring fortune, good business, well-being and happiness in exchange for what is received (in the case of the government, taxes could be seen as the exchanged gifts). When this does not happen, people feel it is legitimate to complain. Hence, this moment of disengagement in the relationship with the government is licit and accepted, since circulation and exchange have not properly taken place between leaders and the communities they should serve. This goes against people's notion of justice: unjust is everything against common good. This present situation of injustice is opposed to the past.

The glorious past of the Aymaras, characterized by common good, equality and well-being for the entire community, is highly idealized: they do not take into consideration that it was a highly stratified society, very warlike and not as democratic as they think. They just juxtapose it to the present. Hence, some indigenous movements as well as Aymara intellectuals propose a return to the original organisation of the *ayllu*¹³⁴ (see the work by Yampara Huarachi 2001), where solidarity, good government and honesty were the basis for an equal

government in the lives of Toracari peasants, although he also underlines that neither have a concrete influence on their daily lives. Government as well as God is perceived as detached, remote, inaccessible, and are never questioned in terms of legitimacy.

distribution of resources. Nevertheless, the current Aymara movement seems to have lost sight of the fact that traditional *ayllu* structures were hierarchical, and *kurakas/mallku*¹³⁵ inherited their position. Moreover, the *caciques*¹³⁶ could also be very exploitative: this shows how the past can be imagined as utopian (Roseberry 1991).

Indeed, the selective memory of the past plays a fundamental role; the past is constructed and re-elaborated in the present, as the literature on social memory has shown (Collard 1989; Burke 1989; Harris 1995; Portelli 1991; Rappaport 1990; Tonkin 1992). Communities selectively remember their past in order to create a sense of shared sensibilities (Bourdieu 1977; Battaglia 1993) and collective memory is the base for the creation of a collective unconscious and identity (Hallwachs 1980). Only certain events are remembered and recalled in specific collective processes.

The Agrarian Reform in 1952/53 is a fundamental historical event, especially for Amachuma peasants. It outlined the passage from the condition of *pongos* (serfs) in the *hacienda* (private land estate) to that of independent peasants (Métraux 1970:183-184). We might expect it would be defined as an event with positive connotations, since people were liberated from their previous semi-feudal condition. However, this is not the case. The general feeling was that nothing really changed for them. Their condition of serfs, often described as a sort of slavery, was not affected by the Agricultural Reform. Instead, the

¹³⁴ Territorial unit, or community formed by a certain number of families.

¹³⁵ Most important authorities.

¹³⁶ Nobles.

patrones of the past gave way to new *patrones*, identified as governmental laws and banks.

As Amachuma peasants and *Alteños* say, with the end of the *hacienda* system, people are thought to have become more individualistic and to have modified some of their communal practices¹³⁷. This is explained through the effects of rural-urban migration, such as the displacement from the original community to new urban neighbourhoods. This is also supported by Lazar's theory (2002) of citizenship in El Alto, based on the experience of collective belonging through a physical and spiritual relationship with place. Some of the inhabitants left the countryside to find better jobs and conditions in the city, passing across and, in some cases, creating a bridge between two different economic models. The city is seen as a very important element of transformation and nowadays it still has a great influence on the lives of the inhabitants of Amachuma: people emphasise their dependence on economic activities in the city¹³⁸.

The loss of community is not seen in positive terms and more than one person has talked about the difficulties of moving to the city or of working there. 'Como esclavos van a trabajar a la ciudad' ('as slaves they go to the city to work') or 'la ciudad arruina a la gente, porque se juntan con gente política y empiezan a beber' ('the city destroys people, because they get together with 'political people' and they start to drink') are common statements among Amachuma farmers. The city is negatively conceived, being described as an

¹³⁷ The structure of the *hacienda* allowed for a preservation of communal practices. The *pongos* had to collaborate with their peers to survive (Métraux, 1970).

¹³⁸ Some of the inhabitants of Amachuma work into the city as bus drivers, street sellers, mechanics and constructors.

environment where you can come easily into contact with corrupt people who can enslave you. People moving to the city are also recognised as being more dependent on the economic constraints of the system. Hence, this conception of slavery is definitely associated with wage labour.

On the other hand, *Alteños* stress how they are affected by the lack of cash and how this can be a cause of separation/divorce in couples, as Don Oscar explained to me (see also Lazar, 2002). They say that this is not a problem in the countryside, where they always have access to food because of agricultural production¹³⁹. On the other hand, in the city, if you don't have money, you cannot eat or live. Therefore, you have to put all your efforts into earning an income for your household. You may start a small business in the informal sector such as selling in the marketplace, but you need an initial amount of capital to do so. Your social and kinship network¹⁴⁰ can support you by lending small amounts of money¹⁴¹, but when this is not possible or a larger sum is needed, banks become a possible solution. My informants refer not only to banks, but also to usurers. These are usually richer urbanised Aymara, classified as *mestizo*. Anyone who is rich enough to lend money is seen as a *mestizo* (see also Chapter 3) and, therefore, becomes part of this exploitative system. This plays a pivotal role in issues of identity and well-being, especially when being poor symbolises a positive identity marker that is inextricably connected with being Aymara. The *préstamos* (loans) that are borrowed have interest and

¹³⁹ Separation/divorce is infrequent in the countryside because of mutual dependence between households.

¹⁴⁰ Kinship and social networks play a vital role in terms of economic strategies, not only for the provision of credit, but also in terms of labour assistance and finding a job (Lazar, 2002).

payment deadlines. Despite the positive effects felt initially, people later become constrained in their everyday life by the interest and the deadlines they need to meet. In fact, on the 2nd of September 2004, there was a large protest in La Paz against banks, micro credit, financial intermediary institutions and money lenders.

Loans are described as exploitative practices that aim to impoverish ‘the poor’ in contrast with the enrichment of the lending institutions and of its owners. Hence, my informants identify themselves as slaves of this system¹⁴², since they do not have any other alternatives and they have to work in order to pay back their debt. Nowadays, finding a job in El Alto is difficult, given the high unemployment rate. This situation also affects selling in the informal sector. If people are unemployed, they cannot afford to buy and, therefore, borrowers cannot generate the business needed to pay off their loans.

Living in the city is not easy and lots of people are dragged into it out of need and desperation. When talking about El Alto, Amachuma peasants say that they do not like it. Their reasons for disliking this city are connected with the dangers of alcoholism: they say that while in the village they drink only when there is a *fiesta*¹⁴³, whereas in El Alto they can drink at every moment of the day. Being

¹⁴¹ This topic will be explored in Chapter 7, where I will show how important it is to engage in credit and debt relationships. As it has been shown by Harris (2000:62), debt and credit are the basis for “a vision of circulation as a fertilizing force”.

¹⁴² They are slaves of the *mestizo* Aymara alike.

¹⁴³ This has a positive connotation: drinking in the feast is inextricably connected with sociality and spirituality, as it has been shown by Andean literature (Lazar 2002; Harris 2000; Carter and Mamani 1989; Abercrombie 1998). It is not considered a ‘bad’ behaviour to drink at a *fiesta*, but it goes against morality when it is disconnected from traditional social and spiritual domains and, especially, when it involves excessive expenditures.

always drunk¹⁴⁴ is connected with the idea of being lazy and of not having enough money to support your household: this is also identified as a source of ill-being.

More than one person explained to me that *Suma Jakaña* for them means not to be a thief, a liar or to be lazy, emphasising the moral nature of this concept. They also add that an authentic Aymara will respect these three laws: ‘No seas ladrón, flojo o mentiroso’ (‘Don’t steal, don’t be lazy or a liar’). This was the motto of the Incas: *ama suwa, ama llulla, ama qhilla-* (De la Vega in Métraux, 1970). However, Amachuma peasants and *Alteños* think of it as a specifically Aymara ethics, a fundamental marker of identity and morality. If they do not respect this saying, they are not Aymaras or they have forgotten who they really are and where they come from, transforming themselves into *gente política*, corrupted by the system, who have to steal and lie to survive and, of course, who become lazy as a consequence.

Working is positive, because, without a job, you lose not only your own identity, but also economic support, which is essential in order to relate socially with the members of the household as well as of the community. Work has traditionally been central to personhood in Andean culture, especially cooperative work (Harris forthcoming). However, people say that this is not true any more. Agrarian Reform has deeply affected the customs of the community, such as the partial loss of the *ayni*. In Amachuma, in the past, *ayni* was usually

¹⁴⁴ Alcoholism is used by different social classes to accuse each other of being inadequate. They all drink, although this happens on different occasions. They use the abuse of alcohol as a category to judge the other and to express the idea that they are different and superior. However, they both drink and get drunk.

practised as communal and reciprocal work. Today it is more commonly expressed as a gift during the *fiestas*. My informants talked about partial loss of *ayni* in their community because that community work is not practised anymore. They spoke about it with regret, especially the elderly, putting a certain emotional emphasis on the memories of their childhood. What is left is reciprocal work only between members of the same extended family -for building a house, for example- and gifts at the *fiestas*, such as the buying of beer. This change in *ayni* is seen as negative, but also as an adaptation to new economic conditions that have inextricably shaped the relations between the members of the community as well as their roles.

This individualism could be seen as a direct consequence of the historical process, but more specifically of the Agrarian Reform. Access to resources is a source of internal factions in the group that leads to disintegration and conflict (Albó 1985). *Ayni* as gift is a means used by some people to reinforce their political and economic alliances. Usually, it is a reciprocal gift: I give you 2 bottles of beer and in return, in the long term, you will give me the same. However, nowadays it is being transformed, since some people have started to expect a return of the *ayni* with interest. This is why there is a partial loss of it. People are beginning to adapt reciprocity to a more capitalist economic model, which is the one they are experiencing. In addition to this, they are not always free to practice the *ayni*, especially when it comes to reciprocal and communal work, because, for example, they need to go to the city to sell or to work, and do not have time to spend on other things. Indeed, in the urban context, they calculate their time and returns on their labour more strictly than in the

countryside, given the fundamentally different structuring of work and employment. Access to resources is fundamental to understand the present situation: during the hacienda times before the Agrarian Reform, everybody had the same opportunity to use land and other resources, although they were *sirvientes* (servants) of a Master. Today, gaining access to resources depends on the abilities and alliances that people have. For instance, the conflicts that happened in Amachuma Town Hall (*Alcaldía*) are an example of this.

In theory, the *Alcaldía* of Amachuma and that of Achocalla are the same institution, since they are part of the same municipality. Amachuma is located on the plateau and Achocalla is positioned in the nearby valley. The division began when a group from Achocalla took over the *Alcaldía*. Because of land disputes, they took power with a *golpe* (a coup). Apparently, they acted as an illegal group and their main aim was that of terrorising people who are against their interests. The legal mayor, who worked in Amachuma, had to change house three different times, because they menaced him: they also attacked two of his domestic workers in order to find out his new address. The Court in Sucre recognised the *Alcaldía* of Amachuma as the legitimate one. However, the group from Achocalla refused to abide by the Court's decision. During my fieldwork, this same group stole a small truck from the *Alcaldía* of Amachuma. This led to an armed conflict between people from Achocalla and Amachuma resulting in serious injuries. Doña Justina, a lady in Amachuma, commented to me: 'these people from the valley want everything for themselves. They never want to give to the people of the *altiplano*'¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴⁵ 'Esta gente del valle quiere todo para ellos. Nunca quieren dar algo a la gente del altiplano'

This event raises important questions about the relation between citizens and the national government or the State: initially, I thought that the inhabitants in Amachuma respected the *Alcaldía* as an important institution and, consequently, they fought to protect it. However, this was not really the case. The rivalry between valley and *altiplano* (Achocalla/Amachuma) depends more on historical factors, connected with access to different environmental zones and land as well as the exchange of products. Later on it became evident that the *Alcaldía* was always judged as belonging to the corrupt system of the *gobierno* (national government). As a matter of fact, in reference to this Don José told me once: ‘Si te contactas con el Alcalde, la gente dice que recibiste dinero desde allí’ (‘If you get in contact with the Mayor, people think that you received money from him’). Hence, fighting against the other *Alcaldía* was only a way to obtain rights to land or resources, such as the truck. The *Alcaldía* was not positively perceived during my fieldwork: it was considered to be in the hands of political (‘corrupt’) parties, being the eye of the State on the community and controlling people through laws.

The State or national government was not only seen as responsible for all the historical events that led to the fragmentation of the community/*ayllu* and to the rise of individualism, but it was also seen as the cause of the ‘current condition of enslavement’ believed to take place through the application of laws. Whether or not these laws (*leyes* or *decretos*) concerned natural resources (such as gas), house taxes (such as *Maya, Paya, Kimsa*), land taxes (based on the amount of

hectares they own)¹⁴⁶, they were always contributing to the process of deception. First of all, laws were conceived as unfair. Secondly, they were identified as instruments for the enrichment of the national and local government. Foreign aid was believed not to reach the farmers, but to get lost in the hands of the ruling class or NGOs. These ideas were very widespread among my informants. The political alienation they experienced was lived as a new, powerful form of slavery. The only institution that was perceived as honest and 'ruled by the people for the people' was the *Sindicato* (Trade Union) in the countryside, and the *Junta Vecinal*¹⁴⁷ and *Junta Escolar*¹⁴⁸ in the city. Although they were not immune from the present process of fragmentation in factions and suspicions, they were the most important and trusted administrative organs.

The Trade Union in Amachuma embodies the old Aymara system of *ayllu* authorities (*autoridades originales*). The General Secretary has the most important position and he has power in the decision-making process. The General Secretary is like 'the father of the community'¹⁴⁹, as Don Tito told me. He also ensures public order by solving or preventing disputes. As Don Mario told me: 'Aqui no hay mentirosos. Si hay los castigamos mediante el Secretario General' ('Here there are no liars. If there are, we punish them with the General Secretary'). Nevertheless, during my fieldwork, trust in the Trade Union was limited to the local experience of it. As soon as you explored other levels in the hierarchy of this institution, Amachuma peasants started not to respect and trust

¹⁴⁶ It was seen in negative terms, because people felt that this law did not have a direct impact on their lives and was used as another form of abuse of power by corrupt parties.

¹⁴⁷ Residents' committee.

¹⁴⁸ Parents' association for a particular school.

¹⁴⁹ Like the Tata Mallku of the Ayllu, who is the most important leader of the local authorities in the countryside.

the authorities. Even when they talked about Felipe Quispe, the Mallku¹⁵⁰, an important Aymara politician and union leader from Achacachi close to the Lake Titicaca, they said that he was corrupt. Recognition and faith were only reserved for community leaders who worked well for the common good of the village (Albó 1998).

The attitude of people towards the police also highlighted the type of relation they had with the State. ‘When you have a problem, you do not call the police’: this was the rule that I immediately learnt. In fact, I remember that once a child got lost in Senkata and her parents were desperate to find her. When I suggested calling the police, they said that it was not a good idea. ‘La policía es muy corrupta’ (‘the police are very corrupt’). They preferred to contact the local Catholic Church and to make a public announcement to the entire neighbourhood. Similarly, when an old man from Amachuma was killed in El Alto, the family decided not to investigate who was responsible for it. When I asked why, they answered that the police wanted too much money and the family could not afford it. People did not usually rely on the police while I was living in Bolivia and, actually, tried to avoid them as much as possible. Hence, this made me realise that none of the governmental spheres people were in contact with were recognised as having positive effects on the lives of my informants. On the contrary, you had to distance yourself from government institutions if you wish to avoid ill-being.

¹⁵⁰ Lord or condor in Aymara.

In all the episodes described above, my informants mention the lack of freedom to act upon reality. This happens as a result of the application of governmental laws and of the loans given by credit institutions. This lack of freedom is defined as *ill-bieng* or as ‘a state of slavery’. The theme of slavery arose frequently during my fieldwork. Slavery as antithesis of freedom has been invoked in the Andes since the sixteenth century (Métraux, 1970). With colonisation and the obligation to convert to the Catholic faith, the Spanish aimed to make the *indios* free from the despotism of the Incas and the caciques (Brading, 1993).

Nevertheless, my analysis of ‘slavery’ is based on the subjective and political use of the term, rather than on the legal one. The notion of illegitimate oppression is key to my research and inextricably and emotionally linked to history in the imagination of Amachuma farmers and *Alteños*. Contemporary invocation of historical events tells us more about current forms of power abuse than it does about the events themselves. The politics of memory is related to the state of control experienced by people. The despotism of economic and political limitation as well as the potential or actual use of violence structures this idea of oppression, shedding light on different aspects of agency and on specific forms of action.

Amachuma peasants and Senkata residents (men) draw parallels between the multiple levels of power: the global, the national, and the local dimension. Illegitimate actions, corruption and manipulation are present in all these spheres. The national government is the central connecting point between the global and

the local, and links the two dimensions through laws and treaties as well as credit and debt. The State's moral function is not seen as positive since it does not allow for a 'vision of circulation', that is a 'fertilising force', according to Harris' discussion of the Laymi (2000:62). Therefore, money in relation to the government is not connected with the idea of fertility anymore, but with that of scarcity. This manipulation betrays all the reciprocal ties between the various dimensions, natural and spiritual.

During my fieldwork only the local representatives of power could be respected and trusted and, even in this case, everything depended on the abilities of the community leaders and on their moral conduct. This moral conduct had to take into consideration the good of the community, a community that was formed through ties of solidarity and common opposition to the State, to the political elites, and to foreign powers, such as the USA, in the global arena. All of them were trying to block that fundamental vision of circulation as well as the generation of well-being. Local leaders had to 'sacar la zona adelante' ('make the zone progress'), because 'for an Aymara leading a good life is improving the conditions of his/her people', despite constraints and difficulties.

Poverty has become a collective experience for Aymara people, attributed to historical and structural causes -for instance, the historical process whereby the conquistadors stole natural resources. This is also why stealing is often described as antithetical to Aymara nature and is severely punished. Punishment of criminal suspects and in particular of thieves is very common in Bolivian cities: usually, the criminal is beaten up by the crowd. It is also very common to

find big rag dolls attached to electricity poles in very busy market places and the often associated signs: 'Death to thieves!'. This is what Goldstein (2005) has described as flexible justice due to insecurity and neo-liberal violence. Amachuma peasants' and Senakta residents' idea of ill-being is characterised by insecurity, disempowerment, and discrimination.

'Being indigenous' is very important for the indigenous population in drawing boundaries between the different social classes and it is usually associated with being poor (Plant 1998). Thus, if you want to be classified as indigenous, you have to convey that you are poor, no matter what your profession is or how much you earn. Poverty becomes a source of identity and solidarity, but it also causes insecurity, since people steal to have access to cash. However, my informants think that this can take place only when there is not a strong tie with the rest of the community, when one becomes individualistic, forgets the common good and in a way transforms one's persona into the 'other' who eludes all Aymara communal values. Being the 'other' means changing racial and social group and behaving like the selfish *mestizo* and member of the political elite (see Chapter 7). For my informants, the solution to problems such as poverty cannot be found at the individual level. It is only through a collective experience that they can overcome them. Social protests are collective manifestations of their communal values.

'The outsiders': from the local to the global

Alteño life is negatively contrasted with the rural *ayllu* by Aymara intellectuals (see Chapter 6) as well as with middle-class/upper-class white-*mestizo*. *Alteños* oppose themselves to *mestizos* and the political elites, both seen as categories in

relation with higher levels of power. In particular, the latter connects Bolivia to the international context, creating a parallel between the local and the global.

Bolivia, like most of Latin America, underwent a process of structural adjustment from the 1980s. Capitalisation through transnational capital as well as privatisation of public institutions and companies in favour of foreign ones have been key policies adopted by Latin American governments: national elites tried to attract mobile transnational capital through the application of conditions that would create a maximisation of internal profitability and also the abandonment of state obligations to the poor (Robinson, 2004:142). Cheap labour, lax working conditions, elimination of state regulations in terms of environmental controls, taxes, and transnational corporate accountability to local populations, added to a very profitable and inexpensive access to natural resources, create very appealing circumstances for the global economy. The consequences of these policies for local populations can be identified in the dramatic increase of social inequality and impoverishment in most of the Latin American region. In the 1990s the Human Development Index decreased for many South American countries, amongst them Bolivia (UNDP, 2000: 7), affected by the international tin price collapse in the 1980s and the pressures of the FMI to pay high levels of interest on the external debt.

Today hydrocarbons and natural resources are nationally represented as the only possible means to achieve a stable economic situation for the entire country and a national discourse around the repatriation of the coast line is also taking place amongst the different social classes, unifying the Bolivian society against Chile,

‘the common enemy’. Again, history is evoked to express an opposition to a foreign force which has stolen a fundamental source of well-being, such as the coast line. Bolivian newspapers are full of articles on current Chilean and Bolivian relations. They are united in picturing Chile as another exploiter of Bolivia’s natural resources. Common headlines are indicative of this: ‘Iquique rico, Oruro pobre, por qué?’¹⁵¹ (Rich Iquique, poor Oruro, why?). Iquique is a seacoast Chilean city and Oruro is a Highland Bolivian city. Others include: ‘Agenda política entre Bolivia y Chile pende de un hilo’¹⁵² (Political agenda between Bolivia and Chile is in a critical situation), ‘Chile vive el peor momento diplomático de su historia’¹⁵³ (Chile is living the worst diplomatic moment of its history).

Diplomatic relations with Chile are focused on different political and economic issues: not only the repatriation of the coast line, but also the export of gas and the use of the water from the river Silala in Potosí. Again, the concept of illegitimate appropriation comes up, especially in relation with the Silala case. Chile has used the water from this river for decades without remunerating Bolivia. There is a betrayal in terms of mutual reciprocity and again, an interesting headline appears on La Prensa on the 7th of May 2004: ‘Partidos: Si Chile quiere gas, primero debe darnos mar’ (Parties: If Chile wants gas, first of all it has to give us back the sea). At the same time, a publication by the Bolivian historian Roberto Querejazu Calvo was offered as a gift to the readers of the national newspapers such as El Deber, Los Tiempos, La Prensa, Correo

¹⁵¹ La Razon, 7/04/2004, La Paz.

¹⁵² La Prensa, 26/04/2004, La Paz.

¹⁵³ La Prensa, 7/05/2004, La Paz.

del Sur, el Alto, El Potosí, Nuevo Sur, El Norte in May 2004. The title of his book is *Chile, enemy of Bolivia before, during and after the Pacific War* (2004).

The Pacific War was fought between 1879 and 1884, leading to the loss of Bolivia's coast line to Chile. Every year, on the 23rd of March, Bolivia commemorates the Day of the Sea (*el Día del Mar*) with many parades and official functions. The Bolivian Navy takes part, marching through the streets of La Paz, accompanied by local school kids. It is a national festivity to claim back the territory lost to Chile. In El Alto too residents march and schoolchildren dress up as soldiers and nurses, remembering the days of the War and waving Bolivian flags. Children are asked in school to make drawings in order to explain their understanding of this historical moment and their desire for the repatriation of the coast line. In March 2004 many drawings were exhibited in San Pedro Square in La Paz (see pictures 16, 17, 18 in the appendix) with headings such as 'An Historical Quest', 'Bolivia has to have its sea back', and 'Bolivia is not the same without its coast line'.

This would suggest that well-being in Bolivia is inextricably connected to the image and loss of the sea as though everything would be fine if they got their coast back. This represents an important collective dimension, a national symbol embraced by different social classes. This feeling against Chile is reinforced by its supposed political connection with the US government, especially during my fieldwork in 2003-2004. In Bolivia, the USA played a pivotal role in internal politics with its military presence in the country against coca growers. At the same time, its global political and economic influence and its interference in

national issues, for example, promoting neo-liberal policies has been identified as one of the main causes of diffused impoverishment.

During my fieldwork, the FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) constituted an important aspect of Bolivian-US relations. The FTAA was seen as a continuation of the US domination and as a reinforcement of their political and economic interests. The Bolivian government affirmed in 2004 that the FTAA was an inevitable process of globalisation. In so doing, it became in the eyes of ordinary people 'an ally' of the North American power. For the lower classes of Bolivian society, accepting the FTAA would mean the destruction of their local production and the introduction of US products, as happened with corn in Mexico after NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) came into force in 1994. People were convinced that USA would control the consumption of Bolivian citizens and would foster dependence on US products rather than promoting the expansion and circulation of local production.

In recent years, imports of primary goods such as potatoes and rice have increased rapidly. In 1998, the import figure for potatoes was less than 1 million kilos, while by 2001 it was more than 4 million kilos. At the same time, rice imports were nil in 1998, while they reached the level of more than 50 million kilos in 2001. These are the results of years of free trade, in which Bolivia decreased its participation in global trade from 0.024% in 1985 to 0.016% in 2000 (Kruse, 2004).

Zacarías Calatayad (2004), a local *campesino* (peasant), says that: ‘the farmer sells his *quinua* and chickens in order to buy *pollo de granja* (chicken), pasta and sardines in cans’. He sees the situation in very negative terms, saying that foreign goods will destroy not only local production, but also people’s identity, which is inextricably linked with agricultural production. Again, in 2004, there was an increasing worry that natural resources, such as gas, petrol, water, and wood would be sold to North American multinationals, benefiting only the Bolivian elite, as had already happened at other historical moments.

US foreign policy is based on wars against drugs, terrorism and for the development of Free Trade. As Kruse (2004) argues, ‘the war against Al Queda (or Iraq) is an economic war for Free Trade Agreements, and if you are against it, you are potentially a terrorist’. On the 30th of March 2004, an ex worker of the mines of Siglo XX, Eustaquio Picachuri, entered into the Congress of La Paz with a bomb. He was asking for ‘a devolution of the taxes he had paid in the past’¹⁵⁴, because he was unable to feed his family. When the police refused to help him, he exploded the bomb, injuring 10 people and killing not only himself, but also two policemen. The government talked about an isolated case, but a few days after the event, the police found 1,600 kilograms of dynamite in a house in La Paz¹⁵⁵ and other miners declared they would use the same ‘act of protest’ as Picachuri did, if the government was not prepared to pay attention to their requests.

¹⁵⁴ “*Se hace el perfil psicologico del minero y del Cnl.Flores*”, La Razon, Sabado 3 de Abril 2004, p.A18, La Paz.

¹⁵⁵ “*La Policia Halla mas de 1.600 kilos de dinamita en una casa en La Paz*”, La Razon, Sabado 3 de Abril 2004, p.A18, La Paz.

During my fieldwork I started to wonder whether these episodes represented a new form of protest. It was the first time that this kind of suicide protest had taken place in Bolivia. For example, I saw an interesting image on the back of a public bus in El Alto: the Twin Towers in New York with Osama Bin Laden on the right and Che Guevara on the left and on the top of it 'Generation 2004' (see picture 19 in the appendix). Che Guevara has long been an important symbol in Latin America, as a fighter on behalf of the poor against discrimination and oppression. His *guerrilla* is seen as a source of inspiration by activists in Bolivia, for example, the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena Juan Cosme Apaza¹⁵⁶. During my fieldwork the *guerrilla* was considered by people as possible form of protest to confront the government, although it was never fully explored and planned. It was only mentioned in informal conversations. At the same time, the influence of models coming from the Middle East was important too. Many shops in La Paz now have Arabic names, although they do not belong to Arabic speakers, as a gesture of identification with the victims of US aggression. In addition, there were figures of Osama Bin Laden with an aeroplane in his hand and a foot on one of the Twin Towers on sale in some of the local markets.

My fieldwork was carried out between November 2003 and November 2004, when Bolivia was living through an unstable political situation; the national arena was simple magnified into the global one, with the Bolivian government taking the side of the USA according to all the people I talked with. Since then some major changes have taken place. On the 18th of December 2005, Evo

¹⁵⁶ "*Investigan a presunto grupo irregular*", La Prensa, Jueves 8 de Abril 2004, p.5^a, La

Morales, coca union leader, was elected as President with 54% of votes. Since the return of democracy in 1982, he is the first presidential candidate to have achieved more than 50% of votes. He came into power after the interim presidency of Rodriguez, who filled the vacuum created by the resignation of President Mesa in June 2005. The country was in a very unstable situation after the so-called Gas War in October 2003. The social uprising of 2003 was a form of protest against the neo-liberal model and the privatisation of natural resources, in particular gas, and their export through Chile to the United States. As I mentioned above, antagonism towards Chile and USA played a pivotal role in the uprisings of 2003 and in the future developments of internal politics.

As Canessa (2005) has noted, Evo Morales MAS -Movimiento al Socialismo, has strategically tried to unify a class discourse with an ethnic one in an attempt to combine both within a broad anti-globalisation discourse, which is mainly based on its opposition towards US politics and Chilean interests. Morales' vision is to defend the nation by making Aymara concerns, national concerns. This is why he emphasises the importance of nationalising the gas and protecting the national interest against USA interests and globalisation. Thus, 'being indigenous' is now seen as 'being national', rather than backward and anachronistic as occurred in the past. Morales represents a new, powerful national symbol, providing an innovative Aymara as well as national image to the international community, based on an inclusive ethnicity and a strong critique of globalisation. He is Aymara and Bolivian at the same time, facing the global arena with an inclusive discourse aimed not only at indigenous people,

Paz.

but also at non-indigenous Bolivians. In this he is different from previous indigenous leaders: he was also very careful to avoid presenting himself and his party as simply an indigenous party. When I went back to El Alto in 2005, Senkata residents told me that Evo Morales was the only possible candidate, the only possible solution for the country. Évo also became a symbol of a new Aymara identity, based on the defence of natural resources, and the opposition to the FTAA as well as to globalisation and US intervention. Evo's image was enhanced thanks to his antiglobal discourse, creating a common basis of identification not only for Aymaras, but also for many non-indigenous Bolivians.

Collective effervescence, everyday insecurity and hope

As Lazar (2002:212) has also noted, 'people imagine themselves as a collective entity, as residents of a particular neighbourhood, or as the Bolivian people'. This is quite clear when talking about social protests. Social protests are a moment of 'collective effervescence', as identified by Durkheim: 'at such moments this higher form of life is lived with such intensity and exclusiveness it monopolises all minds to more or less complete extinction of egoism and the commonplace' (Durkheim 2001 [1912]:102). Amachuma peasants and Senkata residents are very proud of their actions in October 2003. Through their words and memories, it seemed as though that 'collective effervescence' is relived and re-expressed. However, everyday life is characterised by individual insecurity, fear or grief for those family members who died in the protests or as a consequence of neo liberal policies.

The Peruvian writer José María Arguedas (1985), recounts a rural tale from Cuzco, titled 'The Pongo's Dream'. A *pongo*, an indigenous servant, tells his dream of the afterlife to his landlord. 'That's how it should be' answers the landlord, upon hearing that, on Judgement Day, Saint Francis has ordered two of the angels to cover the landlord and the *pongo* respectively with honey and human excrement. But, the *pongo* continues: 'Our father Saint Francis took another look at both of us, first at you, then at me, a long time....Then he said: 'Whatever the angels had to do with you is done. Now, lick each other's body slowly, for all eternity'. Is it possible that the world will turn upside down? Well, this is the tale's forecast. However, even in this case, equality is not the final result, but just an inversion of hierarchy and humiliation, which is not what *Alteños* really want. They do not wish to punish the government and the political elites: on the other hand, they would like to re-establish a certain degree of circulation of leadership, duty and participation. Social protests are indeed a moment of collective well-being, a moment in which the world is turned upside down, even if only for a limited spell of time. Through social protests, *Alteños* try to create a sense of circulation, to which they feel extremely committed.

In this way, *Alteños* become part of a collective self in opposition to a common enemy, such as the political elites or foreign powers. Manipulation, mistrust and conflict are directly experienced by Senkata residents and Amachuma peasants in their everyday life within and outside their group. Co-operation, solidarity and interdependence is something that they experience only occasionally, in moments of 'collective effervescence and well-being', in which the entire world

is temporarily turned upside down, when hierarchies are not suppressed, but positively resisted through collective sacrifice in the promise of a new social order.

Although the experience might be tragic, as in the case of the deaths that occurred in October demonstration in El Alto, it is also full of hope for the future. Social protests are both a challenge and an acceptance of authority (Clifford 1988:95), and a matter of strategy and democracy (Escobar and Alvarez 1990:8), but I would also add that they are a matter of moral orientation. As I mention in Chapter 1, 'to know who you are is to be oriented in moral space' (Taylor, 1989:28), so that one gets a sense of what is good or bad, and decides what is worth doing or achieving, prioritising his/her actions. Undoubtedly, an individual should have the opportunity of free choice, but, at the end, the pressures of peers have a big impact on the final outcome and participation (Giddens, 1979, 1984). There is a constant fear of being marginalised by the rest of the group, and not receiving the fundamental support for well-being: at the same time, there is an individual/collective tension that, in the case of El Alto, is solved through a division of responsibilities among the members of the same household. Yet, there is always an imposition of a moral authority, a moral authority that determines what individuals should or should not do, what individuals should sacrifice for the collective well-being in order to achieve a new social order, a turning of the world upside down.

In this way, *Suma Qamaña* is not only a value in the here and now, manifested through fiestas and social protests, but it is also an aspiration for the future.

Hope acquires a certain importance, playing a fundamental role. Desroche (1979:16) defines hope as a 'collective ideation', citing Durkheim (2001 [1912]: 95) who wrote:

Religion is not only a system of ideas; it is above all a system of forces (...). Religious life implies the existence of very specific forces (...) recalling a well-known phrase, I will restrict myself to saying that they are the forces that can move mountains. By that I mean that when man lives a religious life, he believes he is participating in a force that dominates him, but which at the same time supports him and raises him above himself (...) he believes he is participating in a force that dominates him, but which at the same time supports him and raises him above himself (...).

It is all a matter of believing in a certain force 'to make us act, to help us to live' (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 595). Lacroix (1964) distinguishes between a level of aspiration or expectation of a desirable ideal (will) and a level of anticipation of a possible realisation (capacities). There is a dialectic of hope between 'what one should do to reply to the subjective demand of desires and what one can do to respond to the objective framework of powers' (Desroche, 1979:20). He claims that there is a peak, and this is when the expectation is joyfully exuberant, that is to say when people have faith 'they can move mountains', and they believe in their capacities. Thus, the desirable transforms the impossible, aspiration reinforces expectancy, and hopeless situations, when ill-being is considered dysfunctional, are changed in hopeful scenarios. *Suma Qamaña* contains both aspiration for the future and expectancy based in the here and now and reinforced by the capacity to be united in the struggle. As Tourraine (1981:89) suggests, such revolutionary actions take place only 'in the name of reappropriation by the community of all the forms of self-production of society (...). This critical action aims at restoring community (...)'. He also claims that it is usually due to domination or dependence on a foreign country that 'maintains and reinforces the dominant national class, which hangs on to its

archaic privileges', as was evident in my informants' perceptions of history. This topic will be analysed more in depth in the next chapter.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed social protests as manifestations of communal values. *Suma Qamaña* encompasses a fundamental value, that of living well with the other members of the community and of being united when ill-being becomes dysfunctional. Protests are effective media that enable people to re-establish their ability to conduct a valuable life. By showing *Alteños* and Amachuma peasants' sense of collectivity, it has also focused on the conception of responsibility towards their community peers. There is a strong moral duty to participate in protests organised by the *Junta Vecinal* or the Trade Union, which invoke the importance of collective sacrifice. Yet, there is a tension between this collective dimension and the household/individual. In fact, social mobilisations are in tension with the everyday necessity to go to work and to support the family. A division of responsibilities among the members of the household can be a partial solution to this tension, but collective actions that block roads and prevent the flow of transport, then people cannot work.

This chapter has depicted social protests not only as anti-capitalist rebellions, but also as long-term trajectories of collective well-being and as an expression of group identity, a new image embodied by Evo Morales. This is the picture of a new Aymara as well as Bolivian man who is not afraid to struggle for the defence of natural resources and against globalisation. Yet, even within the same community, there are different orientations, as shown by Senkata during the Referendum in July 2004. Participation in protests is inextricably linked

with issues of leadership, justice and authority; the moral image of the leader affects the results and final outcomes of public action. This is also why rumour and gossip are used by people to compromise the image of political opponents through discourses of corruption and connection with foreign multinationals, governments or individuals (as for example the Gas Referendum and protest in Senkata). However, despite the presence of strategies that might be different in form, the content of the collective vision is always the same, at least from a discursive and theoretical point of view.

Social protests connect the past with the present, residents with their neighbours, and peasants with their community, but are not immune from tensions and contradictions. Social protests show how interdependence, co-operation, solidarity and democracy run in parallel with confrontation, mistrust, manipulation and conflict. Rather than becoming only a model for an alternative society, this kind of public action demonstrates that there are also group pressures limiting individuals' free choice. However, 'collective effervescence' is always identified as a fundamental aspect of well-being, when individuality is suppressed through sacrifice in the promise of a new social order, all supported by an aspiration for the future that reinforces the capacities of people to act.

CHAPTER SEVEN WELL-BEING AND COMMUNITY

This chapter deals with the idea of ‘the good life’ or *Suma Qamaña* proposed by a group of Aymara intellectuals. By looking at some of the topics analysed in the previous chapter (moral obligation, reciprocity, success, failure, historicity, collective well-being), I explore how well-being is constructed and imagined by this specific group. Since Aymara intellectuals do not constitute an homogeneous category, I therefore focus on the work of ‘GTZ Aymara intellectuals’, as I decided to define them, who participated in a project on ‘the good life’ sponsored by the German Cooperation agency GTZ in collaboration with FAM –*Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia*. This resulted in a publication entitled *La Comprensión Indígena de la Buena Vida*, still today one of the few local contributions to the topic.

The central theme of their representation is the pivotal role played by the ‘community’, which is a fundamental element in their romantic view of the *ayllu*. Their theory explores the strength of community life in the countryside in opposition to the dissolution of tight community interactions and obligations in the city. Although my ethnography partially supports this hypothesis, I suggest a new perspective on the topic, unfolding the complexities of issues at stake.

The model of well-being proposed by ‘GTZ Aymara intellectuals presented as a specifically ‘Aymara’ notion, is based on a static definition of the ‘good life’, closely associated with rural life. Well being is a feature of ‘community’ and ‘community’ is achieved only in the rural context. However, as previously discussed, well-being is a fluid concept that shifts according to time and space.

In particular, the thesis is concerned with the lives of the large and increasing number of rural-urban migrants living in El Alto. Given the ‘GTZ-Aymara intellectuals’ emphasis on rural life and their negative appraisal of the city, I will explore how these notions may or may not map onto everyday lives in El Alto. Specifically, I show how far Amachuma and Senkata residents identify with their perspective. This will include a discussion of the possible dissolution of tight community obligations¹⁵⁷ in the city, as suggested by the ‘GTZ intellectuals’ (see also Chapter 5) and the diversity that results from conversion and adherence to Evangelical religious codes as occurs in Senkata¹⁵⁸. I also reflect on some of the differences that emerge between individual and community needs, as expressed by some informants in Amachuma, where participation in community affairs is felt as an obligation, regardless of religious affiliation.

As far as religious affiliation is concerned, the extent to which belonging in a religious congregation affects participation in other community activities varies significantly. Some Protestant groups are more flexible on the issue of religious and cultural syncretism than others. In Amachuma, the Baptist Church appears to tolerate its members participating in offerings for the *Pachamama*. This is not the case in Senkata with the Seventh Day Adventists. Thus, all of this sheds light on the impossibility of sustaining only one model of ‘indigenous life’ and

¹⁵⁷ This group of Aymara intellectuals focuses its analysis on the role played by the community in the countryside in opposition to the urban context. They are critical of city life which they believe leads to a dissolution of close ties among neighbours. My discussion offers a different stance, based on the contrast I found between my urban and semi-urban field-sites, which derived not so much from their location as from the various religious affiliations found in them. For this reason I have included a discussion of the role of Evangelical Churches in this chapter.

¹⁵⁸ People I met in Senkata mainly belonged to the Seventh Day Adventists, well-known for being actively anti-syncretic. For a good discussion on syncretism and anti-syncretism, see Stewart and Shaw (1994).

emphasises the importance of taking into account a multiplicity of factors, circumstances and views, as the diverse contexts of Senkata and Amachuma show.

The chapter also focuses on the alterations I witnessed in people's self-perceptions and self-presentations when engaging with outsiders, compared to those that prevail when engaging with other people who identify as Aymaras. Insiders shape their identity around the shared comprehension of the world and this shifts when confronted with outsiders. Perhaps the most important feature for the present discussion is the emphasis on poverty that characterises interactions with outsiders, since poverty informs the ways boundaries are drawn between different social classes. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 6, being indigenous is usually associated with being poor (Plant, 1998). This is especially true among the inhabitants of the Department of La Paz and it is a view held widely among Aymara as well as non-Aymara people. Thus, if you want to be classified as indigenous, you convey the impression that you are poor (as we have seen in chapter 6), regardless of your profession or income. This is why perceptions of unfair power relations and issues of discrimination as depicted by some intellectuals reinforce and support this common view and are worth looking at. These are also the core concepts for the imagination of the *Suma Qamaña*, a 'collective good life' that is believed to be shaped not only in opposition to the historical exclusion of indigenous groups from the national decision-making process, but also in opposition to immorality, corruption and unfairness. the core of the debate presented by 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' is

that historical and contemporary (up to 2004) corruption and unfairness have led the indigenous population to poverty.

In my discussion of 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals', I refer to a group of people who identify themselves as Aymara and who are involved in the production of ideas attributed to, and related with, indigenous groups. Although 'GTZ indigenous intellectuals' do not represent a homogeneous group, they share some characteristics. They usually have a university degree or a higher level of education and usually live in the city. Most of them are first-generation or second-generation migrants from the countryside.

As has been shown by Baud (2003) and Mato (2001) local intellectuals are not generally taken into consideration in the academic research carried out at the majority of US and European universities. Latin American scholars often have a subaltern status in comparison with European and US colleagues, being only mentioned in acknowledgements or in footnotes, so that a certain type of academic hierarchy has been created and perpetuated. Despite this, Latin American theories such as *indigenismo*, dependency theories, and liberation theology, have deeply influenced and affected the thinking of intellectuals world-wide.

The inclusion in this thesis of the perspectives of a selected group of local intellectuals acknowledges the important attempts to theorise well-being from an Aymara collective point of view, and includes at least some of the voices that are part of indigenous movements and communities. At the same time, the

Indigenous discourse and well-being

In the last six years there has been an increasing interest in, and commitment to investigate what constitutes well-being from an indigenous point of view amongst some indigenous intellectuals. This interest has arisen in conjunction with a new political context characterised by social protests as well as by a *Jach'a* (the translation is 'process of self-esteem'; see Cancio Mamani 2001:99) generated among some urban Aymara and intellectuals. Changes in indigenous political consciousness first emerged in the 1970s with the development of an indigenous discourse and movement¹⁵⁹, especially among some Aymara speakers in the Department of La Paz. *Kataristas* and *Indianistas* supported critical political currents and promoted Aymara and Quechua nationalism (Andolina, 2003). These political changes were crucial in forming political parties and NGOs as well as the peasant confederation. *Katarismo* and *Indianismo* both derived from the same source, Fausto Reinaga, who criticised the use of *mestizaje* as a national revolutionary ideology and placed colonialism and the Indian question at the heart of his analysis (Hylton and Thompson, 2005).

Kataristas were inspired by the legacy of the historical hero Tupac Katari and his wife Bartolina Sisa, who fought against the Spaniards in 1781. In the 1970s the *Katarista* movement issued the 'Manifesto of Tiwanaku' in which peasant class consciousness and Aymara ethnic consciousness were seen to complement each other. The *Kataristas* argued that not only colonialism, but also capitalism were at the root of contemporary exploitation and poverty. On the other hand,

¹⁵⁹ For more information, see Pacheco (1992).

Indianistas had less of an emphasis on peasant trade-union activity and regarded racial issues rather than class domination as the main focus of their criticism. These two political currents influenced intellectual production as well as the ideology at the basis of social protests. Nowadays issues related with well-being have opened new spaces for discussion; previous criticisms of colonialism and capitalism are re-explored through the contemporary debate on how the 'good life' can be defined. 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' were greatly influenced by these ideologies, especially when arguing for an indigenous (racial) political exclusion and economic impoverishment due to capitalist exploitation perpetuated by 'the ruling (non-indigenous) elite'.

The discussion of 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' on the indigenous concepts of the 'good life' begins with a linguistic analysis of the Aymara terms *Suma Jakaña* and *Qamaña*. *Suma* means beautiful/good in Aymara, while *Jakaña* is identified with the placenta as well as with the human body, which is the place where life develops. *Jakaña* is defined as 'the place of living. Towards the inside, the place where an individual develops'¹⁶⁰. Thus, *Suma Jakaña* implies a beautiful/good life, and refers to psychological and physical health. It is also related with metabolic functions, growth, and reproduction as well as with responses to stimuli and adaptation to the environment originating within the organism. This connection with reproduction emphasises the importance of having children, and of creating a household, as discussed in chapter 3. For this reason, the term

¹⁶⁰ '*Jakaña/Lugar de vivir. Hacia adentro, lugar donde se desarilla un ser*' (Torrez 2001:34). Definition provided by Mario Torrez, an Aymara agronomist and industrial chemist. He works in CADA (Centro Andino para el Desarrollo Agropecuario). He has been involved for several years in research on Aymara well-being.

is often used to refer to the well-being of the household in general, as Amachuma residents would tell me.

On the other hand, *Qamaña* stands for the harmonious space that surrounds people and it refers to the well-being of the community in the *ayllu*. *Qamaña* is 'the place of dwelling. Towards the outside. The harmonious space of the collective well-being in the *ayllu*'¹⁶¹, including the political/economic as well as the social communal life. Amachuma and Senkata residents usually see *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña* as wrapping and influencing one another, with the former at the heart of the latter.

The 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' interest in well-being anticipated current global discussions on this topic. The publication *La Comprensión indígena de la Buena Vida. Suma Qamaña*¹⁶², edited by Javier Medina and published by GTZ in 2001, is one of the most important Andean contributions to this topic and it is also a fundamental starting point for exploring the complexity of ideas relating to this issue. Medina¹⁶³ writes in one of the introductory chapters of the book:

It is here in the Andes that a new paradigm of good life has been built. This paradigm that is, in fact, based on the opposite components that form the Western World. It is not the city, but the fields; it is not the separation, but the symbiosis with nature, that represents the space and time of the quality of life. The contrast could not be more radical¹⁶⁴.(2001:19)

¹⁶¹ '*Qamaña/Lugar de existir. Hacia afuera. Espacio armonico de bienestar de la comunidad en el ayullu*' (Torrez 2001:34).

¹⁶² *The indigenous understanding of Good Life. Suma Qamaña*.

¹⁶³ Javier Medina is a non-indigenous intellectual who supports indigenous politics and has been involved with formulating policy at highest levels -FIS, Dialogo Nacional, Participacion Popular.

¹⁶⁴ My own translation from the Spanish version: "He aquí que en los Andes se construye otro paradigma de la Buena Vida que se basa, justamente, en el opuesto del mundo occidental. No es la Ciudad, sino la Chacra: no es la separación sino la simbiosis con la naturaleza, el espacio-tiempo de la cualidad de la vida. La contraposición no podría ser mas radical" (Medina, 2001:19).

Medina emphasises a dichotomy between the 'indigenous' and the 'Western' models. The former develops in the rural context, while the latter in the urban one, forming an opposition. However, the 'Western' and 'indigenous' models he is referring to seem to be associated with an idealised 'Western' and 'indigenous' world that are imagined rather than real. The opposition put forward by Medina seem to be rooted in 'Western' philosophical categories, echoing the Rousseau's 'noble savage' view of indigenous life.

Medina's dichotomy tells us more about the shaping of the model by 'GTZ local intellectuals' and the process behind it rather than illuminating the different models and orientations among ordinary people. Medina and 'GTZ local intellectuals' emphasise the positive aspects of the *ayllu* -the basic political unit of pre-Inca and Inca life, associating it with the rural environment in opposition to the urban lifestyle. According to their model the city does not allow for the practice of this form of collective organisation, since it is in the city that people become alienated and experience a sense of lack of community. 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' often write that the city prevents any form of communal practices and instead fosters individualism.

This stands in contradiction with Lazar's research on street traders associations and unions in El Alto (2008), where one expects self-interested strategies to prevail especially in the dynamics of the informal economy. Yet, Lazar analyses the tensions existing between individualism and collective organisation and through her ethnography she emphasises how the notion of communalism is based upon a particular interpretation or experience of the self.

Individualism, she says, plays an important role in people's decision to join a union or an association. But at the same time, she also highlights how the bonds that make the collectivity are also very important. She explains: '(...) you just are a member of the union, a *vecino*, or a parent, and that requires you to do certain things, to act "organically" (2008: 204). Thus, she recognises not only that unions and associations represent fundamental forms of communal organization and collaboration, but also that the same happens with *Juntas Vecinales* and *Juntas Escolares*. This, I suggest, leads her towards rather different conclusions from the one depicted by 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals.

In fact, 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' think that there cannot be well-being in the city, since they say that the urban space prevents any form of communal practices. Well-being exists only in the countryside, where they believe that the 'community' (*la comunidad*) is really united. This contradicts the view of the anthropologist Xavier Albó, who in 1985 wrote about the indigenous concept of 'individualism within the group'. His ethnography has shown that forms of individualism exist in any Aymara group/community, especially with reference to leadership.

Nevertheless, 'GTZ local intellectuals' tend to overemphasise the dichotomy between Western and indigenous models, and to idealise rural life. They say that rural life is perceived as the connection with their lost past and as a fundamental aspect in creating a sense of unity and empowerment for 'all Aymara' people. They affirm the importance of an agrarian regime for the well-being of 'Aymara' people, despite their individual choices to leave the countryside for

good. Yet, by deciding to live in the city, they themselves seem to contradict their view of the superiority of rural life.

Urban and rural are highly racialised concepts in the Andes (Wade 1993, Canessa 2005) and people seem to belong to different racial and social groups according to the place where they live and the social interactions they engage with. This would also explain why a few intellectuals idealise the countryside, since it is also associated with indigeneity. However, the city offers better educational and working opportunities as well as more possibilities for social mobility. Furthermore, influential urban Aymara are highly regarded and appreciated in their communities of origin as I realised while I was carrying out fieldwork in Amachuma.

During Carnival celebrations, a young man called Leandro repeatedly invited me to dance. Leandro was born and raised in Amachuma, but left after he finished high school. He had been living in one of the central neighbourhoods of El Alto for a few years and had begun his own business. He was also studying Law at university. He was considered to be very successful by the rest of the community and I was advised to accept his invitation to dance, since he was ‘a very good catch’. On the day of our first meeting, Leandro introduced himself by saying: ‘I’m a *mestizo*, but people love me anyway’. I was surprised by his statement and could not really understand it, since his parents are Aymara peasants from Amachuma. However, his migration to the city, his business success and his social interactions made him different from them. He was no longer Aymara. He had become a *mestizo* by moving to a more urbanised area

of the city and by having a good income as well as powerful social connections. Nevertheless, in the context of El Alto, he would have classified himself as Aymara, showing how social and ethnic belonging are situational and dependant on the context (see discussion in Chapter 1 and 2).

A few months later, Leandro was killed in El Alto. He was assaulted after he left a group of friends in one of the local pubs. Apparently, he was very drunk. From the moment they heard the news of his death, people in Amachuma started to talk about him in very negative terms. He was described as stingy, dishonest and a womaniser. Informants explained that his violent death was the result of his drunkenness. It was commented that a 'good Aymara' man from the 'countryside' would drink only during a fiesta. Leandro, by contrast, was in a bar on an ordinary Friday night, wasting money. This is something that Amachuma residents cannot afford to do and would not want to be seen doing.

Before his death, Leandro was appreciated by Amachuma residents and was often praised in daily conversations as an example of success. He moved to the city, began his own business, enjoyed harmony in his family, and was studying to become a professional. He could obtain anything in the view of Amachuma residents. Nevertheless, all of this was cut short by his sudden death: in dying in the way he did, he became an image of failure. Before his death, I never heard people commenting on Leandro's drinking and on his sharing money with the 'wrong' people; but after he was assaulted and killed, they began criticising his drinking habits and the fact he was hanging out with the 'wrong' crowd. He was considered responsible for his own death, since he was too drunk to defend

himself. Before his death, Amachuma inhabitants were aware of the negative sides of his life style, but never explicitly commented on them. Yet, with his death he indirectly destroyed all the opportunities for a long-term state of well-being for himself and his family, and this affected the entire community, since semi-urban migrants usually participate in local *fiestas* as sponsors and are supposed to continue to participate in the life of their village of origin, although they do not live there anymore.

Leandro's story is a good example of the ambivalent perceptions of wealth discussed in Chapter 4. In theory, Leandro was supposed to share his wealth with Amachuma residents, but in practise he shared it with some random acquaintances, not belonging to the community of origin and not part of his household. Again, the temporal dimension is very important for various reasons. First of all, Leandro did not manage to maintain his successful status for long and his sacrifice for the household as well as the community was not enough. His responsibility resided in the fact that he took unnecessary risks, such as getting drunk with 'strangers' in La Ceja. Drinking and getting drunk with the rest of the 'community' is accepted as long as there is a sharing of cash and as long as it is socially contextualised, but Leandro drank in the 'wrong' place, at the 'wrong' time, with the 'wrong' people. According to Amachuma residents, he destroyed everything to pursue his individual desire for fun. However, Leandro thought of his urban life style as well-being, maybe even as happiness, and his view and orientation clashed with the one prevalent in his community of origin.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the sacrifice of individual desires for the benefit of groups and communities is fundamental: first of all, you have to think about your household. For this reason, Leandro was judged to have been behaving in an immoral and irrational manner. His story also shows the contradictions in the ways the people of Amachuma talk about the urban context: on one side, the city is a source of the 'good life' and a symbol of social mobility and wealth. On the other side, it is also a source of temptation, the all-powerful immoral space that transforms people socially. Thus, Leandro identified himself and was identified by others as 'the other', the *mestizo*, embodying both the opportunity/potential for success and the corrupting power of urban life and individualism described by 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals'. As a consequence, he could not be loved or perceived as a peer any more, because he did not pay sufficient attention to his *Suma Jakaña* and to the *Suma Qamaña* of the community.

The 'indigenous' model that Medina and 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals' are trying to elucidate cannot be a single one and does not find its apogee only in agricultural production. There are contradictions and tensions that cannot be denied and that are important for my argument. Migrants who leave the village or their semi-urban community see the city as a source (potentially) of the 'good life'. But this may be a very different 'good life', bearing in mind the contradictions of urban life as Leandro's case has shown. 'Aymaras', like others, contextualise and prioritise, and are not immune from this mobile process. They are continuously adopting different forms of individual and community agency, often translated in various cultural, social and economic

practices, so that, as all human beings, they can create their own well-being and, more importantly for them, that of their children. They place their hope and expectations in the future and often decide to move to the city or to more urbanised areas to offer their children better educational and working opportunities.

However, Medina, and other local intellectuals such as Renjifo and Grillo¹⁶⁵ claim that: '(...) indigenous people from America do not want and indeed do not transform the world (as revolutionary people), but they want to love it as it is (as mystics)',¹⁶⁶. Reynaga, an influential Aymara intellectual, also writes:

The *indios* are earth. The substance of the *indios* is their mother earth. Since 1492 the *indios* have had the same brain, the same heart and the same language. The essence of the *indios* is earth with sun¹⁶⁷ (Pacheco 1992)

The picture given by indigenous intellectuals is that indigenous people or at least those they define as 'indios' are immobile, they do not seek to change anything about their reality, and they are happy as they are. This is a problematic representation, contradicted by the data collected during my fieldwork. In fact, my experiences in the field and the historical process show many instances of Aymara individuals and groups attempting to change the world.

¹⁶⁵ Grimaldo Renjifo is a Quechua agronomist and engineer. Eduardo Grillo is an indigenous agronomist and engineer. They worked for several years in the world of development and in PRATEC (The Andean Project for Peasant Technologies).

¹⁶⁶ My own translation from the Spanish: '(...) *los amerindios no pretenden ni quieren transformar el mundo (como los revolucionarios) sino amarlo tal como es (como los místicos)*' (Medina 2001:19). They say that indigenous people do not try to change the environment around them. I disagree with the static nature of this perspective.

¹⁶⁷ My own translation from the Spanish (Pacheco 1992) '*El indio es tierra. La substancia del indio es su madre tierra. Desde 1492 el indio es el mismo cerebro, el mismo corazón y la misma lengua. El ser del indio es tierra con sol*'.

Furthermore, *Suma Jakaña* and *Qamaña* also change in relation to concrete conditions that surround them and that are in constant transformation. For instance, if we look at agricultural production and at 'nature' I found that in 2003 Amachuma residents wanted irrigation systems and tractors, and more technological equipment to improve agricultural production. They also often wished they had computers for the children who go to school. Thus, the romantic ideas put forward by 'GTZ intellectuals' are distant from the lives and desires of Amachuma residents. Intellectuals' imagined representation of well-being is connected with the historical process of discrimination and social exclusion experienced by indigenous people and intellectuals alike.

For instance, two documents produced by indigenous parties formed at the end of the seventies declare: 'We are not *indios*¹⁶⁸, but with the name of *indios* they have oppressed us and with the name of *indios* we are going to free ourselves'¹⁶⁹. Therefore, the negative connotation attached to the term *indio* is here transformed into a positive dimension, in which identity and politics are fused together and outline a new ideological movement. And again the *Ofensiva Roja Tupakatarista*¹⁷⁰ writes:

Although we have been baptised with the term of *indios*, because of the great ignorance of Christopher Columbus, we have then been submitted, subjugated for 500 years. Because of this we have now to fight with the same weapon and start from the Indian political and ideological conception, as an historical response to the colonial, capitalist and imperial philosophical concepts that have been imposed in our land Qollasuyana¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁸ This word has always been used with derogatory connotations. *Indio* has often stood for an insult and has often conveyed an image of backwardness.

¹⁶⁹ My own translation from the Spanish: "*No somos indios, pero con el nombre de indios nos oprimieron y con el de indios nos vamos a liberar*" (Pacheco 1992:87).

¹⁷⁰ Año 2, No. 13, July 1989.

¹⁷¹ My own translation from the Spanish: '*Si bien hemos sido bautizados con el termino indio por la gran ignorancia de Cristobal Colon, hemos sido pues sotometidos, sojuzgados despectivamente hace 500 años. De esta manera no hay mas que luchar con la misma arma y aferrarnos a una concepción politico-ideologica indianista, como respuesta historica a las concepciones filosoficas colonialistas, capitalistas e imperialistas en nuestra tierra Qollasuyana*' (Pacheco 1992:88).

As a response to discrimination and as a parallel to post-colonial discourses in other areas of the world, some intellectuals and indigenous movements are trying to create a philosophical system to provide a different perception of their culture to outsiders and also to themselves. It is a form of symbolic and cultural recovery after centuries of racism, discrimination and lack of recognition. However, the descriptions of the intellectuals are based not only on the past, but also on the contemporary prejudices and stereotypes¹⁷² constructed by outsiders, 'Western culture' and the Bolivian non-indigenous elite. Indigenous people are represented as naïve and as living in symbiosis with unspoiled nature, resistant to change, transformation and modernity. Political discourses built around this idea of not being modern have been used in many contexts to convey a sense of inferiority and backwardness.

What 'GTZ indigenous intellectuals' are trying to do with their claims is surely to use the same weapons to counterattack. The same stereotypes that have oppressed them for centuries are now reversed and described with positive meanings and characterisations. Aymara intellectuals' depiction is built on the reference points of the political discourse of the 'West' in order to mark a polarisation between their own culture and that of the 'oppressors'. By doing so, they re-explore the issues and conflicts of the past, emphasising how painful they were for the indigenous collectively and how '[...] we are still living with the wounds of the past', as a Senkata resident told me.

¹⁷²See also Jahoda, (1999).

The tension between narratives and practices is evident: on the one hand, there is a need to describe the city in negative terms, and on the other hand, there is the need to migrate there in order to have a better life and to find certain things which are now seen as essential to well-being and happiness. There is an emphasis on the pivotal role of the 'community', which is typically associated (by intellectuals and others) with the countryside rather than in the city. Thus, we can understand why Amachuma residents use different narratives to talk about their semi-urban context: Amachuma is '*campo*', countryside, when they wish to emphasise the unity of the community and the moral behaviour of its inhabitants. Yet, it is *El Alto/La Paz* when they wish to show how modern they are in their constant movement towards more urbanised areas of the city, where they are able to engage in various business relations. Thus, they identify themselves as 'semi-urban peasants', 'commuters' that embrace both aspects, giving different nuances to the term *alteños*. In the following section I'm therefore going to focus on specific case studies from Amachuma and Senkata, showing how there may be many competing Aymara 'collective' and 'individual' dimensions of well-being and also shedding light on how the city is imagined and represented.

Everyday life in Amachuma and Senkata

Amachuma residents speak about themselves as having good lives. They are generally happy about their area and they are not thinking of migrating to more urbanised areas of the city: 'Amachuma is safer, more beautiful and quieter' as they say. However, although they had expressed negative ideas and opinions towards Senkata and the city in general in the past, they were very happy when, in August 2005, they became part of the municipality of El Alto (Amachuma

was nominated rural district of El Alto, district number ten). They were very proud of their new *Alteño* identity, expressing a tension when talking about the urban space, loved and despised at the same time.

Yet, during my fieldwork, Amachuma was considered a village and was part of the municipality of Achocalla. However, because of conflicts, the inhabitants campaigned to be incorporated in the city. Their economic activities with the urban space were very important: women had long sold milk, potatoes and alfalfa in the markets of El Alto, while men had worked as minibuses drivers, mechanics or builders. Despite their economic dependence on the urban economy, and probably also because of it, they despised the urban space. Yet, in the summer of 2005 they were proud of being part of it, especially after the successful mobilisations of the previous years in El Alto.

These tensions and the contradictory views about the city are reminiscent of the ambivalent perceptions of money among Laymi peasants (Harris 1989). On one side, Laymi peasants think that miners in the tin mining towns are nicer and less abusive when they have little money. In this way, money is represented as the corrupting influence and as a symbol of the State, expressing nostalgia for a past characterised by the absence of this token. On the other hand, the same peasants also think that those who live in the highlands are more civilised than valley dwellers, since they understand better how to use money, which in this specific case is a symbol of civilisation. The same happens when Amachuma residents talk about El Alto. For them the city embodies the dissolution of tight

community obligations, fostering individualism, alienation and nostalgia for a 'rural communal past', but at the same time it represents progress.

Thus, the majority of Amachuma residents say that they don't want to move to more urbanised areas of the city, since they think that people there are not as happy as in their area. Many of the Amachuma inhabitants have some sort of economic relations in the city: they sell their agricultural products or they have temporary jobs as bus drivers and builders. Because of their commitments in the city, Amachuma residents do not practice *ayni* as communal work anymore (see also Chapter 6). *Ayni* is maintained only as a gift in the *fiesta*. This partial loss is attributed to the lack of time resulting from the engagement in different jobs outside the village. When Amachuma residents talk about this loss, they do so with nostalgia, remembering how nice it was to work all together. This is more common among elders who can remember experiences of communal work during the harvest. The city is seen as powerfully influencing the dissolution of tight community obligations and, therefore, it is feared and despised.

Yet, El Alto and its inhabitants are also described by Amachuma residents as 'more civilised', acquiring social advancement because of better educational and business opportunities, as well as offering some degree of access to political power through social protests that have allowed *Alteños* to have better living conditions (health centres, schools, better houses, sewer systems). In Amachuma, the majority of the houses are built from *adobe* and *tapial* (mud bricks and walls, with earth floors) and metal roofs (*calamina*); they do not have a sewage system, and some lack toilets altogether. The water supply system was

built in 1995: there are three tanks to which the water is transported once a week. There are no domestic connections, but there are taps in strategic public spaces -the square, and the school. Families usually have one or more containers in which they collect rain water. Consequently, water is scarce in Amachuma.

Inhabitants here publicly say that they are satisfied with their lives, with their *Suma Jakaña*, and they only wish they had just a little bit more money and water. They all put an emphasis on how important it is to have good relations among the members of the household, as I have also argued in Chapter 3. While I was living there, the people who consistently complained about their life were two women: a single mother in constant conflict with her brother, also head of the household, and another young mother whose child was very sick.

Senkata residents also say that they are happy to live in their neighbourhood, describing it as ‘an area with a future’ and proud of their *alteño* identity too. Residents usually have very strong connections with the members of the family still living in the countryside. They go back to the village to help with agricultural activities and the care of livestock, but none of them wish to return for good. The roads are unpaved with the exception of Avenida Seis de Marzo, the main road that leads to La Ceja. While some residents in Senkata have mud wall houses, many of them have cement rooms with paved floors, and all the houses have latrines, running water and electricity, although they still do not have a sewage system. Also, in contrast to Amachuma, Senkata has a health centre and a number of schools. Senkata residents always emphasise how their living conditions are better in comparison to the one in the surrounding villages

or in the semi-urban neighbourhood such as Amachuma. They also talk about the absence of communal ties in the city, but they see it as inevitable and they accept it.

It is difficult to establish whether people live better in the countryside or in the city and, in any case, this is not the aim of this thesis. Certainly, there are some differences in terms of opportunities and facilities between the two contexts. Nevertheless, generally speaking both Amachuma and Senkata residents talk about having a *Suma Jakaña*. Sometimes, Senkata residents emphasised the advantages that peasants have over urban migrants, saying that at least in the 'countryside' (as they often refer to Amachuma) they do not have to worry about food, because they produce it, while urban dwellers have to worry continuously about providing food for the household and therefore earning cash becomes a fundamental aspect of life and a potential source of worry..

Both Amachuma and Senkata residents perceive ill-being as a relational experience that happens when there are conflicts within the household or the 'community' (other members as well as spiritual forces). However, when talking about 'community', there is a fundamental difference between my two field sites even though they are geographically so close. Amit (2002: 18), one among many (Cohen 1985, Hillery 1955, Lustiger-Thaler 1994, Baumann 1996), writes that 'the emotive impact of community, the capacity for empathy and affinity, are not just out of an imagined community, but in the dynamic interaction between that concept and the actual and limited social relations and practices through which it is realised'. In the rural Andes, there is a material

base to community, in the sense of collective rights over land, and the set of obligations (for example, communal labour, and sponsorship of catholic *fiestas*) that all members of the land-holding community share.

The character of social relations in Amachuma based on collective rights and duties means that it is a more tightly constituted and homogeneous community. In Senkata, on the other hand, factions and micro communities divide the neighbourhood. Despite the union of Senkata inhabitants during the social protests and their participation in the meetings of the *Junta Vecinal*¹⁷³ (local residents' committee), residents are actually divided in smaller groups and communities according to religious affiliation. There are many Evangelical institutions¹⁷⁴ in Senkata as well as many Catholic Churches that, although belonging to the same parish, tend to divide the population rather than unite it.

As discussed in Chapter 5, there are important differences between the urban, semi-urban and rural context in relation to the experience of evangelism. In Amachuma residents do not embrace strict evangelist orthodoxy. The Catholic Church was always closed when I was there; the Baptist Congregation was the only institution to hold religious meetings, and only a few people participated. In order to flesh out this issue, I shall discuss the rituals that take place in the *Warakho Apachita*, an Aymara sacred place. These rituals are neither Catholic nor Evangelist, but religious affiliation may affect people's participation in them, as my ethnography will show.

¹⁷³ Some of the Senkata residents told me that actually they thought that there was no union and solidarity in their area until the social protests of October 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Asamblea de Dios de Bolivia, Iglesia Adventista del Septimo Dia, Iglesia Evangelica Presbiteriana.

An *apachita* is usually the highest point on a stretch of path, where *Pachamama*, the ancestors and the *Achachilas* are worshipped. Usually, there are two different hills: one is dedicated to white magic and the other to black magic (Fernández Juárez 1996:211). The rituals of the *Warakho Apachita* show the centrality of the community; after a month of individual money-making in the *apachita*, the whole Amachuma community, whether Evangelical or not, is involved in a very important ritual in honour of the spiritual forces living in altiplano. This is striking in the context of a comparison with Senkata, where Evangelicals do not participate in the *fiesta* (see Chapter 5).

A community and its *Apachita*: different perspectives, different orientations

The *Apachita de Warakho Achachila* is a sacred place on the main road that goes to Oruro, at 17 kilometres from La Ceja, El Alto, which belongs to the community of Amachuma. It is very easy to reach the *apachita* from La Ceja and there are many minibuses that stop there, because many visitors from El Alto as well as from the surrounding countryside come to make offerings to the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) and to the *Achachilas* (God mountains). From the steep and very short path that leads to the *apachita*, you get immediate access to the small *puestos* (selling places), where *yatiri* and sellers from Amachuma work.

This is a very important economic activity for the entire community of Amachuma, and only members of Amachuma are allowed to work here. They do not have to pay anything for their stalls (*puestos*): the only requirement is that their family is one of the owners of the land of the *apachita*. All the families

that own a piece of land on the *apachita* are allowed to work there. Selling (food, drinks, beer, wood, ingredients for the mesas), *yatiri* consultancy, and rituals are the main activities of the *apachita*. There are permanent workers for the entire year - usually they own a car that allows them to leave the village in the morning and to come back at night- but in August the selling activity doubles and to the permanent workers some temporary ones are added, such as Doña Cristina (see Chapter 3). None of them leaves the *apachita* in August to go back to their homes.

The traders live there for the entire month, busy day and night. Sometimes they go to La Ceja to buy the goods and food they need to sell on the following day, but they never close their *puesto*. Most people working on the *apachita* have helpers who are either close kin or good friends who remain with the owner of the business for the entire month. Because of the frenetic pace of work and the numbers of people arriving from the city and the countryside, they usually start very early in the morning and finish very late at night. They have neither toilets nor running water: so the use of water is very limited and it is always reserved for business. Doña Cristina once told me: ‘Look, we live like pigs here, but it’s only a month and the work is very good’.

August is the month of the *Pachamama*, the Mother Earth, and it is a moment when beautiful as well as terrible things can happen according to how much respect you pay. It is when the *Pachamama* ‘*tiene más hambre*’ (is hungrier than usual) and the earth opens. This opening is neither completely positive nor completely negative: the offerings can enter more easily, but at the same time

the evil can come out (Fernández Juárez 1996). The outcome is always in the hands of human beings. My informants believe that they might influence their *suerte* through their actions, and thus have an impact on their well-being (Van Kessel 1992; Van Kessel and Condori 1992). In fact, this is the time when the culinary pact or commensality (Chapter 4) with the *Pachamama* is reconstituted (Fernández Juárez 1996).

Yatiri talk about the *Pachamama* as life, the existence of humanity, equilibrium and harmony: because the relation between nature and man has been broken by not paying enough respect to it and by not making all the necessary offerings (Fernández Juárez 1996), they have to work more in order to return to the original balance. Humankind is fruit of the Earth and, therefore, has to pay respect to it. The ceremonies of opening of the month of the *Pachamama* start at the end of July, on the 28th, and the ceremonies of closure are on the 1st of September. Meanwhile, the place is visited by many people throughout the entire month, taking their minibuses, buses and cars to be blessed, coming with all the family to ask for work, health, love and luck. On the 31st of August the place is still full of people who are seeking advice from the *yatiri* and performing rituals and making offerings to the *Pachamama*. Amachuma inhabitants are busy making money for themselves and their families.

However, on the 1st of September, everything changes. There are no people asking for a *yatiri* consultancy and the entire community of Amachuma is busy for the closure ceremony and their own offering to the *Pachamama* (see pictures 21, 22, 23 and 24 in the appendix). By doing so, they ask for prosperity and

good luck for all the members of their community: there are no offerings made by individuals or families. They all contribute with something and make a communal offering. They also ask for a successful business at the *Apachita*, assuring their future income and *Suma Qamaña* for the entire community.

At the ceremony there are not only *yatiri* and sellers, but also *amautas*¹⁷⁵, authorities from Amachuma, families of the sellers, and special guests from different governmental Ministry Departments (Asuntos Campesinos y Agropecuarios, Asuntos Indigenas y Pueblos Originarios, Turismo, Desarrollo). The day starts at 6am, when they raise the Whipala flag, the symbol of indigenous union. After that, the sellers and *yatiri* of Amachuma have a meeting to decide how they are going to contribute to the offering. Usually, they decide the fees each one is going to pay. Soon after, they start with the preparation of the *Wilancha* -in Aymara the literal translation of this word is 'hacer sangre' (to do blood), when a white llama is killed and offered to the *Pachamama*.

First of all, the *amautas* start by playing *pututu*, a bulls-horn that indicates the beginning of the ceremony and that cleans the place of negative forces, such as

¹⁷⁵ *Amautas* is a Quechua term that means wise persons (*sabios*) that used to give advice during the Inca Empire. Today the word is associated with Andean Masters and includes Aymara philosophers, priests, politicians, scientists, engineers, artists (<http://amautas.org/moodle>). They are said to be 'cultural guides' that help their people to preserve their culture. There is a *Consejo de Mallkus* -authority- y *Amautas* associated with the Aymara indigenous movement and identified as the main representative authoritarial body. Recently, an Aymara Parliament was founded, including *mallkus* and *amautas* from Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Peru. During my fieldwork, August was the only moment when I heard about *amautas*. My informants would never use this term. My impression is that *amautas* is a word that has been recently chosen by the Aymara indigenous movement to identify a representative category. The internet is full of web sites with information on them, who are usually the organisers of the celebration of the Aymara New Year (21st of June) in Tiwanaku. Normally, it is very common to find these words on tourist web sites. On 1st September 2004 and 2005, representatives of many government departments attended the ceremony. Interestingly, employees from the Ministry of Tourism were present too. The word *amautas* was used by the authorities in their official ceremonial speeches.

supays. Then, the *yatiris* prepare the traditional *mesas*, distributing around the different *dulces* (sugar forms representing different things) and asking everybody to contribute with the *dulces* they have received. In turn, everybody positions the objects where they want on the *mesa* (offering), wishing for what they would like to achieve. On the *mesas* there are eggs too in addition to the sugar squares. Meanwhile, abundant beer is offered to everybody and once the preparation of the *mesas* is completed, the representative of each of the different authorities makes an official introductory speech. People listen to them, while they do the *ch'alla* of the *Masu Cruz* with some of the beer. The *Masu Cruz* is a stone completely covered with flowers and *serpentina* (streamers). This stone is believed to be the source of the *Apachita's* supernatural powers.

Later on, the *yatiri* take the white llama close to the ritual place, where they have already prepared its grave. They start to give coca leaves and beer to the animal, which looks very nervous. Meanwhile, they give people multicoloured llama wool and ask them to tie it to the hair of the animal. Finally, they put *serpentina* around its neck and the llama is ready to be sacrificed, with all the festive ornaments. Its sacrifice will feed the *Pachamama* and will assure the supernatural powers of the *Apachita* as well as prosperity and luck to the entire community.

Soon after, the *yatiri* kill the animal and they collect the blood in different plastic boxes. Everybody wants to be close to the animal to touch its blood. The heart of the llama is placed on one of the *mesitas*, close to another very special one, where there is a llama foetus and a condor feather. They put the llama in its

grave and they start the burning of the *mesas*. The heart, the foetus and the condor feather will be burnt with the *mesas*.

While the *Pachamama* is eating the *mesa* through the fire, each authority gives another talk and more beer is distributed. When everybody has participated in the offering and had a chance to talk, they serve the *Apthapi*, a meal shared by the entire community on different *awuayus*. Usually, the meal is potatoes, *chuñu* (dried potato), *tunta* (another kind of dried potato), cheese, eggs, and meat (chicken). When the ashes produced by the burning of the offering are cold, they will be buried with the llama in its grave. The day is very long, but after all these community interactions, people start to clean their *puestos*, and they can finally go back home after an entire month in the *Apachita*.

The opening of 'a hole' in the earth is a powerful metaphor and it has been explained by Fernández Juárez (1996) as 'a crossing of borders and limits' between opposites -such as , for instance, health and illness- that can influence the conceptual stability of the Aymara world, affecting and upsetting the order attached to authority. *Suerte* must be produced by putting lots of effort into it and this process represents the only possible way to protect the individual, the household or the entire community from any sort of disturbance, disorder, distress or illness.

Nevertheless, this practice and strategy to produce *suerte* is not shared by everyone. Some, especially Evangelicals, do not approve of these rituals and offerings to the *Pachamama*. One day in August 2004, while I was at Doña

Cristina's small restaurant on the *Apachita*, a man approached me. He understood I was not Bolivian and asked me where I was from. We started to talk about the rituals and the offerings that were taking place. He was against them and added:

In this place there is something...a malevolent supernatural force belonging to the Devil...It is against God's Law...People visit this place with hopes...and their desires become true, but then they have to pay for what they have received. The Devil gives, but then he also takes everything away. Only God gives you forever...and stays forever. I don't do these kinds of rituals because I'm Protestant and we are different. It's not like the Catholic Church, which is like a prostitute. The Catholic Church accepts everything, even bad traditions

Another time I went to visit two informants who had recently opened a repair shop for electrical equipment in Senkata. While we were chatting about a personal experience I had with a *yatiri*, a lady with a broken black and white TV entered the shop. She started to listen to us, and looked as though she wanted to join in. Therefore, I decided to include her in our conversation. 'Madam, what do you think about *yatiri*?' She looked very happy about the question and replied to me that she didn't believe in them and that she only believed in God. God was her protector and was giving her strength to overcome all the difficulties. 'A *yatiri* is able to take away your partner...They are all bad people. I don't trust them'. She too belonged to a Protestant church.

From the perspective of some Protestant groups there is not so much denial of a supernatural force acting on peoples' lives in the *Apachita* or during *yatiri* rituals, but a different perception and interpretation of them. The Devil gives, as God does, but the Devil will take everything away. In a way, this perception is used by some Protestants to distance themselves from the 'other' and to build a different identity. Their interpretation seems to be used as a cultural and

religious marker and it is quite influential if we think about ideas of well-being in the long-term. Temporality is used again to mark the moral space. For some Evangelicals, there is the conviction that only God gives forever, while other supernatural forces give only in the short-term.

Evangelical conversions are fundamentally linked with a different conception of 'the good life', which takes place post-conversion. Senkata residents often mentioned how their life had improved after they decided to become Evangelicals, especially with regard to their health (avoidance of alcohol has been a blessing for most of them), and including the positive effects that non-participation in social drinking can have on economic stability. This may have the effect of making more cash available to invest in children's education and in creating work opportunities. But those interviewed also expressed the benefits of conversion from a spiritual and moral perspective; as they say 'they feel closer to the Lord'.

Nevertheless, as I mentioned before, there are some differences between the urban and semi-urban contexts, often related to the effects of membership in different religious congregations and their different rules and views regarding community rituals and celebrations. For example, in the case of the *Warakho Apachita*, I saw some evangelicals (who were members of the Baptist Church) from Amachuma visiting it during the month of August. Moreover, the *Secretario General* of the *Sindicato* -general secretary of the Trade Union, who belongs to the Baptist Church, also participated in some of the rituals. For example, he was present at the closure ceremony (which is also a very important

political and community event) of the month of the *Pachamama*. Although he is very active in his church activities, he didn't interpret his participation in the ceremony as disrespectful of his religious beliefs. On the other hand, he told me that he had to participate for the sake of his community, which for him is the most important aspect of leading a good life. However, other evangelicals, such as the Condoris from Senkata belonging to the Seventh Day Adventists' Congregation, do see it as disrespectful, believing that it is the Devil that acts in the *Apachita*.

On the other hand, Catholics generally believe that it is the *Pachamama* in conjunction with the *Achachilas* that offer protection and listen to people's desires for prosperity and luck. My Catholic informants identify the *Pachamama* with the Virgin Mary and the *Achachilas* with the Saints. Therefore, they do not see their worship as something negative or malevolent: it is compatible with Catholic practice. Religious identities shift easily between different spiritual spheres.

In Amachuma conversions to evangelism have increased in recent years, especially among the authorities (*los dirigentes*) who had a huge impact on other inhabitants' conversions. Amachuma is a good example of the embracing of different beliefs at different moments and of the existence of a certain degree of hybridity. When I first arrived in Amachuma it was a Sunday morning in the middle of December. The minibus left me and a few other passengers coming back from the market in La Ceja in the unfinished village square, where the *Alcaldia* (Town Hall) and the Catholic Church are. The village was strangely

silent. The church was closed. While I was walking towards the place where I was going to live, I heard some people singing. The music was coming from a house: later on, I discovered that this was the place where the Unión Bautista of Amachuma was meeting.

In the following months, I realised that the Catholic Church was always closed and that there was no priest in Amachuma. When I asked why, people said that their priest lived in Senkata and did not visit them. Senkata, Ventilla and Amachuma belonged to the same parish, but there was only one priest to attend to all the Chapels. While Senkata and Ventilla were regularly attended by the priest, there was no time to reach the community in Amachuma. By contrast, the Unión Bautista was open every Sunday and sometimes also in the middle of the week, offering religious courses to women and children. The pastor was a middle-aged lady from the USA. She was a doctor and at the time of my fieldwork she was not living in Amachuma but, by the time I left, her new modern house was ready at the entrance of the village. The house, as well as a huge piece of land, was fenced in. She had recently bought the land from the Amachuma community and the idea was to build a modern hospital where American doctors could work. 'Why American doctors and not Bolivian?' I asked Don Mario, the general secretary of the Trade Union. 'Well, she is American, and at the end what is important is that we are going to have a hospital'. When I asked him why he converted, he replied that he did so because she showed them the truth.

The last thing I saw when I left the village was the fenced land ready for the building of the hospital and I could only think of Nelly's (Catholic Amachuma woman) words inside my head: '*Yo no soy una mujer de hospital*' (I'm not a woman that goes to the hospital). This situation shows some of the tensions and orientations I have discussed in previous chapters as well as how people negotiate their beliefs in order to achieve their well-being. Even in the case of health, there is a fundamental relation with faith and morality. Pentecostalism seems to stand to hospital as Catholicism stands to *yatiri*. However, even in this case, people seem to shift their identities according to the different circumstances, trying to assure their personal as well as communal well-being by oscillating between different religious identities as Amachuma leaders do. Despite their religious affiliation to the Baptist Church, they proudly attend the rituals of the *apachita*. It is important to participate in rituals to assure a reciprocal connection with the *Pachamama*, but, at the same time, it is fundamental to become part of the Pentecostal congregation, so that the village can have a hospital. This religious pluralism is in accordance with a medical pluralism (Crandon-Malamud, 1993) as well, and shows how people have different orientations according to time and space. It is impossible to outline a unique model for all Aymara people since everybody aspires to different things and may have different values as well.

Poverty as ethnicity, well-being as morality and community

Harris (2006:14) suggests that the inner, hidden world (*manqha pacha*) is populated by *saxras*, also known as 'devils' (see also Harris 1982, 1989, 2000), beings that are associated with 'chaos, fertility, danger, the possibility of great wealth, but also destruction'. On the other hand, in an argument similar to those

of local evangelists, Van Kessel (1992: 149) claims that they are associated with the 'colonial structure of dominance', considered responsible for everyday insecurity or ill-being.

In Chapter 4, I cited Weismantel's argument that race and ethnicity are inextricably related to economic inequalities in the Andes (2001). Thus, Amachuma men often identify poverty as an aspect of their indigenous ethnicity in opposition to an alien 'wealth', or 'the other', related to danger and destruction. Wealth can attract jealousy and ill-being, as mentioned in Chapter 4. My informants' self-identification as poor has major implications for an understanding of well-being in the region.

My informants identify themselves as poor only in contrast to outsiders. Thus, well-being as *Suma Jakaña* and *Suma Qamaña* is socially and morally contextualised, and far removed from economic categories of wealth accumulation. Nevertheless, as my ethnography has tried to show, there is a constant tension between different models, a situation of sustained pluralism between rural and urban values, but also in religion and medical practice. This shows how values are never fixed and how general formulations concerning well-being (for example, those of Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) that I discussed in Chapter 1) do not take into account fluid social situations.

Alteño life is negatively contrasted with the rural *ayllu* by 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals'. The example of the *apachita* indicates the importance of collective rights to land (see Chapter 2) in binding the members of the same

community together. It is this material aspect of land rights that glues together Amachuma peasants, but also the fact that, despite individual money-making for the entire month, they share the same economic activity in the same space. On the other hand, work in Senkata is more dispersed in other parts of the city, giving rise to a more fragmented everyday community. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, work is a source for the creation of fictive kinship relations and of wider community relations.

These material aspects of everyday life, such as sharing the land and living together in the same space, embody an important dimension of well-being. It is a sense of belonging to a certain place (see also Lazar 2002), as well as a connection with the physical environment and with its spiritual forces. This takes place in El Alto as well, although there is a higher degree of division in smaller groups usually affiliated with the many local churches. I suggest that each church represents the physical and spiritual connection to the other members of the neighbourhood. I am not denying the importance of the *Juntas Vecinales* (local residents' committees), but adding also an emphasis on religious communities, which help to create a link between material and spiritual aspects (between everyday life and faith or relationships with supernatural forces). The choice of embracing orthodox Evangelism in Senkata can be seen as an individual choice for a community or collectivity (the Seventh Day Adventists' congregation) as well, although it is not the one in the countryside. Lack of adherence to the Evangelical code in Senkata means exclusion from the Evangelical community, which for many would correspond

to a state of ill-being. It is a rather different idea of well-being from that found in Amachuma, showing how well-being is a fluid concept.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have tried to illustrate a range of views on well-being in the Bolivian plateau. One of the concepts of well-being I have analysed was proposed by 'GTZ Aymara intellectuals', which idealises rural life in opposition to the city and is based on a clear dichotomy between the 'West' (associated with individualism) and the 'indigenous' models (based on the value of community). This dichotomy is also echoed in the narratives of my informants and it becomes relevant when engaging with definitions of 'the good life' in the region. However, there are some tensions between this discourse or imagined model, and the practices adopted by the 'GTZ intellectuals' and by other migrants who left the countryside in search of a better life.

Everyday life looks more nuanced, as does the local context of Amachuma with its semi-urban reality, shifting between '*campo*' and '*ciudad*'. Sometimes Amachuma is described by its inhabitants as countryside (*campo*) and sometimes as *El Alto/La Paz*, according to the aspects that they want to emphasise –unity in the community and morality or modernity and immorality. Nothing is black or white, but the construction of local realities by its residents shed light on the complexity of issues at stake when researching definitions of 'the good life'. It is impossible to find a single model of well-being in El Alto, since there are many according to the place/area/neighbourhood.

Also, even within the same neighbourhood, there are discrepancies between different religious groups, especially between some Evangelicals and Catholics, which point to different views of the 'good life', moral orientations and models of well-being. On the one hand, orthodox Evangelicals, such as the ones in Senkata (the Seventh Day Adventists) refuse to participate in the fiesta, pay tributes to the *Pachamama*, or become godparents. On the other hand, there are other Evangelicals, such as the ones in Amachuma (the Baptist Congregation) who embrace various religious beliefs, emphasising the importance of community rather than a strict adherence to a religious code. I suggest that these differences in attitude have to do with their different religious affiliations rather than geographical distribution.

This religious pluralism parallels medical pluralism, demonstrating how well-being concepts can change according to time, space and other circumstances. The static well-being model described by 'GTZ intellectuals' is imagined rather than real. The 'good life' is often identified by Amachuma and Senkata residents with good relations and strong bonds between members of the household, and of the community (including relationships with supernatural forces) and this can be accomplished in different ways and involve different kinds of spiritual entities.

Suma Qamaña is very difficult to achieve despite the rhetorical 'GTZ intellectual' discourse on well-being. This difficulty is connected with the many competing orientations and tensions when looking at this complex topic. In the end, it is only possible to live the *Suma Jakaña*, but, even in this case, there are

as many concepts as there are individuals and households, so it is extremely difficult to find common definitions.

Suma Qamaña has often been defined as an ideal, ‘a utopia’ that cannot take place in everyday life. Finding or achieving *Suma Qamaña* or equality in terms of wealth is extremely complicated (see chapter 4). The same can be said about ‘the good life’ in terms of political and social equality. Individual desires and aspirations are often stronger and compete with a sense of obligation to the community/ies, as Leandro’s case has demonstrated. Thus, utopian models of equality and well-being (such as the ones proposed by ‘GTZ intellectuals’ 2001 and Sen 1999) seem to contrast and compete with everyday life and this is why it is important to carry out empirical research. Only through detailed empirical studies that take into account what different subjects say and do, it is possible to make useful contributions to the debates and shed light on the true ‘art of living’ (Lambek 2008). In the following chapter, the conclusions of this thesis, I shall analyse in depth the implications of this argument, focusing on the importance for my informants of creating and perpetuating ‘good’ social relations. As has emerged in my ethnographic account of El Alto, good relations are harmonious relations and they are realized when equality is embraced. But as the ethnography also illustrates, this objective, shared across the different people I encountered in the field, is often elusive and very difficult to achieve.

CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION

My thesis contributes to Andean anthropology by providing an ethnographic account of two neighbourhoods in El Alto, emphasising the importance of engaging with urban research. This contrasts with the more common studies of rural communities undertaken in Bolivia, and is a contribution to the development of an anthropology of El Alto (see Albo, Greaves and Sandoval 1981, Gill 2000, Lazar 2008). The choice to live in both Amachuma and Senkata provided a useful means of including a variety of perspectives. In particular, it affords a perspective that qualifies the term 'urban'. On the one hand, it provided opportunities to explore the views of Amachuma 'peasants-commuters', who are highly dependent on the city and part of it, but are also particularly proud to affirm their rural roots and to adopt certain values they associate with rural life, in opposition to Senkata and the urban space in general. On the other hand, my research provided access to the views of Senkata residents, who picture their neighbourhood 'as modern' in opposition to the 'backward countryside'.

In both field-sites, there are different layers of identity that emerge from people's narratives and many contradictions between what they say and do. *Alteños* are not at all a homogeneous category. This is clear in my discussion of the different realities of different households, which highlights generational and gender differences, experienced by the same *vecinos* (neighbours). The contrast of 'urban' and 'rural' is played out within the urban context in a number of ways that call into question the very term

'urban' in spite of geographical proximity, raising clearly the constructed character of these urban-rural distinctions. This relates to questions of *Alteño* identity, and to ideologies of Aymara-ness as conceptualised by GTZ Aymara intellectuals. Thus, my ethnography challenges the transparency of the term urban, showing how it is symbolically constructed.

My thesis also makes a contribution to the current interest in studying and defining well-being. Whereas development economics have generally approached the question of 'the good life' by assuming that material factors are fundamental, and focus on economic measurements such as the Gross National Product, my research offers an anthropological approach, starting from the perspective of my informants, and privileging their values and practices. In fact, I have explored an understanding of 'the good life' in terms of sociality in contrast to widespread economic understandings of poverty and well-being, often based on criteria that are too far removed from everyday reality.

This is why I mainly focused my investigation on an analysis of the relations between individuals and the outer world, starting with households (chapter 3), the neighbourhoods (chapter 5 and 6), religious congregations (chapter 4 and 7), supernatural forces (chapter 4 and 5), the peer group amongst young (chapter 2), the urban environment (chapter 2), the 'imagined nation' (chapter 7 on GTZ Aymara intellectuals), the state (chapter 6). This thesis outlines how all these forms of sociality have a profound impact on individual and collective aspirations, orientations and

choices. As my ethnography has shown, relations bring with them specific responsibilities and obligations, which sometimes are experienced as contradicting individual needs and aspirations.

Through the ethnographic approach, I have tried to capture ‘the art of living’ (Lambek 2008) of Senkata and Amachuma residents. Living in the neighbourhood and sharing my life with residents helped me to become very close to some of them and reproduce their views, practices and feelings in regard to the good life. This enables a description of ‘how cultural traditions produce and encourage scenarios of life worth living and how they often find ways of making the best of things in the face of considerable impediments’ (Lambek 2008: 128).

The nuances associated with everyday practices and ideas about ‘the art of living’ are difficult to include in theoretical models and policies precisely because these practices and ideas are context-bound. But ‘the art of living’ approach allowed me to challenge many established stereotypes about *alteños*. Rather than adopting the usual approach of depicting El Alto as ‘an emergency city’, poor (Gill 2000, Cottle and Ruiz 1993) and ‘traversed by problems from all sides’ (Antezana 1993:9-13), I preferred to concentrate on how *alteños* themselves talk about this space. Based on my ethnographic findings, I avoid stereotypes of the city and its residents as violent, poor, ignorant, backward, and dependent on local NGOs and churches. This disempowering representation elides the pride and dignity of El Alto’s inhabitants and reproduces stereotypes that *Alteños* themselves define as

reminiscent of colonial structures of abuse and dependence (see chapter 7 for more details). In other words, *alteños* are depicted as being unable to look after themselves and can avoid 'poverty' and 'ill-being' only through the intervention of the state or through NGOs when the government is absent.

Gill's work (2000) on El Alto is representative of this kind of approach. She emphasises the poverty of its inhabitants, and writes about the lack of basic services as a way to make a claim on state resources on the city. My experience in Senkata and Amachuma was very different from what Gill portrays. Most of the people I have encountered and interviewed in Senkata and Amachuma considered themselves as independent entrepreneurs and owned their own house and the land on which it was built (*lote*). At the same time, my informants believed in their capacity to '*salir adelante*', or to forge ahead and achieve their goals -as individuals, as households and as a (or several) community/ies (as in the chapter on social protests).

My research suggests that most of the inhabitants of a zone in El Alto work together to gain benefits for their neighbourhood, whether this means using communal work parties to pave streets, or protesting with civic strikes or roadblocks to have access to basic services, such as water, electricity and gas. Thus, Gill's representation of *alteños* as marginalised and oppressed does not fit easily with my ethnography and experience. My position is therefore closer to that of Perlman's study of a shanty town in Rio de Janeiro (1976). She argues that the residents of the shantytowns in her study are well-organised and share middle-class norms, values and aspirations;

economically, they are productive. Indeed, her careful research illustrates the complexity of social life and values among the poorer residents of Rio and informs her critique of simplistic representations of the urban poor through her notion of ‘the myth of marginality’.

El Alto is a large and complex urban centre and my acquaintances represent only a small fraction of the total population. This is not to say that El Alto is prosperous or problem-free. Nor do I aim to claim that *Alteños* have or have had easy lives. My work aims to stress the complexities of life in El Alto. Although there is violent crime and poverty in the city, I believe that it is legitimate to conclude from my fieldwork that a significant percentage of the population engages in the pursuit of objectives via work, household and kin support, and investing in education and in harmonious relations. My informants sometimes expressed anxieties about violence or crime, but they talked about it as happening in other neighbourhoods (e.g. La Ceja), not where they lived. Also, they often talked about their frustration when media representations suggested that El Alto was a city of criminals and violence; through their narratives they implied that there is another side of *Alteño* life that was never represented or talked about. It is this that I have sought to portray through the chapters of my thesis.

The side of *Alteño* life that has emerged from my fieldwork and which I have engaged with also includes my informants’ commitment to a cosmological order to create a sense of well-being. This commitment is expressed through rituals that vary according to the religious affiliation of individuals and

households. For the majority of my informants, therefore, sociality includes relations both with humans and supernatural forces. Senkata and Amachuma residents believe that nothing can take place without the influence of supernatural forces, whether they are Protestant or Catholics.

In fact, faith is the essence and one of most important ingredients for 'the good life'. It does not matter how ill you are or how much you lack: what matters is the capacity to overcome a critical situation and the aspirations one has for the future (see also Appadurai 2004). For my informants, this capacity includes the ability to believe and act on beliefs that are also the means for the circulation and flows of things in various spheres, constantly recreating relations that represent 'the good life'. These harmonious relations are also pursued through embodied practices, as for example in the *fiesta* and social protests.

While the *fiesta* helps to mediate between humans, wealth and supernatural forces through a partial redistribution of the economic resources within the community, social protests are important means of overcoming ill-being. Everyday vulnerability is believed to undermine the interactions of the community, due to the daily violence and assaults that affect people's ability to walk freely in the streets, to provide food, shelter, safety for neighbours. These effects of violence are addressed by social protests, deployed by *Alteños* as a fundamental tool with which to oppose neoliberal models and policies, which are considered to be one of the main causes of the violence and assaults that are a daily occurrence in El Alto.

This last point emphasises that there is a contradiction in my subjects' statements and attitudes (see page 306), between claims to 'normality' and 'decency' and their experiences or rumours about crime that cause fear and anxiety: it shows how people strive to rise above their circumstances and how they attempt to build their social world through their ideas and their own practices, which might allow them to disentangle themselves from the labels of 'criminal' and 'marginal'.

Indeed, national and global events and features figure very prominently in the interpretation of well-being and in the consequent actions oriented to dealing with them. In particular, while *suerte* is pursued for personal ends, political demonstrations and other community-based actions are a means of confronting the effects of national and international processes. For example, the gas war was a local response to national and international neoliberal policies, the outcome of *Alteño* interpretations of prominent global issues, which were perceived to have affected the circulation and flows of things in various spheres of everyday life in the city.

My findings therefore show how social protests are community actions oriented to deal with events that affect regional understandings of 'the good life', proposing a new analysis of the mobilisations by social movements. Rather than being significant only for its economic consequences, the neoliberal model affects the social context of my informants. Because they believe it leads to the disintegration of their communities, blocking the fundamental flow of cash and things in the various spheres of life, and thereby

affecting sociality, it is important to respond. I feel we see quite clearly how, in El Alto, a person exists and functions in relationship to others.

My ethnographic research perhaps questions the very validity of a general, abstract concept of well-being, showing the importance of taking into account local criteria and trying to overcome the often-reproduced fracture between theoretical models and everyday life, between the factual and the possible. In particular, I have outlined and discussed two specific models as a contestation to a universalising approach to well-being: one coming from development economics but moving beyond its restrictive materialism (Sen 1999) and the other developed in Bolivia by a group of Aymara intellectuals (2001)

Although these two models are very different from one another and were produced in different analytical and social contexts, they share some similarities. In both, people are approached as if frozen in time and space, without taking into account the effects and possibilities produced through nuanced forms of sociality or presupposing that the latter is unproblematically and automatically in place. In other words, they represent an abstraction of human beings, aspiring towards the same future.

By contrast, my ethnography has shown that everyday life is richer than these theories allow for. My informants do not always have the same aspirations; indeed the city itself is 'a mix of urban and rural, collectivism and individualism, egalitarianism and hierarchy' (Lazar 2008:258). I have also argued throughout the thesis that my informants' subjectivity and capacity to

choose what they hold dear is shaped by their social interactions -by the groups and communities they are in contact with.

Crucially, people such as my informants belong to different communities: the household, the neighbourhood, the *Junta Vecinal*, the youth group, the Bolivian state, the city, the village of origin, the religious congregation, for some the kinship networks and the dancing group, the school attended by their children, the political party, and the trade union. Their criteria of 'the good life' are shaped by their interaction with all these different communities. Sometimes objective and subjective conditions may merge; at other times, they may be in tension.

For my informants, achieving 'the good life' is to be in harmony with all the members of the communities they are part of. The Senkata and Amachuma inhabitants I met believe that a good life is found in harmonious interaction with others. This is what makes them 'people' (*jaqi*). When conflict arises, my informants do not feel integrated members of the community in question, but they feel 'different'. There is an emphasis in this thesis on what *alteños* themselves have defined as the importance of being 'the same as others' since 'people talk'. For example, my informants value secrecy when engaging in conversation on household matters and the money owned by its members. In many different cases, Amachuma and Senkata residents talked about the anxiety of being 'envied' by other *vecinos*, because envy can lead to evil eye and to *estar mal*, a state when harmony is denied for the individual and the many communities he/she is in contact with. This explains the claim

that *suerte* -and the active pursuit of *suerte*- are central. They think that if you have *suerte*, you have life: the practice of 'reading *la suerte*' by *yatiris* is actually a tool to analyse a person's life and relations.

Concerns about envy and gossip put into question a simplistic notion of community and of a clear opposition or connection between community and individual which lies at the heart of many of the debates around the topic of well-being. On the one hand there is always an emphasis on the collective as an ideal (the GTZ Aymara intellectuals being an obvious case in point with their emphasis on *Suma Qamaña*) while on the other, much attention is given to individual interests, and the tensions those generate vis-à-vis the community, the household, etc.. It is an illustration of both the connections and the tensions between community and individual, claims to a wider community and the efforts of households/ers that the terms of *Suma Qamaña* and *Suma Jakaña* are specific to related yet distinctive fields. So *Suma Qamaña* is a resource drawn on by political leaders and intellectual elite, while my informants in El Alto talk about *Suma Jakaña*. Indeed, I have shown throughout the thesis (particularly in chapter 6 on social protests and chapter 3 on the household) that individual interests are often defined by my informants as potentially damaging, and as the source of the corruption by a leader (see also Lazar 2008:262), or of 'bad/immoral' behaviour, as in the case of Maya and Leandro.

For their part, Aymara intellectuals identify the problem of individual interests with urban living. The city is described as ‘an immoral’ space, where the ‘community’ is inexorably destroyed and fragmented, and ‘inequality’ (*desigualdad*) prevails. My work indicates that this representation is, at best, inaccurate. *Alteños* interact and create many different communities in the politics of everyday life. And in so doing they negotiate their moral projects as moral subjects. Several authors have recognised the importance of collective organisation in El Alto (Gill 2000, Sandoval and Sostres 1989, Sostres 1995, Anze O. 1995, Goldstein 2004; Lazar 2008). The picture emerging from ethnographic research points to the nuances and flavours of everyday life in El Alto and of *alteños*’ perceptions.

GTZ Aymara intellectuals represent *alteños* in negative terms: ‘individualist and immoral’ urban dwellers, contrasting them with the ‘good’ indigenous peasants. This moralising view imposed from a particular ideological standpoint is clearly debated from any empirical basis. And it illustrates the relevance of adopting an ethnographic approach, able to portray that outside world of everyday interaction so difficult to represent in social theory.

Although Sen (1999) has partially tried to deal with these issues by looking at individuals and their relation to the social context, he has failed to consider the importance of engagement with detailed accounts of the interactions between individuals and specific collectivities/communities. In my opinion, this represents a lacuna in his work, since he does not discuss in detail the

complexity of issues emerging from individual and collective dimensions of well-being. Thus, Sen (1999) ignores important aspects such as 'relationality', 'complementarity' and 'hierarchy', as if people were not embedded in practices and engaged in social commitments (Lambek 2008:21).

This is why I have affirmed above that social relations are fundamental to people's capabilities to choose the lives they have reason to value and I believe that shedding light on this aspect is only possible through ethnographic description, because WB does not occur in the abstract. This echoes Lambek's claim that: 'As human life is culturally constituted, so well-being only makes sense with respect to the contours of a particular way of life; particular structures of persons, relations, feeling, place, cosmos, work and leisure' (Lambek 2008: 125).

By looking at relations, feelings, ideas about place, cosmos, work and leisure in El Alto in this thesis, it has emerged that the tension between individual and collective dimensions produces moments of everyday life when individual interests are not enhanced. On the contrary, they are denied by prioritising living in accordance with shared values and preferences (e.g. participating in social protests, sponsoring a religious celebration or dancing in the *fiesta* to please the *vecinos*, agreeing to act as other household members expect, in cases where the individual would prefer to behave differently).

Thus, the immediate conclusion to draw from such examples would be that individuality may often be denied since human beings are constrained by 'the chains of the social contract' (Rousseau [1762] 1968), that sociality conveys different levels of obligation in all relationships, dictated by specific cultural schemes. Yet, I think that my ethnographic account shows the importance of taking the middle ground between opposed positions, in order to appreciate all the nuances; the tensions between individual and collective dimensions of well-being can never be fully solved nor embraced as the only possible options. These tensions may be rather subtle and hidden and their complexity uncovered only through an ethnographic approach.

This emphasis on particularity and the ethnographic may represent a shortcoming for the world of policy and development, but it may also complement it, by emphasising the implications that emerge from an analysis of the 'art of living', privileging a more unsystematic -yet rigorous- approach to accommodate different cultural contexts and the many perspectives that inform the scenarios of human life. Illustrating the value of such an approach and the complexities of social action can hopefully create space for further discussion on the importance of context and will highlight the malleability of concepts of well-being in everyday life, in opposition to universalist definitions based on material factors.

My informants in El Alto had a rich and varied repertoire of socio-cultural mechanisms and means to pursue what they considered to be a good life. The ideal of the good life was generally associated with aspirations to social

harmony, while they also sought to improve their material well-being. In particular the older generations stressed the importance of encouraging their children to achieve educational qualifications, while the younger generations tended to assume the responsibility of studying and contributing to their households. There were sometimes tensions between generations and these sometimes ended in conflict. Nevertheless, there was a general consensus that harmonious relations within the household were a crucial condition for individual well-being.

Similarly, although engagement in community activities, whether in churches, in *fiestas* or in Trade Unions and *Juntas Vecinales* could enhance a sense of belonging and well-being, the obligations deriving from belonging in a community could also pose a range of problems as far as the achievement of individual goals was concerned. Therefore, my informants found themselves participating at times, withdrawing at others, carefully selecting which activities and institutions to embrace, and which ones they should avoid. The circumstances of different informants varied. Some felt they were working towards a better future, for themselves or their children. Others confronted obstacles that sometimes were seen as failure (as discussed in chapter 3). Therefore sometimes well-being could be attained, although more often it was an elusive but important aspiration that could shape my informants' participation in different kinds of activities and communities.

APPENDIX

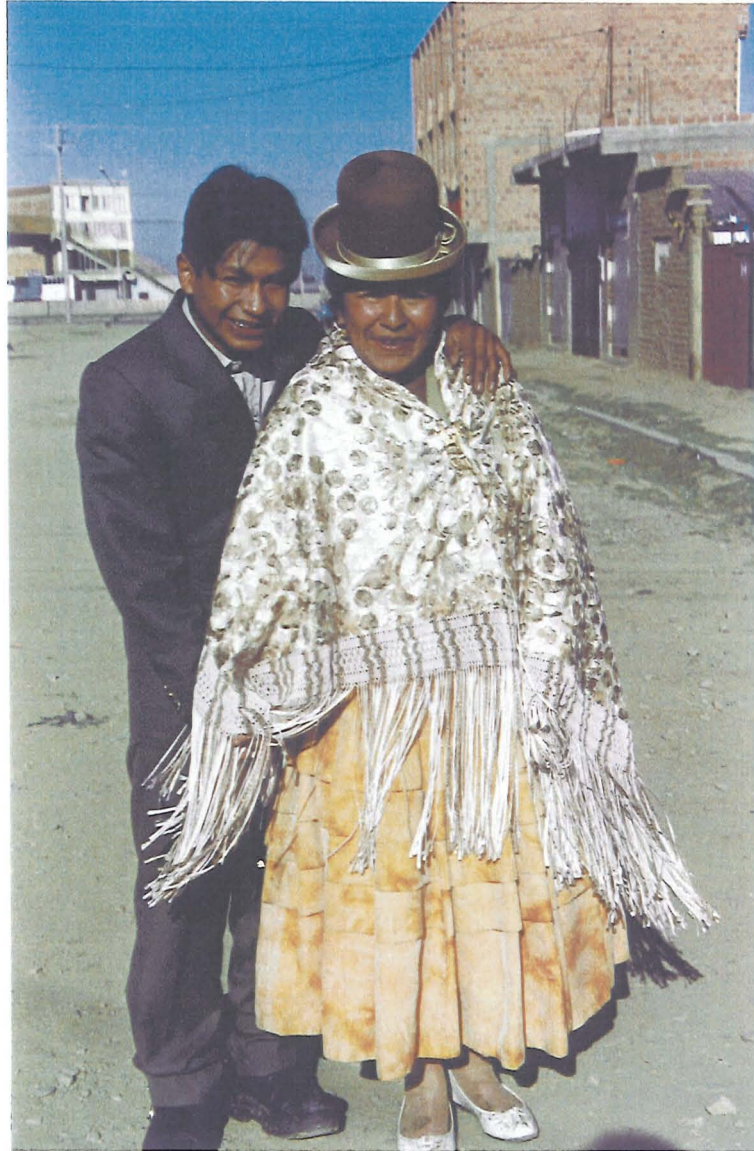


Plate ii. *Cholita* in El Alto. She wears *pollera*, shawl and a bowler hat. The picture was taken on the 3rd of September 2004 during the *fiesta* of the Virgen de la Natividad in Senkata.



Plate iii. *Cholita* in El Alto. She wears *pollera*, shawl and a bowler hat. The picture was taken on the 3rd of September 2004 during the *fiesta* of the Virgen de la Natividad in Senkata.



Plate iv. Meeting of the *Junta Vecinal* in Senkata



Plate v. Members of the *Junta Vecinal* at the *fiesta de la Virgen de la Natividad*, Senkata



Plate 1. *Alasita*



Plate 2. *Ekeko* and miniatures (*Alasita*)



Plate 3. To read the luck with coca leaves (*Leer la suerte*)



Plate 4. *Mesa*



Plate 5. *Mesa*



Plate 6. *Mesa*



Plate 7. House of a *ch'amakani*. The statues of Jesus and the Saints are there to bring luck to the *ch'amakani*'s clients.



Plate 8. House of a *ch'amakani*: *mesa* ingredients



Plate 9. Special blessing for the miniatures (*Alasita*)



Plate 10. *Tinku* dancers in Senkata, 3rd September 2004



Plate 11. *Diablada* dancers, Senkata, 3rd September 2004



Plate 12. *Morenada*, La Paz, 5th June 2004



Plate 13. *Ch'uta*, Amachuma, Carnival 2004



Plate 14. *Ch'uta* dancers, Amachuma, Carnival 2004



Plate 15. Goni go home, La Paz



Plate 16. 'Chile, the sea belongs to Bolivia', March 2004, La Paz, prepared by children on the Day of the Sea.

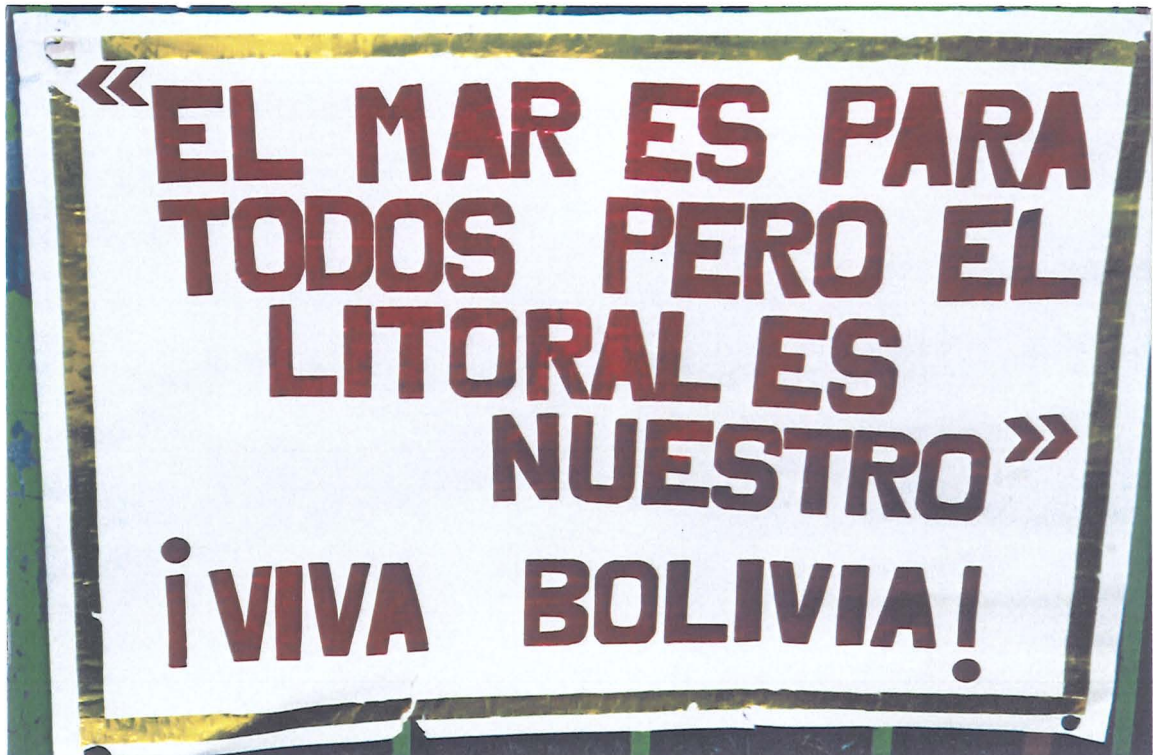


Plate 17. 'The sea is for everybody, but the sea coast is ours. Long live Bolivia'

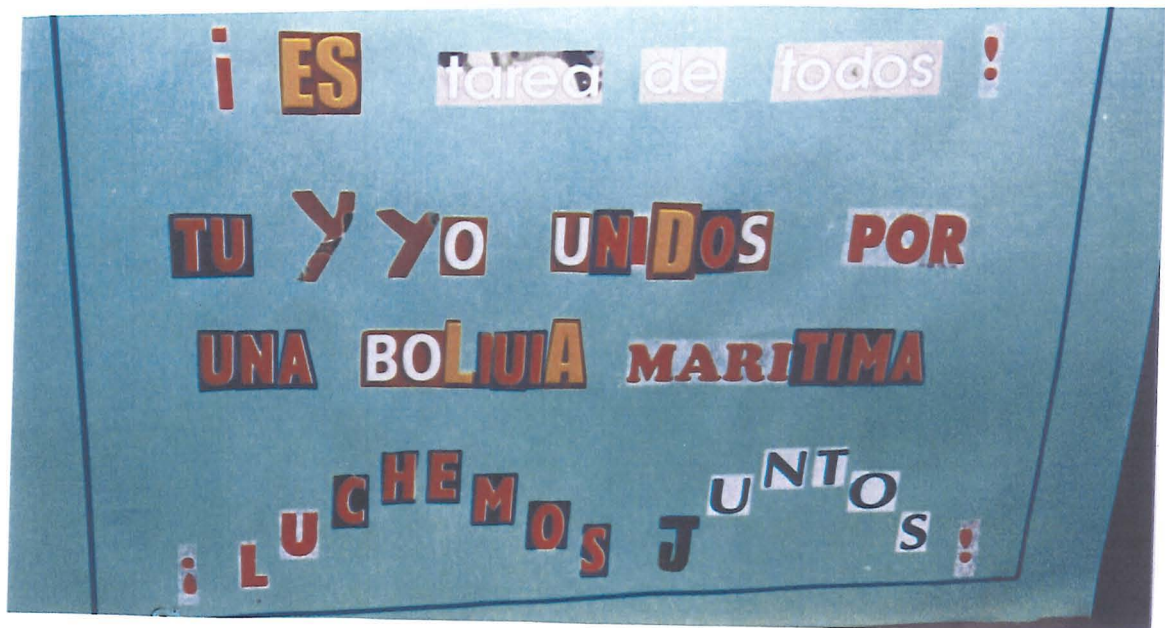


Plate 18. 'It is a duty of everyone. You and me united for a maritime Bolivia. Let's fight together'



Plate 19. Generation 2004



Plate 20. No al ALCA

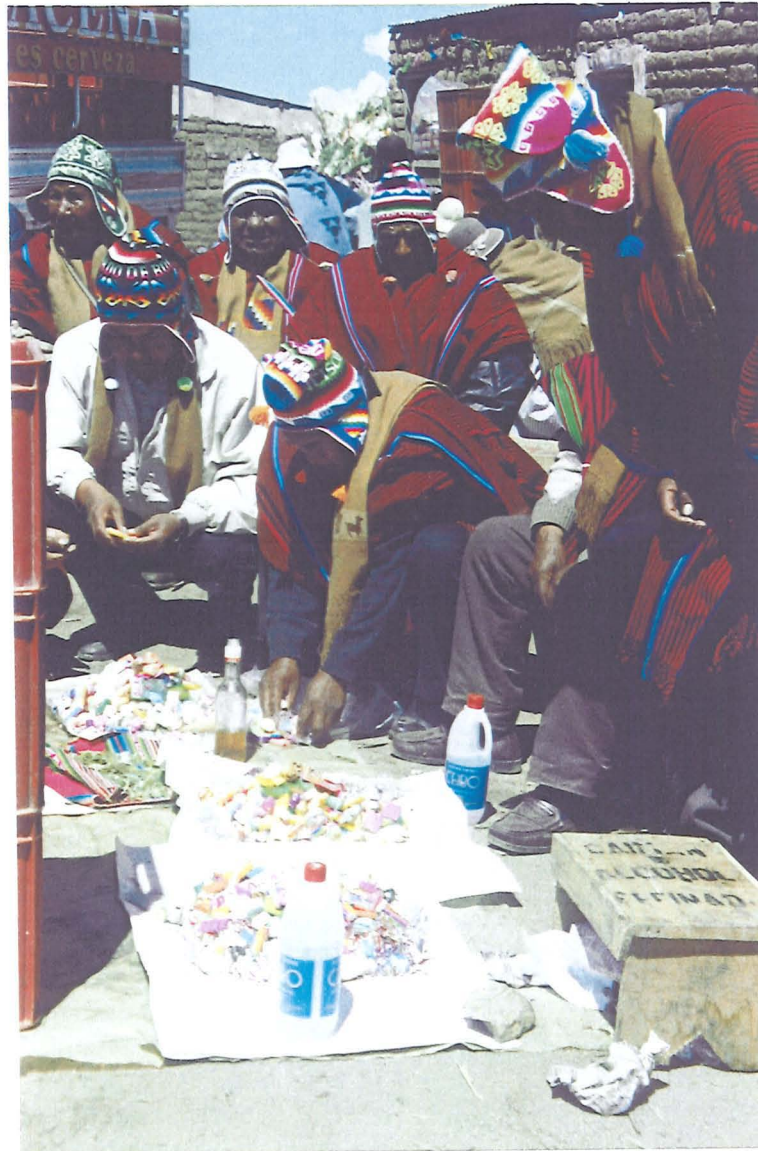


Plate 21. *Apachita*, Offering for the *Pachamama*, 1st September 2004. Some *Yatiri* prepare the *mesas*.



Plate 22. *Apachita*, Offering for the *Pachamama*, 1st September 2004.
Preparation of the llama sacrifice.



Plate 23. *Apachita*, Offering for the *Pachamama*, 1st September 2004.
Llama ready for the *Wilancha*.



Plate 24. *Apachita*, Offering to the Pachamama, 1st September 2004

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