Body, Beauty, and Death in an Andean Context: A Self-Ethnographic Narration

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Abstract: With this article I seek to build bridges between the different narrative elements where the body is situated as a central language, of experiences as a researcher in socio-cultural contexts of Bolivian indigenous peoples in the years 1984 and 1998. In this biographical period I have lived different reflective processes, frustrations, and successes that can contribute to an understanding of the framework of gender, ethnic, and political relations. This text, auto-ethnographic, enables us to see the deconstruction and subjective transformations in an androcentric context of a traditional Andean culture, as well as the investigative awareness achieved during interactions in the field. In my field work I have used tools from different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, social psychology), that are useful for validating the autoethnography as a methodological model to the gender autonomy, listening and learning the different ways of understanding corporal discourses. That is, I wish to recognize the value of various types of production and interpretation of knowledge, such as narration, arts, literature, film, and photography that favors emancipation of the peoples and their inhabitants.

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With the revitalization of narrative methods over the past thirty years, the social sciences not only have gained strategies for addressing narratives, but have also been able to make visible the protagonists excluded from the scene of the research, confirming the experiences of those who do the research as sources of situated knowledge.

As a qualitative strategy, these ways of narrating resurged in the eighties, along with a series of academic, ideological-political interpolations in higher education centers that sought to criticize the dominance of positivism in social sciences. These, in turn, responded to the climate of effervescence and questioning derived from the social movements of the sixties, with men and women who took over the streets, institutions and industries in pursuit of socio-cultural change.

A decade later, towards the end of the nineties, a "narrative shift" or "linguistic shift" began to be heard more frequently among the more critical groups (Blanco 2010; 2012). This shift, in turn, was extended as a result of the strength of the rupture with old mandates, along with the interpolations of the validity of the regulatory order and the control of the institutions. It is recognized as one of the most intense periods in Western society and opened the way for the so-called crisis of dominant representations.

In summary, the ruptures with the old paradigms that are found in the ideological-political and institutional questioning also have to do with the recognition that language is not neutral, that it is political and possesses plasticity and vitality, and, based on that, the recognition of its multiple meanings, interpretations, pluralisms, and resonances situated in broad and diverse socio-cultural contexts. Language and words are not outside the world in which they are constructed, and, in turn, are fed in dialogues with others; from there, the importance of agreeing that we are made of words, and, moreover, that what is said is not always what was intended, gives rise to multiple conflicts, ruptures, and fictions that require comprehension.

I agree with Rosa Montero (2003:10) when she writes that narrating is the primordial art of being human. She also mentions that we must tell about ourselves, and by putting ourselves into words, we invent ourselves because "our identity resides in the memory, in the account of our biography." Therefore, it is also reasonable when she warns that in narration, the words are finicky, rebellious, and evasive: "They do not like to be domesticated. Taming a word (converting it into a topic) is to put an end to it" (Montero 2003:17).

The domestication of words abounds in academia, and in that scenario we are all trapped. Because of that, we try to move in those small spaces where a little air can enter, in that palimpsest of academic culture where we all write about what others have already written, as Faulkner would say (Montero 2003).

As a possibility of freedom, the self-ethnographic account of experiences in the field has gradually become a concern of the social sciences. It has also been validated as a strategy and used much more in northern countries, particularly the United States, than among the Latin American disciplines and social sciences. Even with its lesser development in those fields, some experiences have given accounts of its potential in Argentina, Mexico, and Chile (Padawer 2003; Scribano and De Sena 2009; Blanco 2012).

Some of the richness of this method is linked to taking the "affective and cognitive experiences" that arise during the research process as *material for analysis* (Scribano and De Sena 2009:5). Thus, appropriating this technique implies recognizing that the comprehension of a certain field of study requires a view entwined in the research process between the subjects of the study, the social space, and the experiences of the researcher. "Self-ethnography means telling about what you hear, what you feel, and your own commitment, not only with the subject, but with the action, in reconstructing your own experience" (Scribano and De Sena 2009:8). Perhaps the following statement by Carolyn Ellis (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:209) clarifies its meaning: "Self-ethnography is a kind of autobiographical writing and research that...connects the personal with the cultural." Michael Fisher (Marcus and Fisher 1986:194-233) argues that "ethnic autobiography" must be recognized as a model of postmodern ethnography.

That is, self-ethnography opens a space for questioning the neutral and objective perspective postulated in classical ethnography of a neutral, outside, and external observer. It puts all its emphasis on: 1) taking the social and affective links of the researcher with the subject and the study group and considering them as elements that are crossed over by what the study seeks to investigate, and therefore as loaded with valuable information rather than as factors that bias the view, and 2) conceiving this knowledge production dynamic as a process that is always open-ended and unfinished.

Self-ethnography as a strategy is not constituted solely in a self-referential account, but rather is joined with various social and political phenomena that have required researchers to be completely immersed in order to "identify critical situations and confirm myths and biases created by an apparent homogeneity" (Montero-Sieburth 2006:10). Thus, following and listening to the self-ethnographic subject means being aware of the blurring of the distance between what is observed and what is interpreted, even in the subjects' own stories. In that process, the distinction between the ethnographer and the person narrating is also blurred by means of what we could call a trip towards a memory of what is seen, experienced, and imagined, to the point of being unaware of the scenarios themselves. This figure emerges even if the scenario is a fictitious space that exists only in the representation. That is, what is important is the plot, the organization of the account, the journey that starts there, and not whether what is heard is the truth or a lie.

In this self-ethnography, I ascribe to aspects of recording and writing of both the evocative and the analytical stream, recovering different types of documents as in the case of Magraner Moreno (2012), who combines visual and sound files, at the same time as drawings made in the field, as well as a variety of narrative resources (field notebooks, newspaper articles of field work, documentary videos). With these accumulated records I can describe my professional and personal journey as a researcher, at present, looking critically and reflexively at my biographical journey in an Andean socio-political and cultural context.

No matter how big the differences between the currents are: evocative and analytical, I do not appreciate that they are definitively excluding. León Anderson (2011) does not suggest completely eliminating the evocative of a self-ethnographic narrative. Neither Ellis and Bochner (2000) demand a certain degree of involvement in the text to be admitted as self-ethnography. Basically, all these two currents should appear as two parallel paths, leading to the same place. The tension between the analytical or evocative self-ethno-

graphic position seems to be a forgotten debate about personal self-ethnography, in which, above all, the struggle for direction and the predominant meaning of this method of narrative research is revealed.

I have organized this work in seven convening nodes:1) Contextualization; 2) Immersion in the field: living in Bolivia; 3) Body to earth: the beautiful and the ugly; 4) Releases: a fiction of freedom; 5) Daily life for understanding the meanings of life and death; 6) Gender relations in the community: androcentric based organizations; 7) Progress towards the autonomy of the Bolivian Tropics; and 8) In closing: towards emancipating research.

Contextualization

I see myself as part of the revolutionary generation of the seventies, which in its subjective construction received the literary and socio-political influences of thinkers and artists who proposed breaking with the dominant status inherent in the worlds of Europe and the United States at a time when Latin American social movements were rapidly opening the path and dictatorships and persecutions of politicians, workers, and intellectuals were breaking out all over the South American continent.

In Chile, the dictatorship caused a social divide and forced withdrawal, with a subsequent dispersion in pursuit of survival. As is known, those who opposed the dictatorship were persecuted, imprisoned, disappeared, or forced into exile. My family of origin was among those groups of academics that were "exonerated" and forced into exile.[1]

In 1983, my father, mother, and siblings had been in exile for 10 years. In Chile, there was a new outbreak of political persecution that obliged me and my own family to leave Santiago and head to the northern part of the country, from there crossing the border into Bolivia. That decision transformed our lives, requiring us to deconstruct what we knew to give way to what we were to determine.

Immersion in the Field: Living in Bolivia

From the 1980s until today, the train has been one of the most used forms of transportation for casual merchants and for transporting products between Chile and Bolivia. In the decade of the eighties, the people who commercialized this route the most were those from the valley and the Bolivian high Andean plateau. In January 1984, the five of us (a couple with three children) got on one of the Calama-Oruro trains. The trip lasted three days, which were an intense, shared experience with Chilean, Bolivian, and foreign women and children.

The women were carrying their enormous *aguayos* (multicolored woolen cloth shoulder bags) with marketable products and their babies on their backs; the men wore traditional clothing and had tanned faces, hands, and feet; they chewed coca leaves and drank alcohol to pass the cold nights and withstand the trip in the discomfort of the spaces. This hardship was for everyone, since there were more passengers than seats, and many traveled sitting on the floor.

[1] Some groups of outstanding academicians subsisted in Chile, selling eggs or in other trades of carpentry, cuisine, and informal commerce, and never returned to academia. Others never returned from exile to their countries of origin after the diaspora or died outside their country. Towards the end of the 80s, those who returned to academia rearmed themselves in university centers and programs. Some groups continued to be committed to critical orientations, striving to resist the dominant focuses and insisting on working to produce knowledge of the various conflictive nodes of social relations: power, gender, civil rights, political memory, poverty, and inequality, with an emphasis not only on what these nodes generate, but on how knowledge is produced.

The conversations in Quechua, Aymara, and mixtures with Spanish filled the environment. The tight space caused more intimate contact than usual in a passenger train. This transportation, dating from the time of the saltpeter works, that is, from the 1890s, with deteriorated bathrooms without water, no dining car, and cold and hard seats, made it necessary for the passengers to collaborate. All the activity inside was shared day and night: meals, bathrooms, odors, and diverse spaces.

This shared experience offered us a first panorama of the change in the ways of resolving everyday problems that began to be revealed on this train.

In Bolivia, it was the time of Hernán Siles Zuazo, who progressed in his government after a long period of military governments. This democracy was developing, besieged by social protests led by the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB) (Bolivian Workers' Center) and by political contradictions from the left, set in the framework of what Mayorga (2002) called *democracy adrift*. Regarding this process, Mansilla (1991) suggests that in the practice of Bolivian democracy, there is an underlying authoritarian political culture inherited from the days of colonial rule and from some political practices of the Andean peoples, a practice that we find not only in the framework of Bolivia, but also in the Latin American social fabric.

Therefore, when the time came to become involved with leaders of the Cochabambina and Paceña leftist political organizations linked to the university, I began to become aware of the androcentric and pyramidal authoritarian hierarchies of their structures. This experience was combined with the great tensions and conflicts that were being experienced in Bolivia at that time.

I found those structures and ways of relating to be anchored in the leftist organizations, inspired by the currents of Marxism, as well as in the native peoples' organizations. However, I felt it was imperative to continue with my commitments to support other refugees and get involved in the movements for democracy and social change. During that period, I was becoming aware that the political platform elaborated by communism to organize women was resistant to the passage of time and the socio-cultural transformations opened up by feminism.

I then observed that these currents of change in the power relations in society were seen as "vectors of imperialist ideology and bourgeois individualism" (Grammático 2005:89). I and some of the younger Chilean women who had been included questioned the position of subordination that we perceived in the relationship with some authoritarian and androcentric leaders, since we came from a context of having experienced the emergence of feminist ideas and the so-called "sexual revolution" of the '60s (Casola 2014).

Meanwhile, suggestions regarding the redistribution of political responsibilities in the shared child-raising and domestic tasks of couples were absent from the agenda of the Bolivian Communist Party. The Bolivian militants complied with the place assigned to them, and we did not find the slightest response to our demands for equality.

At that time, we were living in a suburban sector of Cochabamba, several kilometers from the market, the children's school, the university, and any clinic. In exchange, we gained clean air, animals, and large green spaces for recreation that were safe for the family. In that context, it became difficult for me to participate in all the political activities that were

taking place at the university, mainly since there was no room for negotiation regarding who would take care of the home and the children.

Bolivia was in the midst of social and political tensions, with a shortage of products and tremendous price inflation. This experience constantly reminded us of the boycott by the Chilean right, hiding basic foods, that had been experienced during the Allende government. Milk or bread could not be obtained, and it was necessary to resort to daily negotiating strategies with a farmer who had a cow in the area where we lived. Sometimes it worked and other times it did not, since I was unable to get her to trust me. My aspect and my accent worked against me. For her, I was a *q'ara*.[2]

Ideologies Regarding Corporal Beauty

In search of data on how to get food, I started to link myself with women from the area, many of them natives. There I met Valeria, an 18-year-old farmer, who in a cheerful tone compared her corporal structure with mine. For example, she measured the size of our arms and said to me, laughing, "How ugly you are! Skinny, pale, you're no good for anything. I am pretty and strong; touch my arm, look," and in a single movement she lifted a gas drum and put it on her shoulder. "Your hair has no color," and she took her long braid and showed it to me, making it turn, and with her teasing eyes said, "This hair is good, *blaaack*, shiny." She was stout and strong, with compact arms and shining, smooth, hairless skin. She laughed at what, according to her, was my physical weakness. We were very close, and she told me a piece of her life every night while she quickly moved her needles to knit *chompas* (sweaters) for my children.

At first, these corporal distinctions had no significance in my learning; they were anecdotal, but they would become fundamental in my working life. Mary Douglas (1998) has recognized the process of the comprehension of the centrality of the body in social experiences as a natural object shaped by socio-cultural forces. From that focus, it can be thought that social processes are anchored in a material base that is regulated, restricted, and ordered by cultural inscriptions (Douglas 1979). Among the meanings from the Andean world, the body is intertwined with meaningful symbols of nature and social organization and vice versa (Gavilán 2005). Social organization, in turn, is tied to the worldview and religiousness.

In that sense, what Valeria did was a comparative analysis regarding my corporality and hers in relation to some ideas of beauty and how both of us were situated in the cultural scene, depending on a set of valid subjective beliefs.

In the Andean world, the representation of corporal fragility and weakness among women is associated with a low level of prestige. The body is symbolically joined with the processes of the earth. Therefore, it must be nourishing and fertile, both elements fundamental for the existence and survival of the community.

According to the analyses of Pierre Guiraud (1986) and Marcel Mauss (1971), as discussed by Vivian

[2] According to Bertonio (1984), *q'ara* refers to anything that is bare, like a head, hills, plains, and if it is a stone or rock *hanccara*. The following expressions inform us of its sense and applications: *Kara Ppekeñani*, bald; *Karalaccampu*, clear sky; *Karaisi*, dressed without hair, *Karakhatatha*, with no people in the plaza; *Kara*, of a single color; *Karapuntas*, white-faced. Chipana (1986:256) tells us that currently *q'ara* is a term that designates a non-Indian person, Ladino/a (Spanish-speaking Indian), white, refined, outside the Andeans, with the status of a stranger or one ignorant of Andean culture.

Gavilán (2005), a female body is highly valued when it is not thin, and a broad waist, strong and resistant arms, and nourishing breasts are appreciated. Body fat, milk, semen, and blood are symbolic elements associated with life, productivity and reproduction in Andean couples.

A rounded face, a well-nourished aspect, and a healthy tone constitute an ideal model. Long, silky hair with which various braids can be created around the head makes women beautiful. The *q'ara* style with which Valeria associated me responded precisely to opposing guidelines of corporal aesthetics and therefore was devalued in that sense as having less prestige[3] with a lower resistance capacity in life.

My half-washed aspect, the color of my hair, and my bony structure earned me a nickname in Quechua, *champahuma/chususiqui*, which means "hair color dry bush and without meat on the behind." All these symbols that in Western culture, colonized by European criteria, are considered traits of beauty and prestige represent weakness and therefore a low level of aesthetic prestige in the Andean worldview.

Releases: A Fiction of Freedom

In 1988, I divorced and had to make decisions, freeze my university studies in psychology and look for my own place to live and a paid job. This new critical milestone became another ratcheting up that obliged me to look at myself in the new context and try to understand my place in that scenario and what survival tools I had.

[3] It is fundamental to consider that in the Andean, as well as among Westernized worldviews, corporal ideologies are not oriented towards homogenization.

I did not want to go back; I could not return to Chile, nor did I want to return to the communist party. Among what I saw as my positions of resistance was not giving in when faced with adversity, so I worked through my social networks until I got my first job. This job, after quite disadvantageous agreements and negotiations (no salary but with housing and meals), took me to a site in the rural valley of Cochabamba. When my supervisors in the NGO decided that I could go out into the field, the director's recommendation was, "Do not read anthropology, or research manuals. Do not lose your capacity for being surprised and steep yourself in everything you experienced these years in Mizque; draw, write, observe, be connected."

With that recommendation, I joined the technical team and had to work with a group from the communal population linked to Western-style health and with healers from a traditional practice, with educators and with union leaders. I had more than a hundred hours of interviews to code along with a woman farmer. Each morning, from 8:00 to 12:00, the two of us listened to the recordings in Quechua, and she described the central themes for me, which I was systematizing according to thematic areas that represented traditional practices.

Every afternoon, from 2:00 to 6:00 pm, this material was coded and emptied onto enormous sheets, where I had organized matrices with categories based on the focuses that the interviewees revealed. This could become material for broadcasting on the rural radio and/or in articles for the magazine *CONOSUR Ñaupaqman*. Both communication tools were prepared in Quechua and Spanish in order to reach the Quechuan communities in the Valley of Mizque, Aiquile, and the Raqaypampa Heights.

That work in Mizque and in the communities in the heights such as Raqaypampa during those two years (1989-1991) gave me a quota of support and sense for my plans for life in Bolivia. Year after year, I felt that by observing, learning, and participating I would acquire more awareness and social commitment to the native populations and their demands.

At that time, one of the central focuses of the rural communities was the deepening of the debate of the base organizations regarding the ownership and autonomy of the land and the territory that was resulting in a framework of historical-political processes generated at the start of the eighties.

As Pablo Regalsky (2003) notes, these rural fights give an account of the vigorous emergence of a social actor—the indigenous farmers, who displaced the working class from their hegemonic position and set out a new strategic project of change in the country, in the context of the indigenous uprising in various other countries of the continent. Historically, this milestone is identified in Bolivian political analyses as the start of a process towards autonomy in the field of Andean communities. For Regalsky (2003), this means autonomies in delimited territories inhabited by a number of domestic units that through their community assemblies and their traditional or union authorities control what occurs inside that space.

The axis around which the uses and customs, and the forms of authority are organized is access to the land, which is produced through mechanisms and norms that are collectively generated. These movements were formed in the bastions of the strengthening of self-governments in the Quechua and Aymara regions that in the future would give way to the construction of indigenous jurisdictional spaces with autonomy, which expanded and joined various Latin American communities by a common claim of "land and territory."

Daily Life for Comprehending the Meanings of Life and Death

In Mizque, we occupied a house two kilometers from the town. It did not have its own light or water, and to get to town, we had to walk. There was no electricity or public transportation in any rural area of the valley. It was common to use well water, candles, gas lanterns, gasoline engines, and burros or bicycles. We bathed and washed our clothes in the river on Sundays. For the children, it meant total freedom. While the clothes were drying in the sun, many women from Mizque who came down to the river bathed in slips, never nude.

Washing clothes with the other women from the town and sharing a community activity allowed me to observe and understand parts of their culture. At the same time, my children participated in the games and activities of the children from Mizque. At six o'clock in the evening, the sun slowly went down, and everything was night and stars. The weather was temperate in this area, rainy and stormy in summer, with big rises of the river that often left us isolated. In the evening, the heat of the day caused an intense, sweet perfume to escape from the fruit trees, and for that reason, this land was called *misk'i*, which in Quechua means land of honey.[4]

That was a time when a painful knowledge of life and death in the Andes opened to me. I gained this

[4] From the Quechua *misk'i* (adj.), sweet; *misk'imikhuy* (n.), appetizing, succulent delicacy; *misk'irimax* (adj.), affable and sweet; *misk'isimi* (adj.), adulator, flatterer, the one with sweet and smooth accent; *misk'iyachiy* (v.), to sweeten, to make flavorful or succulent.

knowledge by observing the work of the NGO doctor, with whom I worked, and the midwives and healers of Raqaypampa. This town is located in the extreme southeast of Cochabamba on highlands and belongs to the province of Mizque.

When I did the rounds, we started at 7 in the morning under a program organized to visit the cantons distributed in the area: Santiago, TinTin, Vicho-Vicho, and San Vicente. If there was an NGO vehicle, we used it, but if the technicians had left before us, we did it on foot. If it was during the rainy season, access was much more difficult. These visits were strictly coordinated with the leaders of the cantons, and there was better communication with them through technicians who were also farmers from the area (Yanapaqkuna).

During that period, the team was concerned about the high number of deaths of women in childbirth and of newborns and babies up to six months old. To understand how they were attending to the births, an agreement had been reached with the communities for the doctor to accompany the healer-midwife during births and to offer her help if she asked.[5]

In this process, I learned how the community faced maternal and infant mortality and that the importance of care centered first on the mother and subsequently on the child. Yes, the death of a newborn was a cause of enormous sadness, but it did not compare with the traumatic significance of the loss of a mother as an active member of the community dynamic.

This practice corresponded to an Andean logic of comprehension of the relationship among life/death/land/community and the link between the productive capacity of the land and the survival of its inhabitants. In the process of deconstructing my old knowledge, I had to understand that I could not assign ideas from Western modernity, which I had installed as universal, to the notions of a man, woman, or child of Raqaypampa, and especially not an ideology of health/illness loaded with moral values.[6]

That is, I was stressed by my concept of corporality and of subject, both representative of ideologies of a Western, individual society. It was complicated for me to integrate the ancestral awareness of the subject in dialectic interrelation with the whole. In these communities, the notions of the collective were active, where health/illness/life/death were joined to a network of relationships. The being-in-the-world depended on the equilibrium between the subject and all levels of the universe.

The links between these levels, people, places and extra-human beings operated as a key so that vital energy circled overall (Estermann 2008). Thus, a person is conceived not as a substance, but rather based on the person's relationships with the part-

[5] In the cantons that we visited, on several occasions, I observed that in order to position the infant in the mother's womb, the healer performed a *manteo* (technique for inducing labor and childbirth).

[6] I heard on different occasions the great mistrust that the doctor's practices caused: opening and closing the interior to operate on their bodies, removing blood and fat from them. Among the typical healing strategies I participated in with a healer in Cochabamba (Quechua zone), were poultices of medicinal herbs accompanied by rituals with different natural elements; suction of the sick zones; and supporting the person with certain matter or substances they held in their mouth (holy water, honey, rose petals, white carnation, tobacco steeped in alcohol), which absorb and assimilate the pathological contamination of the evil, which is then thrown out when the evil has left the organism. The sucking of the healer implies a complete linking of the material body and the mythical body of the world and the social body of the affliction, appealing to those who wish to harm it and make the patient ill.

ner, the children, the *Pachamama*, the guardian deities, and the animals and their products in a cosmogonic totality.

On this point, Van Vleet (2002) considers that in Andean communal interaction, the community is fed by the quality of such links, at the core of which is the *Ayni*,[7] more than by kinship. According to this logic, events occur through the vital force of the land—the *Pachamama*—and unfold correctly when the relationship that is established involves a reciprocal and harmonious coexistence between the work and the resources for its realization (Van Kessel 1996).

This logic also impregnates the Andean medical conception regarding the body, health, and illness. The Andean medical conceptualization is based on a comprehensive vision characterized by the holistic treatment of the individual that comprehends illness as a psychological, socio-environmental, and, in some cases, magic-religious imbalance. A social trauma or an environmental crisis is expressed through the sick body (Arratia 1996; Chamorro and Tocornal 2005), as opposed to Western medicine, which considers the individual sick body and focuses the treatment mainly on the damaged organs.

In this way, in Andean cultures, illnesses cause an imbalance in the community and in its networks of relationality, interchanges, and responsibilities (Bastien 1986; Orta 2000; Martínez 2001; Chamorro and Tocornal 2005; Bolados 2009). In seeking healing, all the elements linked in the relationship are integrated, offerings are made and rituals are held for the *Pachamama*, the hills, the Achachilas and all their products in search of the reestablishment of equilibrium and, with that, also the curing of the body.

These experiences with death, health, and illness provided me with an initial understanding of the Andean relational order and opened a path towards other languages that are translated into myths, legends, and stories from the oral tradition. To rescue these myths, I observed, listened, and drew. This exercise obligated me to remain open to an understanding of the meanings of the characters, legends, and stories and their symbolic relations. This implied an opportunity to develop another tool to link with the community through visual language with shapes and colors. I illustrated legends, stories, and religious festivals that occurred during my visits to the cantons. I also sought to represent in my drawings the people's relationships with the market, the commerce of their products and the different agricultural strategies I observed. I was not always praised for my way of seeing and representing, given that in my first drawings, I had not yet reached a fine understanding of the traits of the characters, as well as the animals of the region. Thus, some criticized me, saying, for example, "Partridges do not have tails with feathers, and they do not fly up into the trees" or "That animal does not look like a fox; it has the face of a dog."

Once a year, the NGO defined how to summarize the most relevant events that had occurred in the province of Mizque and its cantons. This became a topic that had to be illustrated to be returned to the community in the form of a calendar. For example, one of these illustrations took into account the

[7] Fernando Huanacuni (2005:3), in his book *Cosmic Vision of the Andes*, mentions that "our ancestors understand that there are two forces, the cosmic, which comes from the universe, the sky (*pachakama* or *pachatata*) and the telluric force of the land (*pachamama*). The two energies generate all forms of existence; these two convergent forces are expressed in every life process. And the different forms of existence are related through the *Ayni* (complementarity and reciprocity)."

complex symbolic world linked to the activities of interchanged collectivism in the day-to-day relations of Raqaypampa, and I tried to reflect that link in different scenes.

Gender Relations in the Community: Androcentric-Based Organizations

Another of my activities consisted of attending the meetings of the union organization to gather information about emerging issues and to tour the cantons and pueblos to distribute the magazine *CONOSUR Ñaupaqman*. In this way, I witnessed the deep-rooted model of male hierarchies predominant in the organization of the community, for example, in the way that political decisions are made regarding the distribution of roles in daily life, rights to the land, men's and women's right to speak in public, and the distribution of irrigation or seeds.

I could also observe and hear stories of how games of seduction were played, sexuality, and the establishment of couples, even though, just as in other Andean communities, part of their worldview includes the ideal of relationships of complementarity and reciprocity (De La Cadena 1992) between men and women. However, what predominates in practice and ideologically are relations of hierarchy and subordination of women, in which they are considered subjects that must be watched over and guided similarly to children.

Marisol De La Cadena (1992:22) notes that, in the Andes, "notwithstanding that the sexual division of the work is necessarily complementary, subordination underscores the ideological explanations regarding relationships between men and women."

Women participate in agricultural and cattle-raising tasks and in the market; nevertheless, the level of importance and prestige of their activity is defined based on a structure in which their work and they as members of the community are in an inferior gender position, in charge of caring for and pasturing the sheep or selling minor products. Additionally, in this community system, many women were physically, verbally, and socially mistreated in a brutal manner by the men.

This concept of inferiority was deeply rooted: "Neither girls nor women farmers should go to school. The only thing they do is distract the teacher, then on the road they are raped and just cause problems in the community. In the end, it's not good for anyone, and the teachers will then go away, and the community will be left without an educator." Mizque and Raqaypampa are Quechuan regions that are located six hours from Cochabamba. Due to their closeness, men and women farmers constantly connect in their market, but even so, there is a very high level of illiteracy and speaking only of Quechuan, more among the women than the men.

All communal organization depended on the male lines in public. In private, men and women discussed, negotiated, and agreed, with high levels of conflict. However, part of the communal culture was that men must not be discredited in meetings; the women had to be quiet, but they never were. That was often how the violence started that occurred on the roads, in homes, and in the fields. Women were always under the strict control of the community, with the operation of the *jawanaku* (consideration), or constant social control, where male honor and prestige were at stake, and the man's domination of the family core was confirmed.

I was not outside this same logic as part of the interwoven relationships. In that context, the women on our team also experienced control over our behaviors and occupied places of subordination. For example, we always had to go down to the pueblo with the technicians, and if there were religious festivals, we had to be with the group; otherwise, "the rumor" reached Cochabamba, and explicit sanctions on the duty of maintaining our behavior came from the boss or our colleagues.

Additionally, at the level of the organization of the work, we reproduced those principles of perception and action. In addition to doing the technical work, we had to cook for the men, take care of the children, and take on the housework before our interests. Thus, a transversal hierarchy similar to what occurred in other scenarios in Latin America was (and is) reproduced. I compared these relational forms when I later exchanged experiences in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s with women from Zapatist organizations from Chiapas in Mexico and with community leaders from Ecuador and Peru.

Team meetings were held in Mizque to organize the work and decide on the timelines. We, women, actively expressed our opinions, but we had to obey and be attentive to presentations by the director or the technicians. In this group, the doctor had her own place of power, coming from her hierarchy in the biomedical field. There was horizontal work between her and us, among us, and between her and the team.

Between the third and the fifth year of working in Mizque, I became responsible for the Communication and Rural Education Magazine *CONOSUR Ñaupaqman*. I gathered the technicians' reports, which were converted into simple articles with drawings and photographs on topics of education, health, agriculture, or union organization, oriented towards the rural community and associated institutions. Then, when each monthly edition was finished, I toured the rural communities with the team, delivering the magazine and recording new information. I shared part of the work in the field mainly with male farmers and leaders, who were also becoming monitors of the magazine and then the radio. With this work on *CONOSUR Ñaupaqman*, I participated in all the rural mobilizations from 1989 to 1992 that were recorded in its pages.

Progress towards the Autonomy of the Bolivian Tropics

In 1990, during one of the visits by the evaluators of the Latin American Inter-American Foundation (IAF), my work was publicly praised for the first time, something that was not well-received by some native technicians who constantly placed what I did in doubt.

At that time, the "*gringo* from the IAF" asked me if I wanted to work in the field in the communities of the Tropics that were booming due to their union movements. I immediately said yes, since I had already met Evo Morales, the young leader who stood out for his charm and speaking ability. My boss said, "No! How? A woman cannot go into the jungle alone!"

The *gringo*[8] looked at him, surprised, but did not back down from his request, and finally they let

[8] Kevin "Benito" Healy. To review some of his work in Bolivia, see: http://www.iaf.gov/index.aspx?page=646. Retrieved June 20, 2020.

me collaborate. We traveled for eight hours by highway towards the tropical zone. On the way, he asked me if I had personal projects pending. "Yes," I answered, "to finish my university studies." "And what do you need for that?" "A scholarship," I immediately answered. The next year, I restarted my university studies with a scholarship and turned my work in the field one hundred percent towards the rural union organizations in the Tropics of Cochabamba.

In early 1992, *pueblos* all over Latin America were mobilizing regarding the controversial commemoration of the 500 years of the conquest. In Bolivia, the struggle for autonomy and the right to land and territory had unified the more than one hundred native *pueblos*, from the high plains to the most remote jungle *pueblos*. The great encounter of the native cultures that would reclaim autonomy and territory was approaching.

In that same period, I was able to join a team of German documentary filmmakers who were critical of U.S. intervention in the *pueblos* of the Southern Cone. They were confident that I could contact the leaders to request and obtain authorization to film and to consult the families from the zone if they wanted to give their testimonies.

In making those arrangements, I confirmed that with my perseverance in community work, I had gained the trust of the leaders and families. That was how I started with these documentary filmmakers on an intensive learning process regarding the richness of working with images, the importance of planning, the capacity to overcome the unexpected and the need to enter and leave the field analyzing the experience each day. We camped there for 20 days, filming in the Tropics in the middle of the rainy season, so it was an arduous struggle to protect the equipment and to fight off the mosquito attacks, the vehicle getting stuck in the mud, and the rising of the rivers.

This was a first ethnography of the family life of the farmers cultivating in the Tropics, which circulated on European television and in which the voices of its protagonists could be heard regarding the problem of the international penalization of coca leaves, the union organization, their rituals, and daily life in the fields. Based on this experience and the documentary, there arose articles, interviews, and photographs for the publication of a book about the defense of the coca leaf as a traditional medicinal plant.

The documentary *Im Schatten der heiligen Pflanze*, directed by Gernot Schley, offered another view of the conflict over the use of coca leaves. At that time and until now, the international media have focused basically on the production of cocaine and the need for the intervention of the DEA in Bolivia. From that standpoint, the majority of the international press features have not focused on (or have not understood) the political-interventionist background of the United States in Bolivia and the abuses of power that the rural *pueblos*[9] experienced daily. In contrast, this documentary was able to exemplify the benefits of growing coca leaves, the threat of armed violence by the repressive agencies (the DEA and UMOPAR), the search for alternative crops and the daily life of the families.

I committed to that fight with such passion that it caused conflicts for me in the NGO, and thus I ex-

[9] For more information, see: Gernot Schley, *Im Schatten der heiligen Pflanze: Boliviens Coca-Bauern klagen an* (1992), Horlemann Verlag.

perienced the third ratcheting up of my life plans in Bolivia. I had to go out on my own and decide where to focus my work committed to the defense of human rights. It was an illuminating period, since the success of the documentary work and the commitment that had been created with the German documentary filmmakers enabled me to apply for financing to continue supporting rural organizations in the Tropics with the objective of communicating and supporting the defense of human rights in rural families.

From the middle of 1992 until 1997, my field was the jungle, with 90% humidity, torrential rains, floods, dengue, and the threat of cholera. I had to go out into the field on paths that had the consistency of a trail of soap (red clay, rain, and constant humidity), in the middle of the dense foliage, with a backpack full of flipcharts. That was how we got to the Quechua and Aymara communities transplanted from the high mining plateau to the farms in the Tropics.

We also found Guarani families settled in zones away from the populations on the highway or the market. We provided training for women, young people, and leaders. The main focus of concern was the unionized communities. There, the military attacks regarding coca leaves and the persecution of intermediaries and drug traffickers were mixed. Many times, women were sexually assaulted and houses were sacked by members of the UMOPAR.[10]

It was a constant threat, just as were the untreated tropical illnesses such as leishmaniasis and the high levels of illiteracy. In this region, the organizations that adhered to the defense of coca leaves as a product of traditional use[11] joined other popular base organizations throughout the country in the claims for land and territory as the flag of a common struggle.

By then, my two sons and my daughter were older, and their upbringing, in a complex manner, was shared with their father. Many times, my elder son accompanied me on my comings and goings in the jungle, on trucks carrying rice, chickens, or potatoes. While I did interviews or distributed the magazine *Nuestro Trópico*, he collected bugs or got lost among the trees. When he was older, he helped me distribute the publication to the federations of farmers or distribute food for rowboats in the infinite marches held by the rural populations demanding their rights and autonomy. I learned to *pijchar* (chew) coca leaves during the unending union meetings, to sleep in the storage sheds, to bathe wearing a slip in the rivers. However, my weak stomach, as Valeria said, did not help me, since for half my life in Bolivia I fought innumerable intestinal infections.

At the end of 1992, due to the international impact of the mobilizations to recognize the 500 years since

[10] According to reports from the *International Human Rights Commission* at the time, it was pointed out that "Throughout the region of Chapare, UMOPAR agents have gained fame as ruffians and thieves." See http://www.hrw.org/legacy/spanish/informes/1995/bolivia3.html. Retrieve June 20, 2020.

[11] The violence generated by drug trafficking in the rural communities was aggravated by the implementation of Law 1008, which penalized a broad spectrum of activities related to drugs, including fabrication, distribution, and sale. Although the law was strongly debated before being approved, the debate centered on the regulation of coca more than on the provisions of the law to cover the crimes relative to controlled substances. In fact, the majority of the latter provisions came from prior anti-drug laws. See: http://www.hrw.org/legacy/spanish/informes/1995/bolivia3.html. Retrieved June 20, 2020.

the conquest of America, the *pueblos* became more radical in their demands, and the confrontations and deaths were denied by the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada ("Goni"), president of Bolivia that year. He was a politician-businessman from the right, allied with the United States, who took the army into the street with arms and tear gas. At the end of each day, the numbers of people injured, arrested, and killed mounted. In those events, I was arrested along with leaders of the *Federación de Campesinos del Trópico* (Rural Federation of the Tropics) and foreign journalists, both men and women, who had come to cover the mobilizations. The leaders were released a month later, and the government decided to expel them from the country, in addition to several foreign volunteer professionals who were expelled for "interfering in the internal politics of the country and collaborating with indigenous terrorism."

In my case, they interrogated me with false accusations linked to using the money from the German financing to facilitate the acquisition of arms in the Tropics and for writing "false headlines" for the pages of *Nuestro Trópico*. According to Interpol, the complaints of the rapes of native women by the UMOPAR were unfounded because the rapes had never occurred, and the accounts of beatings received by male and female leaders of the community, published with photos, were false. The Human Rights office with which I coordinated my work hired an attorney, and the federation of students at the university where I was studying hired another. However, Saavedra Bruno, the Minister of the Interior at that time, did not give in. He wanted me extradited, outside the area of the accusation, since our magazine reached hundreds of international organizations. The sense of anguish grew in me as time went by, and I thought about my sons and daughter. Then, one of the attorneys asked me, "Where are they going to deport you if your identity documents say that you are a nationalized Bolivian?" And, on that my defense was based.

That experience in prison revived silenced fears that were difficult for me to overcome. The judge's sanction was that I could not go back to writing in the press, and the magazine for the rural organizations was banned. However, after I overcame my fears, my disobedience of institutional orders emerged once again.

Yes, I had been prohibited from writing, but not from filming. Therefore, I used what I had learned with the Germans, and until 1997, filmed records became my preferred work tool. These documentaries had a wide circulation in the rural communities and among the organizations that supported the struggle against U.S. interference in Bolivia. By 1997, we had edited five movies with different themes: the use and cultural defense of coca leaves, the prison life of Quechuan men and women accused of drug trafficking, Law 1008 on drug trafficking and the place of the United States in this false war, the ultimatum referring to the demands of the United States in the internal politics of Bolivia, and the life of a farming family in the Tropics.

By then, my relations with the Federation of Coca Leaf Producing Farmers had begun to be more distant. My principal conflict was owing to pressure from Evo Morales for these tools to be placed at the service of the emerging MAS party. I reflected on this with the team and manifested my apprehensions about focusing our efforts on a political party, which evidently had tremendous weight; how-

ever, its agenda left out other groups and visions, for example, women, as well as other global rights issues, which were among our objectives.

Since 1994, a profound transformation had been intensifying in the base union organizations as they adopted the organization of political parties for their struggles. In the communities, the federations were entwined with the municipalities. The union leaders started a campaign to gain seats as representatives and senators. Therefore, they were incarnating their struggles within the representations of the formal political system, which they had rejected in the past. That was my main concern, combined with my view of the political party experience that had clouded my experiences as a militant-obedient in the past. However, in the first decade of the 2000s, I observed Evo Morales become a representative, a senator, and then president of Bolivia.

From 1995 to 1997, I focused on working with women who were imprisoned under Law 1008; my last intensive work in the field in Bolivia was oriented towards making visible the legal abandonment and the violence contained in this law, which fell on many rural women accused of micro trafficking. There in the prison, I put all my tools and my capacity for resisting frustration to the test.

In Closing: Towards Emancipating Research

Situating myself under the self-ethnographic model has meant trying to combine a search for gender and political emancipation with a research process that progresses towards the autonomy of the large stories that dominate the social science scene. By placing ourselves subjectively in the research scene, what we write is what we do based on those meanings by which we interpret "who we are and what we do in the world."

This perspective, in turn, contains psycho-social demands, since it requires constantly explaining the complexity involved in what we observe, what our spokespersons say they do, and what we see them do. In this process, beliefs, ideologies, gender, ethnic belonging (native and *q'ara* in this case), social class, and even the ages of those who interact are at play. All these dimensions must be included and analyzed.

In this way, I believe that those of us who use these models should assume the subjectivity of the view we make of the world that we are getting to know or interpreting, beyond the culture in which we have been constructed.

This position marks a way of producing knowledge, sustained by the inclusion of emotions and the commitments of our positions. As researchers, we run great risks, since dialogical relationships need to be established, with constant shifting between the field of knowledge, the subjects, and our own reflection. In that position, researchers face their vulnerability, distances are given new meanings, and hierarchies must be questioned. As a researcher, I must be observed and read, subject to my biography, and crossed by cultural and gender discourses, and therefore must understand that these subjections permeate my way of looking and narrating.

I believe that in any social relation, whether scientific or day-to-day, neutral distances are fictitious. I say this, since how could we disembody, disincarnate, or de-gender scientific work or those who live that experience? Bodies and all their cultural

tracks matter. The research process that I started in the context of native Andean *pueblos* taught me that objectivity is impossible when faced with such diverse ways of perceiving, organizing, naming, or feeling the experiences in these cultures.

I also learned to maintain a willingness to constantly learn and to recognize the agency that resulted from each phase I lived.

In addition, during those years, I learned the urgency of following the tracks of the memories of these peoples, of their voices and accounts. A magnificent notion for naming this learning was identified by Mikhail Bakhtin (1990) in his analysis of human textuality: *unfinalizability.* The accounts of women and men from the jungle, the valley, or the Bolivian heights did not end when they told me their experiences. They were not finished when they were transcribed, since their stories continue unfolding and changing, along with each one of us who was there.

In this exercise, I have been able to contribute to conserving these memories only by means of narrating fragments of the multiple journeys of the protagonists of these spaces of action. I have also tried to note the relevance of constantly rethinking the notion of the body and of the richness of opening ourselves to worldviews that understand that the body is joined and entwined with the world and with other entities that inhabit it; thus, it is porous and does not constitute a closed territory.

I agree with those who suggest working with biographic, ethnographic, self-ethnographic, narrative, and graphic models first as a form of resistance and then as a form of agency with several objectives:

- To unleash experiences encapsulated by silence, fear, or methodological restriction.
- To capture metaphors through languages.
- To open reflective dialogues with all the intensity necessary, trying to make voices heard (and also striving to overcome the temptation to appropriate the voice of the other person who is narrating).
- To recover unofficial subjectivities made by groups' histories.
- To attempt a poetics and policy from what emerges from the culture (with "poetics" being defined as the rhetorical, persuasive, tropic, and metaphorical construction of any context [Clifford and Marcus 1986]).
- To recover the voice of the body that relates and lives (in a critical sense, given that ideas such as the existence of a being and a universal and transcendental body, characterized by individualization, prevail in the social sciences, where each person is a unique, individual subject with its own reason and body, and precise limits that separate it from other entities, substances, beings or people, not only in terms of its corporality and awareness, but also regarding its will and capacity for action or agency).

In summary, this text is a proposal to open up the current conceptual systems of analysis and interpretations that dominate the social sciences based on notions such as *center*, *border*, *linearity*, and *hierarchy* and to replace them with *multi-focus*, *reflexivity*, *nodes*, and *networks*, among other open-ended notions.

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Appendix: Photos and Illustrations from the Author's Archive



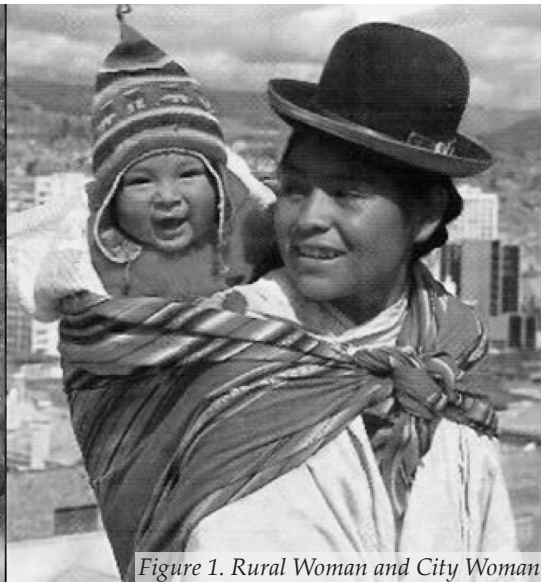


Figure 1. Rural Woman and City Woman

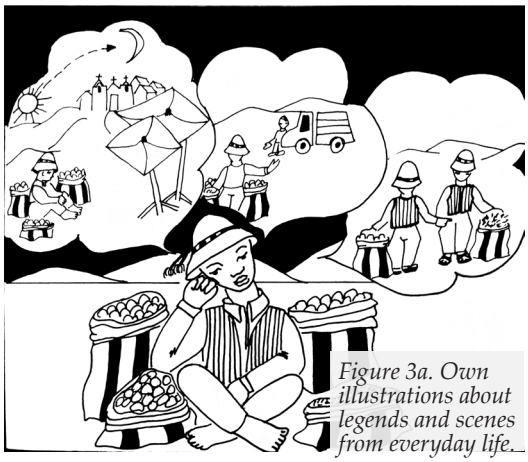


Figure 3a. Own illustrations about legends and scenes from everyday life.

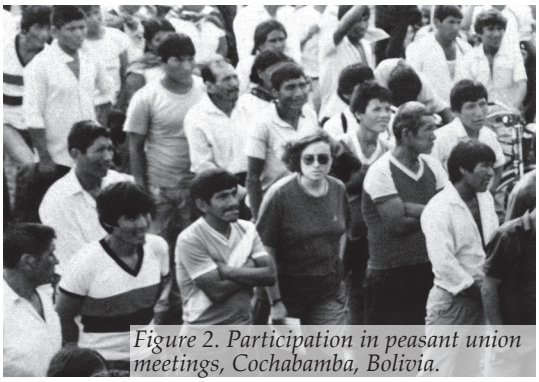


Figure 2. Participation in peasant union meetings, Cochabamba, Bolivia.

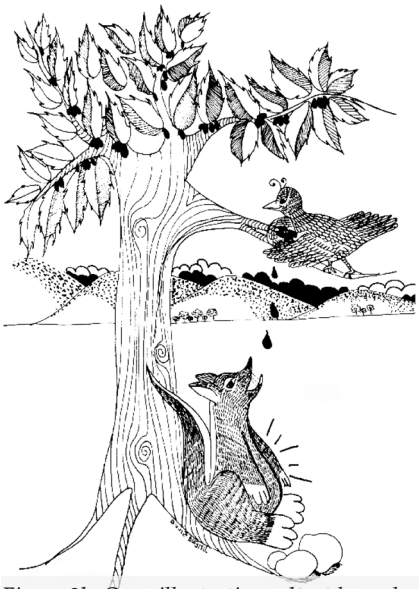


Figure 3b. Own illustrations about legends and scenes from everyday life.

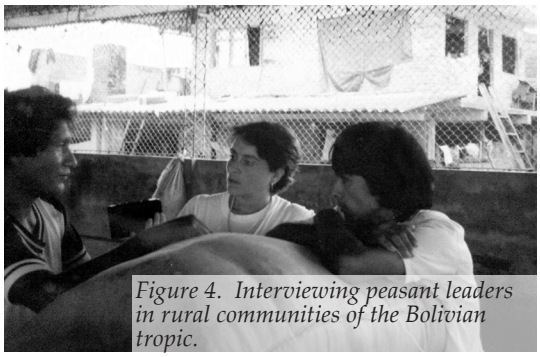


Figure 4. Interviewing peasant leaders in rural communities of the Bolivian tropic.



Figure 5. Participation in Congress Organized by the Five Federations of Peasants