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## Place and the Politics of Knowledge in Rural Bolivia: A Postcoloniality of Development, Ecology, and Well-Being

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PLACE AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE IN RURAL BOLIVIA:  
A POSTCOLONIALITY OF DEVELOPMENT, ECOLOGY, AND WELL-BEING

A Dissertation Presented

by

KAREN MARIE LENNON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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Educational Policy, Research, and Administration



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KAREN MARIE LENNON

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Christine McCormick  
Dean of the School of Education

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This dissertation would not exist without the openness, solidarity, interactions, and insights of both long-time and newly acquired friends in Rumi Mayu. There are four people who were extremely integral to the implementation and fruition of my fieldwork: Margarita, doña Julia, don Sabino, and Katty. This dissertation would not be what it is today without their keen, gracious perspectives, and critical thinking.

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remembering them brings such great joy, and fond memories of strength of character, and just plain fun over so many late nights. We are forever indebted to them for their inspirational daughters Andrea, Grecia and Lunita (our godchild), who each in her own way has taught me about the importance of enjoying life.

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To all, and to all who I may have somehow unintentionally neglected to mention, ¡*pachis!*

## ABSTRACT

### PLACE AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE IN RURAL BOLIVIA: A POSTCOLONIALITY OF DEVELOPMENT, ECOLOGY, AND WELL-BEING

MAY 2012

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This dissertation is a study of the dynamics of place and people in a rural municipality in southeastern Bolivia. A study of the dialectical relations between knowledge, ecology, and culture that are manifest through the daily life of the municipality, it is an ethnography that illuminates the multiple discourses of colonialism, nationalism, modernity and decolonization that overlay one another. The contradictions and tensions produced through these intersecting discourses represent major obstacles to the project of “decolonization” and the formation of viable and equitable “intercultural” relationships, as promoted by the indigenous leadership which is the governing party of the Bolivian state since 2006. This yearlong ethnography of everyday life, conducted together with semi-annual follow up visits, reveals how people within the municipality negotiate differing and conflicting life worlds: one sustained by traditional practices of barter and local knowledge about farming, food, health and ecology); and the other governed by

bureaucratic agencies and professional expertise. These life worlds signify contrasting notions about development and well-being, culture, and politics; and how between both of these it enables an equivalence that moves us closer toward the decolonizing imperative. Taking a postcolonial approach, I argue that knowledge and the systems of education in which knowledge is largely disseminated (schools, health facilities, NGOs, municipal venues, television, Internet, etc.) are crucial places for moving toward critical reflections, social change, and justice. I also intertwine an analysis of food not only as an agricultural product, but as an integral component of communal livelihoods, interactions with others, and nutritional well-being (physical, mental, and spiritual). Using concepts of border crossings and analyses to perceive and interpret local knowledge occurring in and from the margins of development, ecology, and “well-being,” I advocate for the need to disrupt systems of geopolitical values, racial configurations, and hierarchical structures of meaning and knowledge in order to see and validate multiple ways of thinking, knowing and doing. Therefore, rural localities such as this one are essential “places” to learn from and learn with, and to include in the critical discussions and debates on decolonization, inter/intra-culturality, development, and well-being.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: RUMI MAYU: A PLACE AND ITS PEOPLE

*“Quality of life” is a deeper reflection upon the “human condition.” It considers that cultural identity, the physical, mental, and spiritual ties to one’s people, one’s land, is of equal importance to the raw materials of life. The loss of common values, the disintegration of communal structures, and the alienation from the spiritual world can affect the individual more than the lack of physical items...The struggle against poverty is more than just improving the economic base and access to public services.*

Javier Medina, 2008

This dissertation is about the dynamics of “place” and the people that live there, in the municipality of Rumi Mayu,<sup>1</sup> an area that includes 33 dispersed rural communities sharing four ecological floors bordering the western Andean ridges in the department of Chuquisaca, Bolivia. It is about an off-the-beaten-path kind of place, that is both indirectly and directly part of the desire for change which encompasses inclusion, recognition, betterment, and contribution in the Bolivia of today—and, by extension, in much of the so-called “developing world” as a whole. I explore aspects of a “quality of life” that has sustained the ravages of colonialism, yet continues to confront and deal with how to rejuvenate cultural values, livelihoods, and solidarity in an atmosphere of western modernity and development. My ethnographic research focuses on local knowledge, perceptions and daily events, and the political ecology aspects of food production, nutrition, health and education: for me, all of these are integral aspects of rural life and its evolutionary development. These are the avenues through which people connect with and value their land and

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<sup>1</sup> Rumi Mayu is a pseudonym that means “river of rocks.” I have changed the names of all of the towns and people for reasons of confidentiality.



place. Interlaced throughout, I explore multiple “sites”—municipal government offices, schools, health centers, NGOs, state workers, international cooperation agencies—in order to analyze and discuss how local communities (re)describe, (re)learn, (re)negotiate and (re)mediate local social conditions internally, and in conjunction with external encounters. I am most interested here in what may be recognized to be historical and ongoing colonial and patriarchal forms of rural agrarian life, and how these have been, and continue to be, constituted within what are termed (in the critical literature in general, and in today’s Bolivia in particular) the “neoliberal” discourses of development, and what these might entail for the current postcolonial revolutionary-tinged tide of the officially decreed “Plurinational State,” determinedly focused as it is on its own version of *decolonization* and *inter- and intra-culturality*. To these ends, as a means of focus my case study revolves around central interests concerning the concept of *nutrition*, in essence and in metaphor: the ways in which people nourish their bodies, as well as their minds, with a mix of desires, agency, and place.

Food for most *campesinos* signifies more than just eating—it is their livelihood, and their connections with the environment and with people. It is the place that draws people together not only to reap harvests, but to exchange stories and knowledge that culminate from hard work, experience, self worth, challenges, obstacles, decisions and accomplishments. Food consumption is not only important for bodily growth and strength, but is also essential for mental, cognitive, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual development. Therefore, nutrition is an essential point of analysis because of its reciprocal relationship not only as a resource

base, but also as a way of life that enables rural people to be self-sufficient through engagement with their ecology, economy, their region, and with their *compañeros*.

Good nutrition indicates a harmonious relationship with one's physical and socio-cultural environment; as Medina states, "a deeper reflection upon the 'human condition.'" Thus, when nutritional status is not optimal, this also implies a breakdown in not only physiological health, but also in physical social health and well-being—and, perhaps, is also a reflection of the status of societal harmony in itself. The unique geographical contours of Rumi Mayu (a "vertical archipelago, as John Murra [1975] famously termed it") have historically provided an array of nutrient rich foods that were, and continue to be in varying degrees, exchanged through *trueque* (barter), that are part of a regional "ethnic economy" (Harris, 1987) based on inter-generational knowledge, cultural practices, and regional sufficiency. Social, cultural, and livelihood practices, such as *trueque* and reciprocity were mechanisms that were part of an "agrarian civilization" whose geopolitics related with nature, social dynamics and the organization of space (Tapia Mealla, 2011: 387).

While I am unable to determine the level of either harmony or disharmony that took place in the centuries prior to the colonization process in Rumi Mayu, it is most likely that the region was fairly self-reliant, and then becoming greatly "affected and transformed by the colonial dominion...postcolonial states, and in particular, by the expansion of capitalism" (ibid: 387). Lingering postcolonial scars are recognizable, for example, in the miserable financial compensation Rumi Mayuns receive for their crops; also, in an inferior positionality (professional, epistemological), lack of state support and services, and cultural and environmental

deterioration. The process of capitalism has widened these wounds as manifested in the effects of “modern” agricultural practices (chemical fertilizers and pesticides that degrade the land), climate change (unpredictable rains), and the drive to access western markets and notions of progress, all of which have manifested themselves through decreased agricultural production and high rates of malnutrition.

The postcolonial condition accommodates multiple, contesting, contradictory social practices, such as damaged aspects of knowledge and culture juxtaposed with a resilience of certain cultural practices that contributed to self-reliance and the auto-governing of diverse ecological floors. The maintenance of *trueque* and other communal practices in Rumi Mayu, such as communal work and reciprocity, are acts of both agency and resistance that have enabled adequate food consumption and a sense of economic security, all of which have helped curtail a subjection to the depredations of the market, and market forces. Rumi Mayuns are neither fully modern nor non-modern, as they are not detached from the modern world, nor fully immersed within it. Much of the daily ins and outs of their lives progress along similar lines as those of their ancestors, concurrent with newer “novelties” (modern clothing, water systems, cell phones, computers) which are integrated in numerous ways. Some of these changes can be beneficial, and make their lives more enjoyable; others, however, can be disadvantageous to both families and communities.<sup>2</sup> In this

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<sup>2</sup> By way of example: our neighbor’s son was the class valedictorian in only the second municipal high school graduation in Rumi Mayu’s history, and received a national scholarship with which he proudly went off to study architecture at an urban university. Although the costs of this were doable for his parents at the time, the increased needs for modern technologies (most predominantly, a computer) and other expenses drove his parents to work longer hours, and more and more outside of their local cultural economy in order to earn cash. They initially sought out menial labor jobs, and when let go they then invested in a tiny window exchange kind of store. Closing the store because

respect, I find that contemporary exposures and relationships with neoliberal policies (e.g., education and health reforms) coupled with international development projects (NGOs and international agencies) have influenced local knowledge and perspectives, which have had varied effects on Rumi Mayuns: from undermining local systems of knowledge (traditional healers, agricultural practices); to the incorporation into national agendas (girls sew and keep house; boys do “trade work”); to fusions (women participating in local politics); to addressing local desires and needs (access to biomedicines, house renovations, agricultural cooperatives).

While several complex issues are affecting present day agricultural production (i.e., climate change, increased needs for cash, mainstream development programs), agricultural production and local livelihoods have been increasingly oriented towards a more purely market based economy of mono crops and wage labor (construction, migration). Detrimental consequences could lead to the exclusion of a diversity of local crops, and threaten their “cultural economy,” that could have devastating consequences on self-reliance, nutritional intake, physical and mental health, intercultural practices and the overall quality of life (that is, wellbeing). In this respect, I present and discuss here local cultural practices and prominent changes not to *romanticize*, but rather to *highlight* the resilience of “agricultural civilization,” and of challenges to unique rural agricultural livelihoods and economies in places such as Rumi Mayu to open up spaces that counter the effects of Eurocentrism, and can provide ways in which their culture and ethnic

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their other children where eating the profits, their latest venture was the purchase of a hamburger grill and two funky slot machines.

economy lives on so as to rejuvenate, strengthen, and creatively build a viable future (Tapia Mealla, 2011: 387).

The social justice impetus for my research, and during my previous years of living and working in Bolivia, align with the culminating (and well documented) demonstrations of the “Water War” of the year 2000, with the furious outcries for an end to the neoliberal economy,, and (in 2009, with the approbation of the new constitution) the presumed end to externally imposed and crippling “colonial” political and economic policies. Many people have contributed to this struggle, but there is still a long ways to go in order to reach an equilibrium for the common good—in other words, to “*vivir bien*,” to live well, to use the terminology currently incorporated in Bolivia. While the political climate is dramatically changing in Bolivia—as perhaps most strikingly visually symbolized by the official state raising of the multi-colored checkered *wiphala* flag, emblematic of indigenous (re)vindication, alongside the tri-color national republican flag—the historically highly inequitable socioeconomic and political development of the country has left in its wake many scars, fractures, demands, privileges, strengths, possibilities, and opportunities.

This dissertation, however, does not directly focus on the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS) government, its political and historical trajectory, and the changes it purports to install in Bolivia; the greater part of the data collected occurred at a time prior to the elections that brought the MAS to the *Palacio Presidencial* and the halls of Parliament. Yet, what this dissertation *does* strive for, is to discuss the lives of ordinary rural people—aspects of their

knowledge, perspectives, and daily ins and outs—that reveal the imprints of ethnic, gender and class inequality; disciplined subjectivities; productive livelihoods; and resistances to a colonial legacy: as such, to better understand the influences of the past on the present, in order to move forward in a more positive manner. The stories I present talk about the ways in which Rumi Mayuns live, and how this is representative of their ways, values, and existence, and what their struggles are about—for their voices, and all voices, to be part of the “building” of Bolivia, and for the reciprocal recognition, inclusion and enhancement of multiple cultures, languages, livelihoods, and intellects. Therefore, the happenings in Rumi Mayu—and the many other “Rumi Mayus” throughout Bolivia—are essential “places” to learn from and learn with, and to include in the critical discussions and debates of decolonization and rural development.

The bulk of this research took place during the entire year of 2004, and several months in 2005. The unpredictable timing of it occurred at the cusp of a national political scene that embarked on a path designed to transcend and demolish neoliberalism, declaring the initial stages of an era aiming for a local brand of socialism and social democracy. Ever since my family and I first stepped foot in Rumi Mayu, we continue to return on a yearly or bi-yearly basis. In both a geographically and a humanistic sense, it is a place that radiates a gentle beauty mixed with striking hardships, and with resilience. Emblematic of many rural highland areas in Bolivia, Rumi Mayu is a mixture of farmers etching out their livelihoods; with other residents performing scattered merchant related and menial labor jobs; and also professional positions filled with contacted teachers,

administrators, nurses, doctors, NGO workers and the like, imported from the urban centers. Life balances on a continuum between independence and self-sufficiency, and an on-going cohesion to that of self-serving individualism and envy. In contrast to many other areas of Bolivia, there are no *current* radical social movements or stellar projects to learn from and/or emulate in Rumi Mayu; it is thus a place that represents many of those in Bolivia that are *not* in the limelight, yet which are places that need to be paid attention to, to inform and to be part of the larger movements on a national level. Highlighting the municipality of Rumi Mayu as a case study illuminates many of the effects and outcomes of (pre/post)colonialism, (neo)liberalism, and national/international development; furthermore, how “modern” political and economic theories and practices are playing out.

I use food (“barter and market”) as an illustrative point of reference for my analysis, because of its intricate role within the social, cultural and economic dynamics of the region, its inter-dependence /reliance with knowledge, and its linkages with schools, health services, municipal policies and programs, and the work of NGOs. I look at the complex role and interactions of the different actors, and contend here that neoliberal and development policies are extensions of colonialism in several detrimental ways: inequality based on racist preconceptions of indigenous peoples, ethnicities and gender; economic exploitation and paternalistic relationships; hierarchical distinctions and privileges between gender, classes, professions, and “modern” versus “non-modern” (western and non-western); the suppression of local knowledge; and imposed ideologies on established social and economic structures. Within this context, I argue that knowledge and the systems of

education in which knowledge is largely disseminated (schools, health posts, NGOs, municipal venues, workshops, television, Internet, etc.) are crucial places for moving toward critical reflections, social change, and justice. While on the one hand formal education and new information has opened up varied changes and opportunities, much of this occurs *without* an intercultural dialogue that acknowledges the historical damages incurred from colonialism and the ways in which oppression lives on in a lack of authentic participation<sup>3</sup> and space for innovation and creativity. Thus, the data gathered for my research come from the numerous local community members and the varied people that work with, and within, these institutions.

### **The Nation in Context**

Bolivia is renowned for its extensively rich biodiversity (flora and fauna), culture, and agriculture. National geographical contours have shaped patterns of development according to three distinct ecological zones: the high altitude plains (*altiplano*) of the Andes to the west; the temperate (yet still high altitude) valleys in the central part of the country; and the lowland plains of the Amazon basin in the east. This biodiversity reflects the heterogeneity of the culture, and the diversity within these cultures: 36 indigenous ethnics groups with distinct languages and ethno-ecological historical knowledge, together with people of European descent and mestizos. There are today approximately 9 million people in Bolivia, of which 62 percent are native speakers of indigenous languages (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE], 2010). Intercultural relations between rural Bolivians have played

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term “authentic participation” to express what I mean as a form of interaction in which people are well informed about the central issues, multiple perspectives and opinions at hand, in order to take part in a dialogue based on equitable and respectful relations.



a major role in maintaining their ecosystems, culture and knowledge; they have also been, however, a place of contestation and struggle. Detrimentially, like most other colonized countries throughout the globe, the past 500 years have been dominated by political and economic systems that plundered natural resources and devised asymmetrical and oppressive socio-cultural relationships, mainly between dominant populations and elites of European descent and the original peoples. Yet, despite much suffering and great losses, resilience and inter-generational knowledge have survived through cultural and intercultural relationships and economic exchanges. The recognition of these local and regional acts of resistance and agency, which occur in a plurality of ways adjacent to national and international social movements are important resources to work with and build on.

The colonial relationships between the indigenous groups and European and mestizo groups have largely operated around an urban / rural divide. Racist and economic inequality maintained asymmetrical contact between those self-proclaimed as superior, and those declared to be inferior. Semi-apartheid political and economic policies imposed a dichotomy that exploited rural indigenous people's work on the land and in forests and mines, while urban elites managed the economy and built cosmopolitan centers. After the 1952 Revolution, these divisions began to unravel largely due to internal migrations, decentralization policies, the expansion of schools and health services, and later with international aid and development programs; however, in general this ethnic split persisted. Yet, the semi-isolation of many rural areas provided a space for diverse cultures and ways of thinking and doing to evolve, hence providing unique and fertile grounds for different perceptions and newer

possibilities and alternatives for Bolivia, as well as examples for the world. Hylton and Thomson divide Bolivia's revolutionary past into three cycles: "the first was indigenous"; the second was "led by the middle-class National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), and backed by the armed force of Trotskyist tin miners' militias...as well as [urban] armed students and factory-workers;" and the "third insurrectionary moment [brought] into being through insurgent Aymara initiative[s] at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (2005: 42), culminating in the current "plurinational state."

It should be noted, however, that rural places are not disconnected from the national or global economies; neither are they homogenous, idyllic places. Varied historical colonial events have uniquely influenced their "progress" with internal reactions, reconciliations and constructions contingent on the dynamics, possibilities, and desires of its diverse people. For example, the imposition of different missionary groups on lowland indigenous groups varies among the differing missionary institutions (Catholic, Protestant, evangelical), and with the experiences of similar groups in the highlands. While major triumphs of land reform, suffrage and rural elementary schooling were attained with the 1952 Revolution, much of the inequitable treatment of rural Bolivians continued for decades afterwards. Over the past fifty years or so, in varying degrees, more consolidated influences have expanded throughout the country via the state and international development agency policy and programs. Neoliberal and development policies, stemming from the 1970s and 1980s, created and imposed newer ruptures, openings, closures, and obstacles. Inadequate rural development policies, extreme economic austerity plans,

environmental degradation, the collapse of the mining industry, the rise of coca production and the narcotics trade—all of these provoked a large degree of the urban migration and the internal settlement of other Bolivian regions in the lowlands by groups of highlands origin, and all of which impacted upon rural populations. While once the predominant mode of internal movements, in recent years these have increasingly taken a second place to a rapid urbanization process.

Bolivia's 1980s economic restructuring, followed by the 1990s neoliberal reforms, did not contend with racism or structural inequalities and poverty, but rather sought newer ways to exploit *campesinos* and indigenous populations. The country's increased involvement with neoliberalism and global markets coincided with a sociopolitical discourse that attempted to place the *indio* in terms of exploitation through exclusionary ideologies, to one that is more contemporarily aligned with reconstructed terminologies of inclusion, and part of newer formations of cooptation (e.g., the World Bank incorporation of the term "participatory"). As Estermann synthesizes, "'inclusion' is synonymous with 'development,' and in turn, with 'modernization' and participation in 'civilization'" (2009: 63). However, ironic twists began to unfold and emerge with the 1994 Popular Participation Law (PPL), when efforts to "incorporate...indigenous peoples into the national project as responsible and docile neoliberal subjects" (Postero, 2010: 22) began to open up and create spaces for legally recognized venues for indigenous political participation. A confluence of events emerged that was sparked by the accumulation of decades of draconian policies and the unethical oppression of *campesinos* and indigenous populations. A state of crisis emerged from neoliberal policies and careless actions

that united coalitions between ethnicities, gender, and classes and sparked massive demonstrations over the privatization of water, taxes, and the sale of natural gas. These alliances and demonstrations brought down two presidents (Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 2003, and Carlos Mesa in 2005), and opened up newer political, economic and cultural spaces and possibilities with the 2005 election of Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales Ayma. While these changes themselves may be particular to Bolivia, events were occurring at a time concurrent with other mass demonstrations and radical social and political changes emerging in Latin America (specifically, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay).

Evo Morales and the MAS have received massive support from social movements, unions, and the general populace, as demonstrated by their triumph in the last two presidential, congressional and municipal elections: in 2005, the MAS won the presidency with 54% of the vote, and in 2009 was reelected with a total of 64%. The first administration largely focused on the quasi-nationalization of state industries (oil and natural gas, telecommunications); the confrontation with political rivals of the old dominant political and conservative elites; agrarian land reforms; the design of national social and economic development strategies; and the development of social welfare programs for health and education. The second term of the MAS government has allowed them to continue and consolidate their political agenda, demonstrated by the ratification of the new constitution, the passage of educational reforms, and the formation of renewed and renovated relations between the state, market and civil society (Postero, 2010).

These changes have opened up political power to the subjugated indigenous and mestizo populations, shuffling governmental players and reorienting policies and programs toward a Plurinational State that is receiving enormous national and international attention. Yet, the trajectory of economic development continues on the same timeworn path: what Jeffrey Webber refers to as a shift “from neoliberal orthodoxy to a reconstituted neoliberalism under the guise of neostructuralism” (2011: 9). The MAS government promotes a national agenda to work across class and ethnic lines (interculturality, pluri-national state) to increase jobs and reduce poverty (well-being), by turning natural resources into Bolivian-made products (lithium batteries, cars) through industrialization and infrastructure improvements (roads, dams and other energy sources). The economic growth that peaked in 2008 (largely from the hydrocarbons tax) was invested into the state’s “neostructural economic” plans, with limited investments geared toward innovative ecological economic models, which demonstrate an economic path that “continues to be the subject...[to] the changing character of global capitalism and geopolitical strategies of large imperial powers in the hierarchical world system of states” (ibid: 9). To these ends, Bolivia has increasingly moved away from economic ties predominantly with the US, to seeking out and establishing much stronger economic alliances with Brazil, Iran, China, and Japan.

This “process of change” will require a continual engagement with informed citizens, social movements, unions, NGOs, foundations, and other organizations. The MAS needs to maintain open channels to listen and engage with critiques, such as those revolving around autonomies and territory (Regalsky, 2010); reformist

agendas that subvert revolutionary changes (Webber, 2010); post-neoliberal national economic strategies and universal notions of culture (Postero, 2010); and extractivist economic models build on inequalities and environmental contamination (Bebbington, Bebbington, Hinojosa, 2009; FONAMA, 2010). As Kohl and Bresnahan sum up, “the country is seeking ‘partners not masters,’ ...[thus] the challenge for Morales in his second administration will be to develop government capacity to embark on the projects that implement decolonization, further consolidate power, and advance the struggle for hegemony of the indigenous-popular social majority” (2010: 19). This brief overview of Bolivia is a snapshot of a complex history full of struggles and accomplishments. I seek to contribute to the ongoing process of social transformation in ways that focus on indigenous people’s rights, knowledge and culture as a valid basis for the ongoing societal construction and ecological landscaping of Bolivian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through my ethnographic research, I examine the potentials and challenges of recovering and redirecting indigenous culture and modes of being and thinking for advancing a new postcolonial moment in Bolivian history.

### **Rumi Mayu: Influences of the Past, Strongholds in the Present**

The 1952 National Revolution was a social milestone that created an aperture for the citizens of Rumi Mayu, as well as for other Bolivians. Following the Revolution, the Agrarian Reform of 1953, and the scattered uprisings and revolts throughout the rural highlands of the country that followed in the immediate aftermath, a similar process in Rumi Mayu resulted in the distribution of property from the haciendas to the *campesinos* whose ancestors had toiled the lands for

generations. Although much of the land redistribution after the 1952 revolution remained only partial and highly unequal (especially in the eastern lowland regions of Bolivia) (Urioste, 2007; Healy, 2001), the majority of Rumi Mayuns did not suffer substantial inequities. The fragmentation and distribution of land in the municipality did however unbalance the relatively fragile ecological-agricultural system, and the amount of land that was actually received or purchased by local inhabitants depended considerably on the given community, the fate of the ex-landowner, and on the new social and power structures that were taking shape. Furthermore, the process of Bolivian land reform did not lead to significant gains in actual poverty reduction, or in an increase in agricultural production and the access to nutritional foods, as the state did not take a leading role, but rather left land policies to the “‘free market’ forces in land reallocation and use” (Borras Jr. et al., 2007: 1).

At the time of the 1952 National Revolution, the haciendas were in the possession of the second wave of regional landowners, few of whom resided permanently on the hacienda, and who relegated the daily business to the *mayordomo* (administrator), who was generally of mestizo descent and from outside of the region. In the case of Rumi Mayu, the outcome of the Revolution was generally peaceful, as the landowners quietly abandoned their haciendas; however, and as mentioned above, this did not lead to any egalitarian land distribution, and hardly did it leave the region in the sole control of the local indigenous people. The legal process of land reform did not even begin until 1956, and lasted for many years; for example, the process for haciendas in the Rumi Mayu *valle* (valleys) region did not even begin until 1959, and finished only as late as 1969 (Arias, 1994:

199). According to the Rumi Mayu Municipal Diagnosis Management Plan of 2000, “71% of the agricultural properties are without land title documents” (Diagnóstico Municipal de Gestión 2000: 208). Summarizing some key processes of the Agrarian Reform in the Rumi Mayu region, Bolivian historian Juan Félix Arias recounts the following, in his 1994 study:

The organization of the Agrarian Reform provoked profound changes and suffering... One of these changes was produced because of the individual criteria and parceling of the Reform, in which the *arriendos* (people who lease or rent land), had to fragment and assign fixed parcels to the *arrenderos* and *arriantes* (*leasers*, *renters*), whereby before they had been assigned to work on rotational plots of land, thus this caused a total rupture in the agricultural organizational structure and their corresponding work systems; this act has had profound consequences in the new conflicts that has arose in the region.

Considering that the zone is multi-ecological, with some haciendas that had land in all of the ecological floors of the region, one *arriendo* worked different parcels of land in more than one ecological floor...In these cases where the *arriendo* had lots in more than one ecological floor, the Agrarian Reform broke the ecological unity and complementarities of their agrarian organization, enclosing these campesinos in one ecological floor and producing a disequilibrium in its productivity...Another problem that the Reform generated was the extreme *minifundio* (small land holdings) in which a half or quarter of a hectare was insufficient to survive....but this was contingent on whether the receiving land was compensated with pastures, or if these lands were uncultivable...In this sense, after the Agrarian Reform, this mini land division could make it more difficult for some to get ahead than others. For example, the campesinos who stayed with lands in the *valle* could possibly maintain the land better because they could count on more irrigation and possibly produce more each year. In contrast, the *minifundios* in the extreme altitudes of the altiplano region (*cordillera*) were insupportable. (1994: 120-122).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> According to the first mayor of the municipality, the land surrounding the haciendas was parceled into five hectare plots when near irrigation resources, and 10 hectare plots if not within close proximity of a water resource. The mayor elaborated that “the first thing that the Agrarian Reform commission did was to distribute land to the *arrenderos* and the *patrones*, therefore the patrón continued owning some of the land that they previously had, and they then gave some of the land to the *arrenderos* who had occupied or worked the land, and then they gave land to the *arriantes*. This commission did not make an offer to the campesinos, but rather to the owner; the owner gave the commission food, they gave them a place to sleep; they went all out for them. They attended the commission well, and this affected the reform in a bad way, as 70 hectares was measured for the owner and they were given their papers.” Another couple from the Cabecera said that the hacienda in



Consequentially, on the one hand people throughout the municipality of Rumi Mayu were free to work for themselves and to embark on their own system of production, exchange, and food consumption as based on the ecological contours of the environment, climate, and the generational passing on of knowledge and practices; but, on the other hand, the only partially implemented reforms led to an unequal distribution of land that contributed to new social order transformations of gender, class and power divisions. It also opened up the concept and practice of privatization, competition, and individual relations with the market.

Land issues and cultivation were further complicated by the fact that the state did not protect agricultural production and food security, as occurs in many other countries. As Velasco points out, the Bolivian state “relinquishes all of [its] protection...The worst is that the absence of the state reaches all compasses” (Velasco, cited in Ledezma Rivera, 2003: 14). Three major areas of neglect that have contributed to rural deterioration—both human poverty and environmental degradation—include: 1) Capital investment in the financial sector, instead of agricultural production and rural areas; 2) Asymmetrical market prices due to agricultural subsidies in countries like Europe and the United States, that keep prices low in non-subsidized countries, and floods their markets with foreign products; and 3) Disproportionate focus and investment that supports agro-industrial segments and the wealthy, while ignoring small scale farming, and the poor (Ledezma Rivera,

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their community kept approximately 23 hectares, and the *arrenderos* received approximately 3 hectares and the *arrimantes* 1 -2 hectares. The family of the patrons still live at the hacienda, and “has to contribute their services to the community like everyone else...they have to help build the new school, or send a peon.”

2000: 12 - 13).<sup>5</sup> This absence of protection was actually superimposed by deliberate agricultural development policies (1940 – 2004) that prejudiced and negated indigenous experience and know-how, in favor of western designed and financially supported policies that led to the unbalanced growth of agro-business versus small scale farming; this resulted in political land grabs in the eastern section of the country, in addition to privatization and transnational strategies that increased unemployment, deepened poverty, and contributed to environmental degradation.<sup>6</sup> Although not part of the epicenter of these policies, many Rumi Mayuns themselves have experienced and expressed the consequences, which has contributed to a continual decline in agricultural production due to a combination of factors: limited resources to maintain and rejuvenate the environment; substitution of animal manure with chemical fertilizers and pesticides; changing weather patterns associated with climate change; limited irrigation systems; and lack of state support. All of these considerations have direct relations to the consumption of nutritious foods and health; in turn, affecting their physical and cognitive abilities, and opportunities to “live well.”

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ledezma Rivera, prices for Bolivia’s agricultural products are determined by supply and demands, which are affected by food importation, donations and production. Bolivian farmers do not receive any subsidies. Boom production of a product leads to lower prices, decreasing farmers’ incomes and abilities to cover agricultural costs. Ledezma Rivera purports that “when *campesinos* sell their agricultural products below production costs, they are subsidizing low urban salaries. Instead of the government subsidizing the *campesinos*, the *campesinos* are subsidizing the economy so that the *empresarios* can obtain the majority of profit” (ibid: 13).

<sup>6</sup> See Kevin Healy, in *Llamas, Weaving, and Organic Chocolate* (2001) for a fuller understanding of inception of the distorted and damaging consequences of westernized induced agricultural development policies in Bolivia. Healy documents concrete examples of how western technologies were used as a means to snub and obviate indigenous technologies, only to prove that the latter was far more advanced and conducive to the ecological contours, and substantially healthier for the environment and for people.

Not only was the distribution of land highly skewed, and agricultural development policies ultimately proved to be a disservice to the people of Rumi Mayu, but the Agrarian Reform also contributed to a new social order of power and patriarchy that evolved from the hacienda. Many of the people who acquired regional, as well as departmental, political positions were mestizos who either worked in administrative roles for the hacienda; or investors aligned with the ex-haciendas; or were closely affiliated with the National Revolution's dominant political party, the MNR (*Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario*).<sup>7</sup> These people "maintained the traditional antagonistic attitudes toward the campesinos," and attained political positions in the unions and other mechanisms of power (Arias, 1994: 122). They were instrumental in promoting and implementing the "external" and "civilizing" campaigns and laws; such as, the *Ley de la Prestación Vial* (obligation to work on road construction), the registration of births, deaths and marriages with the Civil Registry, and the mandatory purchase of identification cards and public schooling attendance (ibid, 127). During these times, as well as today, many of these positions are filled, exchanged, and inherited through such means as *compadrazgo* (informal kinship relations); thus, the Agrarian Reform assisted them in maintaining administrative roles, and opened up avenues of economic opportunities. Today, many of these same families run the local businesses, and/or have an easier access in attaining political positions. In addition to these dominant actors, the new supplementary mix to this equation has been the increasing role of NGOs, and the ascension to power of other local, and non-local, actors.

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<sup>7</sup> As Kohl observes, local elites are more apt to funnel benefits to their own self-interest, which can potentially reinforce power of central government and allies (Kohl, 2003: 154-155).

### **By Way of Experience**

As a result of happenstance, choice and the opening of spaces, I have worked for over 20 years in several “development” programs in Bolivia. Ironically, since my youth I had always been against the manifestations of what I saw “development” to be in the United States: a homogenizing sprawl of conformity. Then through a convergence of interests, studies, travels and work experiences (political science, history, international studies, feminism, special education, health education, and farming), I went to live and work in Bolivia and involved with , ironically enough, this same field.

It was during the course of my previous involvement in rural development projects that I began to witness the levels of disparity as a result of prejudice, power struggles, and greed. Simultaneously, I also felt the strength, excitement and positive feelings of a myriad of people. I would sometimes see the world as if looking through the eyes of an insect: geometrically perfect, containing an array of intricate social conditions and possibilities; chaotic in a uniquely harmonious way. It is, thus, because of the people I met and the politics I saw, that I was driven to study, think, act and hope, in order to further understand the absurdities I witness. Working in several positions at the local level within the field of development, I sought to understand more deeply the intricacies of how education, economics and politics shape sociocultural and environmental facets of poverty. While exceedingly more complex than I am about to portray, the world appeared to be structurally divided between alliances of the elites—those who maneuvered the banking and financial institutions, and the state apparatus and business enterprises that worked with, or

through, professionals, technicians and para-professionals (teachers, technicians, engineers, health providers, etc.), who serviced an economically impoverished class. Yet, whereas many in the professional class might talk about or insinuate local knowledge as “inferior,” “poor,” “uncivilized,” and “just indios,” I experienced the opposite—strength, depth and sincerity.

It became apparent to me how the development field could be positively manipulated to become not just another process, but rather a powerful intervention that reinforced established structures of societies and the world. Simultaneously, I saw forms of hybridity and multiple pockets of resistance, expressed from local levels: through acts of refusal to let NGOs work in their communities; to grassroots NGOs holding onto their principles, calling attention to social and environmental abuses; to massive demonstrations that evolved into popular uprisings that demanded (and eventually brought about) the resignation of two presidents. It is these junctures that I would like to explore: how pluri-ethnic societies at the local level are ultimately responding to the power of the state and its alliance with the global economic powers. Beginning with locations of place at the community level, my interest is to contextualize everyday acts of resistance and power, and to analyze collective ways of mediations. These combined methods all connect to the importance of understanding the complex ways in which knowledge has been historically situated, socially constructed, valorized and morally rooted. Historical constructions of social arrangement and contemporary lifestyles can enhance theoretical and practical (praxis) applications of critical pedagogies, for a post-development that strives for decolonization and inter/intracultural relationships.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter explains the theoretical focus and methodology for the research. The theoretical analysis uses an interdisciplinary approach which centers on postcolonial theory and concepts of interculturality, and draws from other areas such as feminist political ecology, health ecology, and critical pedagogy. The methodology section describes the multifaceted data collection approach, and introduces the research site (municipality of Rumi Mayu). The data collection took place before the theoretical concepts of “decolonization” and “interculturality” became part of the national discourse of the MAS government in practice, which in recent years have been incorporated into the national constitution, and operationalized into development plans and programs of two key (for my purposes here) ministries, those of education and health. The decision to use these theories, however, came prior to conducting actual field research, yet their relevance was reaffirmed during the different stages of research and writing (data collection, participatory observation, and data analysis). Thus, the timing of the theoretical framework for this research with the new national discourse was, perhaps, not so much coincidence, as it was serendipitous. I believe that my long term association with Bolivia and rural communities has endowed me certain insights attained through experience that enables me to place the events I observed in Rumi Mayu as exemplary instances of the theoretical framework which I have chosen to utilize.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Although the 1994 Educational Reforms embarked on intercultural education, and many Bolivian scholars and activists discussed the concept along with that of decolonization, these theories and practices were barely perceptible and/or implemented by development and municipal professionals

The broad, yet intersectional (multiple forms of oppression), focus of the dissertation required borrowing from the several disciplinary fields mentioned above. This research thus goes against the grain of general trends, which focus on a single aspect of a human behavior, environmental phenomena, etc. My research builds on previous experiences, in which I would see how many different elements relate and interact with one another. Although intersectional studies can be complicated, and unwieldy, I believe that they can also reveal connections that enable a deeper analysis and promote concrete actions.

Using this theoretical framework, Chapter 3 presents the geographical diversity of Rumi Mayu, and how local knowledge, culture and practices have taken care of and maintain their environment. I analyze contemporary influences (e.g., NGOs, municipal governments and schools, and the media) on agricultural and cultural practices, such as barter (*trueque*) and market, and reciprocity (*ayni*). I also illustrate how the changing nature of the market's alliance with the state and NGOs are "re-territorializing" infrastructure and livelihoods in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, which is also contributing to redefining both gender and class / ethnicity roles.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the relationship between ecology and nutrition; in this respect, Chapter 4 builds on Chapter 3 to illustrate the ways in which colonialism, concepts of modernity, and a "catching up development" is affecting the

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during my fieldwork. While the MAS has tuned into this in order to counteract the ongoing effects of colonial power and mestizo domination, by institutionalizing and formalizing decolonization and interculturality into state policy and programs, their attempts remain flawed. They remain reluctant to change the fundamental structures of western models of economic growth and development, and continue on a path of resource extraction that results in massive environmental degradation, with detrimental social, cultural and health related consequences. I will discuss this further in successive chapters.

environment and, in turn, agricultural production and nutritional intake. I discuss the nutritional status of children, and the state policies and how these function in the municipality. I present local and professional beliefs and opinions about malnutrition, and major policies currently presented to show how both forms of knowledge incorporate and resist the other. I conclude this chapter with an example of cultural practices that demonstrate how inter-relationships with the land and food hold much potential for the nourishment of both body and spirit.

Chapter 5 examines how the municipal government (local officials, health workers, education employees) and NGOs respond to and address malnutrition. I examine information and pedagogical practices through workshop venues and health fairs, and also discuss how municipal health workers understand and are incorporating the new (2006) national nutrition program *Desnutrición Cero* (Zero Malnutrition). I explore food donation programs, such as the World Food Program (school meals), and show how they are affecting local eating habits and possible nutritional intake. The chapter closes with illustrations of the relationship between nutrition and the national discourse of *vivir bien* (to live well), decolonization and interculturality. The importance of using intersectional analyses and approaches to address agricultural production and the consumption of nutrient rich foods is also emphasized. The examples and analysis coincide and conclude with a pragmatic approach, utilizing two specific critical literacy approaches: health and ecological.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore the influences of schooling on everyday practices, and some of their effects on local knowledge, self-actualization, and the present directions that the municipality is embarking upon. I present and analyze a high



school narrative project that I organized to better value local knowledge as a means to deepen understandings of local ecologies, health practices and livelihood practices, and to encourage reflection and analysis. While the project did not meet its intended goals, it did provide insights into what schools face as part of a liberating process within a culture of lingering colonialism. I discuss national education policies, and illustrate some differences between *school* knowledge and *local* knowledge, and the challenges of parental participation. I conclude with thoughts on how critical pedagogy (predominately of the feminist and revolutionary veins) and “multiliteracies” could play a role in the self-actualization of indigenous communities, in order to construct actions and changes that build upon local knowledge, in solidarity with regional and global social movements.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation. I summarize the main changes that are going on in Rumi Mayu today, that are most relevant to forging a new path to development and well-being in Bolivia, and in conjunction with the new imperative for decolonization in national politics. I couch this within the current political discourse of the MAS government’s developmental model, and state policies and programs that continue along a “reconstituted neoliberal” path that derides the fundamental rethinking for integrating the economic with the social well being and agricultural practices of rural areas. I discuss the important role that a cultural economy plays, and the need for a critical recovery of history and a valuation of local knowledge for ensuring the self-sufficiency and authentic development of the municipality. I intertwine examples that show possibilities for putting interculturality and decolonization into practice, which should include the people of

Rumi Mayu in a national discourse for social change. I conclude with ways in which rural changes interact, or may interact, within a dialectic relationship with the state that restores indigenous rural places to spaces of self determination and actualization, rather than places of opposition and oppression.

## CHAPTER 2

### IN THE FIELD: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

*We live in a deeply colonial and racist society. These historical relationships shape and define all of the interactions that take place on a daily level, from the way you address people, the use of public space, even who gets preferential treatment in public transportation. Every one of these interactions reflects a deeply stratified society. None of us has any doubt that it will take decades to get rid of these deeply etched internalized colonial relations.*

Álvaro García Linera, Vice President of Bolivia, 2010<sup>9</sup>

People in the municipality of Rumi Mayu in Bolivia have been shaping their local ecologies for generations; to varying degrees, they maintain a close connection to their environment, especially in relation to forms of livelihood, food production and security, and systems of commodity exchange. Their daily lives illustrate the ways in which particular knowledges associated with local experiences, cultural beliefs, modernity/coloniality, and capitalism have encountered one another, evolving in ways that integrate old cures with new modern ones. It is a place—representative, yet uniquely its own—that has developed within the contours of its geographical, inter/intra cultural and resourcefulness possibilities; in many ways exemplifying how epistemic worlds meet, collide, cohabit and partially integrate. I try to capture pieces and chunks of this through the conversations and interactions that I encountered of everyday life on the dusty streets, central plaza, abode homes, renovated houses, original and modernized municipal buildings (mayor's office, schools, health posts, market), along the river banks, and in the fields and back of trucks.

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Controlling State Power, An Interview with Vice President Álvaro García Linera, by Linda Farthing, 2010.

Despite Rumi Mayu's rural location and distance from urban centers, its population has continued to deal with regional, national and global centers through physical encounters for increased usage of the communication technologies and media. The Bolivian state, in conjunction with international development agencies and institutions, are major contemporary actors affecting and/or influencing the ways of life in Rumi Mayu. Much of their program orientation and relationships with locals are positioned along hierarchal professional, gender and racial lines that can be traced to the colonial era, and the subsequent sociopolitical and economic policy spinoffs. As Vice President García Linera acknowledges in this chapter's opening epigram, much of Bolivian societal setbacks and tensions can be attributed to the stratification of people along racist attitudes that are enacted in a myriad of diverse ways. In most cases, political and socio economic policies were designed and carried out by ignoring—if not totally excluding—local knowledge and the involvement of indigenous populations and other marginalized citizens. This has occurred in most aspects of society, from schooling to health systems to agricultural programs. On the one hand, much of the national policies and actions during the past couple of decades have been highly contingent upon (or conditioned by) underlying power structures associated with international development agencies (e.g., the World Bank, USAID, the IMF) in ways that try to change the epistemological and social transformation of communities to better fit the global market economy. On the other hand, however, Rumi Mayuns have confronted this onslaught of imposed reforms through acts of resistance and accommodation, developing the municipality through working with their endowed natural resources, inter-generational ingenuities,

external contacts and maneuvering powers. Yet, despite centuries of resilience and alterations, and the rise of the MAS government's socialist agenda, the legacy of colonialism continues to work in ways that marginalize, insult and threaten to diminish Rumi Mayu's local culture and indigenous systems of knowledge, technology and local economy based on exchange. I discuss throughout this thesis many of the daily ins and outs that affect the "quality of life" in Rumi Mayu, that is in varying degrees affected both by the vestiges of historical colonialism, and by people's struggles to forge their own path.

Given the intrinsic nature of knowledge in regards to how we interpret our worlds, landscapes and livelihoods, this dissertation correlates fundamental understandings and interactions around food as a natural resource, and with personal and community health and well-being within the historical and contemporary context of Rumi Mayu. As highlighted in Chapter 1, I do not specifically study nutrition *per se*, but rather examine food in terms of nourishment within a conceptual framework that analyzes the interrelations between knowledge and agricultural production, health, schooling, politics and culture. The cultivation and preparation of foods is what largely binds Rumi Mayuns' relationships with their land, which provides nourishment in a myriad of ways. The postcolonial framework seeks to regenerate anticolonial epistemologies and "literary imaginations" that recover autonomies of place, and a "profound dialogue with the landscape" (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011: 4). These interconnections have been well stated by Edward Said: "For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow

restored... Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through imagination” (Said, 1994: 77, cited in DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011: 3).

Coloniality has had diverse affects on individuals, and while resistance and local epistemologies and cultures have persisted and evolved, the internal nature of colonialism and modernity has invoked long term damage on the physiological, cognitive, and psychic of people that curtails abilities and agency. In this sense, I utilize and integrate postcolonial theories with several other disciplines: political ecology, feminism, development, and critical pedagogy, in order to examine how Rumi Mayuns are positioned and respond to dominant sociopolitical models originating in the state and international development programs. I also combine an intersectional analysis approach, that looks at how multiple forms of oppression and divisions are developed and enhanced through state and development policies and practices. Drawing on Yuval-Davis (2006) and her critiques of “intersectionality,” my intention is not to “reinscribe the fragmented, additive model of oppression and essentialize specific social identities... [but rather] analyse the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities” (205).<sup>10</sup> The double, triple or quadruple oppression of women are not equally

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<sup>10</sup> The "articulation of multiple oppressions" (Brewer, 1993: 13) is “constituted [and reconstituted] through complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks” (ibid: 30). Mohanty points out the problematic in generalizing “women as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on generalized notions about their subordination” (2003: 31). To me, this applies not only to relations between Western feminists and Third World women, but also to relations within the Third World itself.

experienced, because they share a similar gender, low economic status or ethnic background; nor do women deal with multiple oppressions in similar ways.

Disrupting hegemonic knowledges opens up avenues to understand and value the plurality of differences among people (women *and* men)—their experiences, histories and positions, and their multiple and diverse forms of struggle, resistance and agency. Furthermore, the recognition and valuing of differences help to strengthen multiply forms of thinking and agency. This, in turn, holds great potential to decolonize dominant intellectual thoughts and knowledge practices that enable sexism, racism and oppression. My principal research question explores and analyzes epistemic borders through the ways in which the people who live in the municipality of Rumi Mayu are dealing with and addressing modernity/coloniality in their everyday lives. More specifically, how do Rumi Mayuns (re)negotiate relationships and (re)orient techniques, to actively change their situation that could provide a basis for decolonization projects? What are the major everyday tensions, obstacles and achievements, and how are they discussed? In addressing these questions, I am aware of the limitations of my encounters and understandings of the everyday lives of Rumi Mayun's, and how my own background and positionality (public university, white female student) can cloud my interactions and interpretations. Although I had years of experience in the field of “development” in rural areas, my work on this dissertation stimulated previous and different discomforts to surface, but also created newer lenses in which to look, listen and learn

In a circuitous fashion, from field work to self-reflection and writing, I have struggled with the concepts of development, dependency and postcolonial theory, and what these academic lessons really mean for Rumi Mayuns. I was also self-consciousness about how well I comprehended my encounters, and the fact of who am *I* to represent another; in other words, portraying / talking for others whom had not even asked me to do so. I most recalled Spivak, and the way in which she stresses how seeing through the eyes of the dominant structure or patronizing subject silences the object person (i.e. “can the subaltern speak”). In addition, she also critically looks for spaces in which the subaltern voices can emerge, and ways in which outsiders can hear their voices through a process of “unlearning” and “learning to learn from below,” that entails “two way conversations and non-exploitative learning...[that] establish...an ethical relationship” (Kapoor, 2008: 57). Thus, the foremost goal of my fieldwork was about immersion into town life through being part of the activities and dialogues that people were open to. While most Rumi Mayuns are mildly suspicious of outsiders, despite this they also have varying interests in other people and the outside world. I was particularly careful to pay attention to people’s energy, respecting their expressed (verbal or gestural) desire or non-desire to speak or interact with me. In the end, my fieldwork was never about just gathering data, but rather about building relationships with others on their own expressed terms, and sharing some of this through conversations and the writing of this dissertation.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Initially, I begin with an overview of the concept of colonialism in theory, and then discuss postcolonialism in a similar



fashion. I draw in the role of critical pedagogy to further enhance ways in which to reflect and move forward “the recuperation of interstitial spaces of intercultural communication, and for the creation of new epistemological platforms from which new forms of political imagination could emerge and proliferate” (Moraña, et al., 2008:17). In other words, how critical pedagogy can contribute to self-determination and freedom, which are the fundamental goals of decolonization. I also review theoretical concepts of feminist political ecology and development in relation to “place.” Finally, I utilize and blend a combination of theories to cross disciplinary frontiers and epistemes, in order to better understand and discuss the messiness of everyday life and its relationship with the land on which we stand.

### **Colonialism: Images and Materializations**

Colonialism encompasses the domination and control of a society’s means to live and develop according to their own intellect, culture, economy, ecology, politics, and desires (e.g. another form of imperialism).<sup>11</sup> The building and operation of six haciendas in the region of what is now the municipality of Rumi Mayu enforced local people into servitude, is but one example. The distinction between *colonialism* and *coloniality*, is that colonialism consists of the domination of a people’s external and physical world, whereas coloniality is about how this affects their internal and ontological worlds. Most studies deliberate on the economic, political and historical conditions of colonialism “without touching on...coloniality...which corresponds to

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<sup>11</sup> According to Frantz Fanon, “The term colonialism was created by the oppressor, is overly effective, overly emotional. It is situated in a national problem on a psychological plane...colonialism is not a type of individual relations, but rather a national territorial conquest and the oppression of a people” (1975: 88).

an epistemological expropriation” (Castro Gómez, 2008:268 – 269).<sup>12</sup> In other words, the “matrix of [colonial] power did not only entail militarily subjugating the indigenous peoples and dominating them by force (colonialism); it also attempted to radically change their traditional knowledge of the world, to adopt the cognitive horizon of the dominator as their own (coloniality)” (ibid; 281). Knowledge, like race, class and gender, became categorized and measured as superior and inferior; the knowledge that the western curriculum trained professionals bring to the municipality is considered superior to the inter-generational knowledge that Rumi Mayuns have evolved for centuries. Realms of knowledge were, and continue to be, validated by ethnic and cognitive superiority in which that that is “not produced in the centers of power or in the circuits controlled by them is declared irrelevant and ‘pre-scientific’” (ibid: 279). This is also furthered analyzed in terms of a “geopolitics of knowledge” (Dussell, 1977) and the “hegemony of certain types of knowledge” (Mignolo, 2001: 429). Derived from Wallerstein, Quijano, Dussel’s and Mignolo’s perspective, “European modernity is not an *independent*, autopoietic, self-referential system, but instead is *part* of a world-system: in fact, its center” (ibid: 437). In this sense, “knowledge becomes, on one side of the spectrum, part of the social reality that shall be improved, managed, or domesticated” (ibid: 436).

Colonialism, and new forms of “transmogrified colonialism,” or “colonial modernity” together with the insidious nature of “capitalist modernity,” can

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of the “coloniality of power” is derived directly from the writings of Anibal Quijano.

fractionalize campesinos/as, complicating forms of solidarity.<sup>13</sup> I use the term colonial modernity to refer to the model of development that is coextensive with colonialism and Eurocentric modernity that has both ideological and material/institutional dimensions to it that are congruent with one another that therefore make it hegemonic.<sup>14</sup> On many instances I witnessed heavy handed competition and brawls between local campesinas/os and local authorities around issues ranging from simply selling ice cream; to selective town ordinances of whose pigs could wander the center of town and whose pigs got shot as a show of force; to imposed municipal community projects to widen the streets, which encroached on people's agricultural production lands without compensation; or the installation of a town sewage system that created stagnate water holes for mosquitoes to proliferate, and then later re-routed the raw sewage into a previously relatively clean river. Many Bolivians themselves are involved in the perpetuation of a colonial discourse; they put on, and live in, the masks of their oppressors (cf. Fanon and Freire). Or, as some feminists point out, "the colonized always appropriate the masters' tools" (Lorde 1984), and "redeploy them toward their own interest" (Calás and Smircich, 1996: 239). This, in addition to new and evolving manifestations of colonization,<sup>15</sup> can

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<sup>13</sup> The term "transmogrified colonialism" is my own form of reference based from observations in the ways in which Spanish colonial attitudes and behaviors in Bolivia have been transformed into newer manifestations of subjectivity, resulting in disjunctions and shifts in class, gender and labor positions.

<sup>14</sup> The terms "colonial modernity," and "capitalist modernity," are concepts taken from Timothy Michell's book *Questions of Modernity*, 2000. Many scholars link capitalism with colonialism with modernity, i.e. Edgardo Lander, 2000; Aníbal Quijano, 1997, 2000; Walter D. Mignolo, 1999, 2000; Fernando Coronil, 1996; Aihwa Ong, 1988; Jose de Souza Silva (2006); and, Ramón Grosfoguel (2006).

<sup>15</sup> "Colonial discourses," as explain by Ong, are "different strategies of description and understanding which were produced out of the historical emergence of...transnational network of power relations" (1988, 73). Three examples of these include: 1) *recolonization*, which "permitted the reproduction of domination models originating in property holder and investment elites, who relied upon appointed

alter the formation of coalitions, social movements and solidarity, especially in remote marginalized areas. Many Third World “professionals” (teachers, nurses, doctors, agronomists), and other NGO workers (educators, community development workers) ignore their pasts, their culture and their local practices, and work in ways that actually only *perpetuate* patriarchy, matriarchy, classism, and racism. They hire marginalized people to work for them, treat them as inferiors, and the “simultaneity” of oppression multiplies, further ensnarls and solidifies injustice and discrimination.<sup>16</sup>

These are, by nature, examples of what many theorists have termed as *internal* and *internalized* colonialism. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui uses the notion of “internal colonialism” to analyze the “superiority complex” that Bolivian middle class intellectuals exhibit toward the indigenous populations, and all the political deviations that go along with it (2006: 9).<sup>17</sup> For his part, Gonzales Casanova

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privileges granted by colonial power centers” (Yapu, 2006: 5); 2) *cultural colonization*, as described by Bonfil Batalla as a historical process of “*desindianización*” (“de-Indianization”); and 3) the native population has a particular and distinct identity based in their own culture, which they are forced to renounce. “This exclusion signifies that the culture of the dominated pueblo does not even recognize their own value. It is an incompatible, denied culture...The profound difference between the imposed colonial order of the 16th century and the previous forms of domination is that the new subjugation of ‘the other’ is denied; their culture and their project becomes incompatible and inexistent. The saturation in the system of cultural control clearly demonstrates this exclusion, resulting in the imposition of a different civilization” (Bonfil Batalla, 2005: 170-171). The “*territorial colonization*,” is the “colonization of new land.” The colonization of land, coupled with the colonization of culture, allows for the “immoral creation of captured markets and facilitates access to abundant raw materials, cheap labor, docile mentalities and disciplined bodies.”

<sup>16</sup> King uses the term, “the modifier ‘multiple,’” which she refers to as “several simultaneous oppressions but also to the multiplicative relationships among them” (1997: 223).

<sup>17</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui elaborates that internal colonialism operates through a subjugation-like domination, and through the restoration of the colonial model (such as *internal* colonialism, see below), it is able to proliferate; this elucidates the continued stratification of Bolivian society, its internal contradictions and mechanisms of exclusions (1993: 30). Kamat notes that “some scholar-activists in India have posed the thesis of ‘internal colonization,’ wherein rural areas and people have been colonized by the state for urban-industrial development” (Kamat, 2002: 26).

succinctly sums up the intrinsic nature of what were originally externalized forms of colonialism on contemporary indigenous communities:

Today's indigenous problem is essentially a problem of internal colonialism. Indigenous communities are internal colonies. Indigenous communities are colonies located within national boundaries. Indigenous communities have characteristics of a colonized society (Gonzales Casanova, 2005: 141).

Rivera Cusicanqui refers to this as the “internalized mentality of colonialism, which tells us that the enemy is within” (Rivera Cusicanqui interview with Farthing, *NACLA* 2007: 9). Colonial roots are deeply embedded in state institutions, and reproduce themselves “internally within the authoritarian structures found in the left parties, “such as, clientelist relationships” (ibid, 9). These attitudes and beliefs can be traced to concepts of race and status (inferiority and superiority) as a means to access capital through salaries and the market, which leads to “associated cultures” and a society geared toward “these determinations” (Quijano, 2000: 217): “Colonialism is constituted from modernity” (Mignolo, 2000: 75), propelled by characterizing ethnicities, and then by grouping them into singularities of race (Quijano, 2000). As a lived example of this, one man from the *Cabecera del Valle* of Rumi Mayu explained to me: “Here they say Indians (*indios*), pigs (*cochinos*); some people call us that, here the problems are always caused by the *indio*. Those that call us this have a little more money, they're a little richer. Yes, this makes us feel a little bad.”

Colonialism operates through structures of domination and difference that locate women and men dissimilarly, constructing a “politicized gender consciousness”

(Mohanty, 2003: 55). For example, as one woman told me of her experience at one public municipal meeting held in Rumi Mayu, “I walked out of the meeting. I was so mad to hear the mayor tell all the women that they are lazy (*flojas*), that they sleep late and don’t do much, that this is why they are poor. [The other women] just sat there in silence.” Intersecting oppressions of race, ethnicity, class and gender collude in a “simultaneity of oppression” (Brewer, 1993: 13),<sup>18</sup> in which “feminism is not just the purview of women (but of women and men)” (ibid: 55). As Mohanty further explains:

Gender and race are relational terms: they foreground a relationship (and often a hierarchy) between races and genders. To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being “women” has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or sexuality, just with gender. But no one “becomes a women” (in Simone de Beauvoir’s sense) purely because she is female. Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex...It is the intersections of the various systemic networks of class, race, (hetero) sexuality, and nation, then, that position us as “women”...[in which] relations of power...are not reducible to binary oppositions or oppressor/oppressed relations...[but to] multiple, fluid structures of domination that intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures.... In other words, systems of racial, class, and gender domination do not have identical effects on women [and men] in Third World countries (2003: 55).

According to Quijano, the myth of a “Eurocentric” version of modernity originated in the “unilateral and unidirectional” projection of civilization, based on

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<sup>18</sup> The “articulation of multiple oppressions” (Brewer, 1993: 13) is “constituted [and reconstituted] through complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks” (ibid: 30). Mohanty points out the problematic in generalizing “women as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on generalized notions about their subordination” (2003: 31). To me, this applies not only to relations between Western feminists and Third World women, but also to relations within the Third World itself.

the ideas and myths arising from Europe's "central and dominant...capitalist world colonial/modern" position, which obtained its "vigor" from the "ideas of race as a basic criteria for classifying a social universe of the world population" (Quijano, 2000: 220).<sup>19</sup> This was also attached to patriarchy, whereby "the notion of the [colonial] ruler is seen as a white, masculine, self-disciplined protector of women and morals...this was accomplished through the creation of the 'English gentleman' as the natural and legitimate rule—a creation based on a belief system that drew on social Darwinism, evolutionary anthropology, chivalry myths, Christianity, medial and 'scientific' treatises, and the literary tradition of empire" (Mohanty, 2003: 59).<sup>20</sup>

The historical result of this colonial power has two decisive implications:

The first is obvious: all of the communities were robbed of their rightful and individual ("*propias y singulares*") historical identities. The second is, maybe, less obvious, but no less decisive: their racial, colonial, negative identity implicated a pillaging of their place in history regarding the cultural production of humanity. In the future they are not only inferior races, but also only have the capability to produce inferior cultures. This also implicated their new re-allocation in the new historic time constituted first in America, and then with Europe: moving forward will be condemned by the past. In other words, the power of the patron that was founded in colonialism also implicates a cognitive patron, a new perspective of knowledge within

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<sup>19</sup> More specifically, Quijano proceeds to give an example of the more well-known, "developed and sophisticated" ethnic groups, such as, "Aztec, Mayans, Chimús, Aymaras, Incas, Chibchas, etc." Highlighting that within a period of three hundred years, these different ethnicities were grouped into "only one identity: indios" (Indians). "This new identity was racial, colonial and negative" (2000: 221). Quijano points out the similarity to how African tribes, such as the "ashantis, yorubas, zulús, congos bacongós, etc." were collectively grouped and identified as "Negroes" ("blacks" or "niggers"), and utilized as slaves (ibid, 221).

<sup>20</sup> Mohanty cites Helen Callaway (1987) study of European women in colonial Nigeria, in which Callaway states that "white women did not travel to the colonies until much later, and then too they were seen as 'subordinate and unnecessary appendages,' not as rulers. Thus, the British colonial state established a particular form of rule through the bureaucratization of gender and race specifically in terms of the institution of colonial service. This particular ruling apparatus made certain relations and behaviors visible, for instance, the boundaries of the relations between white men in the colonial bureaucracy and 'native' men and women, and the behavior of imperial rulers who seemed to 'rule without actually exerting power" (Mohanty, 2003: 59).

which all that is non-European is of the past, in this way inferior, and always primitive (Quijano, 2000: 221).

In Bolivia, the very term “campesino” was introduced into the national lexicon following the 1952 National Revolution, which grouped together and labeled all the agricultural laborers and their families that lived in the countryside; the majority of whom were, and continue to be, indigenous peoples or of indigenous descent (*mestizos*).<sup>21</sup> The state’s strategy was to promote patriotism and nation building through lumping together 36 indigenous groups into one category; this also reinforced their destiny to be the “peasant” working class—a more disciplined labor class to serve the needs of the state and their elite “European” descendent class. This move was an attempt to obliterate indigeneity by trying to disregard indigenous roots; this by informing the indigenous people that they were all now *campesinos*; in other words, no longer indigenous, let alone Quechua, Aymara, Uru, Weenhayek, Guaraní, Moxeno, T’simane, Yuracaré, Sirionó, and so forth. By glossing over indigeneity—its memory and identity—all citizens could now be separated by profession and class, and fall under the rubric of a one state apparatus.<sup>22</sup>

Fausto Reinaga observed that the 1952 Bolivian nationalist political process was locked in step with the modern-colonial world system—which was not compelled toward societal justice and wellbeing, but rather was more interested in

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<sup>21</sup> The literal translation of “campesino” is “peasant.” “Mestizo” refers to the racial mixing of those of indigenous and European background.

<sup>22</sup> The Bolivian historian Rossana Barragán points out that the “stigmatizing content of the terms like ‘Indian’ or ‘mestizo’ have been continuously renewed...[and that] new differentiating strategies (Bourdieu 1993: 57), through the power of categorization and reconstruction of hierarchical differences...[are maintained] because identities continue to be labeled, stigmatized, and colonized” (1997: 63).



characterizing and molding “the Bolivian *cholaje*<sup>23</sup> ‘intelligence’ [to] imitate in simian fashion ‘echo for echo and gesture for gesture’ that of Spain, France and Russia” (1967: 231). In response to this Bolivian reality, Reinaga stated that “the *indio* should not take another name, ‘*sino el suyo propio*’ [but rather his own]: *Indio*” (1969: 10); in other words, he proposed that the political reality and identity with the concept of *pachukuti*<sup>24</sup> be the energetic force. The full intent of this is to destroy colonial representations step by step, thereby opening up and giving passage to other notions of a society that had not been thought of by the criollo-mestizo, but from the same condition of the colonized indio, since in the indio not only is resistance found, but also a well-formed ethical social political thought of plural and intercultural character (Fernández Osco, 2010).

Although recent indigenous and social movements are pushing forward much long-awaited and beneficial changes, and have been reclaiming with pride their distinct indigenousness, the classification of “campesino” is still commonly used, and is frequently preceded with a proper noun; i.e., “Quechua campesino.” With this stigma adheres the inferiority of a group of people that, Quijano theorizes, will only reproduce an inferior race, and have the “capability to produce inferior cultures.” In addition, “racism is [also] another barrier to solidarity between women” (Hooks: 2000 489)—one just has to visit any Bolivian rural town, or walk down any street in any city, to see and feel these results and reproductions of 500 years of colonialism:

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<sup>23</sup> *Cholaje* refers to the process of become *cholo*, a frequently (but not always) derogatory term for mestizo; a version of “half-breed.”

<sup>24</sup> *Pachukuti* refers to the native Andean notion of a moment of radical change in time and space, in which orders and hierarchies are reversed, and when there is a transformation of one world ending and another beginning.

the farmers are undervalued and underpaid indigenous or mestizo “campesinos/as;” the maids in the cities are their daughters;<sup>25</sup> the construction workers in the cities are their sons; the vendors in the city market are mainly “campesina” transplants; the new generation of “campesino/a” high school graduates are stacking shelves in the supermarkets; and so forth.

Some campesinas/os break the mold by learning a profession, and often times try to blend into the criollo-mestizo middle class by rejecting their roots.<sup>26</sup> As also indicated by Quijano, the aftermath of the “colonial model” (*patrón colonial*) has become imbedded in the individual psyche, materializing as a “cognitive model” that aligns with Westernized perspectives and knowledge, and thus rejects that which is non-European and linked to the past, “in this way inferior, and always primitive.” As one woman from the higher altitude region of Rumi Mayu succinctly stated to me: “They enter the school and come out *mozos* (gentlemen). Because they are now more refined, they call us *imillas* (little girls), *lloqhallas* (little boys), *indias*.”

The colonial model—in this sense a hierarchical system of whites and criollos socially characterized as being on top—or, the “internalized mentality of colonialism”—also materializes in the self-maintenance of class and gender roles and destinies, and/or could also be seen as a form of resistance to protect one’s

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<sup>25</sup> See Leslie Gill (1994), *Precarious Dependencies: Gender, Class, and Domestic Service in Bolivia*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>26</sup> By way of example, in conversation one day an Aymara friend in La Paz told me a story about how his friend’s nephew became a lawyer, was fairly successful, and purchased a house in an upper middle class barrio of the city. Shortly after his nephew moved into his new residence, the uncle went to visit him, but was stopped outside the front gate by his nephew, who informed him that he wasn’t welcome, and that he shouldn’t come back.

family. As one young man from the valley in Rumi Mayu observed about the higher altitude communities, from which his mother is from:

Almost all the girls stay in the cordillera. They have huge flocks of sheep, usually all the girls; since they are very young dedicate themselves to taking care of the sheep, and for this reason they have fewer opportunities. Also, their fathers and mothers believe that their daughters have to take care of the sheep, because how else will they spend their lives; how will they survive if they don't have sheep. They think that the sheep are eternal, but it isn't like that. For this reason, so many girls are illiterate in the cordillera.

Colonialism instituted the imagery of racial, gendered and cultural opposites (colonizer / colonized), manipulating social spaces and opportunities. It draws on what Sivanandan describes as “a color line that divides the power line with the poverty line” (1981: 300). In looking at racial formation in apartheid South Africa, Sivanandan observes that, “the racist ideology of South Africa is an explicit, systematic, holistic ideology of racial superiority—so explicit that it makes clear that the White working class can only maintain its standard of living on the basis of a Black underclass, so systemic as to guarantee that the White working class will continue to remain a race for itself, so holistic as to ensure that the color line is the power line is the poverty live” (ibid: 300). The Bolivian indigenous populations have also been excluded from the socio-economic and political process and development of the country with similarities to an apartheid state based on injustice and a marginalization from opportunities. According to Patzi Paco:

Citizenship is based on an *equality of opportunities*, as the fundamental concept of democracy, it has only been an element of discourse to legitimize the established colonial hierarchy, in which the access to these opportunities, in all areas (political, education, science, etc.) were always an exclusive monopoly of the white criollo-metizo chaste, whom held all of the rights and privileges in all spheres of the society. This chaste, which were born in

contra to the Indians, were systematically dependent—in their lives, successes and blunders—and served by them. However, the criollo-metizo chaste reproduced under the rules of endogamy so that they would not decompose; in other words, their components marry between themselves, and pass on the heredity of their privileges among themselves. The rest of society, in this case the indigenous, is excluded from these opportunities, founded in an unequal citizenship that is precisely the characteristic of the coloniality of power (“*colonialidad del poder*”) (2006: 53). Nevertheless, although campesinas/os have been “subjugated,” oppressed,

and excluded they have not been “*vencidos*”—conquered, vanquished, defeated (as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui demonstrates in her much acclaimed book, *Oppressed But Not Defeated* [1986]).<sup>27</sup> As the Quechua-Aymara Bolivian intellectual Reinaga also emphasized, the lived realities of colonialism and its subsequent marginalization simultaneously created apertures of self/communal introspection, resistance and insurgency. Throughout the municipality of Rumi Mayu, everyday campesinos/as enact their own manner of influence and agency; the strength in their survival skills, culture, “ethnic” economy, and persistence to meet their needs in itself exemplifies numerous forms of struggles and resistance.<sup>28</sup> Women and men—together and separately—contest and subvert the colonial process at various junctures.

Historically, the survival of the colonialists was indebted to the accumulated

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<sup>27</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui’s book analyzes the 1979 katarista-indigenous uprising in Bolivia, in which she argues for a “radical and profound decolonization” process of the political, economic structures, but most importantly the ways in which we perceive the world.

<sup>28</sup> Some recent acts of organizing in defense of local rights include in Rumi Mayu: running the mayor out of town for corruption; the *Valle* communities organized to demand equipment and supplies to build riverbank supports, after the river had overflowed and washed away agricultural land and produce; the *Valle* communities also organized to have the local priest arrested for purportedly sexually molesting boys in the Church run boarding school for high school students; some of the *Cordillera* communities organized and insisted on receiving electricity, and got it; one *Cabecera del Valle* community organized and built its own boarding school and high school, and then demanded that the Ministry of Education provide them with teachers and a director; one community in the *Altura* is in the process of organizing of a community run agricultural cooperative with all interested and willing local residents; and in another community in the *Altura*, an NGO agronomist told me, “the people here are very organized and take action...if they don’t like someone, they send them out of town on a donkey—I witnessed two agronomists and one NGO worker get sent out this way.”

knowledge and practices of pre-1492 native Americans: agricultural practices, such as potatoes in the Andes and maize in Mexico, contributed to storing food and a staple diet; environmental management of expansive land masses enabled settlements and cities to flourish (Mann 2005); and mineral mines to be exploited to provide the tools and riches that financed the “modernities” of the mutated tentacle of colonialism (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2000).

But again, I would like to point out that, in the case of Rumi Mayu, not all local state professionals (e.g., teachers, health workers, administrators and staff at the mayor’s office) and NGO workers are discriminatory and oppressive; however, in my opinion, most do exhibit attitudes and behaviors associated with Quijano’s “cognitive model,” Rivera Cusicanqui’s interpretation of “internal colonialism,” and Lorde’s “reappropriation of the masters’ tools.” Some brief examples of open relationships between the “outsider” with the local population include: one agronomist, who explained how he valued learning from the campesinos, especially their ancient beliefs to plant according to the points of the moon and constellation movements; and another agronomist told me of his admiration for the ancient terracing practices in some of the higher altitudes, pointing out that although they have deteriorated they do continue to product lush foliage, and that he would like to work with the campesinos/as to explore the possibility to re-manage and reutilize these terraces. A “work for food” program manager linked the reason why several communities in the *Cordillera* were more organized, to a regional NGO; as he noted: “I’m sure it’s because they have received better assistance and training, they work a

lot with ASUR,<sup>29</sup> an institution that thinks more of the community needs than personal and institutional benefits. I guess this benefits the community, don't you think so? They also have high quality professionals that know how to organize people."

Yet, for whatever reason—centuries of marginalization by national elites, the state, or the international imperial class; campesinos need for cold cash; curiosity; a desire to have more things; and/or the consequences of colonialism; most people do seem to be captivated by the spell of a "Eurocentric" modernity as the *only* means to "progress." Progress has been associated with the idea of "development" that was first introduced in 1492, linked with the dichotomy "civilized-primitive, used by the Europeans during imperial colonialism, transformed after World War II into a "developed-underdeveloped" dichotomy spearheaded by the United States during "imperialism without colonies" (de Souza Silva, 2006: 211; Escobar, 1995: 2-3). The idea of development is to dominate, according to de Souza Silva, under the following pretext:

It is disguised under different names (progress, modernization), hidden under different faces (civilization, development), adorned with lovely promises (peace, well-being), provides hypocritical offers (aid, cooperation), is under an evolutionary focus phases, stages), through global designs (colonialism, globalization), will surely resolve world social problems (hunger, poverty), using neutral forces (science, technology), will also design world regulations (international laws, Free Trade agreements and oversight institutions (military, multilateral agencies), in order to institutionalize and legalize

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<sup>29</sup> *Antropólogos del Sur Andino* (ASUR) began in 1985 with a small grant from the Inter-American Foundation to investigate and implement a cultural revitalization program with the Jalq'a indigenous group. The result of this work has led to the cultural revival and international recognition of Bolivian weavings; the strengthening of ritual lifestyles (dance and songs); the promotion of popular participation activities (organization and leadership); and skills-training workshops (literacy and technical skills). This has evolved out of, but always rooted in, the community: ownership was always in community hands. See Healy (2001).

consequences (inequality, injustice), meanwhile, what development really promises, at whatever cost, is economic growth that benefits the strongest (2006: 211).

Given the complexity of these circumstances, my intent is not to romanticize people's lives, but to attend to the social fabric of everyday life, and the shifts in relationships, opportunities, and affiliations through examining the disjunctures, apertures and displacements facilitated by NGOs, local government prospects, and the monies dispensed via Bolivia's Law of Popular Participation (LLP).<sup>30</sup> As Lesley Gill suggests, "It is clearly not a matter of documenting the demise of the state, the rise of the market, the spread of NGOs, and the concomitant implications for social life. The key issue is how new institutional relationships reflect changing forms of engagement, accommodation, domination, and immiseration at the local level" (Gill: 2000: 11). Yet at the same time it must be understood that "seeking to separate colonizing and colonized cultures analytically in the Bolivian context undermines the possibility of understanding to what degree all participants in the on-running colonial and postcolonial encounter have internalized one another" (Abercrombie, 1998: 418).

### **Postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism is highly debated in terms of its origin and exact theoretical nature. Although the Incas themselves semi-colonized much of what is now the nation-state of Bolivia, the colonizing consequences from and since the Spanish

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<sup>30</sup> The Law of Popular Participation, passed in 1994, decentralized twenty percent of the federal budget down to 314 sectional municipalities (Inter American Development Bank, 2000), thus giving more power and autonomy to municipal governments while legitimizing community participation and groups in local government (Medeiros, 2001).

conquest of Peru in 1532 were far more brutal, insidious and profound—physically, mentally, culturally, environmentally, and economically. The colonial domination of the Incas largely focused on utilizing the diverse cultures and ecologies to build a vibrant and integrated economy (Klein, 2003; Murra, 1975), whereas Spanish colonialism used militaristic tactics to suppress cultures, enslave labor, plunder the environment, and “eliminate the ‘many forms of knowledge’ of native populations and to replace them with new ones more appropriate for the civilizing purposes of the colonial regime” (Castro Gómez, 2008: 281). Therefore, in terms of identifying a specific post-colonial period, most Latin Americanists focus on the time period following Bolivia’s “liberation” from Spain. Yet, I would like to clarify that despite Bolivian “independence,” the indigenous people continue to struggle with a state model that marginalizes their way of life, and oppresses their way of thinking and being (e.g. coloniality). While the MAS administration has pushed forward some major philosophical and judicial laws, the Bolivian state has never performed acts of catharsis from colonialism that allow for a restructuring—a self rule-- that would rebuild and create from and within their own originalities and pluralities of cultures, ecologies, literacies and economies. Rather the republic of Bolivia transits in tune with the modernization practices of a capitalist economic system dictated by western powers; in other words, the state structure operates within a western liberal model juxtaposed to that of the communal model of diverse indigenous populations (Castro Gómez, 2001).



“Breaking free” from colonialism and coloniality to develop anew is what many Bolivian people have been doing, and what the current Bolivian state under the MAS administration proclaims to be striving for, and performing through its decolonization proposals and programs. While the MAS government has made some bold, and seemingly drastic moves, most prominently through the 2009 Constitution, autonomies, nationalization of state resources and enterprises, health and education program development, and the sponsoring of internationally acclaimed scholar panel conferences in La Paz and elsewhere (featuring the likes of Spivak, Wallerstein, Zizek, etc.), a closer look and deeper critique reveals how much of the current economic and political policies and their epistemological basis are rife with colonial and neocolonial threads (Regalsky 2005, Webber, 2011). As Casanova rendered years ago, colonialism is an “internal phenomenon” (1965: 27), and expressed in the peculiarities and culture of everyday life (Sanjinés, 2011: 289). In Rumi Mayu, as well as within the state scene the crux of coloniality materializes into mixtures, amalgamations of varying degrees of agency to non-agency that are heavily influenced and determined by one’s experiences, perceptions, positionality, opportunities, and interactions with those that one encounters and is surrounded by. In this way, it is even more to provide expansive spaces for diverse voices and actions of people to surface, to be heard and seen, in how they confront coloniality that empower epistemological difference and de-colonial ways of being and actions. As Hulme emphasized, “nothing in the word postcolonial implies an achieved divorce from colonialism; rather, it implies the process of breaking free from colonialist ways of thinking (2008: 292).

Postcolonialism, as a concept and a theory, is fluid, focusing on the heterogeneity of marginalized (subaltern) people, valuing difference, and “reconstructing other kinds of histories” (Bhabha, 1995b: 87, cited in Kapoor, 2008: 9); it “challenge[s] colonial power and perception” (Kohn and McBride, 2011: 13). The lens of postcolonialism transcends looking at colonialism itself from binary categorizations (civilized / uncivilized) and fixed points of opposition between the centers of domination (the metropolis; e.g., Washington D.C., La Paz), and the places and subjects of exploitation (haciendas, mines, municipal and community development personnel, indigenous populations), to interrogating the manifestations of colonialism on the subjugated, as well as the subjugating. Postcolonialism acknowledges the historical tensions and reconfigurations between pre-colonial and colonial encounters, seeking to expose and understand counter-movements, diversity and multiplicity from the subaltern’s history and viewpoint. In other words, whereas coloniality focuses on the dominant power enforced through colonialism’s systems of knowledge and economics, postcolonial concepts gives space to the “existence of other simultaneous cultural ‘voices’ and forms of producing knowledge” (Castro-Gómez. 2008: 268). As such, postcolonialism “implies a process of liberation from the mediums of colonial thinking” (Hulme 1996: 6, cited in Garcés, 2009b: 63), that “goes from the inside out....giv[ing] us an understanding of the long-standing endogenous practices of the peasantry which lend to a necessary reconceptualization of democracy that is more in line with subalternity and with the multicultural nature of our societies” (Sanjinés, 2001: 308). In other words, to de-center the celebrity of a Eurocentric history and way of life; to seeing and learning from other people’s

history, and ways of life. As Mohanty acknowledges, “uncovering and reclaiming subjected knowledges is one way to lay claim to alterative histories” (2003: 196).

In sum, postcolonialism does not imply any *disassociation* with colonialism, but rather seeks to understand the diverse evolution of distinct, and the plurality and fluidity in which people maneuver within those spaces. Mignolo uses “border thinking [to] foreground the force and creativity of knowledges subalternized during a long process of colonization” (2000: 11). He proposes a postcolonialism that brings to light the subjugated ways of thinking that resist coloniality; as Mignolo explains as a “thinking process in which people living under colonial domination had to enact in order to negotiate their life and subaltern condition...as a constant move and force toward autonomy and liberation in every order of life” (ibid: 100). Disrupting this “system of geopolitical values, of racial configurations, and of hierarchical structures of meaning and knowledge” can help decolonize western domination of knowledge, allowing to see and validate other ways of thinking, knowing and doing.

While subaltern people have experienced similar oppressions and brutalities, this does not imply that all subjected people think the same, or share an epistemological unity. Mohanty's (2003) notions of postcolonialism complements Mignolo's “other way of thinking,” calling for solidarity “across the borders”—geographic space, class, gender and ethnicity—and her focus on how the experiences of Third World women can help expand and strengthen coalitions (on their own terms) that aim to dismantle patriarchy and other power hierarchies. This dissertation

uses Mignolo's and Mohanty's concepts of border crossings and thinking to perceive and interpret local knowledge occurring in and from the borders of development, ecology, and "well-being." There are many scholars who study (post)colonialism, of whom I rely mostly on Bolivian and Latin American intellectuals. I do so in order to highlight the strong quality of theoretical work that is published in Bolivia, and because of the proximity of their theoretical concepts to what I saw in Rumi Mayu. I thus hope that this study will be able to contribute to these much needed debates.

### **Postcoloniality in Bolivia**

Racism and knowledge have been positioned by a Eurocentric hegemony of thought, economic models, relationships with nature, western systems of education, and scientific technologies. In observing the interactions between professionals and *campesinos* in Rumi Maya, a different type of knowledge was expressed according to a hierarchy of social identities; in other words, a "coloniality of power through knowledge (Quijano, 2000). Professionals arrived in Rumi Mayu with knowledge attained through western curriculums (myself included), while *campesinos* have their own way of thinking, doing, knowing, and analyzing. While I did encounter a scattered few professionals who acknowledged local practices and knowledge, they still portrayed their own brand of acquired knowledge as superior. My concern here, however, is not so much the *particularities* of the differing types of knowledge floating around; but more so, how western knowledge is frequently *projected and accepted* as automatically "right." What holds back, or prevents, constructive critical analyses?

Most people (local Rumi Mayuns, as well as visiting professionals) can be very insightful and critical, yet they overwhelming (although not all) tend to seek, and/or allow, modernization projects to affect their communities in ways that subvert their own knowledges and practices that work well, or could be expanded or improved upon, but not necessarily erased. For example, the displacement of a complex system of agricultural production and exchange for mono crops and markets; *curanderos* (natural healers) who are eliminated and replaced by bio-medical nurses and doctors, etc. Who decides on the hierarchy of knowledge? Why do systems of knowledge themselves not collaborate? Where does the doubt and insecurity come from?

These concerns were very apparent with our neighbor in Rumi Mayu, don Sabino. He was a versatile, intelligent, extremely hard working agriculturalist, florist, builder, and artisan, with extensive knowledge of the local flora and fauna, including animal husbandry. Yet, he would continually ask my husband Brian and myself how to do things, or if he was doing it the “right way.” This included such activities as planting vegetables, to curing his sick goats, to how much television kids should watch, to what does the natural gas referendum meant and how he should vote on it. Brian and I often discussed why don Sabino would ask us such questions, even after we had long since explained our own backgrounds and emphasized the strength of his expertise over ours. Our conclusion was that he simply wanted to learn more, to improve his own practices, and to be more productive; and, since we came from a western country and have university degrees—like the other professionals that come to Rumi Mayu and project a superiority of knowledge—we

too should know “more” and “better.” As the years passed, don Sabino—although he continues to ask lots of question—began to teach us more and more about how to do things (plant potatoes, shift wheat chaff, make singani, etc.). And in addition, we continued to share only the information we felt confident about (for example, that bit about why too much television is not good for kids, or how to cultivate eggplant).

To analyze the interactions of professionals and locals, as well as between locals who live in the same community or with other communities, I draw on Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo’s classification of ethnicities and races (physical biological attributes) into hierarchical categories of inferior (ignorant, savage) and superior (intelligent, civilized), as the basis in which professionals working in Rumi Mayu find their domination as “legitimized” by the act of attaining a technical or university degree. In different contexts, I draw upon Quijano’s “*colonialidad del poder*” (coloniality of power)<sup>31</sup> to demonstrate how the concept of race is used as a means to subordinate and exploit labor. Furthermore, Mignolo’s notion of “*diferencia colonial*” expands upon this with the concept or the process of classifying races into work divisions for exploitation, in order to fill the needs of colonialism and capitalism.

The complexities of Bolivians dominating other Bolivians—i.e., teachers’ rude treatment of parents, or doctors of patients—illustrate ways in which colonialism has been internalized. These actions occur in a myriad of ways and intensities, of which I believe most people are not aware of, such as the connections between behaviors and “a form of socioeconomic-cultural domination based in

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<sup>31</sup> Mignolo relates that “two independent local histories were intercrossed and articulated by coloniality of power” (2001, 428).

capitalist hegemony and racism, and historically exercised by local and regional governing elites over subaltern groups” (Johnson, 2010: 140). As González Casanova theorized years ago, colonized peoples are “culturally heterogeneous and distinct,” thus internalizing colonialism differently (1976: 240).<sup>32</sup>

Although colonialism as an institution has ceased, it continues though a “matrix of colonial power” most associated with modernity (Garcés, 2009b: 8). This occurs through “four interrelated domains: control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institutions, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education); and the control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity)” (Quijano, cited in Mignolo, 2010: 3). While drawing upon several scholars’ theories of the concepts and the interconnection of colonialism and modernity, Ann Ferguson links together these academics in the following manner:

...modernism is a set of ethical, political and metaphysical presuppositions derived from the European Enlightenment...the modernist worldview is based on the following beliefs: that human nature is rational and self-interested; that each individual human has inherent human rights regardless of his or her culture of origin; that the capitalist economic development is good because it leads to progress; that such development will benefit all humans in the long run; and that human ethics and knowledge are capable of being developed from a universal, impartial standpoint (1998: 96-97).

Intrigue and a quest for new knowledge and things intertwined with the righteous humanistic angle associated with modernity empowers a colonial modernity to live on in ways that ensnarl people into a market economy to purchase

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<sup>32</sup>The concept of “*colonialismo interno*” (internal colonialism) in Latin America can be traced to Pablo González Casanovas (Mexico), who first published his ideas in 1965; Rodolfo Stavenhagen, (Mexico), also in 1965; and the *katarista* movement in Bolivia, whose thoughts were heavily influenced by the work of Fausto Reinaga in the late 1970s and 1980s (Yapa, 2006: 10-11).

newer technologies (computers, cell phones) and goods (noodles, plastic buckets, shower heads). While innovation and newness is strived for as a means to attain more comfortable living situations, security and fun, this frequently occurs without giving much thought and analysis to how colonial modernity can create inequities and injustice, and deprive creativity, difference and heterogeneity. On the other hand, aspects derived from modernity can be used and maneuvered in ways that can be beneficial. Although my study presents a myriad ways in which Rumi Mayuns are affected by, and in many instances perpetuate, a colonial modernity, my aim is not to draw a line between “hard” sciences and “indigenous” local knowledge, but rather to gain insights of local understandings regarding ecologies and health, and also of the various agencies that influence local realities—a variable which includes differing perceptions and learning processes between age groups and gender, both positive and negative. Therefore, as each “place” has experienced its own history and course with modernity, the ensuing present is unique to their engagements and responses with modernity, as Mitchell explains:

This constitution of the modern as the world-as-picture...is the source of modernity's enormous capacity for replication and expansion, and at the same time the origin of its instability, the source of the liability that opens it up to rearticulation and displacement. No representation can ever match its original, especially when the original exists only as something promised by a multiplicity of other imitations and repetitions...Every performance of the modern is the producing of this difference, and each such difference represents the possibility of some shift, displacement, or contamination (2000: xiv).

After liberation from Spain, the building of the new nation was imbued with a modernization process that stemmed from and built upon “a phase of



modernity/coloniality and not the end of colonialism” (Mignolo, 2001: 434).

Mignolo’s and Mitchells’ echoes of modernity’s “mimicry” can be related to Bhabha’s concept of “mimic men,” in which the colonizer’s mission is to promote a civilized, modern man who is “almost the same, but not quite” that of the colonizer (Bhabha, 1994: 86, cited in Kapoor, 2008: 7). However, as Kapoor points out “this ambivalence (‘same’/‘not quite’) is exploitable: mimicry is easily camouflaged as mockery, with the colonial subject consequently subverting or refusing to simply repeat the master’s lessons” (ibid: 7, 8). In numerous way, Rumi Mayuns are attracted to new encounters (human and material based), cautiously taking advantage of them to better accommodate their needs and interests. However, while some ideas and technical advances are may be to their advantage, others can invoke setbacks and/or be detrimental.<sup>33</sup> Historicization and a theorization of difference are what postcolonialists use to analyze the transformative nature of coloniality, and illuminate acts of resistance and agency that can drive a decolonization discourse. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui argues it is not possible to rely only upon *theories* of decolonization, without actually putting them into *practice* (2006: 7). These acts of resistance and demand are part of a decolonization process. However, while these resistances are frequently based around monetary compensations, which are worthy and legitimate, they do not however necessarily involve a deep critical analysis of

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<sup>33</sup> Whereas there were certainly examples of ways in which locals maneuvered situation to their benefit, one unfortunate episode was when the municipality of Rumi Mayu became involved with a group of “international consultants” (Spain), who were supposedly involved in a large project to encourage Bolivian tourism. However, after several trips to town and what appeared to be an exciting effort to promote Rumi Mayu as part of the departmental tourism circuit for foreign travelers, and a large sum of money was invested by the municipality as part of a stated “down payment” for the various components of the project, it turned out to be a scam, and over \$18,000 was lost. Thus, the legitimate desire to be part of something “new,” “modern,” and “beneficial” to local interests, turned out to be just one more instance of outside exploitation.

the roots and intricacies of the issues, or demand systematic changes that “plant critical alternatives to a capitalist and colonial society” (Carlos and Viaña, 2009: 81). So, how do we transit “to articulating the principles, institutions and methods of self-determination...[to] establish...stable, political alternative[s]?” (Kohn and McBride, 2011: 5). Where should decolonization begin?

Mignolo proposes a “de-coloniality,... [or] another thinking [which is] about making a world no longer ruled by the colonial matrix of power.” This should not be based on singularly subject disciplines; but, rather on “a trans-disciplinary horizon in which de-colonialty of knowledge and de-colonial knowledge places life (in general) first and institutions at the service of the regeneration of life” (2010: 11). In this regard, Mignolo, along with a group of Latin American scholars (Dussell, Quijano, Mignolo, Escobar, Walsh, and others) have been theorizing and using what they refer to as the “modernity/coloniality/decolonialty project,” or “MCD” (see Mignolo and Escobar, 2010), whereby modernity is seen more as a *project* rather than as a particular *historic moment*, that began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Escobar, 2003). Thus, MCD provides a constructive “framework for thinking theoretically and ethnographically about and from the colonial difference” (Escobar, 2008: 13), through self-reflection and “self-understanding...[that] start with the agent’s description of his/her own practices in everyday life” (Toranzo, 1989, cited in Sanjinés, 2011: 299). Within the context of Escobar’s long term relationship and work with Afro-Colombians on the Pacific coast of Colombia, he says:

The notion of coloniality...signals two parallel processes: the systematic suppression of subordinated cultures and knowledges (*el encubrimiento del otro*) by dominant modernity; and the necessary emergence, in the very

encounter, of particular knowledges shaped by this experience that have at least the potential to become the sites of articulation of alternative projects and of enabling a pluriverse of socionatural configurations. The modernity/coloniality/decoloniality perspective (MCD)...is interested in alternatives which, arising from the epistemic borders of the modern-colonial world system, might pose a challenge to Eurocentric forms of modernity. Succinctly put, this perspective is interested not only in alternative worlds and knowledges, but also in worlds and knowledges otherwise (2008:12).

In agreement with Rivera Cusicanqui, I believe that you have to put decolonization *in practice* in order to develop a discourse and theoretical analysis, constructive critiques, and changes. I argue that decolonization needs to begin with a *decolonization of knowledge*. Or, as Mohanty suggests, linking the micro and macro levels, and the local and global levels, connecting "causal links between marginalized locations and experiences" that enable the possibility to "decolonize knowledge and practice anti-capitalist critiques" to take place (Mohanty, 2003: 7; 231). I contend with Mignolo that knowledge needs to be premised on life over institutions and ecological interdependencies. For this to flourish, deeper social understandings, critical thinking, and creative development need to occur that inspire pluri-verse of intellectual and spiritual growth, and self-determination. Or, to what Reinaga strove for: "to think and construct something new...and re-establish a liberating postcolonial *Pachakuti* ('time-space, cosmos, deep change')" (Ticona, 2010:38). This should "foreground the landscape (and seascape) as a participant in ties historical process rather than a bystander to human experience...[expanding] the "realm of the human material world...[that] reckon with the ways in which ecology does not always work within the frames of human time and political interest...reflect[ing] a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both

history *and* nature, without reducing either to the other” (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011: 4).

The concepts of decolonization that my study presents are not about a total negation of knowledge that comes from Eurocentric modernity, but more about the damage and loss due to “epistemological imbalances” (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009: 9). As the MCD scholars, in addition to Timothy Mitchell and other intellectuals, point out, forms of modernity have been incorporated into daily life in many ways, [and can save lives, i.e vaccines]. Modernity has also been used as a means of resistance; e.g., Internet and cell phones (Zapatistas, 2011 Middle East rebellions).

Estermann contends that “the political and educational discourse of decolonization cannot reach the bottom of issues/problems if it does not take into consideration the debates about the possibilities and limitations of intercultural dialogue” (2009: 52). This intercultural discourse is not new to Bolivia. It was a crucial centerpiece in the Educational Reform (LRE) of 1994, although—as its many critics would have it—in the decade that followed, the discourse of interculturality was for a succession of Bolivian administrations little more than just that: merely a discourse. During the MAS administration, it has increasingly become part of the political discourse expanding from education and health policies and programs to the Bolivian National Development Plan to the new Constitution. Indeed, there have been many debates and analyses in the past few years, yet little firm agreement on the meaning of the concept itself, or even more so how to actually put it into practice. Whereas in its most common incarnation, interculturality is described in terms that emphasize fundamental aspects of understanding, respect, and tolerance,

more critical proponents, while recognizing these components, situate the model much further. In this vein, Xavier Albó (2001:4) emphasizes that acceptance and respect alone are not enough, and can simply regress to multi / pluricultural relationships, in which cultures may live side by side “like a mosaic where some pieces are put together, but without exchange of the individual’s potential.”

If concepts of interculturality are to be used as a means towards decolonization, as the MAS government proposes, this would require the construction of new socioeconomic and political systems that allow for, and build upon, the articulation and conviviality of differences across of race, gender, age, logics, rationalities, knowledge, and ways of living and being. Thus, interculturality is about breaking with the ongoing colonial relationships (“coloniality of power”) in order to legitimize “*difference...[as]* a constitutive element of the structural-institutional foundation of the state and not merely the addition of ethnic groups” (Walsh, 2009: 83). This includes a profound and active “recognition of self-determination...which is communitarian-collective, encouraging politics that create incentives of cooperation, alliances beyond ethnicity that reduce disparities between groups both in the rural and in the urban areas” (ibid: 84).

However, there are a myriad of ways in which interculturality can be co-opted, similar to the concepts of “participatory.” As Koen de Munter cautions: there exists the risk that [interculturality] “can be converted into a dangerous essentialism that can multiply, impeding an appreciation of diversity that also supposes common elements and potential encounters, thus making it impossible to conceive of interculturality as mutual enriching and transformative, parting from the interaction

among differences” (Degregori and Sandoval, 2007: 51, cited in Koen de Munter, 2009: 22). Or, as Arnold and Yapita warn, “under the apparently innocent guise of bilingual intercultural education, neoliberal policies are able to impose state hegemony by dividing a common cultural terrain into archipelagos of competing linguistic and cultural groups, deprived of the sovereignty they enjoyed before the Spanish Conquest” (2006:2). These cautions align with Spivak’s analysis of the subaltern ability to “speak,” because it is “always mediated and appropriated by others (the colonial administrator, patriarchal institutions, the academic intellectual, etc.)” (Kapoor, 2008: 9). Yet, “Spivak concludes that, nonetheless, the role of the postcolonial critic is to record this silence/disappearance so as to valorize the ‘difference’ revealed by the disenfranchised woman and to critique the domination of imperial and patriarchal discourses” (ibid: 9).

In this sense, critical pedagogy can play a major role in illuminating the roots of racism, and understanding its detriments (classism, sexism, patriarchy, loss of knowledge, etc.); in other words, to deconstruct and put into practice interculturality and decolonization on a more extensive and profound level that could open up spaces and places for “self-actualization” (Haymes, 2003). Although I draw from a number of critical pedagogy theorists (Freire, Giroux, McLaren, Greene, Shore, etc.), for me Lather provides a critical pedagogical framework that more fully aligns with decolonization and inter/intraculturality: as she defines it, “post-critical pedagogy is positioned as that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression” (Lather, 1992: 212). Exploring open terrain in areas that deconstruct our theoretical conceptions and uses

of critical thinking, she proposes a way in which to move beyond a "framework that sees the 'other' as the problem for which they are the solution" (Lather, 1992: 132). Lather then proposes the use of *deconstruction* to shift the foundations that ground these issues. She frames deconstruction as "'not a method,'...[but a] 'way of thinking' that disclosure[s]...how a text functions as desire" (Derrida and Spivak, cited in Lather, 1992: 120). Lather succinctly outlines the contribution of a post-critical pedagogy to problematize this, via deconstruction:

Practices of pedagogy that work against systems of oppression are more, not less, needed in a world marked by growing global maldistribution of power and resources. In translating critical theory into a pedagogical agenda, (post)critical pedagogy foregrounds movement beyond the sedimented discursive configurations of essentialized, romanticized subjects with authentic needs and real identities, who require generalized emancipations from generalized social oppression via the mediations of liberatory pedagogues capable of exposing the 'real' to those caught up in the distorting meaning systems of late capitalism...This postmodern re-positioning of critical intellectuals has to do with struggling to decolonize the space of academic discourse that is accessed by our privilege, to open that space up in a way that contributes to the production of a politics of difference... [An] end of the great metanarratives of emancipation and enlightenment is that *who speaks* is more important than *what is said* [Said, 1986]" (Lather, 1992:131-132).

### **A Sense of Place**

Colonization and globalization changed not only bodies and minds but also geologies, territorial boundaries and the usage of material resources. The theories of colonialism, postcolonialism, development and modernity were chosen because I feel that they provide the best ways to analyze what people express in their interviews and conversations, and in my observations. Rather than *idealize* or *privilege* local knowledge, I examine complex relationships among different social actors in the

community, and how particular food and nutrition issues are linked to national, transnational, and global forces. I look at how everyday experiences inform local knowledge as "a mode of place-based consciousness, a place-specific way of endowing the world with meaning" (Escobar 2003:46). In talking about different places in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, I use the common term *communities*; however, I do not see the community "as a small spatial unit, as a homogeneous social structure, and as shared norms" (Agrawal and Gibson, cited in Haugerud 2003:69). I perceive place, or "community," to be a diverse social network of alliances and contradictions with expansive spatial dimensions, contingent upon the diversity of respective lived realities. In order to understand and respect each other's world better, we need to focus on places of convergence. Again, as Escobar points out, "place, one might add, is the location of a multiplicity of forms of cultural politics—that is, of the cultural becoming political" (Escobar 2003:49; also see Escobar 2008).

To analyze the transforming landscapes in relation to historical changes, external influences, and local participation and resistance, I draw from an array of disciplines that include political ecology, critical literacy, feminism, health, and anthropology. In particular, political ecology expands our understandings of environmental, economic, and political power relations, and provides an analytical framework. My analysis regarding political ecology largely draws from the academic research of Escobar (power- knowledge), Bebbington (pragmatism), Rochelea (feminist perspective), and Peet and Watts (civil society). I analyze how power relations that drive the agricultural productions and environmental usage



largely come from “western mimicry” (Peet and Watts, 1996:, 17), through hegemonic discourses of mainstream development, i.e., “corporate NGOs,” through a regulation of knowledge (Escobar, 1995). I nevertheless believe that there are “places” and “possibilities” of resistance (Scott, 1985) which still occur, and that Rumi Mayuns are molding their environment in attempts to “make it better” as a means with which to enjoy life and survival. As Bebbington points out, a better understanding is required that “look[s] at the rationales behind indigenous strategies and factors underlying them... Whether or not these responses are adequate is a secondary questions. If we do not understand the reasoning underlying them, we can never make a useful contribution to an “alternative” development. Instead we run the risk of imposing our conceptions of what is “alternative” and of what it means to be “indigenous” (1996:105).

As part of a wider (intersectional) critique of "development," feminist political ecology and feminist post-development theories traverse political ecology with a perspective that analyzes ecological, economic, health, and political power relations. In this sense, utilizing the research and work from feminist political ecologists (Shiva, 1988,1993; Agarwal 2000; Mohanty 2003, Haraway 1988, Harding 1987, Saunders, 2002, Fortmann 1996), guided my research and provided me with ways in which to deal with the complex context in which gender interacts with multiple aspects, and “treats gender as a critical variable in shaping resource access and control, interacting with class, caste, race, culture and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change, the struggle of women and men to sustain

ecologically viable livelihoods, and the prospects of any community for 'sustainable development' ” (Rocheleau et al.1996).

Knowledge (epistemology), and ways of being (ontology), influence how power is exercised and reproduced, and how material resources are accessed and accumulated. Escobar (1995) examines how systems of learning revolve around knowledge (ways of being, relating and understanding, or other ways to simply state that it is how we act and interact in the “life world”), which is intertwined and embedded with power and agency. This interdisciplinary approach provides me with multiple lenses to observe how power dynamics shape both micro and macro politics. One example (examined in greater detail later) is the road that cuts through people’s agricultural land in Rumi Mayu. While one man reclaimed his land by fencing off a portion of the road that was not transited often, another woman was unable to prevent the town from taking her land, although she was able to save some of her trees by refusing to move when they went to cut them. Similar acts around the environment and livelihoods play out daily, with different outcomes that are largely dependent upon the actors, gender, knowledge, politics, and relationships.

### **Cracks in the Discourse: Unresolved Contradictions**

I would like to tie up this chapter’s theoretical overview with the integrative concepts of “vivir bien,” interculturality, and decolonization. In essence, these are the goals that the MAS administration is aiming for; why scholars deconstruct colonialism and theorize colonality, internal colonialism, the geopolitics of knowledge, and postcolonialism; and what the people of Rumi Mayu have *been*, and continue to work towards. In current years, the government has been using the

principles of “vivir bien” as a universal guiding moral and ethical light as outlined in the preamble of the 2010 “New Political Constitution of the State” (*Nueva*

*Constitución Política del Estado* – NCPE),<sup>34</sup> which reads that:

The state is based in respect for and equality among all; with the principles of sovereignty, dignity, complementarity, solidarity, harmony, and equality in the distribution and redistribution of the social product; in which the search for a good life (*vivir bien*) predominates; with respect for the economic, social, juridical, and cultural plurality of the inhabitants of this land, living together collectively with access to water, work, education, health, and housing for all...

Another major political example, as noted in chapter 1, is the creation of the two Vice Ministries (“Decolonization” and “Interculturality”), and the 2006 National Development Plan (PND), which is also heavily imbued with theoretical concepts of interculturality, decolonization and living well. Its title, “*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo—Bolivia Digna, Soberana, Productiva y Democrática para Vivir Bien*” (The National Development Plan—Bolivia Dignified, Sovereign, Productive and Democratic to Live Well), demonstrates the general framework of how the government is broadly using “vivir bien” as part of their “cultural and democratic revolution.” While the NCPE, PND, and two Vice Ministries may appear idealistic, the perceptions and practicalities of *vivir bien* can have very different meanings of what a good life would consist of, and the economic development model needed in order to attain and sustain these social aspirations and programs. Results will have different implications for different people. Furthermore, there is *no* mention of how theories and practices of decolonization and interculturality are, or can be, integrated

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<sup>34</sup> References of decolonization and interculturality are found in the following articles of the NCPE (January 25, 2009): general education (art. 17, 18, 30, 78, 79, 80, 91), university (art. 93, 95), communities (art. 3, 100, 218, 394, 395) and dialogue (9, 79, 98).

into official policies in development (e.g., NGO work), economics, or the political structure. Instead, many national development policies follow a extractivist and “*neodesarrollismo asistencialista*” (“assistentialist new developmentalism”) model (Stefanoni and Bajo, 2009, cited in Rodríguez Carmona, 2009: 254).

In this fashion, as mentioned in chapter 1, we see discrepancies coming from the MAS government. Whereas President Evo Morales talks about the Pachamama and the importance of Mother Earth, simultaneously the MAS government is pushing through mega development projects and industrialization with potentially larger negative environmental, social and cultural consequences affecting one’s ability to live well. The MAS administration is still very much enmeshed in the donor agency/bank financing schemes of large scale projects, natural resource extraction and capitalist marketing ventures, albeit with a socialist flare, and a “partnership” relationship (no conditions).<sup>35</sup> The main difference between the pre and post MAS governments, is that the state is genuinely pushing forward land reform, autonomous regions, and has quasi-nationalized industries (petroleum and gas industries, mining sectors, telecommunication and national airline). Profits are reinvested in

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<sup>35</sup> The State’s extractivist economic development model—similar to those from colonial times, but which could potentially be more destructive to local and environmental landscapes—is clearly recognizable in the continuance of the Initiative for Integration of Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA). Initiated in 2000, 12 heads of South American states approved of geopolitical plans to construct 514 mega projects, which have been estimated to cost 69,000 million dollars, with financing coming mainly from the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB), the Corporación Andina de Fomento (CAF), and the Fondo Financiero para el Desarrollo de la Cuenca del Plata (FONPLATA). Current megaprojects being implemented or explored include the following: increased oil explorations, much of it on indigenous lands in the Chaco region and Amazon basin of La Paz; hydroelectric mega dams that comprises part of the Andean region and Amazon forests; road construction in ecologically sensitive regions; relocation of people to bio diverse reserves ; the construction of a polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic factory to make housing materials; and so forth. Although the MAS government rejects neoliberalism, the Washington Consensus, etc., apparently this does not entail a rejection of environmentally disastrous mega-development projects.

infrastructure, industry, and welfare programs (Bono Juancito Pinto, Bono Juana Azurduy, and Bono Dignidad). Although the dispersion of these funds can be positive and are well needed, critical attention needs to be given to the ways in which newer formations of self-motivations and dependency may develop that do not necessarily progress toward decolonized individuals living well in an intercultural nation. Furthermore, it is a temporary fix that does little to address the roots of these issues, and distracts attention from restructuring the political economic system in ways that could develop innovative and long lasting social ecological development, that does not depend of depleting and contaminating massive expanses of the environment. While revolutionary change is indeed occurring in Bolivia (to a degree), Garcés captures one of the main obstacles for the transition from an “‘era’ of interculturality to an ‘era’ of decolonization’ ” and living well:

The state does not put aside their colonial and classist burden, from the night to the morning, just because it’s administrated by an Indian. Global extractive capitalism does not put aside their deadly practices just because they’re a little restrained by a landlocked country in South America. The normalized and disciplined willpower of the political class and the ascension of the new political class does not abandon their practices of control and cooptation over the directional sectors of the Indians and of the “new Indians” (2009a: 41).

In a less grander, yet still philosophically similar way, state development is being promoted in Rumi Mayu that replicates national development goals and the basic tenets of internal colonialism. Here again, a divide occurs between local Rumi Mayuns who want to improve the environment and increase their political participation, and the more entrepreneur locals and outsiders who would like to develop the region along the lines of the national and global market agendas. While

there are limitations and benefits to these desires and goals, discussion on what “vivir bien” actually means to the lives of Rumi Mayuns is not part of the conversation—locally, regionally and nationally. Terminologies, such as interculturality, decolonization and vivir bien are not part of the local vernacular in Rumi Mayu, yet their conceptual actions can be seen in many aspects of how they live their lives. It is not that all is blissful and that profound suffering and struggling does not exist, as malnutrition, ecological degradation, and migration rates unfortunately demonstrate. But rather, that Rumi Mayuns have had and continue to have many natural resources, knowhow, traditions, wisdom, and skills to live well, yet under detrimental “colonial” conditions. The people of Rumi Mayu need to analyze the insidious sustaining affects of colonialism, coupled with contemporary national and international politics and policies, and how they can enhance the good and confront the obstacles that have impeded and continue to impede self-reflections and local visions of development, that would allow them to live well with others; in other words, to decolonize on their own terms. And, to share these experiences and interact with others that listen on a national level. Equally so, if not more so, the politicians, academics, and others need to live with and “hear” the subaltern in ways that really matter (Beverly, 1999).

### **Going to the Field: Methodological Considerations**

I arrived in Rumi Mayu in the back of a truck with my husband Brian, our son Natán, and a group of women, men, and children from the different *places* in the municipality, amid sacks and crates full of goods. It was a warm evening in January

of 2004. We went there specifically for our respective field research projects; but, also to live, learn, be open, and be part of community activities and life. Although the bulk of our research took place during 2004 and part of 2005, we continually return on a more or less yearly basis. Our three rented rooms in the house of don Sabino and doña Julia are like a time capsule: everything in place pretty much as we left it in 2005, yet the world around it changes at a different rhythm. We chose Rumi Mayu for several reasons, the main ones being: the ecological and agricultural diversity of the region; the indigenous population (Quechua); the fact that a close friend and her family live there; an approximately four to five hour drive to the city of Sucre (emergency backup for our son if necessary); the roads were not *too* treacherous; and the simple fact that it just felt “right.”

Our first *viaje* (trip) to Rumi Mayu, however, took a total of eight hours. It was still the rainy season, the bridge had been washed away, we took a detour, the road was muddy, the truck clunky, and it simply took a little while longer than usual to arrive. At that time, three people from the *Valle* communities owned a truck to transport agricultural products and passengers to and from Sucre. Generally speaking, the trucks left the *Valle* communities in the morning, and picked up passengers along the way heading up to the *Cabecera de Valle* and the *Altura*. Another truck would depart Sucre around mid-day, arriving in Rumi Mayu in the early evening. In 2009, a bus service began between Sucre and Rumi Mayu, improving the comfort of the trip. The road was dirt then, but it is now in the process of being paved with stones. You enter the municipality from the *Altura*, meandering past fields of potatoes and wheat, passing through scattered communities of dotted

adobe houses; half an hour later, you descend slowly into a canyon, zig-zagging back and forth down the slopes to the plains that bring you into the capital town of Rumi Mayu itself. The road used to follow the river bed, and you would have to duck your head from the hanging *molle* branches, while passing fig trees and fields of corn. However, very recently the authorities built a new road that cuts straight through agricultural and open fields, so now the trucks and bus can zoom straight into town. Approximately two to six vehicles travel this road every day, and on weekends it might increase to eight or ten.

Rumi Mayu has nine streets that surround the central plaza, on which there are a few houses, a small chapel, a health center, and a boarding school. Two blocks from the center of town are agricultural lands circled by mountains. The parcels around town are not that large, and many people have land further outside, or in other communities. While most people work the land, some work as merchants, in construction, at menial jobs for the hospital, school, or NGOs, or in the town hall (town councilpersons, mayor, administrator, secretary). Approximately 500 people reside in the capital town, while the municipality as a whole encompasses a total population of 11,806 inhabitants, dispersed among 33 communities (HAM Icla, 2007).<sup>36</sup> Chickens, roosters, cows, horses, donkeys, goats, dogs, and cats run free. (Pigs, however, were banished when the town hall passed an ordinance in 2005 to keep pigs out of the center of town.) Life is somewhat loosely structured around the seasons, yet spontaneous. There is an interesting blend of always being busy, yet

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<sup>36</sup> The level of education for the municipality is among the lowest in the Department. This is largely due to a lack of availability. Approximately 95% of the schools are elementary level (first to sixth grade); 87.76% of them only go up to fourth grade (*Programa Operativo Annual, P.O.A. 2005 / Annual Operative Plan*).



having time to talk. Before the building of the cell phone antennae in 2010, there was only one public phone booth in the middle of town, which was occasionally attended by a person or two, who would then track down the recipient of the call; in 2008, a loudspeaker was installed, and the solicited person's name was broadcast throughout the town. Now, however, everybody has a cell phone, and the streets are quieter.

Obviously, much has happened since we first went to Rumi Mayu in 2004. Prolonged research has its pluses and minuses. Although we do not permanently live in Rumi Mayu, as stated we return on a regular basis, in order to maintain our relationships and self-imposed commitments. Temporary and prolonged migration (both within Bolivia, and to Argentina or Spain) is fairly common in Rumi Mayu, because of economic reasons, study issues, etc.; therefore, many people are accustomed to seeing others come and go. So in a sense our comings and goings are associated with the culture of migration. People in Rumi Mayu have been very kind and generous with us, and when we return after being away for a period of time, a common greeting is "Oh, you haven't forgotten us!" and "When did you get back?" Although there is a feeling of warmth, and usually a smile, there is no big fuss. Yet, acts of nonchalant reciprocity soon take place: for example, typically a day or few will pass and then doña Julia, don Sabino's wife, will bring us a basket of Swiss chard, onions, potatoes, or parsley, all from their garden. We then reciprocate with products only available in the city, such as kiwi and eggplant. Then, a few days later, one of the kids appears with eggs and garlic. And so on. The lengths of time between these acts vary, from days to weeks to months, and similar expressions of reciprocity occur with other people in Rumi Mayu as well.

Returning to the main pluses and minuses of long term research: on the one hand, the validity of research is strengthened, and self reflexivity expands “a vital process [of]...critical self-awareness...in which you question and observe yourself at the same time as you listen to and observe the participant” (Ulin, e.al., 2005: 23). It is also a time “of growing awareness of how researcher values permeate inquiry” (Lather, 1991: 2). On the other hand, it is difficult to limit oneself to the initial data collected—that is, life goes on. Therefore, while this dissertation focuses on the years of 2004 and 2005, I interject pertinent changes and subsequent data into the ethnography. We lived in Rumi Mayu for approximately three months before I began to interview anyone about my specific research questions. During this time, we talked with the mayor, town council, neighborhood council (*junta vecinal*), health center staff, and school personnel; we became actively involved in activities with our friends and neighbors; and frequently visited the school, hospital and town hall, participating in a variety of events. I also participated in a three day training workshop for pre-school educators and cooks. This was the beginning stages of settling in (Natán in school, fixing up a home), getting to know people, participant observation, and revising semi-formal interview questions. As Lincoln and Guha suggest, “the design of a naturalistic inquiry...cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, unfold” (1985: 225).

Initially, people would look at Brian, Natán and I with curiosity, blended with suspicion and interest. The proportions of this mixture depended on the person, and changed with the length of our stay and continual returning visits. However, four main aspects helped us to be accepted by most people in the communities: one was

our close friend, Celia, who was a Quechua women from Cochabamba, and had moved to the area with her family several years prior to us; second was Natán, a kid who studied at their school and played with *their* kids; third, we were a family; and fourth, we participated in communal festivities (carnival, Pucara, Todos Santos, San Juan, health fairs, etc.) and school activities (parades, monthly teacher / class meetings, payment of monthly dues, contributions of potatoes and fire wood, making bread for school breakfasts, and helping in the construction of the new elementary school).

My levels of comfort varied with my daily moods, interactions with people, family issues, and with getting to know the area better. I am not new to Bolivia, and I have spent a lot of time in rural areas; I feel most comfortable there, and am very fond of farming and rural life. However, I had never spent a prolonged length of time in an area that speaks predominately Quechua, and I only speak but a few phrases. I had taken some Quechua classes in Sucre, and had friends who taught me some, but unfortunately I had never had the time to dedicate myself on a continual basis. Brian was fairly fluent in Quechua, and Natán could speak some, but understood more. (While Natán studied in the fifth grade, and approximately 50-60% of the class should have been taught in Quechua, it was all taught in Spanish, because the teacher herself did not speak Quechua.) I am very aware that speaking the local language is vital for understanding what is going on, and to develop relationships. All of the youth and many of the adults (men and women) in Rumi Mayu speak Spanish; however, most of the older adults, and people in the diverse communities, speak only Quechua. Thus, whenever I interviewed and conversed

with people who only spoke Quechua or preferred to express themselves in that way, my friend Celia would translate. (Celia had a good rapport with people in Rumi Mayu, has been involved with social justice and political movements in Bolivia in the past, and had experience doing similar work with a sociologist in Cochabamba.) My interview questions were translated into Quechua by a Quechua linguist in Sucre, who also translated and transcribed the interview tapes.

In total, I conducted 65 semi-formal interviews of local people of different ages and gender, as well as an assortment of different professionals who were working in the municipality. I also conducted several interviews in Sucre with both food donation agencies, the head of the nutrition department at the regional health authority in Sucre (SEDES), and the Director of Social Development for the Department of Chuquisaca. Prior to conducting interviews in the communities, I discussed my research with the *sindicatos* (unions) in the communities where I worked, and all of the *sindicatos* approved of my research but one. (The reason in the latter case was that they simply did not want outsiders asking questions in their community, and we respected this.)

We did not have a car, jeep, or truck, and did not want one. We traveled like everyone else: in the back of trucks, NGO and municipal vehicles, and walking. This had its advantages and disadvantages: the main advantages were the contacts and spontaneous chats with people, and experiencing what everybody else does. The open air atmosphere lends to a different kind of bonding, and conversation. The main disadvantages, however, were that it was difficult to get to communities to collect data; we occasionally had to impose on people to have a room for the night; long

walks on hot days were exhausting; we were occasionally stranded by forgetful or inconsiderate NGO workers; etc.

Most of the days, I felt at ease in Rumi Mayu and in the other communities, especially as time went by. However, periodic uneasiness would creep over me when I saw everyone working their land, fixing their houses, tending to their animals, mending the water and irrigation systems, weaving their *axus*, and so forth. I often wondered what people thought of Brian, Natán, and myself; although everyone was always friendly and open with us. We told people about our research, and were very open about it, but I never had the sense that most really understood exactly what we were doing in town. And, interestingly over time, it did not seem to matter to people, as everyone seemed to treat us like anyone else. The day always involved running into different people and talking, and getting involved in an array of meetings, farming activities, participating in school activities with Natán, etc. Natán's teacher once even asked me to substitute for her for three days, when she had an emergency and had to go to Sucre. In a relatively short period of time, faces and people became familiar, and there seemed to always be something to talk about with almost everyone we came across. Before we went to Rumi Mayu, I had thought that I would find plenty of time to read and write notes in the evening, and actually get to bed early. But, it rarely turned out that way; we were always "too busy," and I can only remember a handful of times retiring to bed before 11:00.

I also got actively involved in organizing two other "peripheral" programs: one was a High School Student Narrative project with three of the municipal boarding schools (in different communities); and the second was coordinating

university volunteers to organize Ecology Youth Clubs with middle and high school students, at the same boarding schools. Some of these students participated in both groups. The purpose of the narrative project was to teach tenth to twelve grade students some basic qualitative research skills with which they would discuss and then write open ended questions about history, environment, people and culture. They would then take these conversational probing questions home, and dialogue with family and friends, while jotting down some notes. I supplied students with notebooks and pencils, and also gave each group a disposable camera with film to share. We would then meet together as a group, and discuss their results. The students came from different communities, and the main purpose was to stimulate the discussion and sharing of local knowledge, with the intention of collating their writing together into a booklet. I wrote a brief proposal outlining the project, and got it approved with the directors of two of the respective boarding schools, and the priest who ran the other one. I also tried to get several teachers on board, but they did not have the time, and /or were not interested. Although the project achieved some success, we never collected enough information to make the booklets. I discuss this project in further detail in Chapter 7.

I also became a member of the Asociación *Sucrense de Ecología*, ASE (Sucre Ecology Association of Sucre), and shortly afterwards learned about their ecological club of university students from different disciplines, that organized youth clubs and urban ecological fairs. I talked with them about coming to Rumi Mayu, to work with the students at the *internados*. They were interested and excited, and we developed a plan. I talked with the students, some teachers, the directors, and the mayor about the

ASE ecology club, and they were all in favor of it. (I also talked with the priest, but he was not interested. Ironically, he and the students at his school were the ones that I had hoped would be the *most* involved, because every day they would throw their trash over the river bank—the priest told them to do so, and their sewage poured directly into the street because their septic system was full.) This project was relatively successful, but short lived; I also discuss it more in greater detail in Chapter 7.

This dissertation is, thus, about the experiences and the stories that I collected and witnessed while in Rumi Mayu. It is about contradictions (nourishment and malnutrition), suffering (depleted land, droughts), joy (reciprocity, festivals), and resilience (*trueque, markets*). In addition to the data collected, and participating in numerous activities, events, and meetings, other data came from reading municipal, school, hospital, and NGO documents. With this compilation, I analyze the inter-connections between local perspectives and practices with modern development (geopolitics of knowledge), colonialism (coloniality of knowledge), neoliberalism, and colonial difference (border thinking takes place), “to contribute to the imaginary and coloniality of power and knowledge implicit in the geopolitical configurations of the world” (Mignolo, 2000: 171). In this manner, I hope to present arguments for ways in which to think about, interrogate and build inter/intracultural relationships, decolonize knowledge, and alternative forms of development.

### CHAPTER 3

#### BARTER AND MARKET: PATTERNS OF CIRCULATION

“We, the Aymara, Qhechwa, Camba, Chapaco, Chiquitano, Moxeño, Tupiguarani and other peasants are the rightful owners of this land. We are the seed from which Bolivia was born and we are exiles in our own land. We want to regain our liberty of which we were deprived in 1492, to bring our culture back into favour and, with our own personality, be subjects and not objects of our history...” Socialist declaration of the CSUTCB (1979)

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 1986: 103

Sitting on the dirt ground behind the stone wall that encircles their one room adobe home, and shelters their goats, sheep, dogs and chickens—the sun’s shadows getting ready to set behind the silhouette of a sea of piercing mountain tops, and the constant winds get colder—bundled in a black sheep wool shawl Angela cautiously and quietly talks with Celia and I; her gaze moving between the soil, us, and her husband, as his eyes peer down on us from the adjacent hillside, just meters away—most likely wondering “who are they, what do they want with us”—doña Angela, like the others from this rugged yet magical place, shares with us her memories and stories of the land that embraces us:

According to what my grandparent told me, these lands belonged to the Spanish, and our ancestors were their servants for many years. For us, there was only obedience and respect for the Inca then—but the landowners were the bosses, and we went about beneath their whip. We had to serve the hacienda. They always measured our strength. There were no schools; all there was, was to work on the hacienda for the boss. We knew how to feed and take care of the pigs and sheep, but we didn’t know how to read or write. Everything was about serving the boss. We even had to take care of their mothers and fathers, if they had any.

In the night we would spin our wool, and during the day we would knit. We did this all week long, until the national agricultural reform—so, our parents finally won. Our community leaders walked and walked, until



they organized a union, and in this way we achieved that these lands became ours. *We are now the legitimate owners!* We organized our unions, and we now consist of 32 communities in all, and we even have legal recognition for the unions.

We plant a little of everything: potatoes, beans, wheat, barley, quinoa, peanuts, maize, all kinds of fruit. Before, a small piece of land would give us 10 quintals of potatoes, but today, even if we have good seeds and a large amount of land, we don't have the same production. When it rains we have enough for the family, but sometimes we don't. We raise sheep, cows, horses, donkeys, chickens, pigs, cows, and cats. We exchange our products with anyone, wherever. I go up or down to exchange products; but this year they say that the production was bad. I go with oranges, limes, grapes and *singani*,<sup>37</sup> to exchange for potatoes and grain.

We *q'oa* to the *Pachamama* with a little wine. Some of the young people *q'oa* in August and during carnival, and we also *q'oa* our houses. *Ayni* is what one does for another, and sometimes we do *mink'a*, that is, we work for others and they return that with *ayni*. We loan to each other when we don't have anything, and later it comes back to us. These beliefs are ancient. They say that before it was better, but that now it's not like it was before. But also that's because there isn't as much production like before. There were wonderful fiestas then, when there was an abundance of food...

In the above narrative doña Angela, and other locals that I have interviewed, briefly highlight some of the paradoxes of colonial / postcolonial times: a continuum ranging from oppression, resentments, pride, accomplishments, set-backs, humiliation, dignity, struggles, and challenges that have occurred, and continue to occur, in a changing landscape of interacting actors from different places--local to the global, dating from Inca memories to the Spanish conquest to "independence" and the contemporary arena of international/national development policies. Doña Angela, as well as others that I spoke with, often ruminated about local cultural

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<sup>37</sup> Singani is a sort of grape brandy. Most families in Rumi Mayu grow grapes for home consumption, *trueque*, to sell in the market in the city, or to make singani. Singani is much more profitable than the grapes themselves, and can be stored over time, consumed or sold when needed—like money in a bank account.

practices and knowledge, and the abundance of crops produced, and the fiestas that drew people together derived from their labors and abundant harvests. Rumi Mayuns spoke about a cultural economy of labor and material exchanges and personal interactions; an inter-dependence on each other and their land. While people expressed the hardships and losses incurred by colonial rule and servitude, (i.e. enslaved working conditions, the suppression of local knowledge and creativity, etc.), they also frequently spoke of their strength in reclaiming and maintaining their land, making connections of this with their cultural practices and knowledge, and the fruits of their relationships, labors and production. Contemporary opportunities have opened up for “developing” the region, accessing markets, and increasing the participation of local citizens (indigenous men and women) in municipal political positions; as a result, this has created numerous expectations which have further expanded their hopes of increasing incomes and improving quality of lives through the “modernization” of the region already underway. These recent apertures are the result of more than a decade of neoliberal governments followed by the explosive 2005 political changes that embarked upon a program of “decolonization” consisting of national policies of plurinationalism, interculturality, and to live well (“vivir bien”). My intent is to illustrate the continuities of the past within the present, and to explore the municipalities’ complex cultural and economic behaviors/systems as a means to highlight alternatives that are already there, but are in danger of being overshadowed and dissipated. The discontinuities and apertures incurred from local struggles to national / international policy changes can narrowly look more toward the outsider for “assistance,” rather than value, and reflect and build upon what’s

within. In this way, I hope to focus on several ways that Rumi Mayuns have been practicing decolonization and interculturality as a means to live well, and what this might mean for development issues; which I begin to portray here, but moreover expand upon in subsequent chapters. It is not about romanticizing the municipality and its indigenous inhabitants, but rather abstracting and highlighting the unique evolution of their cultural and socio economic base as an alternative model to value, learn from, constructively critique, and creatively build upon.

This chapter tries to contextualize the diverse landscape, people and their livelihoods; it is about learning from the dialectic link between culture politics and economics. I relate the historical and macro through analyzing the local and regional environment of agricultural practices and barter (*trueque*) in rural Bolivia, as part of a larger social, cultural, environmental and political network of a “cultural economy.” I use Pullard, McEwen and Hughes’s, concepts of a “cultural economy” to discuss the ways in which the people of Rumi Mayu have evolved that have sustained and enriched local livelihoods and agency. Furthermore, I utilize the principle of a cultural economy as an example of an alternative economic system that could challenge universalizing economic western models through ways which “reflect on how culture (concerning identities and life-worlds) and economy (concerning resource production, allocation and distribution) are intertwined” (2011: 4). Economic practices observed in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, provide alternative insights that value local cultural practices, such as *ayni*, *reciprocity* and *trueque* (“circulation of goods”) that could help restructure economic models to be more humane, inclusive and just. While notable, barter and complementary cultural

practices such as *q'oa* and *ayni* are still practiced widely in rural Bolivia, under increased market influences their vitality is changing or fading. I take this into consideration, and more so in later chapters, I juxtapose changing cultural economic practices with the role of the market, the fluctuations (increases and decreases) of international and national development policies and programs, and the increased social and political actions of local citizens (women and men).

The process of decolonization is a “key postcolonial theme” to interrogate and reinterpret relationships...”that is, seeing it differently by questioning its knowledge/power constructions (Kapoor, 2008: xiv). The words of doña Angela and others at the beginning of this chapter express recognition of how indigenous people in Rumi Mayu were humiliated but did not succumb to the beating, seeing value in their culture and labors. This chapter attempts to illuminate the beauty and uniqueness of the people and place of Rumi Mayu to contribute to venues for self-valuation and processes of decolonization. Before continuing, I would like to clarify that my intention is not to romanticize, but rather value what is, as a means to think about how much more this could be.

### **Crop Production and the “Vertical Integration of Micro-ecological Systems”**

The communal practices of a cultural economy, and the power dynamics embedded in the political forces that drive the production and commodification of nature (“capitalist modernity”), condition environmental changes and food production/consumption (Bryant and Bailey, 1997), and provide insights to mechanism of resistance, domination, struggles, exploitation, and the newer manifestations of so-called “development.” The enactment of cultural economy plays out in different configurations, and can be seen in different lights. The lineage of *trueque* in the Andes goes back to pre-Incaic days, and although the verticality of the environment remains much the same, with time and “modernity” drastic changes have occurred in the political ecology of the municipality of Rumi Mayu, “alter[ing]

the forms of social organization and of access to ecological resources” (Harris, 2000: 77). Therefore, I also wish to emphasize a theoretical analysis of “modernity,”<sup>38</sup> as a way to present my own views in relation to my fieldwork, and how it is being used in current “development” discourses.

The competing interests in shaping local environments have political, social, and health ramifications. As shown in the works of Peet and Watts, political ecology examines the dialectics between social groups and their physical environment and questions their socioeconomic relationships, based largely on intersections of class and ethnicity (Peet and Watts, 1996). For my purposes, I draw here upon Escobar’s concept of how ecological systems rely upon the importance of cultural meanings (1999), through exploring practices of local livelihoods and the power relations that are embedded in political forces: these drive the production and commodification of nature that condition environmental changes, such as the market. To look at this then as part of a wider critique, feminist scholarship in turn analyzes the complex context in which gender, in Rocheleau’s words, “interact[s] with class, culture and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change, the struggle of women and men to sustain ecologically viable livelihoods, and the prospects of any community for sustainable development” (1996: 4). These scholarly works are couched within the concepts of postcolonial theories that take into consideration the specifics of the social historic and the present context, a decolonization and critical interculturality

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<sup>38</sup> Mitchell cautions the use of terms, such as “alternative modernities” or “multiple capitalisms,” and exemplifies the need to question modernity through exploring “two forms of difference...both the displacements opened up by the different space of the non-West, and the ways in which this space is made to appear different. Modernity is the name we give the stage where this double difference is performed” (Mitchell, 2000: 27).

process that could lead to reconstructing knowledge and practices within the local milieu. In other words,

Everything begins with an affirmation. The negation of the negation is the second moment. How can you negate the humiliation of one's own self while initiating the path with self-discovery of one's own value? The postcolonial cultures should effectively decolonize themselves; to do this they should self-value oneself (Dussel, 2006: 50).

Most of the products and agricultural production in the municipality of Rumi Mayu are used for home consumption, some for *trueque*, and some for sale in the city. Many scholars have studied the Andes unique environmental variation in altitudes, and its ecological complementarity that provides a variety of nutritious foods and other resources in a relatively confined geographic space.<sup>39</sup> At the forefront was John V. Murra's pioneering study of sixteenth-century Inca organization and state administration, in which he highlighted the practice and concept of the "vertical control of a maximum of ecological levels" that supported a system of reciprocal procedures absent of commercial markets (Murra: 1972). Rivera Cusicanqui points out how the extensive consumption of coca and the indigenous market system and practices, such as *trueque*, demonstrate a "space of cultural resistance," and "long-standing indigenous modernity." "Indians generate community reproduction strategies through the market, and while they were subordinated to a huge number of colonial requirements, they created a flourishing market that permitted them modernity and a connection with the urban world. These

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<sup>39</sup> For a historical analysis, see Carlos Sempat Assadourian (1982), *El sistema de la economía colonial: Mercado interno, regiones y espacio económico*; and Luis Miguel Glave (1989), *Trajinantes. Caminos indígenas en la sociedad colonial, siglos XVI/XVII*.

commercial networks could not have existed without indigenous labor at the edges of circulation and production” (Rivera Cusicanqui, in Farthing 2007: 6).

Historically, the municipality of Rumi Mayu largely interacted around reciprocal practices: food, clothing and house wares were all locally produced and bartered. Up until approximately two generations ago, the municipality mainly functioned around practices of cultural economy (reciprocity), or what Gudeman and Rivera (1993) refer to as “livelihood economy”; Harris illustrates as an “ethnic economy” (2000);<sup>40</sup> Meillassoux, (1981) as “a system of long-term advances and restitutions”; and Taussig (1980) as a “use-value” orientation. The production was and still is to varying degrees, steeped in rituals and acts of reciprocity, such as *challas* and *q’oas* (forms of blessing) to the Pachamama in exchange for agricultural fertility, rain and good harvests; *ayni*, an exchange of labor for labor; and *mink’a*, an exchange of labor for products. Today, these forms of reciprocity are still practiced regularly, although each of the respective manifestations differs quantitatively and qualitatively within and between communities.<sup>41</sup>

The unique geographic contour of the municipality of Rumi Mayu—ranging from less than 2,000 meters in altitude, to over 4,000—allows for diverse agricultural production and exchange, which, among other things, potentially contributes to a nutritious diet.<sup>42</sup> The superficial extension of the municipality of Rumi Mayu is 583,061 km<sup>2</sup>, most of which is mountainous, and is distinguished by four ecological floors divided among 32 communities. The higher altitudes include the *Cordillera* or

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<sup>40</sup> See Olivia Harris’s, *Economía Etnica* (1987).

<sup>41</sup> Gudeman states that, “reciprocity is never contained within a community”...but rather a “probe into uncertainty” that extends its border (Gudeman, 2001:467).

<sup>42</sup> For studies on vertical exchange, see Murra (1972).

*Puna*, located between 3,080 to 4,284 meters, and produce potatoes, haba beans, wheat, barley, *oca* (indigenous tuber), quinoa, and onions; followed by the *Altura*, located between 2,900 and 3,300 meters, which produces wheat, barley, *tarwi* (indigenous grain), maize, haba beans, peas, *oca*, cabbage, lettuce, carrots, chili pepper, apples, and peaches. The lower altitudes consist of the *Cabecera del Valle*, located between 2,252 and 2,900 meters, which produces maize, potatoes, peas, haba beans, wheat, onions, carrots, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, Swiss chard, parsley, spinach, garlic, celery, grapes, pomegranate, oranges, lemon, sugar cane, apples, figs, oregano, and other herbs; followed by the *Valle*, located between 1,900 and 2,200 meters, with potatoes, tomatoes, green pepper, avocado, maize, carrots, radishes, beets, cauliflower, sweet potatoes, cherimoya, oranges, lemons, papaya, and guava. Domestic animals—sheep, goats, cows, chickens, and pigs, are widespread throughout the municipality, the only exception is that horses are more common at the higher altitude, and there is also exists a llama farm in the *Cordillera*.

As observed, the diverse climatic and vertical ecological terrain provides a wide variety of nutritious complementarily foods ideal for *trueque*, and for household consumption. The bartering and “circulation” of foods occurs in all directions within the municipality due to a connecting road, and many antiquated pathways. Some families do travel outside of the municipality, mainly for maize and *aji* (hot peppers). In the past, *trueque* was the main substance for survival, with cash occasionally obtained from transporting sacks of food on the backs of mules walking 90 kilometers to Sucre. Nowadays, although the dependency of bartering as a major food source has diminished, almost everyone I spoke with continues to exchange



some sort of food product. The following condensations of verbal commentaries portray what people—both men and women—told me about the variety of foods they trade, the measurements of some of these food exchanges, and how the circulation of *trueque* is changing:

**Products:** We continue with the same *trueque* system as before, it's our custom, we bring potatoes to one community and exchange it for maize, we bring wheat to another community for figs, grapes, oranges, tangerines. A lot depends on the sector, if we live near the valley we go to get oranges, sweet potatoes, peanuts; people always come to here exchange. We give what we have. If the production is good they come with everything. We go to get onions, lemons, bread, oranges, carrots; onions are the greatest. We also go with bread in search of maize, we exchange both ways; we also exchange maize for potatoes. We have corn bread, potatoes, oca, and potatoes to exchange with the people from the *Valle* when they come with oranges, limas, and tangerines. We go with potatoes and onions to exchange for maize; we bring potatoes to exchange for oranges, grapes, and figs in the *Valle*. With potatoes and wheat, with only these products, we go to exchange. We only go to one community to exchange for chili peppers. When they come to our community they bring chili peppers, peanuts and other products, we do *trueque* with wheat, maize, potatoes and grains. Here we go to the *Cordillera* and we bring grapes, figs, and peaches to exchange for potatoes, wheat and barley.

**Measurements:** No, *trueque* hasn't changed much, however, the quantity is a little less. We don't trade in large quantities anymore because there isn't a lot of production. They come with anything, like sweet potatoes, peanuts from the valley to exchange for wheat, and we give according to what they give, but we also give by *tupu*, which means according to measurements. When they come we exchange something, according to what they give, we exchange by arrobas, and when there is a lot we exchange a lot. We exchange two *paltos* of wheat for one *p'uti* of potatoes, I use a *canasta* (large basket), but everything should be given according to one's conscience. They bring maize to exchange for onions, so we exchange one bag for one bag. I go to exchange my *singani* for bread; we measure bread with the *romana* (scales). I exchange one bottle of singani for one arroba of potatoes, and also one bottle for one arroba of wheat. It's always been the same as in my parents' day, one *tinki* of grapes for one arroba of wheat, potatoes or grain. A *tinki* is one arroba or two *canastas*; the *canasta* is long like this, you know, in this *canasta* only one arroba enters.

**Changes:** In my grandparents time *trueque* was better, because there were all types of foods, and a lot of them. Well, when I was a kid they came with fish to exchange for wheat, for one arroba of wheat they gave us 5, 6, or 7 fish, now there aren't any more fish. It was really nice, they came with fish to exchange for maize, wheat, and they would give us 10 fish for one arroba. All of that is lost now, but we can still eat fish if we buy it in Sucre. *Trueque* has changed, the times have made it into another kind of thing, because before there was a lot to eat, and we could really fill up with food, as the people in the higher altitudes would bring us products, and they brought a lot to exchange, but now that has diminished. *Trueque* has changed, before the *trueques* were a lot more, now they occur less, for example, they give us a small amount of peanuts because they say that they cost more on the market, but they want us to give them more potatoes, we have now began to adjust our measurements; all because of this... Little by little *trueque* is diminishing, because the people in the higher altitudes are now thinking of the market, nothing else. *Trueque* is changing because we have less products, and the little we have we need to sell to cover our other needs.

Obviously, various influences and changes have affected, and continue to affect, the production of foods and their bartering, and the local economy. One outstanding contradiction to accessing a variety of diverse nutritional foods is the commercial market, which has contributed to a deterioration of *trueque* (and the introduction of less nutritious foods). One person from the *cordillera* claimed that people from the *Valle* believe that their peanuts are more valuable than the *cordillera's* tubers or grains due to market prices; therefore, they want to step outside of the customary "cultural economy," and receive more tubers or grains for their peanuts. Another person from the *Valle* claimed that the people from the *cordillera* only think of selling their products to the market. Another woman from the *Cabecera del Valle* explained it like this: "Before, we'd exchange our animals for a cargo of wheat or maize, but today everything is with money; I then turn around with my cash and buy food to eat...rice, noodles, sometimes wheat and potatoes, whatever I lack, I buy."

Another prominent consequence that is affecting *trueque*, and other aspects of a cultural economy, is how climate change, soil fertility, and river contamination has, and continues to, jeopardize food production. Supposedly, in the times of the “*antepasados*” (forefathers) production was predictable and harvests were abundant due to the soil fertility, aided by animal manure and loyal rainfalls. However, climate changes and soil deterioration have led to decreased agricultural production, loss of communal grasslands and trees, food availability and nutritional intake, and other consequences, such as increased migration and immigration, both seasonally and permanent—as one man from the *cordillera* summed it up: “If there is no life in your pueblo, the people leave. My brother took off to Santa Cruz.”

A compilation of what a variety of men and women from the four ecological zones said about climate change and soil fertilization is as follows:

When I was much younger, a kid, the rain was perfect, continuous, but now we have noticed that there is a lot of wind, little rain, and bad hail storms. We have all of this, plus it also freezes now, whereby before it never froze. It's the phenomenon of the times, because there is no permanent rain; it gets very hot, and more sicknesses are appearing. It has changed a lot, before we would plant anything in the dirt, and it produced in large quantities. Now it doesn't, it doesn't rain, and with all our hard work it still doesn't produce well, very little. Also, before we had lots of animals, we would get a lot of milk from the goats. Before there was a lot of water, it rained a lot, and that is why there was a lot of water, there wasn't a lot of wind, now we have lots of wind, like one big cloud. With every year that passes we lose more water, it doesn't rain during its season. It's very sad, everything is dry, the soil is not like before, and it's losing its value. There are no grasses in the bush (communal pastures), not even for our cows, the trees are also drying up. My parents knew how to take better care of their land using animal manure, not with anything else; they produced only with sheep manure.

An additional point in regards to food production diversity among the four ecological zones is the abundance and potential of herbs, grasses, and animal

production. A wide variety of different herbs—medicinal as well as condiments—and wild fruits and vegetables are plentiful; however, these are more so at the lower altitudes. At the foothills of the cordillera there are wide expanses of lush grasslands where people from the lower altitudes walk their horses to leave them in the spring to graze, until the end of summer or fall. In the past there were other communal grazing lands for sheep and goats, many of which now lie fallow, due to feuds and land purchases. Currently, these animals are walked to the outskirts of the town nucleus, or away from the house to the bush, in order to forage for themselves. Several dogs will protect the flock of sheep and goats, and at times guide them back to town before dusk; however, usually the owners will go back to escort them home, frequently collecting fire wood along the way. Predictably, this has also been contributing to a steady deterioration of the environment, as bush and forest management is not well considered, and appears to be seen as a “free grab zone.” The majority of the municipality, although well aware of the environmental depreciation and erosion, has overlooked the protection of this open, “free-for-all” space.<sup>43</sup> One exception to this is a community in the *cordillera*, where a communal fine is supposedly enforced for cutting down a tree. As one man from the community described it: “We’re taking care of our trees in hopes that it will improve our lands. In our community we have *thola*, *queweña*, *molle*, *yerba santa*, *chillque*,

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<sup>43</sup> Susan Paulson’s study of how social inequality and environmental degradation interact around resource management in a highland region near Cochabamba, emphasized how commercial agricultural production sidelines communal pastures and bush, which “affected poor families, who had earned a livelihood by pasturing other people’s livestock, gathering and selling fuel wood, and doing other activities that depend on watershed resources outside of private agricultural plots...often pushing them to further degrade the surrounding resources” (2005: 186).

*chirchircoma* [native plant species]...and it's prohibited to cut them; if you do, you have to pay a 5 boliviano fine for every tree you cut."<sup>44</sup>

### **Life: Cultural Economy / Reciprocal Exchanges in Circulation**

Cultural economy, posed by postcolonial approach, "challeng[es] the hegemony of Western economical theorizing by revealing its cultural rootedness and opening up space for alternative notions of the economy" (Pollard, McEwan and Hughes, 2011: 7). From a Rumi Mayu experience it may be construed around a basis of reciprocity—the mutual exchange of non-monetary goods, services or actions, and which can be expressed in many ways.<sup>45</sup> Several well-known practices in Andean cultures that exemplify this include *ayni*, *mink'a*, *ch'alla*, *q'oa*, and *trueque* itself.<sup>46</sup> The general conception of the phenomenon of reciprocity relates to a combination of biological and cultural factors (Guerrero: 1998; 259).

Incorporating varying concepts of communal autonomy and self-sufficiency which

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<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that at the time 5 bolivianos was equivalent to approximately 62 U.S. cents, a pittance in comparison to the value of the plants and trees—but, the area is cash poor, and at least is making an attempt to raise awareness and restrict environmental damage. This will be addressed further in Chapter 6.

<sup>45</sup> Mauss (1990) presents a threefold principal of reciprocity: to give, to receive and to reciprocate.

<sup>46</sup> For future reference, the specific definitions of these terms are as follows: *Trueque* refers to the voluntary exchange of one good for another, between two or more consenting individuals. Transactions usually consist of agricultural crops (e.g., potatoes, wheat, peanuts), or agriculturally derived products (homemade bread, made from wheat; brandy from home grown grapes). Although I briefly described the ritual circulations of exchange above, I would like to reiterate them here, with some common local examples. *Ayni* is an exchange of labor for labor; for example, helping one's relative, neighbor, or friend to plant, and then they help you plant. *Ayni* is highly practiced by widows who are unable to plow with oxen, and will exchange this labor with their own labor, such as cooking or sewing. *Mink'a* is when labor is exchanged for a product, for example if you help your sister's family plant potatoes, you will get a percentage of the harvest. The *ch'alla* is a ritual performed for the protection of a new home, auto, other large material possession, or for the crops; or, on a more informal, quotidian basis, performed whenever one drinks alcoholic beverages: a little is splashed onto the ground, for the Pachamama (Mother Earth). *Q'oa* is a frequent, weekly or monthly ritual, also of giving to the Pachamama, and asking for protection of one's land and crops—for example, in the form of rain and, subsequently, good health.

co-exist with inter-dependence, labor practices, knowledge, and traditions that have been passed along and modified from generation to generation, reciprocity has continued to exist throughout the Andes since pre-Incaic times, although fluctuating in usage, intensity and meaning.<sup>47</sup> In this manner, as has been frequently noted, cultures are not stagnant; social relations themselves are in a state of continual flux, varying across cultures, and changing historically (Bourque, 1989; Abercrombie, 1998; Gudeman and Rivera, 2002).<sup>48</sup>

A personal illustration of reciprocal practices that I'd like to cite again and deepen here, is that of planting potatoes, involving a ritual of reciprocity to the Pachamama, and *trueque*—i.e., and as previously discussed, bartering. (Please note that this story is not intended to *embellish* the events, but rather to *highlight* essential contemporary acts of reciprocity.) It began one evening before the yearly planting of potatoes in the *Cabecera del Valle* community of Rumi Mayu itself, as my neighbors, doña Julia and don Sabino, performed a *ch'alla* ritual. Spilling home-distilled singani brandy onto the dirt, drinking and praying to the Virgin Mary and a

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<sup>47</sup> Aafke E. Komter's study on linking together sociological theory on solidarity with anthropological theories on cultural and social significance of reciprocity ("gift giving"), points out that in non-monetarized societies, "the entire social system, including its economic, legal, religious, and moral foundations, was maintained through gift exchange (it was a 'total social phenomenon,' as Mauss calls it), in modern society gift exchange has increasingly come to be considered the opposite of economic exchange... 'social exchange' as opposed to 'economic exchange' " (Komter, 2005: 117).

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Abercrombie stresses that societies and cultures do transform, and the importance is to not fall "prey to anthropological nostalgia...[that] could pretend to study beautifully hermetic 'other cultural' worlds, untarnished by contact with the rapacious and polluting 'Western culture' or capitalism...[Abercrombie does] not mean to suggest that colonialism did not "violate" native societies, only that they were not pure and closed semiotic orders before the conquest, just as sixteenth century Spanish society was in no sense closed and unchanging. Both Andean social forms and Spanish ones were in the midst of rapid transformation at the time they were thrown together, and both were also transformed as a result of their confluence" (Abercrombie, 1998: 22).

local saint,<sup>49</sup> we asked for the rains to come well that year. The next day before planting, another *ch'alla* was performed between all the adults<sup>50</sup> involved in the planting, which included chewing coca leaves, drinking singani, and smoking homemade cigarettes. The final ritual was the *q'oa*, a combination of different herbs and grasses placed atop of a broken ceramic bowl. As it slowly burned, we began to plant the potato seed. Don Sabino plowed, the women planted, and the other men and children spread goat manure fertilizer on top. Women and men planted together; at times we would switch jobs, with the exception of plowing, which the men always managed. Another practice that took place was *ayni*, that of exchange; a neighbor exchanged the use of his oxen, for a percentage of the tentative harvest. Lunchtime revealed the extent and importance of *trueque* in contributing to a balanced and nutritious meal: all the foods consumed were from their own previous harvests, with several additional products acquired through *trueque*.<sup>51</sup> (Occasionally, doña Julia

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<sup>49</sup> Many families in Rumi Mayu have saints painted onto sacred stones. Don Sabino told me how people would stumble onto a sacred stone, and then paint them. Each year, in Rumi Mayu, all the families who possess a sacred stone build a temporary alter around the plaza, and later the local Catholic priest holds a mass and walks from alter to alter, blessing each of the sacred stones.

<sup>50</sup> The adults consisted of doña Julia, her mother, brother and sister, don Sabino and his mother, and my husband and myself. The children included doña Julia and don Sabino's two older sons and daughter in the morning (they attended school in the afternoon), and their two younger daughters and our son in the afternoon. (The latter children attended school in the morning; school was on split session due to building space issues, and which had no relationship with the family/community planting needs.)

<sup>51</sup> Two big pots were cooking: *lawá* (a thick soup consisting of a wheat base, with chopped scallion tops), and *mote* (corn). Mote and roasted peanuts are served in a communal dish; the mote is from the previous harvest, and the peanuts were acquired through *trueque*. We then ate a plate of potatoes, salad (shredded carrots, tomatoes and onions), and chicken. The chicken is fattened with scraps and cast-off vegetables. We ate bread that doña Julia, don Sabino, their children, my husband, our son, and myself had all made the other day—from their harvested wheat, which was milled at the local water mill. It was baked in the adobe oven that don Sabino made, and heated with molle wood from their land. No ingredients came from a package—or, as many people refer to such foods, “*fabricados*” (fabricated). I do not mean to insinuate that doña Julia and don Sabino's family eat purely their own products and those that they have obtained from bartering. However, in the several years that I have now known them, the only products that I have seen them purchase are salt, sugar,

and/or don Sabino travel by foot, mule or truck to neighboring communities, where they exchange wheat, homemade bread or singani mainly for barley, quinoa, peanuts, oranges, and different varieties of potatoes.)

This story demonstrates how rituals and practices of reciprocity are integral in the production, exchange and consumption of food, and a connection with the environment. Reciprocal practices can—at least temporarily—bring together people on more equitable terms, and provide a space for exchanges to occur. As the Aymara intellectual Marcelo Fernández Osco explains, “The exchange of knowledge and experience is fundamental in the indigenous world. It is in this interrelation that political autonomy is defined, which consists in the interconnection between living and knowing (*vivencias y saberes*)” (2006: 89-90). With, or without, full consciousness, there is an increased awareness of our dependence on the environment. As we pray for rain, we are aware of the clouds, precipitation and water as a life support. As we collect goat manure into woven sheep woolen sacks, and then (re)disperse it, we are reminded of the cyclical fertility of the earth, and of the dual nature of life. These acts had just been played in union between female and male (gender); Quechua and gringos (ethnicity); kids, adults and grandparents (generation); and a reliance on others in the community and neighboring community (oxen—*ayni*; lunch foods—*trueque*). Olivia Harris’s anthropological studies serve to highlights Tristan Platt’s own research on Andean dualism, in which he suggests that men and women at one time were in some contexts at least seen as equal and almost symmetrical (Platt, 1986b, cited in Harris, 2000: 13).

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some other fruit, crackers, candy and soda. (Although they do have sugar cane itself growing in their large garden; however, they chew this only on the stalks, and do not process it into sugar.)



I see cultural economy as a circulatory exchange of products (such as *trueque*), labor, and / or actions (such as rituals) that functions outside the realm of cash based markets—which has changed over time and varies in relation to other areas and cultures in Bolivia. Although products exchanged through *trueque* may not coincide exactly with their monetary equivalents on the market, and can veil the inequalities between household productions, they do involve ethical reciprocal interactions between individuals and / or households around given products, and / or between themselves and their environment. For example, Olivia Harris’s anthropological study of the “ethical economy” of Aymara Lymi *ayllus* in Northern Potosí (2000) explores similar issues of the social organization and reciprocal exchange of diverse products between two ecological zones: the highland *suní* (3,300-4,500 meters) that produce tubers, potatoes, barley and wheat; and the intermountain valleys know as *likina* (2,000-3,000 meters), that produce maize, squash, goats, cows and pigs. However, Harris refers to these exchanges as “circulation,” that “often...follow a cyclical pattern;” and she aligns herself with the Meillassoux characterization of interzonal exchange as being

...based on a system of long-term advances and restitutions. The crucial point is that while the flow of prestations is socially regulated, it is only equalized over time, and at the level of the whole community. At any given moment, some households will be producing more, and others less, than what is socially necessary for their own reproduction, but nonetheless their reproduction is ensured by the general flow of goods within the *ayllu* [Meillassoux]...point is that reciprocity is an ideological form that conceals the real relations of distribution on which the economy is based (Harris, 2000: 85).

Whereas I have also witnessed how *trueque* is a system based on “long-term advances and restitutions,” that becomes “equalized over time” and can hide “real relations of distribution” and inclusion / exclusion, my own experiences in the municipality of Rumi Mayu display how these exchanges did enhance interactions and understanding between the four ecological zones, and provided a space for the availability of diverse nutritious foods; given the cultural variation between the four ecological floors, these interactions may be seen as representative of local intraculturality among the communities. I associate *trueque* as being intertwined with agricultural practices and rituals, which alone or together are based on reciprocal acts. For example, to *ch'allar* the Mother Earth, the “Pacahmama,” before planting displays physical, symbolic, and circular returns of what was taken, and then given back, in hopes of receiving again. Before planting potatoes we “*ch'allared*” with *singani*<sup>52</sup> made from vines that grew up the native molle trees, by sparingly pouring it onto the earth, as an act of appreciation and respect, and a prayer for an upcoming fruitful harvest. In a similar fashion, as agricultural production decreases or becomes erratic due to environmental changes, as the market encroaches and re-defines distribution and acquisition of products, as inter-generational knowledge is swayed by schools, television and the Internet, and as migration separates the familiar and brings in new-fangled ideas and ways, the varied enactments of reciprocity are fractionalizing and opening up newer spaces. The

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<sup>52</sup> Singani is a sort of wine brandy. Most families in Rumi Mayu grow grapes for home consumption, *trueque*, to sell in the market in the city, or to make *singani*. *Singani* is much more profitable than the grapes themselves, and can be stored over time, consumed or sold when needed—like money in a bank account.

outcomes are numerous and complex, and play a major role in the re-shuffling of power dynamics and forms of solidarity.

Empirical data and theoretical discussions in anthropology and sociology have historically linked cultural economy to fostering social relationships, creating social order and solidarity behaviors.<sup>53</sup> Levi-Strauss's work highlighted how reciprocity was part of a social structure of mutual obligations that acted as a moral cohesion of culture and society.<sup>54</sup> Komter goes on to connect that reciprocity consists of "gifts given in informal relationships invariably affect human solidarity, whereas goods exchanged on the market do not" (Komter, 1996: 117). In other words, cultural economy consists of and represents social relations, and most theorists acknowledge a "distinction between the domains of market and gift" (Olsteen, 2002: 2).

But cultural economy (reciprocity), as previously mentioned, can be asymmetrical, and does not "necessarily mean equivalence" (Gouldner, cited in Komter, 2005). Some more contemporary studies and theorists have demonstrated how reciprocity can actually mask socio-economic differences often determined by wealth and gender, demonstrate personal status or "symbolic capital," and / or provoke widening communal tensions (Orlove, 1974; Mallon, 1983; Weismantel,

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<sup>53</sup> Some of the most prominent works include: Malinowski, 1948; Mauss, 1990 [1923]; Levi-Strauss, 1961; Gouldner, 1973b; Elster, 1989; Mayhew, 1971; Tonnies, 1964a; Coleman, 1986; Hechter, 1987; Raub, 1997; Linderberg, 1998). <sup>54</sup> According to Geertz (1990), "the cultural, social, psychological, and biological constitutes an 'integrated total' because it makes the 'interactive relation' that permits a cultural understanding like a program that 'molds... man' through symbolic systems from ritual actors" (cited in Ticona, 2005: 46-47).

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1988; Gudeman, 2001; Bourdieu, 2000). Maria Lagos's study of a community in a highlands region of Cochabamba demonstrates how reciprocity (interchange) of products mainly occurs between campesinos and "*rentistas*" (commercial middle men), resulting in "ambiguities of domination, resistance, and collusion" (1994: 86). Small business people bring "salt, clothes, fruit...bread, coca, sugar cane alcohol, and general merchandise...to exchange for potatoes" (ibid: 130). The market value of these products—in terms of volume and weight—results in unequal gains or profits. For example, the "exchange of a canister of 50 oranges...for one arroba of potatoes (25 pounds)," differs on the market in terms of price: 50 oranges "sell for 1.50 bolivianos," whereas, one arroba of potatoes "sells for 6.00 bolivianos" (ibid: 130). Similarly, as I discussed above, the production of peanuts in the *Valle* of Rumi Mayu were being aligned to the market price as a means to attain more product in *trueque*, i.e. the exchange of less peanuts for more potatoes. The peanut producers exhibited a sense of having more clout, while the potato producers displayed indignation. Whereas generosity, trust and cooperation are often linked to systems of cultural economy, cultural economy can also be associated with how people use it to impose "power, affectivity and instrumentality" (Komter, 2005).

When one family's product distorts values within the system of *trueque*, or produces considerably more than another, it can result in communal inequality and envy. However, the term "*envidia*"<sup>55</sup> (envy, jealousy) arose more around issues of material acquisitions and monetary wealth attained through the market than the actual agricultural production, or *trueque*. When people spoke of past harvests of

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<sup>55</sup> Talks and acts of "*envidia*" continually came up in conversations during my field research and on subsequent visits, and thus periodically surfaces throughout this thesis.

abundance, it ultimately led to fond stories of large communal parties given by those whose crops yielded the most. Apparently, families that produced more in the past would share some of their harvests by giving a fiesta and provide food and drink. As one older woman from the *Cabecera de Valle* told me, “Before we all produced a lot, and those with the biggest harvest would have a fiesta...don Simón produced a lot of maize and made very good chicha, we usually always celebrated at his house for days.” Yet on the other hand, one older man from the valley saw this as a hindrance, as days were lost to drinking and eating. One 70-year-old woman from the *Valle* reflected on these fiestas, and why they changed: “The fiestas use to come one after another, we would dance the *p’altancho*, the women had lots of *polleras* (dresses), and the men used a *montera plana* (traditional head covering), they covered themselves with an *aguayo* (weaving), just like the campesino dress. But now there aren’t these big fiestas, everything is scarce, there isn’t any money, the lands don’t produce anything, there’s even a shortage of food.” Another older woman from the *Altura* succinctly summarized: “When the work diminishes, the fiestas also diminish.” This coincides with what another woman told me about how relationships have changed in recent years; before, when a family had difficulty making ends meet, other families were more inclined to help them out with some of their own harvests, etc., but now a day, they “won’t even share an egg.” People’s stories of the past reveal impressions of self / communal accomplishments, sharing, and a healthier form of competition between themselves and the other communities, regarding the quality and quantity of particular crops.

Reflecting back on Komter's observations that reciprocity contributes to relationships of solidarity while the market does not, I am reminded of Gérald Berthoud's analysis of how two models of "development (state in the market, or dynamics of the market alone) produce self-interested individuals, reputedly liberated from all moral or social obligation" (Berthoud, 1992:74). Berthoud continued to explain that "market relations are...reduced to numerical values; with the price mechanism, the market appears to be composed of strangers connected only on the level of appearances, with all signs of friendship, loyalty or affections put aside" (ibid: 78). So, as Berthoud himself questions, "How are we to avoid becoming individually and collectively the instruments and the victims of systems of our own construction, systems which we have taken as the expression of our own aspirations?" (ibid: 86).

### **Circular Exchanges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Rumi Mayu's cultural economy, largely based on *trueque*, is increasingly succumbing to the production of mono crops to be sold for cash on the market. The production and exchange of most clothing and household goods have already gone down this path, as older artisans die out, and younger consumers prefer to buy new and used clothing and plastic buckets. While many of these practices are very much alive, they are increasingly mixed into a new economy of agricultural production, food consumption discourse and unequal power relations that is driven by concepts of, and an imaginary of, "Eurocentric" modernity. Western modernity builds on, and exploits, concepts of colonial racism that entices many Rumi Mayuns to change their cultural economy to fit market practices, as a way to improve their lives and

experience new technological innovations. In the process, their own history and way of life is disregarded, seen as imperfect, and inept to suit or benefit a Eurocentric framework of modernity. Instead, indigenous cultural and economic practices are seen as a yet-to-be modernity project, ultimately undermining the richness and values within its own cultural economy and lifeworld.

Gudeman and Rivera say that societies and their economies function on the interaction between systems of barter and market that embrace “human feelings of both ‘mutuality’ and ‘self interest’” (Gudeman and Rivera, 2002: 3). However, whereas barter is enmeshed in social and cultural relations, the market places the precedence in self-interest. Neither system functions without communal consent and both are integral for community development. However, in Rumi Mayu I have observed an increasing focus on the market, at the expense of *trueque* and other forms of cultural economy, that demonstrates the powerful growth of self-interests and a skewed class structure—this then has the potential to eliminate cultural and agricultural practices within one system that might not be in as good a position to substitute the previous system, with possible negative effects on the environment, food security, nutritional consumption of food, and communal well being.<sup>56</sup>

Through many years of travel and work throughout Bolivia, Libermann, Godinez and Albó observed that when confronted, barter economies are

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<sup>56</sup> José De Souza Silva describes these events as the “colonization of nature,” whereby the “European occidental dominates the rests of the world for their own benefit.” This process occurs through an intense influence over people *agricultural paradigm* [first, an exchange of plants, next was the imposition of European agricultural technology and practices] that liberates an *extraction paradigm* [mono crops, over fishing, lumber], that later enables the development of an *industrial paradigm* [markets, packaged goods], spawned by emerging capitalism, with the help of the development of modern science under a mechanical vision and masculine reality” (2006: 209).

irredeemably susceptible to market economies; “initially a communal economy will try to adapt to external conditions imposed, but the modifying effect of the market will lessen the traditional norms of the community...unable to manage this situation for much time, [the communal economy] will most likely weaken and decline when faced with the power of money, and the productive necessities and the consumerism that the market generates” (Albó,1989: 37). Similarly, in exploring the changing nature of the market’s alliance with the state and NGOs, there is a correlation with newer forms of colonialism that utilize the imposed transition to a market economy as a means to “re-territorialize” the municipality of Rumi Mayu, resulting in redefining both gender and class / ethnicity roles.<sup>57</sup>

As reviewed above, numerous studies and theorists have, and continue to, analyze and contest the meaning and actions of reciprocity. Two sociological poles consist of: 1) theorists who align with Komter’s “moral cement” approach, in which reciprocity has the ability to create social bonds and solidarity; and 2) theorists who contend that acts of reciprocity are used to attain and exercise power, which in turn foment inequality and social disintegration. In line with the Komter approach, one study conducted by David Cheal within Canadian communities determined that reciprocity acts as a “‘moral economy’...a system of transactions which are defined as socially desirable...because through them social ties are recognized, and balanced social relationships are maintained” (1988: 15). On the other hand, Cheal also points

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<sup>57</sup> This became clear at a March 2004 municipal meeting organized by an NGO, financed by USAID, that brought together local municipal authorities with local people to discuss how to divide up the municipality according to economic development possibilities that included the mono production of certain crops for the market (male employment), artisan production of marmalade, weavings and knitting (female employment), developing a tourism industry (business class and labor class), etc.



out that reciprocity does not really threaten the dominant market economy because reciprocal practices are part of an economy that occurs predominantly among small groups (1998: 16).

Barter and reciprocity form a cultural cohesion and economic system that facilitate local / regional sustainability and independence, yet they are very susceptible to the whims of the market. One reason is, as Cheal points out, that reciprocity occurs among small populations in disperse regions that is based on equitable commodity exchanges, and not money. They do not threaten dominant capitalist systems, but rather are used to benefit them. On certain levels there is a co-dependency for material exchanges, such as national urban centers desires and/or needs for food and other resource commodities, and Rumi Mayuns desires and/or needs for complimentary foods, medicines and luxury goods. Whereas I believe that geographically and culturally diverse regions, such as the municipality of Rumi Mayu, have the advantage for living sustainable and illustrate numerous healthier relationships, with increased urbanization their local commodities are increasingly needed and economically desirable on a national and international scale. The intergenerational agricultural expertise and knowledge, and strong cultural behaviors expressed in places like Rumi Mayu contain the know-how, managerial skills and regional stability to enable capitalism to thrive. Unfortunately, the market does not encourage equitable benefits or acts of solidarity, but rather operates in ways that fractionalize relationships and imbalance returns. For example, when peanuts were seen as a good cash crop for one of the *valle* communities, a “behind the scenes” cooperative was formed and supported by an NGO to produce peanuts as a cash

crop. Consequently, only few chosen families consolidated efforts surpassed by those of the rest of community, thereby skewing the regional cultural economy and creating social tensions and envy.

As previously discussed, present day reciprocal actions in the municipality of Rumi Mayu continue to function mainly around the production and exchange (*trueque*) of numerous food products; its existence is unique and contingent upon the socio-cultural and environmental particulars of the region and its communities in terms of their distinctive patterns of evolution and transformation.<sup>58</sup> Reciprocity practices continue to provide people with the ability to attain a number of positive results: 1) diversify, enrich and enjoy a variety of healthful foods; 2) break up the daily routines of life with visits to other communities to socialize, and to exchange thoughts and products; 3) enable people to compare harvests, brag, share information and learn from each other; 4) engage in collaboration between women and men; and 5) balance municipal class relations. (Although it must also be affirmed that those that are more connected to the city market, or outsiders that come to the municipality to trade, obviously distort local “ethnic economies” as they try to maximize their profits.) In other words, the people of Rumi Mayu in the past, as well as now, continue to work with their environment to make the best out of one’s own means—to survive, and to make life more enjoyable.<sup>59</sup> My own experiences, observations,

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<sup>58</sup> Indeed, when discussing my research with a Bolivian friend who is a communications environmentalist, and has traveled extensively throughout Bolivia, she was very surprised to learn that “*trueque*” was still being practiced to this degree in any municipality at all in the country.

<sup>59</sup> In general, people would have lots of fond stories about their visits with other people in the communities that they visited to trade. A sense of relationship solidarity and knowledge about the current situation in the community was enhanced. It is a given that the terrain can be cumbersome, but the distances between the four ecological zones are not that far apart (a couple of hours to a day’s walk). Most people are very accustomed to walking, and for long distance treks people hitch rides

and data reveal more similarities with Cheal and Komter's analyses; acts of reciprocity help strengthen social ties, and furthermore potentially contribute to healthier diets, but on the other hand, when someone attains a lot more than another (commodities to barter or market), aspects of power play or asymmetrical relations can occur, which over time could influence the social order.

Inherent in reciprocity are ritual acts that not only bring people together in ceremonial performances that help maintain social ties and structures (Durkheim, 1997), but in addition, they also "revitalize the social heritage of the group and helps transmit its enduring values to future generations" (Coser 1971: 139, as cited in Komter, 2005: 120). An awareness of interdependence with other people occurs, despite value differences and how everyone interprets the rituals. For example, my own personal experience of chewing coca or offering singani to the Pachamama held a different value and ritual interpretation than with those of the other participants with whom I shared these rituals; however, through these ceremonial performances I felt more connected with the people with whom I shared, and my interest in the purpose of our ritual (a fruitful harvest) was enhanced. Also, through demonstrating respect and participation in these rituals, I felt more accepted by other community residents. One day while planting potatoes and performing the accompanying rituals, the mayor, don Jorge, walked by with doña Estefania—a 75-year-old women who likes to talk. After that day, and for many days afterwards, people would inquire and comment about how we knew how to plant potatoes and do the *cha'lla*.

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with a truck. As one 65 year old women proudly told me as she pointed up to the side of the mountain, "I use to walk that path up there on the mountain [to the Cordillera], I'd go with my father. We'd leave at 5:00 in the morning, and get there by 9:00. It's so beautiful up there... But, now my knees are bad. I wish I could still walk up that mountain."

One high school philosophy teacher, Marisol, commented, “I’ve never done anything with the people here. I don’t know how to plant potatoes, or have even thought about learning.” As Komter points out, a “basic aspect of solidarity” is when individuals “participating in a group activity...learn how to ‘read’ themselves, how their basic emotions become transformed in the interaction with other people, and how their individual being gets shaped through their interdependency with other people. In this sense, rituals reinforce the main basis of organic solidarity: mutual dependency” (Komter, 2005: 121). Teachers and other newcomers to the region could deepen and exchange their knowledge and cultural relationships—i.e. pluri/interculturality—through local (recipriocal) practices that value and enhance inter-generational epistemologies, leading to a form of decolonization.

As noted, the practices of reciprocity continue to involve rituals that are integral in the production, exchange and consumption of nutritious foods, reinforce connection with the environment, and generate solidarity, that “transcends the mere behavioral interaction between the exchange partners by extending it to the emotional mood and the quality of the social relationship” (Komter, 2005: 122). As Libermann, Godínex and Albó point out, “agricultural rituals are an integral and fundamental part of agricultural technology, and should not be considered as external factors of a productive strategy” (Albó, 1989: 32). After my own personal involvement in local rituals, I felt a more emotional bond with doña Julia, don Sabino, and their family, plus a deeper connection and concern about the prospective potato harvest, soil fertility and sufficient rainfall. As previously discussed, the unique geographic nature, and the region’s relative isolation until the 1990s, sustain

many agricultural practices and rituals that stem from the Inca Empire, which in itself conquered the Aymaras, and functioned as a non-market economy distributing goods and services over an extensive region among a variety of different local languages and cultures; “this whole system of vertical integration of micro-ecological systems (which has been likened to an archipelago), based on the production of different crops and bound into a non-market economy through elaborate systems of kinship, exchange, and labor obligations, was fundamental in maintaining a powerful and economically vital society on the altiplano” (Klein, 1992: 18).<sup>60</sup> Even though these agricultural practices and cultural rituals have changed, and continue to do so, “the postcolonial historical sorceries of Bolivian interculturalities are in no imminent danger of disappearing. Ritual action is capable of transforming the relationship between context and human subjectivity and, consequently, of transforming the ways in which messages can be interpreted and by whom” (Abercrombie, 1998: 421).

### **Conclusion: Cooperation in the Cultural Economy**

Throughout this chapter I discuss Rumi Mayu’s system of *trueque* and reciprocity, and some ways in which it has evolved and continues to function according to the environmental terrain and condition, and inter-cultural relationships,

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<sup>60</sup> The merging of the two cultures (Inca and Aymara) led to economic advancements including the development of an extensive irrigation system, agricultural terracing, food storage, domesticated cameloids, work with gold, silver and precious metals, herbal medicinal practices, and complex mathematical and architectural skills (Bujra, 2000: 227). In addition, they maintained a centrally organized political and cultural system, based on rational principles of equality and justice that were rooted in a well-developed infrastructure that stimulated productive activity and labor, and that maintained such traditional social structures as the *ayllu* (kin group). Agriculture was considered as the most important economic activity by the Incas, which moved to second place under Spanish colonialism, following the conquerors’ primary interest, the exploitation of silver (González, 1980: 21-22).

local epistemologies, materials, needs, interests, and values. My intention is not to portray the region as idealistic and utopian but to try to express in words a dimension of living that is more in tune with ones' surroundings, intercultural relationships, and daily needs, interests and desires, obstacles and struggles. the nature of a cultural economy based on *trueque* and reciprocity illuminate interactions of "care," and the necessity of inter-dependence, both of which help to curtail disproportionate inequities between haves and have nots; in other words, trueque is fundamentally antagonistic to the culture of colonization, as such therefore in its present day form it represents an important act of decolonization.

I was witness to different examples of how the complexity of reciprocity plays out in practice. For example, in one Cabecera del Valle community: a single mother and her daughter did not have a home or relatives to help them. The *sindicato* (community union) discussed the issue, found a piece of land, and built them a two room adobe home with enough space for a garden, chickens and goats. In this case, the results were positive for all; mother and daughter, and the community as a whole. However, on the other hand, there were also instances involving similar exchanges that did *not* prove as beneficial to the common good. The *sindicato* gave don Sabino's cousin, who had left Rumi Mayu years before and only recently returned, a piece of forested land near the river. Presumably, he was to use this land for agriculture or the cattle he was attempting to raise; however, he later chopped down all of the trees and sold the wood. This served only to benefit the pockets of don Sabino's cousin, at the expense of the local environment and the community's trust.

Before I move on to the next chapter, I would like to finalize by clarifying a few highly relative points. Firstly, the material and social basis of Rumi Mayu's cultural economy is constructed through epistemologies that are considered mutually exclusive in the development paradigm, and inferior in the modernization discourse. Yet it is these cultural economic practices (i.e. *trueque*, reciprocity, *ayni* and *challa*'s) that enabled Rumi Mayuns to live through and survive colonialism, in core ways that were of their own being, and after liberation to construe their lifeworld largely outside of a Eurocentric discourse. Although *trueque* was the engine of a regional cultural economy, and continues on various levels and dimensions, it does not exist in and of itself; it operates within a web of other social and material relations that include those of external and "modern" markets. As Rivera Cusicanqui (2007) pointed out, and was mentioned earlier in the chapter, indigenous cultural economic practices are "space[s] of cultural resistance," that grew through varying degrees of complex social and market relations. Barter and reciprocity allows economic relations to have a certain stability that is an essential support for a market to function. While indigenous labors appear to exist on the peripheral of the market, the two are co-dependent, like feudalism and capitalism in many societies; whereas capitalism and development did not replace feudalism, instead feudalism actually helped capitalism thrive, just as did systems of slavery.

Secondly, what this chapter has shown is how intercultural relationships exist and work together. Granted, the different cultures throughout the municipality may not seem so different to the outsider, but within the municipality they are. While everyone speaks Quechua—the main reference point for being "indigenous"—

people from the higher altitude communities are frequently referred to as “*indios*” by those in the lower altitudes. This is largely due to the fact that most of the people who live in these communities continue to weave their own traditional clothing, and to wear them. At the other extreme are many people from several *valle* communities, who are noted for their paler skin and blue eyes. Yet, while occasional derogatory comments are exchanged, for the most part people respect and value one another’s labor and the products that are shared. Inter and intra-cultural relations are a key factor that enabled a sense of continuity to be maintained amidst change. In other words, cultural economy systems, such as *trueque* and reciprocity, are sustained over time and history through interculturality. In line with Dussels comments at the start of this chapter, processes of decolonization take place through valuing oneself, neighbor, one’s culture and another’s culture.

One final note: although the maintenance of *trueque*, reciprocity and other communal practices demonstrate a regional autonomy of both agency and resistance, which in turn allows for a more significant degree of economic security not subjugated to the ravages of the market, there is still a need for caution in dealing with contemporary relations concerning the market and development agencies (NGOs, as well as the state). Rumi Mayuns have constructed a way of life that escape the binaries of “modern” and “non-modern,” and as such shows us how inadequate and irrelevant these colonial categories are to understanding the cultural economy of Rumi Mayuns.



## CHAPTER 4

### NGOS AND THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

*We all should support the process of auto-reflection in our society...I would like to address the collision between two conceptions of life...Of the two Bolivias that haven't reached an understanding of each other, for the exclusion of an anxious indigenous majority to recuperate their active presence in the construction of the nation.*

*Jorge Sanjinés, 2003*

Rumor had it that Prince Felipe of Spain was coming to Rumi Mayu, in order to check out the work, in a protocol kind of way, of an NGO that receives Spanish financing. This particular NGO— *Promotores Agropecuarios* (PROAGRO), mainly focuses on agricultural projects, but they also have an education and a health component. As part of the education element, they financed the construction of one boarding home for high school students, and two elementary schools in the *Cordillera* and *Altura*. At the time, I was working with a group of these same high school students on two projects, one of which was going to be presented to the Spanish delegation. However, as the rumor spread about the prince, I too began to wonder, could this really be true? Since I frequently hitched a ride with PROAGRO to the communities, in anticipation of the event I asked if I could accompany them for the occasion, to which they assented.

The big day arrived; it was a cloudy cool spring morning, and several pickup trucks from the NGO and municipality were loading up with people to head up to the *Cordillera* for the Big Event, where all sorts of welcoming preparations were under way. I happened to hop in the back seat of the truck with the regional coordinator,

an agronomist, named Xavier. I asked, “So where’s the Prince of Spain?” He laughed embarrassedly, and said that not only had that been a false rumor, the result of fanciful and wishful thinking, but also, and worse yet, the rest of the Spanish delegation wasn’t coming either—thus, the whole community had gone all out in preparation for nothing. The (Bolivian) delegation of project evaluators was, unfortunately, stuck in Santa Cruz because of a transportation strike. The coordinator was deeply concerned about what to say to all the people who were waiting so excitedly. An hour and a half later, as we were approaching the community, in the distance we could see the column of colorful *awayus* strung across the road, one behind the other, supported by crooked wooden poles. Everyone from town lined both sides of the dirt road, with a band playing *zampoñas* and *charangos* at the head of the crowd. With this spectacle in sight, in desperation the coordinator Xavier turned to me and asked, “Karen, why don’t you pretend to be one of the Spanish evaluators?” As he and others repeated this proposition in the truck, I realized that they were actually serious. I responded, “I can’t do that; besides being deceitful, a whole bunch of these people already know me.” Xavier shrugged, and said ruefully “You’re right, I’ll just have to tell them the truth...” Xavier was the first one to descend from the truck, and with much regret in his voice he explained the situation, and apologized for the no-show prince and Spanish delegation. Everyone was disappointed, but this all seemed to dissipate as the morning activities began. A major compensation was that PROAGRO had brought a video photographer from Sucre, to film the day’s events.

These kinds of fanfare and elaborate preparations have become protocol to express gratitude to the “kind generosity” of NGOs and municipal projects.

Although people are appreciative of “outside” assistance, and seem keen for a little celebration, these acts are generally “show pieces;” the locals are not addressed or treated on equal grounds. For example and on this particular day, after driving through the hand held *awayu* tunnel, the group was lead to an exhibition of tables that displayed the children’s projects, and then to the classrooms to see some performances of how the children are learning with some innovative classroom made toys.<sup>61</sup> A few of the more extroverted locals led the NGO workers and video

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<sup>61</sup>I was working with two groups of high school students who resided at the community boarding house. One project focused on historic recollections of their communities in which students interviewed their family members during weekend visits and vacations. The other project consisted of forming an ecology club through coordinating the visits of a Sucre university student ecology club via the environmental NGO *Asociación Sucrense de Ecología* (ASE). Each of the two groups of high school students displayed their respective work. However, when the PROAGRO educational coordinator approached the students with the video cameraman, she tried to cover up the ASE ecology club logo; when I took the cover off, she moved on and would not film nor talk with the students. Similarly, when she approached the students’ community history investigation project, she cordially greeted them, filmed them quickly without any dialogue, and walked on. Here there were no logos to cover over. Prior to this event, I had asked her if it would be okay for the students to present their work; she agreed and even gave us some poster paper and markers. Apparently the innovation of these students did not merit attention because their work was not a product of the NGO being evaluated. <sup>62</sup> To briefly reiterate, concepts of decolonization and interculturality are the ideological pillars of the MAS government’s national policies and discourse, most evident in the 2006 National Development Policy (NDP) and 2009 Constitution. They have made their way into ministerial policies such as “decolonized education,” “bilingual intercultural education,” and “intercultural health.” Refer back to the introduction and chapter 2 for more details.<sup>63</sup> In a conversation with the school director from the Altura region, he described educational plans in which the children living in the higher altitudes (*Cordillera*) were more apt for agricultural labor because of their ancestral ties with farming, while the children living in the lower altitudes (*Cabezera de Valle* and *Valle*), were more suitable for going to college and learning higher qualified western knowledge and skills because of their close vicinity to town life and higher exposures to modern ways.

cameraman, while the remainder of the campesinos/as straggled behind or milled about. After breezing through the impressive exhibits, like walking through a living-art museum, they were taken to a classroom with set-up tables and fed a feast of country (*campo*) foods. I would usually go in and check out the scene at this sort of affair, but this day I was not in the mood, so I sat outside in the dirt with the others. In a small way I see the value of these visits, as they provide a space for the students and community to share and feel good about what they are doing. It also ensures the financiers that their money is efficiently spent.

But, I also find the whole process demeaning. There are no profound exchanges going on between people, nor substantial dialogues. More interest is placed on the monitoring of project implementation to make sure that the NGOs have sufficiently carried out their end of the bargain, than with working together with locals on deeper levels. Days and weeks go into the preparatory processes, with all of the anointments bestowed on the evaluators and NGO workers who earn handsome paychecks. They then go away with gifts of weavings that take women weeks to months to elaborate, and most likely will end up in someone's closet. Program reports are written, passed around the respective agencies, and then filed. I have been a part of, and seen, numerous evaluation events, and they are almost always the same. Where is the historical political awareness and social justice element of NGO development? Why are these elements not incorporated into a better way toward reciprocal expressions, and program check-up exchanges? When and how will the political discourse and national policies currently related to

“decolonization” and “interculturality”<sup>62</sup> effect NGO workers and municipal development?

As I sat outside on that particular day, a woman gave me a plate of food, the same as given to the NGO staff and others sitting at the tables behind the classroom door. No one else outside was eating. I shared my plate of food with an elderly couple sitting beside me. I talked with them and others, and reflected on what the women and men of the Rumi Mayu communities wanted from the NGOs working in their area and from the municipal government, and what they saw as the actual felt needs of their communities. The following are composites of many key opinions that I heard from numerous people from young adults to elders, in their own, but in similar ways. I distinguish between what women and men expressed:

*Women narratives:*

“I would like to have water wells and canals constructed, so we don’t lack water and also to improve our lands with animal manure. Maybe we can start a business. To improve our community we should form an organization, a cooperative. My major desire is to improve education for our children, so that they can learn more. I would like to see education and health improve, and that the women organize to receive educational training. I would like to leave my community in good condition, for my children. We can learn more, or we could *away* (weave), and we could sell our weavings.”

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<sup>62</sup> To briefly reiterate, concepts of decolonization and interculturality are the ideological pillars of the MAS government’s national policies and discourse, most evident in the 2006 National Development Policy (NDP) and 2009 Constitution. They have made their way into ministerial policies such as “decolonized education,” “bilingual intercultural education,” and “intercultural health.” Refer back to the introduction and chapter 2 for more details.<sup>63</sup> In a conversation with the school director from the Altura region, he described educational plans in which the children living in the higher altitudes (*Cordillera*) were more apt for agricultural labor because of their ancestral ties with farming, while the children living in the lower altitudes (*Cabezera de Valle* and *Valle*), were more suitable for going to college and learning higher qualified western knowledge and skills because of their close vicinity to town life and higher exposures to modern ways.

“I would like to buy animal manure for my lands so that I could produce better; than I will return the money that I borrowed. I would like our community to have potable water for our lands, and to improve the school. My major dream is to have my own house and travel. If I was one of the authorities, I would have to be correct and loyal, and also I would look for help from other organizations. I would like to help other women, look for some work for them, for example with weavings, and also do something for the men. I would also help our union to be good and organized. I would like to better guide my children with their studies. We’d like the education to be better and to produce more. We don’t have any sheep, therefore not much animal manure, but if we did have more manure we would have better production. If we had some money, we could buy and sell coca and cigarettes.”

*Men narratives:*

“We would like to do reforestation, so that we will have a forest. I would like to leave my community with all of the necessary comforts, such as good roads and irrigation canals. To improve our culture, we need to work together with other communities to improve our agricultural production, and find institutions that know this stuff very well, and work with the municipal government to see if they can really help us. We have a community representative who is very intelligent, but at times there are problems. We need more institutions that are truly committed. We should terrace the land, so that the water will flow, and so that the water doesn’t wash away our soil; in this way we could produce more. I believe that we could improve our production if there were better collaboration with seeds, and more training.”

“I would like to improve the land, more importantly training workshops to help us improve the conditions. We would like to make *lacayote* (a form of winter squash), and guava marmalade, and then find someone to help us, so that we could sell it quickly. We would like to buy some more land to work, and maybe also start a business.”

These local narratives illustrate a somewhat different vision of the future of communities than purely market oriented economic projects: one that includes cultural cohesion, community solidarity, healthy environments, and learning enhancement and expansion, as well as infrastructure projects (water, improved housing, schools and health posts). Both men and women shared similar visions,

although women would talk in more depth about education, while men would discuss more about agricultural production. In a sense, NGOs are fulfilling needs and desires of locals, but with a social and cultural cost. Unfortunately, after years of neglect, and many living with just enough to get by or not enough, most locals appear to take what they can get from the NGOs. This state of semi-desperation can hastily ram through projects that can divide the community and provide them with no alternative vision of development and well being. But, until now what other options or alternatives have locals had? Results have been mixed: in some ways beneficial, yet also lopsided, incongruent and disjointed leading to commodification, alienation and breaking the communal ethos. On the one hand, these infrastructure projects contribute to the health and education of the communities, with many locals manipulating them in ways that better serve their needs. However, essentially the NGOs and municipal employees are not operating in ways that bring people together, or address the fundamental issues of poverty conditions throughout the municipality. It is in this manner these NGOs are contributing to a “depoliticization” process (Kamat, 2002; Ferguson, 1990; Kapoor, 2008), as their focus is on technical assessments and professionalized cures, with projects that do not necessarily address the historical consequences and internalized processes and outcomes of colonialism, and contemporary colonality. They also emphasize a functional only view of social relations and natural resources, creating individualism and divisions, as locals compete for goods and profits. A process of privatization and accumulative ethos is set in motion, which “concentrates power and resources rather than diffuses it” (Kamat, 2004: 17). Subtly, individual needs increasingly prevail over community

welfare, as the trend moves toward capitalist relations and markets. Corruption may also result as municipal administrators are tempted by possibilities to skim some cash from large infrastructure projects.

Whereas numerous Bolivian NGOs originally surfaced in response to dire poverty and political oppression and injustice, in recent times a good majority of them have become increasingly “professionalized” and westernized; shifting from liberation theology and Freirian consciousness raising, indigenous social critiques and political justice education to technological and economic projects, stocked with bits of helpful information. Kamat associates this change with a co-optation of community-based NGOs (CBOs) and advocacy NGOs by the “emergent international economic order and its neoliberal notion of democracy” (2004: 157). Kamat connects how NGOs “are being integrated into global capitalist relations” (ibid: 156), as the new partners of donor agencies; the dominant protagonists being the World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations (UN) (see also Ferguson, 1990, Escobar 1995, and Hearn 1999). Strategies are occurring through pluralizing the public sphere with outcomes demonstrated by how municipal leaders, NGOs workers, and some local campesinos are planning regional development projects and policies that are largely determined and supervised by matching grant funders (Spain, US and Japan), and international agencies (UNICEF).

Thus, these current trends show that monies for municipal projects directly and indirectly focus on liberalizing the economy through a “depoliticization” process of the private sphere. Development visions concentrate on carving up the municipality into agricultural mono crop production zones, with school curriculums



oriented to divide children's projected skills according to their geographical zone and stereotypical inherited abilities that could match market related jobs.<sup>63</sup> This logical thinking gets twisted with concept variations of democracy and participation that highly overshadow regional cultures and practices in favor of those that are molded and tuned to the likes of major donor countries and institutions; e.g., USAID and World Bank that open up private and public spaces for western economic ideologies and markets. Evelina Dagnino (2008:55) refers to this as a "*perverse confluence* between participatory and political projects," in which the struggles and accomplishments of grassroots organizations and social movements of the 60s and 70s principles of democracy and participation have been appropriated and redefined by neoliberalism. Collective participation has become individualized through an emphasis on "'voluntary work' and the 'social responsibility' of individuals and private enterprises...[whereby the] "adoption of a privatizing, individualistic perspective, replac[es] and re-signif[ies] the collective meaning of social participation" (ibid:61). Furthermore, civil society has increasingly become synonymous with NGOs, who play the role of a "third sector;" the other sectors being the state and market (ibid: 59). Neoliberalism redescribes citizenship "to mean individual integration into the market as a consumer and as a producer." (ibid: 66).

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<sup>63</sup> In a conversation with the school director from the Altura region, he described educational plans in which the children living in the higher altitudes (*Cordillera*) were more apt for agricultural labor because of their ancestral ties with farming, while the children living in the lower altitudes (*Cabezera de Valle* and *Valle*), were more suitable for going to college and learning higher qualified western knowledge and skills because of their close vicinity to town life and higher exposures to modern ways.

Unlike colonialism per se, NGOs do not operate through outright forced labor, oppression and exploitation. Many people view the infrastructure changes and newness with open arms and hope. But this paradigm is not revolutionary in terms of social justice, but more like a humanistic extension of the past, increasingly muddled in “global capitalist interests.” The discourse of progress and development promoted by NGOs requires the erasure or forgetting of history, such as the political education and community organizing of the 1970s and early 1980s that have been co-opted into narrow goals of infrastructure projects that satiate some material needs of the community, in ways that restructure communities and orient learning along private and corporate interests. Currently, it is largely through the influence of NGOs that the ambitions of large bureaucratic institutions and the state are carried out in Rumi Mayu.

This chapter exposes and discusses how the NGOs in Rumi Mayu are unfortunately part of a liberal democracy ideological framework. My hope is to demonstrate the “normalcy” of this problem in rural areas in order to reclaim the radical and revolutionary foundations that NGOs started out with, and needs to build upon to deepen discussions of alternative development. Thus, while I heavily critique the work of NGOs in Rumi Mayu I do it not with any means to disrespect the hard work of many NGO workers, but to help open our eyes, ears and hearts to what they (we) are doing, and to whose aims we are serving. And, through these reflections and critiques to work in open democratic forums with locals, social movements, academics, foundations, the state, and international forces.

### **Development Discourse in Rural Northern Chuquisaca**

The municipality of Rumi Mayu was, to a significant extent, abandoned by the state,<sup>64</sup> and also overlooked by NGOs until around the mid 1990s, when PROAGRO, an agriculture / education / health NGO, set up shop. As one of the first NGO agronomists to descend on the area—and who is currently in a managerial position—told me, “When I first came to Rumi Mayu it was totally quiet, no one knew what to make of us, or how to relate to us...no one offered us a place to sleep or anything to eat. We slept in our car over there.” His tone reflected how “indifferent” and “inhospitable” the people were, as if he expected open arms to what they were to “bestow” on the communities. He did not seem to fully grasp the inflictions of a not too long ago oppressive hacienda system, to the inequitable outcomes of the 1952 National Revolution, or to the abuses of neoliberalism that continue in reconstituted ways. Similar expectations have been expressed by many other NGO and municipal employees, especially by those who see their current jobs as a sacrifice, a hardship; yet a stepping stone to urban employment; however, there are also workers who display respect to the ways and desires of the local indigenous campesinos.

Since the promulgation of the 1994 Popular Participation Law, monies began to descend onto the municipality; with that, the attraction to run for municipal political seats became increasingly alluring, considering the now numerous

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<sup>64</sup> Similarly, in Leslie Gill’s anthropological study of the predominately Aymara city of El Alto, adjacent to La Paz, *Teetering on the Rim: Global Restructuring, Daily Life, and the Armed Retreat of the Bolivian State* (2000), she notices the “steady deterioration... [of] viable small-scale agricultural activities” on the altiplano, and that “the state has willfully ignored the plight of poor rural cultivators” (Gill, 2000: 2).

possibilities of financial compensations—legitimate as well as illicit. Municipal political ability to now co-finance projects has also led to lure in or gain the support of other NGOs. Over a span of 10 years, NGOs have mushroomed to sixteen projects working in the municipality, mainly in the more physically accessible communities (i.e. mountainous road condition and distances). The PPL was lobbied as a means to include locals in the decision making process, but has been critiqued by many Bolivian activists and scholars as a method to expand the neoliberal agenda, with a plethora of NGOs benefiting from the process. Although the PPL is associated with the opening of new national political opportunities for many indigenous peoples and organizations, including Evo Morales, “the law does not necessarily promote greater equality and autonomy among local people...and is notably silent on the deepening class divisions that characterize Bolivian society” (Gill, 2000: 9). As the Bolivian sociologist (and ex-Minister of Education under the MAS) Felix Patzi explains, the Popular Participation Law “called for the involvement of the indigenous population in the management of limited financial resources and local decision making, while [those at the helm of the national government] maintained exclusive control and private power” (Patzi, 2006: 67). Patzi links how this, and the formation of municipalities, actually contributed to the dismantling of “ancestral forms of life and communal political practices” that brought on a “process of corruption and leadership competition” (ibid: 67). The “ancestral logic of collective control and the rotation of authorities” based on communal responsibility with no economic recompense has been “broken,” and replaced with a “liberal democracy” in which only those that have “leisure time” can

dedicate themselves to politics, accessing financial compensations (ibid: 67). These tensions are playing out in the local milieu of barter and markets enmeshed within a social ethos of reciprocity and individualism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the interactions and reciprocal nature of *trueque* is being overshadowed by development visions that highly favor meeting the demands of markets (mono crops, purely technological solutions) that detract from local creativity, innovation, and collective practices (sindicatos, cooperatives). So, pumped up one after another—hacienda systems, agrarian reforms and popular participation—all continue to infiltrate, reformulate, and chip away at a natural process of change, from ancestral times of a communal and complementary existence, to the supposed era of the *pachakuti*.<sup>65</sup>

With LLP funds, and external financial counterparts, the role of NGOs has increased, and despite rhetoric to coordinate with other NGOs, most of them work alone, and/or in competition with each other. On my second day in Rumi Mayu, while in conversation with an NGO worker, I had asked him what he thought that the biggest challenge that the NGO faced was. He replied, “Coordination, we rarely coordinate; everyone does their own thing, and there’s a lot of duplication and waste.”<sup>66</sup> Most often NGO and municipal workers are in Rumi Mayu because of

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<sup>65</sup> Communal and complimentary relations are highly contingent to time and place, and my intention is not to present these as a utopia existence. My terminologies refer to the regional structure heavily based on external influences, and not on assumptions that this inferred community solidarity or even a household solidarity. As discussed in Chapter 1, Evo Morales’s ascension to the presidency is often referred to as a *pachakuti*, which Rivera Cusicanqui defines as “the union of the fragmented parts of the indigenous body” (1993:53).

<sup>66</sup> John Farrington and Anthony Bebbington, et al. highlighted NGOs tripping each other up a decade ago stating: “retaining independence from any co-ordinating mechanism often leads to situations where within one region several organizations (NGOs and public) are each merrily working away duplicating efforts, replicating mistakes, using conflicting approaches and generally confusing the

their own financial or professional needs, in turn becoming “strapped to their positions because of an economic reliance on the institutions that provide employment” (Taussig, 1979: 127). As is apparent, the NGOs in Rumi Mayu are not social justice groups, but are rather “development oriented” NGOs, as their orientation and financing are chained to institutional financiers, with most employees demonstrating a business approach to “community development,” and exhibiting little long term commitment to the people and the region. As the Director of Social Development had herself reiterated, “the majority of functionaries are paid through external financing and have better salaries; however, they don’t respond to the local interests. They respond to the interests of the financiers, and they’re efficient operators for external financiers.”

### **NGOs, Municipal Government, and the Perils of Social Maneuvering**

Bolivian NGOs first surfaced in response to military dictatorships and their oppressive rule; many were grassroots organizations with left leaning ideologies. During these extremely dangerous times, NGOs fought for the transition to a democratic (or socialist) model.<sup>67</sup> In the aftermath of Bolivian re-democratization (post1982), NGOs proliferated and many aligned with established political parties, utilizing this forum to promote political agendas, gain professional experience, and obtain economic income. PROAGRO, the first NGO to appear in the municipality of Rumi Mayu had evolved from an alliance with the left wing faction political party

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rural poor. Such circumstances may sometimes arise because of deliberate neglect of each other—because NGOs end up competing for clients, and against each other (Ayers 1992; Kohl 1991). Either way, it weakens and indeed may negate the contributions of NGOs” (1993, 23).

<sup>67</sup> In addition, during the 1970’s progressive religious orders and church affiliated organization aligned with the NGO ideology of the time, to combat the oppressive regimes.

*Movimiento Bolivia Libre* (MBL), formerly part of the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR), which was later to move more to the right politically. Over time, the symbiotic relationship between political parties and NGOs dissipated, as each found their own source of funding, freeing themselves up to pursue their evolving ideology. PROAGRO has, in turn, also become much more politically conservative. This disassociation with the state was short lived; as the two structures (NGOs and the state) later rejoined to take advantage of the influx of international monies dispersed to Bolivia, to help mollify the situation of dire poverty created by the 1985 structural adjustment reforms.<sup>68</sup> The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and international aid organizations targeted NGOs to implement their policies, because they believed them to be more efficient and malleable than the state. This process was recognized by the Director of Social Development for Chuquisaca, who explained to me during an interview that:

There is a phenomenon occurring now in which the external financiers are not going through the departmental governor (*prefecto*), but rather they work directly with the municipality.<sup>69</sup> However the municipalities do not yet have the capacity to generate their own projects appropriately, they do not have the capacity to generate information of what they are implementing, or a way to systemize information. There should be a way to decentralize this information to establish what will be the adequate regional politics, which should include departmental functionaries from the *prefectura*. But this is not happening, and we would like to sit down and talk with the external financiers, but our contact is only with their operators.

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<sup>68</sup> As Kohl explains, “The reliance on NGOs as development agents continued a pattern that began in 1990 when the Social Investment Fund channeled millions of dollars through NGOs for projects to ameliorate the impacts of neoliberal restructuring” (Kohl, 2003: 156).

<sup>69</sup> During one of my first encounters with the mayor of Rumi Mayu, after he spewed out a list of NGO affiliated projects that he had contracted or planned to do, he boasted about his personal autonomy as a mayor and that he “didn’t need to consult with the *prefecto*, or anyone about his development plans.”

As international money and support expanded exponentially, coupled with limited employment opportunities for the middle and upper class, the implementation of an NGO became more and more viable and accessible. This spurred the formation of a new group of NGOs with different ideologies that aligned with neoliberal policies and free-market principles, which at the time conveniently assisted the state in implementing their, and other, international mandates; thus, extending the influence of the state where it could not reach alone. This relation continues until today, albeit in a more selective manner. While the Evo administration continues to accept financial monies to finance certain “corporate” NGO work (largely due to state economic needs), they schizophrenically single out and accuse other NGOs—mainly the more radical ones that expose state wrongdoings, such as environmental degradation—of pocketing international donors’ monies (mainly USAID)—of instigating social havoc and carrying out imperial agendas and social economic ideologies. While these political maneuvers have not affected the large mainstream international capitalist interest, it has greatly affected the radical grassroots and established progressive NGOs, instilling fear of being ostracized and preventing their ability to fight for their social causes.

Not all nongovernmental organizations share similar ideologies, concerns, goals and methodologies. Kamat (2002) highlights Garain’s (1994) neat categorization of three groups of NGOs, with Kamat stressing that the compartmentalization of “these NGOs do not operate in watertight compartments, and there is considerable overlap and collaboration between the three, albeit in varying permutations and combinations” (2002: 14):



‘Corporate NGOs,’ which are heavily government sponsored...have marginalized the issues of the poor to promote capitalist development. The second are ‘development oriented NGOs,’ which rely on government patronage, and hence, do not question government policy and programmes, and further the state’s [and foreign] capital interests. The third are NGOs which profess a ‘development with social justice’ orientation, and are often in conflict with the state and elites for organizing the poor for their rights (Kamat, *ibid*: 13 – 14).

In many respects, this NGO schema holds a mirror image in Bolivia; its distinctiveness is contingent on the socio-cultural, environmental and political dynamics of the time, coupled with the reshuffling of “permutations and combinations” between and among a non-governmental organizations. Since the late 1980s, NGOs have mushroomed throughout Bolivia—most of them work in communities located closer to urban centers, with few NGOs in the isolated, more impoverished areas. The current MAS administration is much more vigilant in their relationship with NGOs and international aid agencies, and although they work closely with the social movements, the government does continue to accept cash, technological assistance and personnel employees from international aid agencies. Given a lack of government agencies and employees, and experience, for now the government has little or no other options. But, as the Vice Minister of the Environment and Water clarified, “We will dialogue with others, but the state is in control” (Climate Change and Forestry Seminar, La Paz, August 4, 2009).

In Bolivia, there are numerous grass roots NGOs and cooperatives financed by international aid organizations and other resources, which are working on innovative and inclusive projects in other areas of the country. Unfortunately, for the most part this is not the case in Rumi Mayu, where the NGOs are more aligned with

free market principles and western ideologies. Yet, it must be recognized that there is also much of the positive to be learned from the successful experiences of grassroots development projects and cooperatives. Kevin Healy's book, *Llamas, Weavings, and Organic Chocolate* (2001), presents nine successful case studies, in which the cultural identity and heritage of Bolivian indigenous populations were fundamental in the design and implementation of grassroots endeavors, all of them having received financial support from the U.S. government-based Inter-American Foundation (IAF). One of these projects supports the revitalization of indigenous weavers and their textiles, and works in several communities in the *Altura* region of Rumi Mayu. The project has been instrumental in assisting the community to rediscover their weaving techniques and symbols, which are sold through the NGO's museum, part of *Antropólogos del Sur Andino* (ASUR), and have also been exhibited at international art forums, such as the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. Healy attributes the success of these grassroots projects and cooperatives to several factors: 1) That the proposals should come from the local participants, on their terms and at their own pace; 2) Methods should be built on the acceptance and construction of indigenous identity, and developed through cultural revitalization efforts; and 3) Initiatives should be socially inclusive. Measuring success is determined in terms of the ability to improve the quality of life of people living below and around the poverty line. Aspects of these criteria might be *expressed* by the NGOs and municipal government officials in Rumi Mayu, but in essence are absent from the underlying aims of their programs and their actions, with the exception of ASUR, whose work is limited to a small geographical fraction of the municipality. The

donor agencies of the NGOs and bi-lateral organization have well defined programs and strict mandates on budgets that do not allow the space for employees' autonomy, or authentic local participation involvement, in creative local/regional endeavors.

It would have been nice to find similar more socially inclusive and culturally revitalizing projects in Rumi Mayu, but as mentioned in the introductory chapter, the objectives of my study did not involve a deliberate focus on successful cases, but rather to explore the dynamics of an “ordinary” indigenous region. Coincidentally, Rumi Mayu seemed to be embarking on its heyday of NGOs and municipal political changes. These dynamics brought about a mixture of changes, from the improved infrastructure of schools and health facilities to ex NGO staff and some locals taking over local political seats. While a variety of these visual and political improvements can be beneficial, they also promoted separate solutions to integral problems that deter from building on local epistemologies, cultural practices and equitable acts of participation. For example, throughout the municipality malnutrition and hunger are fairly endemic. In such an ecologically diverse and agriculturally rich region, as discussed in the previous chapter, I was surprised to observe the magnitude of malnourishment. While people were going hungry, the municipality sought school food aid of staples that consisted of canned sardines, rice, flour and sugar; the nurses and health promoters weighed babies and infants, and briefly discussed the results at district meeting and communal CAI meetings; Plan International developed posters of quantities of food (spoonfuls and bowl sizes) that children under 5 should consume, and trained their *madre vigilantes* to read the materials and talk with mothers about them; UNICEF had one male worker and a local women making

sporadic house visits to a number of households in several communities to talk about nutrition; and PROAGRO selectively focused on agricultural production in targeted communities (i.e. *cordillera* received apples and water storage tanks, six families in the *valle* got peanuts, some families in the *Altura* got potatoes, etc.).<sup>70</sup> Yet with all of these individual nutrition oriented programs, malnutrition did not decrease. While I discuss this in more depth in the next chapter, a condensed analysis is that these programs do not include the voices and opinions of the local people as to the diversity and historical depth of problems, nor do they discuss their thoughts on some innovative options to address the environment, agricultural production, and nutrition. Furthermore, NGO workers do not have the adequate knowledge, flexibility (autonomy) and resources to be innovative and work together with locals. Many municipal and NGO employees and some locals do not understand the history of the region and tend to blame locals for their dire circumstances (colonial reverberations). A more profound analysis needs to take into consideration the historical changes and influences of colonialism and neoliberalism on local communities / regions, and allow locals and NGO workers more autonomy in exploring and understanding the profound issues and time and money to work through solutions (interculturality and decolonization). While the intentions of the many NGO workers and municipal employees are to improve living conditions, they are strapped to the ideologies and mandates of national and international development policies, strategies, and projects.

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<sup>70</sup> Years previously PROAGRO's nutrition program consisted of a nurse that met with the mother's clubs to talk about nutrition and prepare nutritious meals. Most of the foods were supplied by PROAGRO. I talk a little more about this in chapter five.

One event that demonstrates these observations and critiques occurred during a World Food Program evaluation. While waiting alongside the twenty or so school children who were trucked in from the *Altura* community (Santibáñez), to the *Valle* community (Chullpas) to dance in their traditional clothing for the evaluators, the chemistry teacher, Arminda, and I slipped away to another *Valle* community. She needed the school director's signature for one of Plan International's training programs; Arminda volunteers as Plans municipal treasury. During our chat, Arminda expressed her visions and frustrations with teaching in Rumi Mayu, and complained about the constraints she confronted with trying to be innovative, and the limited support that teachers receive. Although Arminda expressed an appreciation with some of Plan's work, she associated their training programs with "having a baby, and then leaving it to grow up on its own." Arminda's metaphor signified that "PLAN provides infrastructure and materials, and conducts periodical training workshops, but they are weak on follow up lessons and discussions on what pedagogical practices work well and what changes could be done..." In tones of exasperation, Arminda went on to talk about how her criticisms and suggestions seem to always backfire, stating that, "people don't want to recognize their weaknesses, they reject listening to comments or suggestions and call me a *malcriada* (in this particular case signifying, uppity, doesn't know her place, etc.). When we arrived back to the World Food Program evaluation, the crowd had swelled, and everyone was taking their seats around the cement basketball court to watch the trucked in school children dance. I turned to Arminda and asked, "Why didn't the children from Chullpa perform?" She, replied: "They don't wear their

traditional clothing anymore ..., and the mayor wants to impress the evaluators with the indigenous clothes still worn by the people of Santibáñez...He wants them to tell the evaluators how much they appreciate and need their food donations.”

Over the years, many of the innovations of the majority of grassroots organization have succumbed to inter-organization competition or a “development oriented NGO” mentality, or functionality backed by corporate interests. As the events that occurred around the World Food Program evaluation highlight, instead of critiquing government policies—past and current, and offering alternative solutions, most NGOs and municipal state workers in Rumi Mayu align with capitalist models of development, hand-outs, or the resource extraction model of the MNR’s 1985 21060 decree, and now the MAS 2006 NDP.<sup>71</sup> Whereas the majority of indigenous and rural citizens in Rumi Mayu are aligned with the social movement agenda, and support the Morales government in hopes of achieving much needed change, the municipality continues on development model based on tourism and mono crop extractions for external markets that is largely driven by municipal and NGO employees that continue to seek a piece of the pie through international financed projects.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, NGOs were latecomers to the municipality of Rumi Mayu (roughly between 1995 and 2006), and targeted the more

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<sup>71</sup> The Plan de Desarrollo Nacional (National Development Plan, NDP) pursues a neoliberal, natural resource extraction model similar to that of its predecessors. Although the MAS government have increased revenues from transnational petroleum companies, export agriculture and mining the bulk of the governments 2010 public “investment will be directed toward basic infrastructure and the financing of prefectures and municipalities, as well as to various support mechanism for enhancing the small-scale production of the petty-bourgeoisie, linking them to niche markets, and creating virtuous ties between small-scale producers and transnational capital in nontraditional export markets” (Webber, 2011: 75-76).

logistically accessible communities. The boom of NGOs greatly coincided with the dissemination of PPL funds, and although each of these organizations provides services unique to their institutions, many focuses overlap. There were sixteen NGOs working in the municipality of Rumi Mayu during the main stint of my field research in 2004-05. Given the increasing presence and influence that NGOs have in the municipality and my continual reference to them, the following is a list of the NGOS and their general functions:

- ❖ *Proyecto Social Cardenal Maurer (PROSCAM)*: Catholic Church project that built the original small hospital in the town of Rumi Mayu; paid hospital electric bills; supervised the doctors and nurses; and implemented fumigation campaigns for the Chagas disease spreading black beetle known in Bolivia as the *vinchuca* (*Triatoma infestans*).
- ❖ *Promotores Agropecuarios, (PROAGRO)*: National NGO that is financed mainly by international donors; it works in agricultural production, education, a short-lived nutrition program, and more recently water projects.
- ❖ *Antropólogos del Sur Andino (ASUR)*: Foundation for Anthropological Investigation and Ethno Development; a national NGO that is financed mainly by international donors and focuses on the production and commercialization of textile weavings.
- ❖ *Plan International*: International children's aid organization that works in education, health, and children sponsorships.
- ❖ *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*: Alternative education (literacy, nutrition) and girls' education ("*Niña Indígena*")
- ❖ *World Food Program (WFP)*: The Chuquisaca department *prefectura* canalizes food donations through the Participatory and Integrated Rural Development in Depressed Areas (*Programa de Desarrollo Integrado y Participativo en Áreas Deprimidas - DRIPAD*), which in turn distributes food donations to the National Program for the Integrated Development of Boys and Girls under 6 (*Programa Nacional de Atención a Niñas y Niños de Seis Años -PAN*), and the School Feeding Program (*Programa de Alimentación Escolar - PAE*).
- ❖ *Esperanza Bolivia*: National NGO that is financed mainly by international donors; renovation of houses to prevent Chagas disease, respiratory infections, and diarrhea.
- ❖ *Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo Regional - Tarija (CEDERTA)*: National NGO that is financed mainly by international donors; family planning program for women, in addition to a sexual and reproductive health education program

- ❖ *PROSIN*: Financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), along with counterpart monies from the mayor's PPL funds, provided a series of talks on human rights, and women's sexual and reproductive rights
- ❖ *Mano a Mano* (Hand to Hand): A United States financed NGO, which constructed and equipped three mini hospitals (slightly larger than the government health posts), and paid the salaries of one doctor in each of these facilities.
- ❖ *United States Peace Corps*: The mayor's office contracted one Peace Corps volunteer to work in the municipal offices. Initially he did not have much work, but then wrote a land refill project and got some start up monies. However, it never came to fruition, because the next mayor, elected in late 2004, did not support the project. Another later Peace Corps volunteer worked for a year with PROAGRO.
- ❖ *Japanese International Development Agency (JICA)*: Again, the mayor's office contracted a volunteer to work for the municipality. For months she did not have much work, but eventually taught computer classes to groups of high school students, when 10 computers were donated to the boarding school.
- ❖ *Cuban doctors*: Funded predominantly by Venezuela and staffed exclusively by Cuba, the program sends pairs of doctors to work mainly in the rural areas and poorer urban zones; since 2006 Rumi Mayu has had three sets of doctor teams.

Noticeably, there is a considerable number of NGOs working in the municipality of Rumi Mayu. Yet it may be said that, thus far, a significant number of their programs are more likely to marginalize locals from any active participation in their projects, inhibiting them from expanding their own knowledge as informed citizens and involving them in decision making in a substantial way in order to improve their communities in a more natural progression.<sup>72</sup> These organizations, consequently, may be seen as providing

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<sup>72</sup> Berthoud relates that "contrary to [an] ideology of the 'natural identity of interests', development must be conceived as an 'artificial identification of interests' resulting from all kinds of disruptive constraints...Paradoxically, to understand fully the phenomenon of development requires a radical questioning of ourselves. The true problem of our time is fundamentally our own Western or modernist culture universe, based on the limitless expansion of technosciences and the market" (1992: 81).



interventions that are based on “compartmentalized modes of development planning [that] have permitted different groups of policy-makers to focus on very specific aspects of women’s [and men’s] lives and define their interventions in terms of those aspects alone (Keeber, 1999: 269-270). Simultaneously, too little emphasis is placed on co-ordination and sustainability, and are miles away from approaching “interculturality.” For example, none of these programs offer substantial training, (i.e., apprenticeships or scholarships granted to the local population, for technical schools or universities), and little attention is given to expand relevant and useful local employment opportunities (i.e., veterinarian, agricultural extension workers, paid health care promoters, teacher assistants, etc.),<sup>73</sup> that could contribute to increased local involvement in a multi-pronged fashion.

### **Paradigms of Development**

In Rumi Mayu, I perceive that international financial institutions and state interests played out through mainstream NGOs are overshadowing the public good. Although local unions (*sindicatos*) remain strong in most of the communities, and

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<sup>73</sup> There were a few exceptions to this. The *escuelas iniciales* and PAN program paid the wages for the following positions: one coordinator (who originally was an outsider, but later a local person was contracted); one school facilitator and one cook for each pre-school; and one cook for each elementary school. UNICEF employed two literacy trainers. PROAGRO recommended that one recent high school graduates teach at the elementary school in the *Altura*. Although a top student, and very responsible, his teaching position was met with much resistance from parents because he had not received additional pedagogical training from within the Bolivian normal school system. As previously mentioned, there were also the two nurses that temporarily returned as employees of different NGOs; and lastly, the temporary employment offered to a crew of men by Esperanza to supervise building construction. <sup>74</sup> Gramsci describes the “function of ‘hegemony,’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of ‘direct domination,’ or command exercises through the state and ‘juridical’ government.” Later, he describes social hegemony as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1971: 12).

the main town of Rumi Mayu operates as an urban area with a mayor, *junta vecinal* and *Comité de Vigilancia*, the overall work of NGOs is rarely questioned. NGOs are generally viewed by locals as disseminators of resources, scientific technologies, and infrastructure—"organizations," and rarely connected to international financial institutions. Individually NGOs and international agencies *present* projects to the mayor and community for approval. However, there is no deep analysis or critical clarification of contextual conditions; furthermore, coordination between NGOs is minimal, and once the project is in motion, follow-up is sporadic. The ease by which they implement projects and programs could be rooted in Rivera Cusicanqui's internal colonialism, or Gramsci's hegemony.<sup>74</sup> Thus far on a national level, the current MAS government's preoccupation with their political party's stability through the promotion of visible infrastructure works and megaprojects, and the complexities of the country's problems as a whole, has resulted in the continuation of NGO and international agencies work, essentially as is.

Power proliferates through hegemonic process, whereby the interests of a dominant class become perceived as the interests of all.<sup>75</sup> As Gramsci points out, the consent of the population has a historical evolution (1971: 12), the progression of which persists through a relationship between colonialism /postcolonialism and

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<sup>75</sup> Foucault perceives power as being everywhere, and not limited to those in dominant positions, "not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1979, cited in McHoul and Grace: 39).

modern science and technology (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009:13). Fornet-Betancourt refers to this linkage as epistemological hegemony in which,

the scientific-technological hegemonic paradigm props up the development model and dominant civilization of today; this is not explainable if we do not consider colonial history also. It is in this precise plan, how the imposed violent history of an excluding epistemology whose hegemony grows exactly in the measure in which human cognitive diversity is reducing or neutralizing in its effective and ruling capacity, consequently the scientific and technological immaturity of the pueblos” (ibid: 13).

I would like to emphasize that symbolic violence, as a disciplinary tool, also contributes to this type of social / epistemological "contract;" it plays out in both a physical sphere, such as the ex-haciendas system and poverty; as well as psychologically: racism and oppression. The combination of social hegemony, state control, and elite domination has perpetuated a hierarchical apparatus based on divisions such as labor, gender, ethnicity, class, economic status, and politics that have been manifested as an autonomous organizational ("functional") structure. The internalization of colonialism persists through hegemonic processes that operate in relation to sociopolitical, economic, epistemological, and historical contexts. Coming from the cities and universities, NGO employees, health workers and teachers are regarded as “all knowing”; as experts they are talked about by locals, but rarely if ever questioned. Political appointees such as the mayor, council members and *sindicato* leaders are left to their own accord, being queried and examined when something goes *really* wrong (i.e., food donations are stolen from the school storage room). The technical knowledge and market oriented goals promoted by these “professionals” (often times men from the middle and elite class) are seen as the

main way out of poverty conditions. It is here that “[European] science will be the inseparable companion of capitalism, especially contributing to the myth of progress and the lights as symbols of ‘civilization’ that should convert itself in the objective condition of all of humanity” (ibid: 12).

This is also explained by concepts of paradigms, utilized by Thomas Kuhn (1970),<sup>76</sup> here being used in a broader sense in which western science and capitalist markets are seen as the sole development model and path to economic wealth.

Whereas Kuhn used paradigms to explain the worldview shared by a mainstream cohort of scientists, my usage is applied to the field of development. In this case, it is the cohort of affiliated international financial institutions and their entourage of NGO workers that massively accept the dominant capitalist model, and go along with it despite decades of sporadic gains and numerous setbacks for large segments of the population. Kuhn’s view of the typical scientist is also present in the typical development worker, in that they are “not an objective, free thinker and skeptic.

Kohl and Farthing elaborate on how the continuance of a paradigm is associated with personal interests and job security:

Because science [and capitalist markets] operates within a social sphere, with individual careers built on a specific approach, resistance to adopting new paradigms, even within the natural sciences, can be significant. A particular paradigm’s social construction represents the interests of a community of researchers, and this is reflected by their use of information and rewards to maintain its hegemony over time [Polsby, 1998]. This theory has also been used to examine how economic and political models become conventional wisdom and how maintaining them becomes important to careers and policy choices despite evidence that they are failing [Wade, 1996; Fine, 2002] (Kohl and Farthing, 2009: 64).

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<sup>76</sup> Kuhn defines a paradigm as: “an entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques, and so on, shared by the members of a given community” (Kahn, 1970: 175).

NGO workers become caught between a rock and a hard place. NGO workers are like everyone else, having gone through a similar education system and having been exposed to the colonial stereotypes and racist thoughts that have permeated society over generations. While many NGO workers see their role as “saviors,” and believe the mainstream international donor rhetoric that progress and modernity entails changing the backward ways of indigenous groups and campesinos, other NGO workers are more astute, but are trapped in their positions because they need the job. Employment shortages help to staff international NGOs positions and implement their mandates. NGO workers maneuver within these confines; while most follow their job descriptions, others try to adapt the rules to better serve the needs and desires of locals. Overall, and not to generalize, I believe that most NGO and state workers maintain a very subservient role, and do not question authority. This, in conjunction with an education system that does not “read” its own history, or stress critical thinking and creativity enables the perpetuation of neocolonialism. PROAGRO’s project evaluation event—at the beginning of the chapter—is one illustration of how NGOs in Rumi Mayu, as well as throughout Bolivia, legitimize the development paradigm, and promote “progress” as the solution to poverty.

### **“Signs” of Development**

As you begin to switch back and forth on the road that descends down the canyon wall into the center of the municipality—the town of Rumi Mayu—your sight overlooks an impressive expanse of land, and shortly thereafter your eyes fall

upon the first signs of the NGO billboards that proclaim who has taken charge of what. With the passing of the years, the newer NGO signs have gradually overshadowed the initial old concrete community welcoming sign that announced the entrance into Rumi Mayu. But before that happens, you reach the canyon floor, where the road somewhat straightens out as you go through one small community, then pass over the Rumi Mayu River, leaving puffs of dirt and dust to lay back down over the *molle* and *tacu* trees, sheep, goats, cows and dogs, and an occasional pedestrian. The rural charm is suddenly broken up by the gigantic concrete signs that are erected in two rows shouldering both sides of the road, standing out like colossal cemetery gravestones with the names, and some of their claims to fame, of the numerous NGOs that work in (or, as the intensity of these plaques tend to project, *own*)<sup>77</sup> Rumi Mayu. “Development” (*desarrollo*) is the catchall term that is associated with *progress* and *modernity* in Rumi Mayu. A strong association and faith in economic growth is seen as the way to “catch up” by the municipal and NGO employees, in addition to some local citizens, consequently slowly erasing various cultural and social relationships. Little reflection is given to the regions cultural economy. , nor is an inclusive dialogue with citizens based on well formulated and researched information presented by the mayor, *concejales*, or other connected persons. Development plans appear in prepackaged documents geared toward profit-

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<sup>77</sup> Environmental problems, as Roe points out, are described by development organizations through their professional sciences as a “primary means whereby development experts and the institutions for which they work claim rights to stewardship over land and resources which they do not own” (Roe, cited in Fairhead: 101).<sup>78</sup> One major exception to this occurred in 2009, when a few local women sought municipal funds to rejuvenate the annual *Pucara* festival (harvesting celebration that displays annual production combined with cultural events).

oriented endeavors that bypass cultural values, solidarity and mutual aid.<sup>78</sup>

However, as elaborated through local events and narratives presented at the beginning of this chapter, there exist opposing ideas of “development” in Rumi Mayu between the people of Rumi Mayu and that of the state , NGO, and professional network: one is more individualistic and market oriented; the other more communal and livelihood security focused. For example, as the mayor dreams of resurrecting the *haciendas* as a tourist attraction and NGOs focus on infrastructure projects and standardized stocked education curriculums, most Rumi Mayuns talk about improving land fertility and environmental conditions (forestry, farming terraces), and expanding their knowledge (creative / critical thinking) and taking care of health issues; while some expressed various culturally specific marketing ventures (weaving, knitting, marmalade production). One person linked the strengthening of their culture with community organization, and useful/beneficial knowledge obtained from outside institutional alliances, along with municipal support to achieve agricultural improvement and well-being. A strong sense of connection to one’s place and livelihood was expressed, with desires to enrich their communities, environment and cultures. I derive that most Rumi Mayuns’ concept of “development,” or their ideas for improving the quality of their lives,<sup>79</sup> is seen as a means to equity, secure livelihoods, food security, health, education, comforts and

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<sup>78</sup> One major exception to this occurred in 2009, when a few local women sought municipal funds to rejuvenate the annual *Pucara* festival (harvesting celebration that displays annual production combined with cultural events).

<sup>79</sup> For Dudley Seers (1979), the purpose of development is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. He purported that “development is inevitable a normative concept, almost a synonym for improvement. To pretend otherwise is just to hide one’s value judgments” (Seers, 1979: 10, cited in Kabeer, 1999: 76).<sup>80</sup> Interestingly in the original section of town, many of the old adobe houses have not been renovated because of the owner’s lack of either interest or money. This part of town holds much charismatic charm and history.

freedom. At the same time, these are similar to the expressed reasons that many NGO workers, municipal employees and the church state why they work in the region. Yet, how to arrive at these terms have very different meanings that are linked with the different vantage points that one is coming from and looking for.

Much of the viewpoints and behaviors from colonial times have imbued the development discourse; this infusion is very much present in contemporary development models and actions in the municipality of Rumi Mayu. Relationships are very top down, the professional knows best, and the ideas and supervision that come from the outside are most valued. The NGOs and municipal employees analyze communal / individual situations and design projects based on their perceptions, and the fad of the financial institutions at the time. In this respect, the feminist economist Naila Kabeer correlates these aspects with “serve[ing] the policymakers’ own predefined agendas, which are both ‘safer’ to implement and have an instrumental value” (1999: 91). For example, the two latest “depoliticized” development “fads” in Rumi Mayu are infrastructure related and reproductive health. New schools were built with bathrooms, yet limited responsibilities as to taking care of the classroom and school grounds are taken on by teachers, students, and administrators. Parents were told if they want the school built that they would have to contribute with construction hours, and provide a certain amount of materials. While the teachers would complain about how “dirty” the students were, they did not organize to work together with the students to maintain the school or bathrooms. No trees or gardens were planted, and the bathrooms are under lock and key because the students clog up the system with rocks, for lack of toilet paper. The common



consensus: parents (read: mothers) are to blame for their children's slovenly ways. Yet, no real communal gathering has incurred that bring families and school staff together on equitable terms.

Another infrastructure project is housing renovations that are designed by a national NGO to combat Chagas disease, respiratory infections, and diarrhea. These health issues are endemic to the region, reflective of the long-standing social inequalities that require multi-faceted and enduring strategies. Secure housing is one essential measure to prevent these diseases, or treat them more effectively. Although most of the houses maintain the local esthetic,<sup>80</sup> and incorporate fuel-efficient Lorena stoves and bathrooms, many families with more money took advantage of the donated construction materials to expand their houses to two and even three stories (a sign of status and a division of class). In addition, numerous people who had left the area temporarily returned to build or renovate their houses, some of which turned out to be gaudy multi-story houses. Afterwards, they went back to the city (or even places such as Argentina, to where they had migrated), and now rent out their houses to NGO or municipal employees.

These project contribute to the health and education of the community with *short-term fix-ups*, but they do not address the social inequalities and racism permeating Bolivian society since colonialism, but instead reinforce a sense of “good deed” completion on the part of the NGO workers and local political structure, and submission on the part of the rural citizens—“indigenous campesino/a.”

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<sup>80</sup> Interestingly in the original section of town, many of the old adobe houses have not been renovated because of the owner's lack of either interest or money. This part of town holds much charismatic charm and history.

Furthermore, the sustainability of these projects are susceptible to: 1) not addressing the root causes of injustice; 2) communal exclusion during the decision making and implementation stage; 3) its rapid implementation because of the external financial institutional deadlines; 4) the neglect of providing local citizens with well balanced, in-depth information; and 5) no long-term relationship between the NGO and the community, or any substantial follow-up. Just like the houses that the communities originally built, the recently renovated ones will begin to deteriorate, and how will the families go about maintaining them? Where will they get new roof tiles? If the Lorena stove cracks or begins to smoke, how will they fix it? If a new family wants to build a house, where could they learn about building an ecological toilet or Lorena stove? The underlying causes to these health concerns are related to social inequities, race, fair work compensation, and nation building. In the end, these remain unaddressed, but symbolically “development” is occurring, or at least the appearance of development is represented in these school buildings and houses. These infrastructure projects provide a sense of satisfaction, as change is seen, but this progress deflects from addressing the deeper issues, and in time could have damaging long term consequences. When the buildings begin to deteriorate, land fertility and production decrease, health conditions remain poor, and education inferior, the blame will rubber band back to the locals in similar tones as those expressed by one NGO worker, “we give them chickens and goats, but they don’t take care of them and they die.” In sum, the newly constructed schools, health posts and market elude the deeper needs and desires of Rumi Mayuns. Instead of exploring alternative development models based on concepts of decolonization and

intercultural practices—which are inherent in the regions cultural economy of *trueque* and reciprocity—a colonial modernity continues that reconstructs physical structures, but does little to deconstruct social constructions.

Furthermore, other outcomes affect migration and gender role positioning. Although some local men were employed at low wages to assist with the construction of people's houses, there is not much future in these newly acquired skills unless they move to the city and work for low wages as construction workers. In addition to possibly *provoking* the migration of men, the project reinforces patriarchal gender stereotyping. Women are seen as the domestic caretakers, those most at fault and the target of responsibility for the dirty house and sick children. The NGO female workers focus on teaching the women "*campesinas*" to "sweep up," while the NGO male workers provide the men "*campesinos*" with a skill.<sup>81</sup> As Mohanty points out, "development projects do not affect both groups of women [urban, middle class, formally educated and rural, indigenous, non-formally educated] in the same way" (Mohanty: 2003: 30). She goes on to specify that the problematic in generalizing "women as a group, as a stable category of analysis [is that] it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on generalized notions about their subordination" (ibid: 31). This applies not only to relations

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<sup>81</sup> Keeber points out that development policies and programs position men and women differently, in which "men [retain] their privileged place within planners' models and practice as heads of households and principal decision-making agents...that women (and children), particularly among lower-income households, were engaged in productive work, the latter were mainly perceived in the role of the unpaid family 'helpers'" (1999: 267).

between Western feminists and Third World women, but also to relations within the Third World itself, both female as well as male.<sup>82</sup>

Another illustration of this is the NGO reproductive health project that lasted (or was planned) for a period of approximately six months, and consisted of a coordinating director and a team of two charismatic people (one female and one male medical doctor). The two doctors implemented intensive workshops in nearly every community of the municipality, and were well liked. After decades of family planning prohibition from a Catholic church affiliated NGO that dominated reproductive health issues throughout the municipality (in addition to four other nearby municipalities), these talks were a source of interest among the local population, and were well received. A few months after the completion of the reproductive health project, the director ran for mayor of Rumi Mayu, and won. (Albeit as the result of some-back door politicking and deal making, as it had been a tight race with the vote split among eight candidates.) Obviously, his penetration into and active presence in all of the communities in the months preceding the election, and the charisma of his two fellow doctors (and campaigners) opened the gate into politics and, for the time being, a job. Both of the doctors were soon employed by the municipal government in differing health related functions, and yet no follow-up to the reproductive health project ensued.

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<sup>82</sup> An example of this is an encounter I had with the municipal gender social worker, Ximena, who was paid through municipal funds. One day I bumped into Ximena in the street, and in conversation I asked her when she was going back to the *Altura*, as I might want to go along. Ximena said that she “didn’t know, and didn’t much like going there.” With a facial expression of disgust, she commented that “the women are all dirty, don’t keep house... They need a lot of help, and it will take a lot to change them.” Ximena is an indigenous woman, wears the traditional pollera, and had previously worked with a women’s organization in Sucre.

Given the distances between the 32 communities and the harsh geographic terrain, local people's contact with NGOs and municipal projects vary. Interestingly, most people I interviewed and talked with did not seem to fully grasp the work of the NGOs, or to hold very high expectations of them, nor of the municipal state government.<sup>83</sup> The main exception to this was that of formal schooling, whereby parents were highly concerned that their children learn to read and write, and get a good education. Many people saw NGOs as temporary entities—here one day and gone the next, as one woman from the *Cordillera* explained:

For almost 3 years Plan International worked here, but then retired because another institution wanted to come to work in the municipality. The other NGO constructed a big school, and also made some bathrooms. There was also another NGO that came here, but they don't do any real work; they give some talks, that's all. They come and say we're going to do these projects; they talk a lot, but don't do anything. The benefits of the NGOs are that they give our children a pencil, pencil sharpener, notebook, and so with this they help us. We don't get much other help.

This reflects how NGOs are seen as transitory and distributors of material goods; furthermore, that many locals have a limited understanding of the ultimate goals of program and their timeframes. For example, is the building of schools and pencil handouts about creating just a shelter and handing out supplies? Or, is it about providing a more conducive place for learning? Is the objective of teaching and learning about addressing social needs and desires based on local stances? Or, is it about developing local skills to adequately meet national and international markets?

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<sup>83</sup> Most of these interviews were conducted in 2004-2005. However, the main exception to this was the Reproductive Health Project (see pages 30, 31) and Esperanza's housing renovation project (see page 28). The housing project ended in 2010, renovating a total of 800 houses in various communities located in the *Valle*, *Cabecera de Valle* and *Altura*. Most people express a deep appreciation to have been able to improve their houses, and speak highly of the project.

When and where are these issues discussed? Often times people would ask my husband and I about the specifics of NGOs, which we thought reflected their seeing us as having more of an in with the NGOs because of an association of our “whiteness” or “professional,” or “western” ways that share similarities with many of those exhibited by NGO workers.

The communities, just like the people and terrain of Rumi Mayu, are not homogenous. While some communities observe the comings and goings of the NGOs and municipal political seats, others do take a more active role. Some are experiencing success, as others are still working for a community consensus. As one man expressed, in frustration:

One NGO just recently started to help out; they want to start an association, but the people don't show much interest. I don't know why, I don't understand this. Just a few of us are interested. The idea is that we plant a lot of apples and oregano, and then sell it. I don't know how far this will take us. They tell us that we'll sell these products someplace else.

Yet, some communities are more suspicious of NGOs, a possible indication of their “fly by night” nature, or indifference to their “assistance,” as evoked by the *sindicato* representative and one woman from a *Valle* community. According to the *sindicato* representative, “the ONGS are distracting us, pushing us in different ways in the interest of their own projects...they cause us to fight between ourselves for a little candy or food. The benefit of this, though, is that it makes us wake ourselves up.” While the woman commented: “This is how it always is with these NGOs. The professionals come in and make their money but everything stays the same for us, we remain poor. A little more money, but we're still poor.”

And, then there are communities that are more organized, and have a clearer vision of what they would like:

Our community is very organized and has vision, because not too long ago I went to the Chapare, and while there I had participated in some workshops and gained some understanding on how we can develop ourselves. My community is very organized, and when I returned we talked about what we needed, and we decided not to be quiet, not to wait. So, we always knock on the door of the institutions that work in the municipality, and specifically state what we want. We're the authorities here, and we'll go to the institutional offices to get our needs met. But some communities don't have a leader to help move forward their community.<sup>84</sup>

These are just a few examples of how development is playing out in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, along with some disconnects between what many people view as their immediate development needs, and their limited participatory involvement. There are NGOs and municipal projects that are addressing some irrigation concerns, agriculture issues, and income generation project; but, for the most part these projects do little to address the environmental concerns that are affecting the livelihoods of the communities in Rumi Mayu, or the production and consumption of foods, and the future generations of their children. Although some benefits develop from projects, the core issue of "multidimensional aspects of deprivation" (Narayan et al. 2000:4-5), and the incorporation of the opportunity to broaden choice are only subliminally, if at all, tackled. The reasoning why these

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<sup>84</sup> Several people from this particular community were very active in the resistance movement of the *Apoderados Espiritualistas*, during the 1930s until the 1960s (see Arias, 1994). Thus, this may be seen as a possible indication of historical solidarity and continuity in the community. In recent years, the community organized to get a health post, school and electricity. It was the only community where I saw parents hanging around the school to make sure that teachers were there, and actually teaching. As one father explained, "I come here almost every day to make sure that the teachers are here working."

issues and social concerns are not being dealt with was explained by one NGO worker, “it requires too much time and investment, and results are not immediately visible.” In other words, instead of seeing the continual rearticulating nature of coloniality, NGO workers, as well as others, view the main obstacles of a civilizing “modernity,” in terms of time and money; discussing issues, developing regional systems knowledge, offering choices and building cooperatives take too much time to implement, and donors (evaluators) need to see visible results immediately (i.e. schools, cemented enclosed markets, paved plaza, etc.); thus decisions are made externally in order to get things done quickly for them, and in ways that lock them into the outside market system and world.

In several ways, these examples support Gill’s and Patzi’s observations regarding how the Popular Participation Law is contributing to outcomes that actually *exclude* local participation, change the nature of local politics, and contribute to classism and sexism, whereby the differences in culture, ethnicity and professional training contribute to these disparities. Furthermore, the hierarchical and exclusionary characteristics of these NGOs and municipal employees may be seen as virtually emulating the colonial relationship between development and modernity, in how “colonialism is exclusionary by nature, based on the incompatibility between the cultures of the colonizer with that of the colonized. Although the propositions for colonization are achieved by the measure in which the colonized changes their form of life in order to adjust to the needs and interests of the colonial apparatus” (Bonfil Batalla, 2005: 38). However, as noted in reference to local Rumi Mayuns, resistance, manipulation of situations, and regional modern development visions



about the diverse ways that they would like to see their municipality develop all exist simultaneously. Their experiences, intergenerational stories, and migration encounters, coupled with the collective memory of peasant oppression and indigenous rebellions (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1984), enable a scrutiny of sociopolitical and economic discriminations. In a myriad of ways, locals continually seek to reclaim and repossess their culture and place; the most challenging dilemma is expanding networks of solidarity that focus on disentangling and tearing down the colonial structure.

### **Asymmetrical Visions, Alliances, and Obligations**

Approximately three decades ago, Michael Taussig elaborated on how capitalist modes of production introduced a labor economy, international trade, the development of the hacienda system, land appropriations, and a feudal tax structure—all of which created a proletariat society alien to the very nature of indigenous peoples (Taussig, 1980). Of these, the hacienda system, Agrarian Reform, and the Catholic Church have had the most profound impact on Rumi Mayu.<sup>85</sup> However, over the last ten years, NGOs and municipal state institutions (local government, schools and health posts) have had an increasing influence and control on the direction of the municipality, positioning themselves around their ideals of the market and capitalist economic growth, consequentially moving many campesinos/as further toward a labor economy. As briefly discussed above, a few

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<sup>85</sup> In just about all of the interviews, when asked about the history of their community, the interviewees talked about the *patrones* (bosses; hacienda owners). For example, “Before there were the haciendas...the owners were the *patrones*...there were obligations, we knew how to do everything, but my father was poor” (combined from two interviews: one from the *Cabecera de Valle*, and the other the *Cordillera*).

salient local examples include: periodic infrastructure projects promoted by the municipal government, most of which are co-financed by NGOs, have attracted many men to leave fallow their fields to haul rocks from the river beds, for a quick monetary return for their labor; the transition from a diverse agricultural production, to mono-crops strictly oriented toward the market; a humanistic education policy that will train boys to be electricians and carpenters, and girls to sew and knit; and municipal goals to develop tourism with plans to train locals—mostly women—to work for the planned hotels and restaurants.

Obviously, everyone has different livelihoods and work habits, much of which is contingent on the local community. Throughout the municipality of Rumi Mayu, agriculture and artisan production are the main livelihoods. However, newer occupations have surfaced in the main town of Rumi Mayu itself, as many people are leaving their fields to work on town infrastructure projects. According to the testimonies of several people, there are only about ten families in the town of Rumi Mayu that rely mainly on agricultural production for their livelihood. Town project jobs usually revolve around shoveling rocks into the dump truck for new buildings or roadwork, and some building construction or plumbing work. These employees are paid on a daily basis, and the line prevalent among much of the town is that they work one day, drink their pay the next, and are back to work again the following day. Many families rent out rooms in their houses to town employees, teachers, health workers, or NGO employees. Several families earn a living from purchasing products in the city, and selling them in their corner stores. Five local residents work as town council members, or as municipal secretary, but most government

employees are hired from the city of Sucre or other regions. The same applies for most NGO positions, where the cook, janitor or drivers are locals; all other positions are from the city or other regions. The only two exceptions to this were two nurses who had spent their younger childhood days in Rumi Mayu, but moved to the city to study high school and university. They were later contracted by two different NGOs: one quit her job after approximately six months and went to Spain; the other worked in Rumi Mayu for about two years, and was then transferred to another municipality. The other exception was the NGO that sponsored the housing renovations; as mentioned above, they hired local men to help construct some of the housing construction. A relevant observation to this state of affairs, presented by Zimmerer about soil erosion in the Bolivian Andes, is that it had “worsened during recent decades (1953-91) due to changes in production as peasants shifted labor from conservation [farming practices] to nonfarm employment” (1993a: 1659). Are people leaving their lands fallow because their increased labor input continues to result in decreased production, or is land abandonment contributing to environmental deterioration? Or, is it a combination of both? Or, is it the quick cash that they can turn around and drink with that in the evening? My time in Rumi Mayu lead me to believe that it is a combination of all of these factors. Given the geographical location and ecological nature of the region, farming is certainly a critically important livelihood, in which the local citizens may live well, but other skills and occupations are also needed, and appear to be a dream of many others too. Also given that farming, “*being a campesino*,” is not validated or honored by development and modernity, nor do state policies provide appropriate and adequate support for it.

Therefore, the abandonment of farming is dialectically related to the structural and ideological conditions within which subsistence farming exists.

Everyone is not banking their future on the NGOs and municipal government for the “growth” or the “moving ahead” of their communities. When I asked parents what kind of employment they would like to see their children aspire to, their responses generally referred to some skill that would contribute to the “growth” of their communities. Numerous ideas and hopes for their children and the community included the following: teachers, union leader (*dirigente*), public works employee, nurse, doctor, carpenter, lawyer, dentist, agronomist, and veterinarian. Then again, other people were not thinking of any specific occupation, but had a more community oriented reply; for example, “that they become a leader, and help the community to be more comprehensive in working toward change” (man from the *Cordillera*); or “that they learn what is necessary to help move our community forward; maybe with more ideas it could help us to grow” (man from *Cabecera del Valle*). A few people did express concern of the seemingly futile future of the community, preferring that their children move on to brighter horizons; as one man in the *Cordillera* summed it up, “I believe more in studying than in the soil; I want my children to finish high school, and learn more about how to work with an institution so that they get ahead.” But the overall consensus was that, “it would be nice if someone from our community studies, and then and returns back here” (woman *Cabecera del Valle*)—as another person put it, “in the youth is our future, within them is how the community will move ahead” (man, *Cabecera del Valle*).

Thus, the struggles for their land and community continue, as hope is placed in the youth to develop the verbal skills and know-how to gain control, and to help their communities to move forward. Yet presently, it is a tepid alliance between the state municipal employees and NGO workers (mainly financed through international institutions), that is assuming a leading role in the rural development in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, and that is hierarchically organized on race and patriarchy, empowered by external financing and their perception is always mediated by the external world. As Bebbington points out, “bilateral and multilateral funders are increasingly directing resources through municipalities, which imply a loss of direct institutional support and increased competition for project funds for NGOs. In response, NGOs have increasingly assumed the role of consultants that sell services to municipal” (1997: 122).

### **Dysfunctional Partnerships**

Working alongside the NGOs are the municipal government employees, who include the mayor, town council members, accountants, etc.; the local hospital and health post employees; and school teachers and staff. The allocation of substantial government funds to municipalities has served to boost numerous work incentives for mayoral candidates and employers; this income provides a decent salary for the municipal employees and supporting staff, plus it gives the municipalities start-up monies to lure and work with international agencies on a co-financed basis. This has attracted the wealthier residents, people from the city, and former NGO workers to compete for local government positions. Both the previous mayor of Rumi Mayu

and the current mayor had worked for NGOs, and represent the trend that Albro refers to as “fiefdoms of political parties” (2006). As noted above, the two major contenders for the 2004 mayoral elections consisted of don Jorge, the incumbent mayor aligning himself with the NGO he was previously employed with, using the organization to give away potato seeds in order to buy votes; while the (winning) candidate, don Gonzalo, (as previously discussed) once worked as the coordinator of CEDERTA’s six month reproductive health project, that implemented an intensive education program in most of the communities, conveniently finishing the project only a few months before the elections. The widespread visual outcomes of the house renovation project also contributed to enhance the then mayor’s stance among local voters. Not surprisingly, after don Jorge lost the election he went to Sucre to start up another NGO with some of the employees who had worked with the NGO that supplied the potatoes. Thus politicians (or wannabe politicians) are using the backs of NGOs as clout to boast their images and win votes; reinventing aspects of the post-1982 days when NGOs aligned with political parties to gain access into employment and income, and promote their political agendas.

With all these NGOs, you would think that there was a lot of bustling work going around. But, generally there was not. In a sense, there are two sets of people living parallel lives within the regional confines of the communities. It did not seem to matter where I was sitting—be it in the plaza of Rumi Mayu, on the steps of an elementary school, on a stool in front of don Lucho’s store, or walking the streets of the *Cordillera*—the scene was similar. One group of people—generally labeled the “campesinos/as”—consists of those who were born there, or moved there to live in

the community (by and large people who came from another rural community, but had married someone in the new community). These “campesinas/os” were up early, the majority of them etching out a living from the land, while several others were carpenters, merchants (operating small shops with basic supplies), and town council members; in addition, a few people were employed as servants or drivers for the state institutions and NGO offices. The other group is the “professionals.” They appear on the streets a little later in the morning, and earn a living from providing services and “trainings” to the campesinos/as, filling in such positions as the mayor, accountants, surveyors, doctors, nurses, teachers, principals, agronomists and other NGO workers. While the campesinas/os walked to their fields, or took their animals out to the hills, the professionals walked to their offices and classrooms, or drove off on motorcycles or in trucks. As my neighbor would say in his angry responses to some of the town projects that negatively impacted his house, “All they do is sit, sit, sit, and then tell us what to do.”

Seldom did the two parallel groups converse; the relationship, if any, was pure business. The distinctions of gender, class, professionalism, and ethnic roles were fairly well defined subliminally, with a rare crossover of a local inhabitant becoming a teacher or auxiliary nurse. Politics and development issues were dominated by the lighter skin, formally educated, “professional” males. Rivera Cusicanqui links this to the “political culture [of] patriarchal authoritarianism, vertical subordination, and a lack of transparency...[which are outcomes] of continuity with past neoliberal governments” (interview with Farthing: 2007, 5). Campesina women have been moving into some strategic positions, such as a town

council member and head of the local neighborhood committee. Several of these women pay a dear price for their positions: Doña Estefania, a town councilwoman, appeared to be carefully chosen by the previous mayor to fill the gender quota of the Bolivian electoral system that requires that 30% of women hold municipal town council seats. She was a young attractive Quechua, who would play the token role of indigenous woman at ceremonies for the mayor, but her words in the decision-making process often fell on deaf ears. By the end of her term she was humiliated by her alliance with the defunct mayor, and by an affair with an NGO worker. (While the now ex-mayor, whose wife lived in the city, blatantly lived with one of the schoolteachers in the one small, rustic residential hotel.) After they lost the next municipal election, doña Estefania went back to her role as a mother, but now a single mother eking out a meek livelihood off of her land, until 2008 when she opened a small store. As mentioned above, the ex-mayor with all his contacts moved to city and started his own NGO.

There exist dualist visions and relationships regarding the land and community. Most of the campesinos/as that I talked with or interviewed expressed a close relationship with their land, and highly value it, as exhibited in their rituals discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>86</sup> They are highly dependent on the environment for agricultural production, be it for subsistence needs, a means for commodity exchange in *trueque*, or in the market for monetary income. Thus, they are well

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<sup>86</sup> Albro noted that the “indigenous movements in Bolivia have sought to expand the state’s limited conception of ‘land,’ understood simply as a factor in agricultural production, to a larger conception of ‘territory’ as the location for the social reproduction of collective identity” (2005:11). <sup>87</sup> For many it is because their families live in the city, and /or that is where their lives exist. But, there are several people, mainly scattered teachers in a community here and there that stick around on week-ends and a holiday. They tend to have a warmer relationship with many of the families in the community.



aware of, and concerned about, the environmental and agricultural challenges they confront. Most of the municipal employees, NGO workers, and the Catholic priest are not from the municipality, and leave town whenever they can, demonstrating limited commitment or affinity to the area.<sup>87</sup> However, most of them seem to work long hours, and express belief and commitment to their professions; at the same time, it appears that they are compelled to work in the municipality mainly due to financial necessity. Their income is not dependent on the immediate environment, and they purchase their foods from the city and in restaurants. (Meanwhile, a common joke around town is how bad the food is at the two small pensions.) These dualistic visions fuel how each party views the community and environment in ways that are self-beneficial. While a few NGO workers and municipal employers try to take advantage of their positions to make substantial and beneficial changes, most exert a superior position of “the professional knows best,” and “posit the individual as the basic unit of economic development and political democracy that undermines indigenous forms of collective organization” (Rivera Cusicanqui (1992), cited in Gill, 2000:137).<sup>88</sup> At times, the dynamics between the NGOs and municipal workers

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<sup>87</sup> For many it is because their families live in the city, and /or that is where their lives exist. But, there are several people, mainly scattered teachers in a community here and there that stick around on week-ends and a holiday. They tend to have a warmer relationship with many of the families in the community.

<sup>88</sup> Similarities of the professional make-up of NGOs in Rumi Mayu coincide with Leslie Gill’s analysis of NGOs working in El Alto Bolivia. Gill concurs that, “Although NGOs incorporate some of El Alto’s poor in the new national and global networks, the organizations are primarily controlled by middle-class professionals, who are their ultimate beneficiaries. NGOs have become an important employment option for the professional middle class at a time when economic crisis and the retrenchment of state agencies are eroding a traditional source of middle-class jobs. As professionals lay claim to ‘development’ resources, they bolster their own economic fortunes, and by portraying themselves as the representatives of the poor, they strengthen their position vis-à-vis the state and international funding agencies. Such self-serving portrayals offend many would-be beneficiaries in El Alto who disagree with how they are represented to international agencies by NGO staff members and who want to control NGO funds for their own projects” (Gill, 2000: 186).

with the campesinos/as “can fall into the role of a new “boss” [*patron*] (Kohl, 1993) for campesinos, replicating the previous subservient relationships they had with landowners under the semi-feudal hacienda system” (Kohl, 1993: 161).

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, the Mexican ethnologist y anthropologist, connects how the excluding nature of colonialism is not about the “assimilation of the colonized into the dominant culture, but only about their adaptation by the new order of defeat by the colonizers” (Ticona Alejo, 2005: 38). As Bonfil explains this, one can see parallels to the relationships between the local “campesinos/as and the urban “professional.” A difference between the two is maintained because that is where the justification of colonial domination lies. The exclusion becomes a powerful tool because “the culture of the dominated pueblo does not recognize their own value. It is a ‘denied culture’ (*cultura negada*), and is incompatible with the dominant culture. The colonizers do not subjugate them to take away what they make or reproduce, but to have them make or produce another thing. Here lies the profound difference between the imposed colonial order of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and what still prevails today” (ibid: 38). We can see this in the way that the municipality is being re-territorialized through visions and actions of “development” coming mainly from the outside, with little thought given to historic culture and knowledge, or alternative paths. Campesinos/as are gradually being maneuvered and subsumed into a capitalist development model.

In Chapters 1 and 3, I discussed the not-too-long ago hacienda system of the municipality, which was not fully relieved by either the 1952 National Revolution, the 1953 Agrarian Reform the 1985 New Economic Plan 21060, the structural

adjustments of neoliberal policies, or the 1995 Popular Participation Law. What has changed, though, are the networks that manipulate power, many of whom are the descendants that in one way or another were linked with a previous political system of domination. Thus, other notable rapid changes are occurring with the social, cultural and economic dynamics.

### **Re-territorialization: *Trueque* versus Market**

Instead of working together with local practices and perspectives, cultural beliefs, and local organizations—interculturality and decolonization—such as described in the previous chapter, the Bolivian state at the municipal level in Rumi Mayu, together with NGOs and schools, are contributing to a restructuring—or, as Zimmerman highlights, a “re-territorializing”—of the local economy and environment (primarily oriented toward a market system), which brings with it newer manifestations of another form of colonialism. Most often authorities that come from other regions do not share the same connection and respect to the land, as do the people who actually built their houses with their own labor and materials, and worked the land since childhood. Most outsiders tend to see the land in terms of its material and monetary value. Where can profits be made? How can we turn backwards people into productive workers? This gets played out in development projects that impose municipal policies that dictate and fine people for not abiding to new market mandates indicating where and how Rumi Mayans can sell their food products, to plowing through people’s land, destroying crops and impinging on future agricultural yields. The affects of environmental degradation, generations of

marginalization and little to no compensation for ones labors have incurred divisions that isolate people in ways that they fight alone for personal values and together for larger communal interests and concerns. As one 80 year old woman, Santusa, sadly reminisced about the day when the municipal tractor destroyed their family home, and later tried to cut down their trees:

I was born below in the house of my father. This house is my husband's. My parents lived below, and left me the house; it had started to deteriorate, but I fixed it with cane stalks (*caña hueca*). But then one day the tractor from the mayor's office came, and they destroyed my house. When I was told that they were there destroying my house, I went to ask them what they were doing. I told them if you're going to destroy my house you will now have to build me another one, and the mayor replied, "Do you think an adobe house is worth anything? It has *no* value." When my children came, they too were crying. After that, many times I would ask the mayor to buy me any type of adobes, and I would make another house.

During this interview, Santusa continued to explain that after her house was demolished she and her daughter clung to their trees, and refused to let them be cut. The road ate away a good portion of their land, but the mayor, don Jorge, did allow the *molle* trees to be spared; don Jorge promised economic compensation for the affected land and lost harvest, but until that point had still neglected to do so. A year later another family reclaimed their land, by blocking off the street with large tree trunks on the two ends of the road. Given that this street was rarely transited, besides sporadic walkers, its reclamation has not been contested. After several months, the family eventually began to cultivate their land again.

At times, several municipal officials and NGO worker will join forces to convince or connive that locals accept the infrastructure changes as is, on the terms designed and imposed by outsiders. When our neighbors refused to let the town

dynamite the stone ledge that was literally one meter away from their house, in order to lay down sewage pipes, the mayor, town surveyor, and an NGO director all arrived on the scene to convince them of the importance to do this. (When our neighbors were out of hearing range, they would ridicule and make fun of how ignorant they perceived them to be. Despite the town having other options of where to lay the sewage pipes, after a week of dispute the three authorities insensitively swindled our reluctant neighbors to accept the blasting, and provided them with a promissory note of an agreement that if the house were damaged, the town would fix it. Two weeks and 120 detonations blasts later, the house *was* indeed damaged, but the town officials refused to acknowledge this, and denied compensation.

Plans of the municipality are highly skewed towards market-led policies and economic growth, which might not necessarily raise incomes, or solve the problems of inequities, agricultural production, health, and “development.”<sup>89</sup> Plans coincide with a rural commoditization process based on cash-crop production and tourism, that clearly distinguishes separate familial and intra-household gender relations—labor roles that hierarchically position men with greater access to resources (peanuts, apple trees, oregano)—while integrating women into more of the secondary or servitude positions (marmalade production, cooking, cleaning maids). In conjunction, moving away from subsistence agriculture to mono-crops jeopardizes family food nets, and juggles newer formations of class according to market related successes.

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<sup>89</sup> As observed by Nico Van Niekerk in his study of the international agencies in the Andean world, “It is difficult to foresee how the strategies that look to increment competition and market access based on solid commercialization could have success in regions like the Altiplano” (Van Niekerk, 1992: 97).

Markets are seen as a way to access cash, to climb out of economically strapped conditions. This tends to deter “out of the box” thinking about newer ideas and innovations, or alternative visions of development and society. Understandings pertaining to the intricacies of market operations and its measurement by GNP and their implications are not acknowledged or discussed. What tends to be ignored (or uninformed) is the less desirable consequences of a purely market oriented economy. According to Seers (1979, as cited in Kabeer, 1999), the measurement of markets by GNP is a “highly partial mechanism for assigning value” (Kabeer, 1999: 76). GNP measures the exchange of production based on the value of the resources and marketplace prices. However, excluded from this economic analysis is not only domestic labor, “but all aspects of human endeavor and the natural environment which have not been subjected to the same market-oriented rationality” (ibid: 78). As explained by Waring,

The current state of the world is the result of a system that attributes little or no ‘value’ to peace. It pays no heed to the preservation of natural resources or to the labour of the majority of its inhabitants or to the unpaid work of the reproduction of human life itself – not to mention to its maintenance and care. The system cannot respond to values it refuses to recognize (Waring, 1989: 4, cited in Kabeer, 1999: 78).

The monetary value of mono crop agriculture and tourism are contingent to market prices that do not take into consideration the effects that they might have on the social, cultural, or ecological environment, or on the long term sustainability of the region. Wolfgang Sachs asserts that economic growth is incompatible with social justice, because re-distribution is skewed and trickling down monies do not happen; thus, this results in social inequities and ecological degradation (Sachs,

1999: x-xi). Furthermore, market based incomes and economic growth does not guarantee a better quality of living, because more emphasis is placed on “the *rate* of economic growth than to its *pattern*” of redistribution (Kabeer: 75).<sup>90</sup> An equitable distribution of energy and resources “tends to get postponed on various pretexts: because economic inequality is considered necessary to provide incentives, because countries need to build up domestic industry or military power, or simply because ruling groups consider the current distribution a just one” (ibid: 75).<sup>91</sup> Regionally, in Rumi Mayu profits are highly susceptible to being pocketed and/or invested in “showy” infrastructure projects instead of addressing land degradation and water issues, or the fundamental causes of social inequalities. This neglect of economic redistribution has repercussion for gender equity as “‘ill-founded gender asymmetries’ are woven into the core concepts of development thought” (ibid: 75).

### **All Roads Lead to the “Market”**

Changing patterns and values have consequential effects on social power dynamics, as well as on mediating relationships with the environment, and the

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<sup>90</sup> Anthropologist Bret Gustafson points out how large land-holdings of mono-crops for national and transnational export markets have led to the intense opposition of land re-distribution reform, and national sovereignty of natural resources; this has deepened national polarization, fermenting blatant racism and violence. As Gustafson explains: “The narrow-based extractive model (Gray 2005) generates royalties that fuel elite rent-seeking battles and concentrates wealth among a thin middle and upper class, following a long history of extractive resource dependency that is returning in intensified form today with Bolivia’s natural gas boom. This unstable model creates the illusion of growth and wealth, yet the GDP of Santa Cruz has been flat in relation to population expansion over the past 50 years [PNUD 2004]” (2006: 360).

<sup>91</sup> Kabeer cites Emmerji (1992) to provide a couple of exceptions that demonstrate more equitable redistribution: “Sir Lanka has higher adult literacy than Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that its per-capita income is fifteen times lower. Child mortality in Brazil is four times higher than in Jamaica although its per-capita income is twice that of Jamaica” (1999: 75).<sup>92</sup> *Seis hueco* (six hole) blocks are a type of brick that is shaped more like a thin walled cinder block. It is a very popular and inexpensive building material in Bolivia. Its quality is inferior to adobe, brick, rock, or wood. Houses and building made from “*six hueco*” blocks tend to be cold inside.

production and consumption of nutritious foods. In general, I have observed that an increased relation with the market system has resulted in a deterioration of reciprocal practices, an increase in individual and competitive characteristics, and a blind drive towards such programs as mono crop production and tourism. As E. P. Thompson remarks, “The market is indeed a superb and mystifying metaphor for the energies released and the new needs (and choices) opened up by capitalist forms of exchange, with all the conflicts and contradictions withdrawn from view. Market is...a mask worn by particular interests, which are not coincident with those of the ‘nation’ or ‘the community,’ but which are interested, above all, in being mistaken to be so” (Thompson, 1993: 305).

Marketing as defined by actions of the state and NGO workers leans toward a modernization process that could thus result in “changing” the social fabric of communities, by supplanting one socio-culture model for another, that moves it from a highly communal mediation of material life in which the community takes precedence over self-interest, to one in which the market “situates individuals and groups as separate actors in material life,” as Gudeman and Rivera term it (2002: 4). In addition to the push toward mono crops and agricultural exports, the most recent example of market encroachment or a “symbol of progress” in the town of Rumi Mayu, is the newly constructed (in 2009) local market facility itself—the latest development project financed by Venezuela and the mayor’s office, from LPP funds. An eye sore at best, this two story “*seis hueco*”<sup>92</sup> red block building was erected a

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<sup>92</sup> *Seis hueco* (six hole) blocks are a type of brick that is shaped more like a thin walled cinder block. It is a very popular and inexpensive building material in Bolivia. Its quality is inferior to adobe, brick, rock, or wood. Houses and building made from “*six hueco*” blocks tend to be cold inside.



block away from the main plaza. The building interior is dark and cold, and divided into little stalls with concrete floors and small rectangular glass open windows with vertical metal bars positioned high up on the wall, letting a little sunshine in, but making it difficult to peer in or out, reminiscent of cow stalls in Vermont barns, or of a prison for humans. There are approximately 40 little market stalls, for a total town population of approximately 450.

Who is going to sell their products there, and to whom? On numerous occasions I have asked people around town if they knew who would be selling their merchandize in the market. No one knew of anyone. I also inquired if they would be going to the market to make purchases. Everyone said no. Most people consume their own fresh produce, which is supplemented by products attained through *trueque*, purchases made at the Friday night open air market on the plaza, or goods attained from periodic trips to Sucre. Dry goods, such as rice, noodles, sugar, coca, flour, etc., are purchased at the little stores dispersed throughout the center of town. Fresh bread is baked by whoever feels like it, whenever they feel like it, and is sold by hanging a basket outside the door to announce availability, or from a wheelbarrow on two strategic corners of the town. Each of these current locations of food / product exchange are places of social interaction, be it at the Friday night market, or hanging out in front of doña Dora's *tienda*. The integration of small "Mom and Pop" stores dotted throughout the town enlivens the natural and unique character, and enhances families' livelihoods. Why would these store keepers pay rent and spend their day in a cold, dark stall at the market, when they can sell from a designated room out of their home and attend to customers on an as needed basis,

while simultaneously participating in the goings-on in the street, and while taking care of their family and home? As Berthoud deduces, “Market relations are thus reduced to numerical values; with the price mechanism, the market appears to be composed of strangers connected only at the level of appearances, with all signs of friendship, loyalty or affection put aside” (1992: 78).

In the municipality of Rumi Mayu, a collaboration of state and NGO structures, ideologies, and policies are thus greatly influencing a re-structuring of landscapes to commercial mono-crop agriculture and entrepreneurial jobs, that can potentially ensnarl citizens into a market economy: agronomists and NGO technicians will teach campesinos which foods to produce; health professionals will teach families (mainly girls and women) how to prepare nutritious meals; school teachers will acculturate children into modern means of production; and local politicians and municipal administrators will manage and supervise these restructured rural labor practices and infrastructure. These newly aligned positions also redefine gender differences and roles, as well as class and race. Men will be the main agriculturalists, while women will be expected to work in, for example, the hypothetical tourism business. Instead of an exchange of ritual reciprocity and the cultivation of crops that meet multiple needs, the land will be used to produce cash crop commodities.<sup>93</sup> *Trueque* will not be a necessity, as people will purchase their

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Pollan’s study touches on the transformation from inter-crop sustainable agriculture, to mono crop commercial agriculture of “number 2 field corn” on Iowa farms in the United States. These experiences provide cautionary insights into social, environmental and political consequences for Bolivian communities. As Pollan explains: “When George Naylor’s (current Iowan famer) grandfather was farming, the typical Iowa farm was home to whole families of different plant and animal species, corn being only the fourth most common. Horses were the first, because every farm needed working animals (there were only 225 tractors in all of America in 1020), followed by cattle, chickens, and then corn. After corn came hogs, apples, hay, oats, potatoes, and cherries; many Iowa

food products in the city, and local production will turn to cash crops. This process has already begun in the Rumi Mayu lower *Valle*, where city-bound crop production (primarily lemons and peanuts) have contributed to increased monetary incomes, and city purchases that are expressed in a sense of social superiority to the other communities. As previously discussed, many of the people from the *Valle* communities refer to the higher altitude people as inferior: they called them “Indians” (with a pejorative, backwards connotation), “lazy,” and spurn and criticize their homespun clothing. Furthermore, although most of the *Valle* people sell their products in the city, they are still open to *trueque* with other communities, however at a higher price. As discussed in the previous chapter, one man from the *Cordillera* explained that “bartering with the *Valle* communities has changed; before we exchanged more, now it’s very little. For example [the *Valle* people] give us very small amounts of peanuts, because they say that they cost more, and they want us to give them more potatoes; this is what began to change all of this.”

My point is not to deny the necessity of markets, nor to claim that traditional practices of reciprocity and *trueque* are the sole answers to environmental stability, food security, and health—after all, there have *always* been markets in the world,

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farms also grew wheat, plums, grapes, and pears. This diversity allowed the farm not only to substantially feed itself—and by that I don’t mean feed only the farmers, but also the soil and the livestock—but to withstand a collapse in the market for any one of those crops. It also produced a completely different landscape than the Iowa of today” (Pollan, 2006: 38). “Yet George Naylor is all but going broke—and he’s doing better than many of his neighbors...For though this farm might feed 129, it can no longer support the four who live on it: The Naylor farm survives by the grace of Peggy Naylor’s paycheck (she works for the social services agency in Jefferson), and an annual subsidy payment from Washington, D.C. Nor can the Naylor farm literally feed the Naylor family, as it did in grandfather Naylor’s day: George’s crops are basically inedible—they’re commodities that must be processed, or fed to livestock before they can feed people. Water, water, everywhere and not a drop to drink: Like most of Iowa, which now imports 80 percent of its food, George’s farm (apart from his garden, his laying hens, and his fruit trees) is basically a food desert” (ibid: 34).

since pre-modern civilizations until the present. Rather, I desire to highlight and abstract several ways in which I have observed and experienced the Bolivian municipal government and NGOs aligning themselves with market practices that invoke colonialist models, that have resulted in: a) excluding a great deal of locals from the planning process and decision making; b) systematic (re)shuffling of a hierarchy of bosses and subordinates; c) “re-territorialization” of environmental and economic landscapes that redefine economic, gender, and social positions; d) the possibility of diminishing self-sufficiency and increasing dependency; e) reinforcement or redefinition of gender stereotypes and racism; and f) creation of risks that could potentially dissolve communal integrity.

As noted, most of the municipal and NGO workers in the municipality focus on “western” concepts of socioeconomic development that are designed and evaluated from the international financiers, which in turn is used to reinforce their own legitimacy, political practices, and authority. As Fairhead bluntly states, “In becoming knowledge’s subjects, one becomes subjugated” (2000: 100). In this way, many state and NGO workers see themselves as the “expert,” teaching the campesinos how to be “modern” or “civilized,” yet without sharing a sense of commitment to the work—for example, nine out of ten of the state workers and teachers who I have interviewed did not enjoy working in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, and considered their jobs temporary, hoping to return soon to other work in the city. These subjugated positions greatly affect their commitment for trying to understand and work in a more collaborative manner with the communities—while simultaneously they often do not seem to recognize how their production of

knowledge is self-enhancing, and at the same time possibly damaging to the culture they are paid to “help.” Indeed, campesinos are aware of this, and have commented that “lots of the people from outside come here to earn money off of us,” and pointedly state their belief that “the laws which have decentralized money for development have ended up in the hands of corrupt people, who do not have either the desire or the mental capacity to develop the municipality in order to take it out of poverty.”

### **Marmalade Entrepreneurship: Acquiescence, Utilization, and Re-integration**

This chapter has examined the ways in which state and NGO development programs are reshaping the environment, which will have implications on food production, culture, gender, class, and ethnic relations. However, this is not to say that some benefits have not, or may not, come out of municipal and NGO programs, nor that all western knowledge is “bad” and all traditional knowledge / practices are “good.” This is where “catching up” development, “that coalesce with global capital interests” (Kamat, 2004: 156) gets murky. Even though the international institutions, the municipal state and NGOs come with their own agendas and their own self-empowering motives, people in the communities recognize this, maneuver around it, show resistance, and gain ground in different ways. For example, our neighbors quickly added on a modest extension to their house to take advantage of the roof tiles, bathroom equipment and Lorena stove provided from the housing renovation project. They did not like the Lorena stove and the dim kitchen, so they turned the kitchen into a storage room, and returned to their outdoor, open fire stove. This time

the outdoor stove is further removed from the eating area, a most likely reflection of the interpretation of the NGO's educational message about smoke inhalation and lung diseases. However, they did not believe that the Lorena stove reduced fire wood consumption, and said that their homemade stove system was more efficient and burned less fuel.

The influence of the NGOs and state institutions, such as school and health services, bring new perspectives, information, knowledge and practices that local people reformulate to meet their current needs. Although NGOs are often commendable in fine-tuning technical aspects toward local cultural practices, often times they tend to neglect local innovations, or subsistence farming practices of mixed crops and other cultural practices; reflective of imposed constraints and uneven relations with their financial institutions. There are of course several beneficial spin-offs and potentials of these NGO organizations and fair market practices, such as: increases in economic incomes; additional resources to finance community projects; the introduction of additional complimentary nutritional foods; increase awareness of disease prevention; the exposure of people to helpful information and innovative ideas; strengthening women's opportunities and positions, increase self-reliance and esteem, and contributions to a more comfortable living situation. However, caution needs to be applied to the ways in which these changes are distributed. Is it about the public good and a fairer distribution of resources? Is it about improving natural environments to enhance livelihoods, food security and healthier conditions? Or, is it about conforming cultures to better compete in capitalist markets, and gain business skills and scientific technology?

How newly introduced economic and social practices are used and incorporated into daily living and community life has varying affects, in which the present deals with “a contemporary backdrop of what Drakulic calls ‘a form of imperialism,’ the incursion of western food into local stores, impairing the market of traditional local goods and threatening self-sufficiency” (Drakulic 1991: 13, cited in Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari: 1996: 252).

Obviously time does not stand still and “progress” and “modernity” will take shape according to the dynamics and “mechanics of power,” intermingled with local people’s interpretation and actions, as distinguished by Taussig:

The tendency is to fetishize the community as an organically meshed totality of mutual aid, separable from the society in general...the researchers ignore the harsh facts of economic history which make most peasants the world over turn increasingly to cash cropping at the expense of autarky. The pious appeal to turn the clock back—that all the community has to do is withhold production destined for the market—flies in the face of all that is known concerning peasant economies, even if it’s well with the rise of commune-consciousness among the middle classes of the industrialized world. Wrenched out of context as an isolated calculation, it makes good sense to eat one’s product if the protein value is greater than the cash gain. But then, how does the peasant compare these two dissimilar entities and how does protein gain compare with the stark necessity for cash which confronts these people at every turn? (Taussig 1979: 137).

Similarly, Taussig argues that large scale farming is not inherently more “efficient” than peasant farming—efficiency being defined in terms of output over input, in currency or in calories (ibid: 133). In his late 1970’s case study of a Colombia plantation zone, Taussig deducted that two hectares are sufficient for subsistence farming (ibid: 130), and points out that large scale agriculture has not improved the “general standard of living” and actually causes a “growing rupture

between agriculture and nutrition” (ibid 132). However, as I described above, approximately three decades later, larger scale, mono-crop farming continues to be the main model of “development” in the municipality of Rumi Mayu to “assist” people out of “poverty,” and to “improve” their nutritional intake and overall health. Although this strategy is oriented toward the market, little orientation of what this implies, or how this increases one’s monetary income, or how this affects the social fabric and environment of the community, has been addressed.

One potentially fairly positive, yet still to be consolidated, example is one of PROAGRO’s projects in a *Valle* community in which they organized a small women’s income generation cooperative to produce guava and lemon marmalade. The women’s cooperative supports some local small farmers, and the availability of a nutritious marmalade locally, and in the nearby city. The recently established PAN pre-schools (*escuelas iniciales*) provide a supervised place for the women to leave their young children. Although the financing and support for the marmalade cooperative has come from a regional NGO that was founded on radical principles, but over time has exhibited more neo-liberal capitalist aligned practices, the outcome of the project has opened up new spaces for women.

In 2004, there were 33 women who worked at the marmalade cooperative sharing shifts in which 15-17 women would work one week, and 15-17 the next. Several years later, the NGO upgraded the women’s cooperative kitchen with state-of-the-art industrial equipment to increase their production. On the one hand (based on what some of the women explained to me), the work allows them to get together with other women, talk, get a break from domestic responsibilities, and earn some



money. On the other hand, the cooperative has had some destabilizing influences, such as envy and jealousy, because some believe some others are benefiting more. In addition, typical of NGO projects, women, like these of the marmalade cooperative, are sidelined from the planning and evaluation procedures that inhibit their understanding of business and marketing practices. Another point for consideration is that the nature of the cooperative—part-time women’s work that fulfilled the gender component of an NGO, and impressed donors and evaluators on their visits—situates women competitively, and perpetuates the industrial homework and women’s labor role typified throughout the Third World. As the ex-director of CIDEM,<sup>94</sup> Verónica Flores, pointed out, “a favorite NGO income generation project for women, are marmalade projects. However, none of these gender programs are truly gender oriented until they sincerely consult with the women from the start, provide options, include the women in all of the processes, and not treat them like token gestures.”

But, outcomes are unpredictable; Funk highlights that “in some cases the very thing that serves some western interests also benefits the region and women in it” (Funk, 2006: 11).<sup>95</sup> For example, during a focus group evaluation conducted in 2004 by the World Food Program, the questions of the evaluator focused on the

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<sup>94</sup> Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Mujer (Investigation and Development Center for Women, CIDEM) was one of the first women’s human rights organizations in Bolivia (1983).

<sup>95</sup> Further analysis would need to examine how these changes affect women’s agency: the disadvantages, and forms of discrimination, as well as the benefits, and forms of recognitions. A superb example is Tinsman’s (2000) article, in which she concludes that although Chilean women fruit workers are exploited and suffer, their earnings have nevertheless provided them with room to maneuver their own agency.

women's work with the marmalade project, and how the PAN program helped their children. But it was not until the evaluator asked them, "Who helps you to take care of your children?" that the women perked up as they interpreted the question as a family planning related inquiry. With much enthusiasm they discussed what they wanted from the two local health programs, CEDERTA and PROSIN. Apparently the women had been discussing this among themselves while stirring the guavas. The following is a slice of the interview:

**Woman 1:** You mean how we take care of ourselves? [This woman continued to talk about birth control measures, which locally are referred to as "*como cuidarnos*," or "how to take care of ourselves."] This confused the evaluator at first, but with interest she allowed the conversation to unfold. ]

**Evaluator:** Who is teaching you to take care of yourselves?

**Woman 1:** PROSIN and CEDERTA.

**Woman 2:** In our communities we don't know how to *cuidarnos*, many women get pregnant and in their final pregnancy they die. Our bodies cannot endure so many pregnancies...CEDERTA is going to work here teaching us about taking care of ourselves, and using different methods.

**Evaluator:** But, weren't there methods available before?

**Woman 3:** No, the Church controlled this, and they didn't accept the use of any birth control methods. Before we couldn't even talk about it, but now thank God' (*ahora gracias a dios*) our husbands understand.

**Woman 4:** Yes, my husband cannot obligate me to have children.

**Woman 5:** There are many children without parents; we need to plan because lots of children suffer.

**Woman 6:** These workshops are not only for married people, but they're also for the young and unmarried too, so they can take care of themselves, too.

**Evaluator:** Well, let's talk again about the pre-school...

**Woman 1:** We still lack a lot about feeding ourselves well, and nutritional education, it's not sufficient...

Whereas the women were concerned about their marmalade cooperative, and the continual assistance of the PAN program for their children, it was the family planning program and nutrition education that most inspired them at the time. The PAN program provides them time for themselves, and the marmalade production drew the women together, providing a space to discuss and interpret the family planning programs. Verónica Flores explained a similar experience herself, in which the evaluation of a yogurt factory operated by women in Oruro revealed that the women were more excited about what they learned through their work experiences about hygiene practices and its relationship to health, than that of factory operations and financial management.

### **In Conclusion: Challenges of Decolonization and Interculturality**

In the course of recent years, international aid organizations (donors) and NGOs have had more influence on the municipality of Rumi Mayu than the state. Though slow to the gate, during the past decade collaborative efforts between the municipality and NGOs have stepped up pace in pursuing a capitalist economic development model based on mono-crop agriculture, resource extraction and tourism. This aperture came to fruition through the combination of the LPP and the impulse of Garain's defined "development oriented" NGOs, together opening "a large margin of action for the state to plant their control over the jurisdiction space that until now belonged to the campesino community" (Regalsky, 2005: 125). The historic experience and record of international aid and NGOs has not "eradicated poverty," but has instead allured campesinas/os into circuits of capitalist markets, exchanging a production oriented toward regional food security for another aim of production that is increasingly geared for sale on the market (CENDA, 2005). "Both models of development (whether based on the active intervention of the state in the market or on the dynamics of the market alone) produce self-interested individuals, reputedly liberated from all moral or social obligation" (Berthoud, 1992: 73-74). It is a utilitarian path that dismisses and neglects any real imposition on the wealthy and unjust socio-economic structural systems, in the name of efficiency, progress, and "civilization." It is a "modernization" process that is changing the social fabric of communities from a highly communal mediation of material life to one in which "development NGOs posit the individual as the basic unit of economic development

and political democracy undermine indigenous forms of collective organization” (Rivera Cusicanqui [1992] cited in Gill, 2000: 37).

Some Rumi Mayuns align with the current NGO development discourse, while others are more communally oriented, with different variations of crossovers, tensions and conflicts between the two. However, in a general sense, the ideas, pressures, options and monies are heavily slanted toward a development discourse of “catching up,”<sup>96</sup> which polarize social relationships, and thwart time for reflection—taking a look from inside, or provide adequate space to find one’s own way. NGOs and municipal employees “tend to aggravate processes of differentiation and fragmentation” (Gill, 2000: 186), sidelining locals from any real substantial reflection, understanding and participation. Despite the hard work of most NGO and municipal workers, their actions reveal a hegemonic alliance with western epistemology, scientific technologies and global capitalism that is reinforcing a development paradigm that echoes Quijano’s “colonial model” (*patrón colonial / colonialidad del poder / colonialidad del saber*) (2003: 201-246). It is in this way that “we must not only be aware of the knowledge produced, but also understand that the knowledge producer is located within a particular social, economic and political context of society which feminist scholars call “positionality”” (Tercault, 1993, cited in Elabor-Idemudia, 2002: 229).

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<sup>96</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Siva associate ‘catching up’ development strategies “with a colonizing logic of accumulation and growth that is based not only on an inequitable consumption of resources but also on a widening disparity between core and periphery in the face of ecological limitations. They identify colonial relationships – between core and peripheral nations, urban and rural regions, man and nature and men and women – that make it difficult for the colonized to overcome their enchantment with the lifestyle of the colonizer” (Mies and Shiva, 1993 cited in Saunders, 2002: 19).

It would, though, be naïve to believe that NGOs impose themselves on locals and that they have no effective agency. Or, that some relationships are not formed between locals and well-meaning workers. Ideas and knowledge are spread about, discussed and incorporated in varying degrees. Acts of interculturality occur between the four ecological floors between locals, and in minute ways happen with some NGO and state workers. However, because of historical consequences—an absent state until 1994, followed by a municipal government that substantially excludes local participation—that many women, as well as the men, have turned to NGOs to access resources and financial assistance. Although Bolivia is heavily unionized and there are numerous social movements, they play a small role in the municipal development of Rumi Mayu. Local *sindicatos* have minimal resources, are male dominated, and focus on mundane practical issues, such as who funneled more than their share of communal agricultural irrigation for their crops. National unions and social movements focus on large singular essential issues (i.e. mining; coca production; land reform; regional autonomy, etc.). Progressive NGOs work in scattered small pockets in other regions of Bolivia. Furthermore, as discussed, the main source of knowledge, resources and development models is coming from capitalist imbued NGOs and municipal employees (teachers and health workers). Therefore, the space for obtaining and discussing objective information and milling over constructive analyses are missing in ways that place locals in a disadvantaged position in relation to the development model coming from Eurocentric constructions of modernity.

On the one hand, through a variety of exposures and influences, we can see how the people of Rumi Mayu are beginning to replicate western practices in their daily life constructions (marmalade factory), and labor (9-5 jobs, children in pre-school). On the other hand, we also see replications in a stance for their own rights, reclaiming their land and consuming their own products, broadened personal and social awareness and how they strive for a better quality of life. Change is dialectic; while something is lost, something new is born that can produce positive outcomes. The dilemma lies in the localized approach of poverty alleviation, and that these NGOs and municipal employees do not contextualize programs in the historic milieu, nor prioritize the social, cultural and economic problems of campesinos/as accordingly that includes a regional conception of *vivir bien* (well being). On the contrary, these development models ostracize the cultural economy that evolved over centuries, and destabilizes the potential for decolonization.

As elaborated through local events and narratives presented at the beginning of this chapter and throughout, there exists multiply ideas of “development” in Rumi Mayu between the people of Rumi Mayu, the state (municipal employees), NGOs, international agencies, and professional and political network that moves along a continuum between individualistic and market oriented goals to local epistemologies, communal practices and livelihood skills. Capitalist interests, a desire to progress and attain material goods, coupled with the professionalization of positions and knowledge has had a depoliticizing affect on local struggles and challenges for alternative models of development that can raise above Eurocentric constructions of modernity. With this in mind, the next chapter looks at how development oriented

NGOs that further the state and foreign capital interests is influencing the environment, and how this affects agricultural production, food security, and the consumption of nutrient rich foods.

## CHAPTER 5

### “PARA VIVIR BIEN”:<sup>97</sup> ECOLOGY AND NUTRITIONAL HEALTH

*Vivir bien es vivir en comunidad, en colectividad. Y no solamente entre seres humanos, vivir bien en armonía con la madre tierra. La tierra para el movimiento indígena es algo sagrado, la tierra, la madre tierra es nuestra vida, es madre tierra, la Pachamama que decimos en nuestros idiomas, no puede ser convertida en una mercancía.*<sup>98</sup>

Presidente Evo Morales, 62 sesión de la ONU  
sobre el medio ambiente, el 24 - 26 de septiembre 2007

While concepts of “vivir bien” (to live well) were *not* part of the national discourse during my field research, it has developed into the philosophical core and theoretical guiding standard for official government programs and development plans (e.g. 2010 Bolivian constitution and 2006 National Development Plan).<sup>99</sup> Intertwined in this state discourse is the promotion of interculturality through acts of patriotic pride, ethnic and cultural recognition and respect, and the formation of inter/pluri-ethnic relationships. Intercultural jargon and policies were part of the

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<sup>97</sup> The term “*vivir bien*” literally means to live well. It is known in other Bolivian cultural contexts as Sumaj Kawsay (Quechua), Suma Qamaña (Aymara) and Ñande Reko (Guarani).

<sup>98</sup> Translation of President Morales quote from the United Nations 62 environment session, September 24 – 26 2007: “To live well is to live in community, to live collectively. And, this is not only between humans, but to live well in harmony with the mother earth. The land for the indigenous movement is sacred, the land, the mother earth is our life, it’s the mother earth, the Pachamama is what we call it in our languages, it should not be converted into merchandize” (personal translation).

<sup>99</sup> *Vivir bien* has become part of the national discourse, and has been institutionalized within numerous ministerial programs (especially health and education), and on several national fronts, such as the *Political Constitution of the State* (Constitución Política del Estado—CPE), and the *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo: Bolivia digna, soberana, productiva y democrática para Vivir Bien* (National Development Plan: Bolivia Dignified, Sovereign, Productive and Democratic to Live Well--NDP, 2006). Article 8 of the CPE establishes that “the state assumes and promotes the ethnic and moral principles of a plural society: ama qhella, ama llulla, ama suwa (no seas flojo, no seas mentiroso ni seas ladrón / don’t be lazy, don’t be a liar, and don’t be a thief); suma qamaña (vivir bien); ñandereko (vida armoniosa / harmonious life); teko kavi (vida bien / good life); ivi maraei (tierra sin mal / earth without evil); and qhapaj ñan (camino rico o vida noble / noble life path). (The indigenous language here is aymara).



educational discourse during the collection of my research data, most tangible incorporated into bi-lingual educational policies and practices. Ironically the principles of *vivir bien* and interculturality are rooted in rural indigenous places of knowledge and practices, and after centuries of negation, and decades of obscurity have resurfaced as labels, indicators and mechanisms for “development” and a quality of life.

In rural municipalities, such as Rumi Mayu, there is a historic outcome and causal relationship—an archaeology of knowledge (Foucault, 1969), between current environmental realities, agricultural production and the consumption of nutrient rich foods.<sup>100</sup> In this case, I approach this by exploring the linkages between history, politics, environmental changes, agricultural production and food consumption. As highlighted by people throughout the municipality, in years back the land was more fertile and produced an abundance of a variety of foods. To maintain this diverse productivity would have implied several factors: sufficient economic incomes, political will, access to objective and beneficial knowledge, and adequate state rural development policies and support. This chapter explores the transformations of an agriculturally rich region of Bolivia that consists of four ecological floors within a condensed geographical region, and its affect on the nutritional well-being of its inhabitants. I emphasize that despite Rumi Mayu’s long history of inter-generational inheritance of knowledge and practices centered on local food production,

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<sup>100</sup> In other words, as explained by Arce and Long, “the realities of inequality, poverty, hunger and marginalization cannot be understood in terms of the assumed ‘unequal’ exchanges that exist between different economic and political orders and epistemologies; but rather should be seen as the outcome of social processes that are contingently located in ongoing struggles over meanings, values and resources” (2000:159).

consumption and exchange, and an intimate connection and dependent relationship with the natural environment, a large proportion of *campesinas/os* have become economically impoverished and undernourished.

Over the past centuries the lives of Rumi Mayuns were situated by colonialism, followed by a new era of developmentalism, technology, structural adjustment policies and neoliberalism, which spawned climate change and the spin-offs of (Popular Participation Law) PPL. And although the current MAS government deplores colonialism and neoliberalism and is focusing on a neglected rural population and their environments, the livelihoods of Rumi Mayuns are increasingly undermined by a deteriorating environment, highly dependent on unpredictable weather patterns and harvests, water scarcity, and temporary / fluctuating NGOs and municipal employees (teachers, health staff and municipal workers). As succinctly articulated by de Janvry and Garcia (1988: 3), “environmental degradation is created...by the rational response of the poor households to changes in the physical, economic and social circumstances in which they define their survival strategies” (cited in Peet and Watts, 2002: 5).

In current times, the views of numerous outsiders to Rumi Mayun communities (the state, NGOs and international agencies) often see the environment as an objective thing—for its material resources to be extracted and eventually sold for profits, or a place for “professional” employment for outsiders who often express little social cultural attachment to the region. The views of the insiders of these communities (*campesinos/as* and laborers) often see the environment as life and

livelihood—for its reproductive and life-giving qualities.<sup>101</sup> Whereas *campesinas/os* and laborers do sell portions of their products for cash income, the majority of them are not getting wealthy.<sup>102</sup> Their wealth lies in having potential access to a diversity of nutrient rich foods (agricultural lands and animals), and family ties. “The main objective of the *campesina/o* economy is to ensure and maintain the unity of the household with generated income. The same products that they consume are the same products that they sell. They sell the surplus food, above what they eat. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that they produce for their own consumption and not for the market” (Radhuber, 2008: 107). Yet, these views themselves may be changing as people are developing an increased need for cash (school supplies, clothing, electric bills, medicines, computers, etc.), and ways for achieving this draws people deeper into the market, into migration, and a drive of recent young high school graduates to attain “professional” jobs.

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<sup>101</sup> This polarized view of the environment and rural development is explained by the Austrian investigator Isabella Margerita Radhuber, “as two opposed conceptions: one, rooted in the indigenous world view and another, based on liberal western ideas... For the indigenous, life is viewed as a coexistence with nature; it stems from an integral point of view of the territory, whereby the resources above the ground and the subsoil form a unit that cannot be divided. The land and territory, moreover, are the foundations of existence, the basis of subsistence. The land is understood as a social good and therefore the land, or demands for land titles, are considered a factor of social cohesion.... The vision of the enterprise sector is, by definition, of enterprise type. The *Cámara Agropecuaria de Bolivia* [Bolivian Agriculture, Fish and Wildlife Office] outlines three different [enterprise] groups in the agricultural field. First, a group of commercial agricultural property owners; secondly, a group with concession rights that work in the exploitation of natural resources, and thirdly, a group of small proprietors. The activities of the three groups are oriented toward productivity and profits... Their actions are oriented toward economic units of enterprise, the minimization of production costs and the maximization of profits, far from any logic of family [campesino] economic practices. Thus, everything becomes a business, which often times is conceived of in urban centers and have little to do with broader visions of rural development” (2008: 133-134).

<sup>102</sup> In an analysis of the *campesino* economy, British anthropologist Alison Spedding points out that “the *campesina* economy shows realities that in a capitalist system would signify losses; i.e. that *campesinos* sell their products on the market at prices that are below production costs, which reflects a dynamic and personal rationality, which clearly differentiates that [of the *campesina*] with those of the enterprise producers” (204:2, cited in Radhuber, 2008: 107).

The previous chapters provided a lens in order to gain a sense, a feeling, and a vision of Rumi Mayu today. This chapter builds on the previous ones demonstrating the ways in which colonialism, concepts of modernity, and a “catching up development” is affecting the environment and, in turn, agricultural production and nutritional intake. My proposition here is to move away from traditional dichotomies between science and politics to reveal the dynamics between the two in relation to the social, cultural and environmental development of the region. Postcolonial theories broaden and deepen an understanding to the artificial distinctions of ethnicity and class, their imposed hierarchal positions (here also including gender), and exclusion or marginalization. The influences of this are very present in the daily “progress,” livelihood, “sustainability” and survival of the communities. The current dependence on the environment and the natural elements (rain, soil fertility) are essential community resources; to eat is a daily actuality. And, what one eats reflects, symbolizes and enables the ability to *vivir bien*.

### **Political Ecology of Nutrition**

#### **Nutritional Well-being**

When I first arrived in Rumi Mayu, I had hoped to conduct a study that could provide information about a geographical region that was agriculturally fairly self-sufficient, and in which people were well-nourished. On the surface, a variety of foods were produced in seemingly large quantities between four ecological floors. Initially people would tell me that malnutrition was not a

problem, and that just a few “poor” families suffered these ill consequences.<sup>103</sup>

But then, in time and in reviewing local nutritional records, I came to see that undernourishment and malnutrition indeed *is* a problem—and possibly, a blind acceptance of the status quo. As one Plan International nurse, Elvira, explained how an intern doctor came upon two cases of malnutrition:

In May or June [2005] there were two severe cases of malnutrition in one *Altura* community. When the intern doctor Marco conducted a community visit, he detected the two cases, both were children; one a few months old and the other approximately 5 years old. The intern tried to help and get the children to the hospital, but the families refused. Shortly afterwards, Plan International also went to talk with the families, but they didn’t want to go. The families thought that the children would recuperate. We explained that the children could experience irreversible damage, but these two families still would not take their children to the hospital. In the next month or so we continued to insist, and when the families noticed that the children were not improving, and the one child died, the other family took their child to the hospital.

In a region that harvests an array of nutritious foods, and has a fair amount of professionals walking around, ones needs to reflect: How come these two cases were not noticed sooner? Did the parents recognize their children’s ailments as malnutrition? If not, why not? How come they did not seek out help in the community or go to the health post? How come the parents could not understand the extreme level of malnutrition of their children and the possible consequences expressed by the doctor and other health professional? Or, did they, and for their own reasons decided to move, or not move, in their own ways? What other

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<sup>103</sup> The World Food Program (WFP) reports that in Bolivia, “there is enough food for all of the population, but it is the inequalities that cause many to suffer from hunger. 1.8 million Bolivians do not consume sufficient foods to live active and healthy lives. One out of every three Bolivians, nationally, and three out of every five Bolivians in rural areas do not have access to essential food supplies (‘canasta básica de alimentos’)” (cited in MSD: 2010).

educational approaches (health literacy / ecological literacy) could have been used to help the families better understand nutrition, and the illness of malnutrition? What other interculturality approaches could have been explored when the family refused to take their children to the hospital? What could the community have done to help these two families, and prevent this situation from occurring in the future? How can the community and region learn from such unfortunate, yet preventable experiences as these?

The remainder of the chapter responds to these questions through showing ways in which environmental deterioration juxtaposed with forms of internal colonialism and individualism manifest in malnutrition and social suffering. Although at the time these were two outstanding and preventable cases of malnutrition, statistical representation of malnutrition levels in the municipality demonstrate that it is a common problem. I did not thoroughly comb through the nutrition records of all of the 33 communities, but focused on a few, in addition to conducted interviews. Data of weights taken of children under 5 years of age during the months of January to May 2004 in two communities in the *Cabecera de Valle* indicated that 21 - 41% of the children demonstrated low levels of malnutrition, while 9 - 25% showed moderate levels; in April, two out of the 65 children weighed that month were severely malnourished in one community.<sup>104</sup> These figures varied throughout the municipality; for example, according to the doctor, nurse and three auxiliary nurses

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<sup>104</sup> There is debate about how precise weight and height measurements indicate nutritional status because of genetic and social environmental differences (i.e., rural indigenous person who eats from the land versus urban upper class mestizo person who eats a lot of meat, etc.) (Taussig, 1979; Payne and Cutler, 1984; Kabeer, 1999). While nutritional requirements and measurement indicators may be imprecise, “the relationship between *severe* malnutrition and increased risk of morbidity and mortality is not an issue” (Kabeer, 1999: 142).

that work in the *Cordillera*, up to 70 - 75% of children under 5 years of age are low to moderately malnourished. An average for the municipality for the months of October, November and December was analyzed during the trimester *Comité de Análisis de Información* (CAI, Information Analysis Committee),<sup>105</sup> indicating that 40% of children under 5 are malnourished; in other words, 4 out of 10 children are malnourished. Data were registered in the National Epidemiological Surveillance System (*Sistema de Vigilancia Epidemiológica Nacional*, SVEN), presented at the trimester CAI hospital meetings held with the doctors and nurses and with the participation of all the auxiliary nurses from the different health posts. Data is then sent to the Departmental Health Services (SEDES), in Sucre.

In conjunction with the SVEN data, the following field note, from a visit with the auxiliary nurse in the *Valle*, compliments previous data listed above, and with what other auxiliary nurses expressed:

I went to the health post and talked with Juan. He works with six communities in his district; Puma Punku has the highest malnutrition prevalence. Juan's nutrition registration book includes an average of all the six communities that he covers, and demonstrates malnutrition to range from 44 – 52%. Juan said that Puma Punku has the highest malnutrition rates among the six communities because they have no outlet for their products. When the Pilcomayo River rises, they have no way to cross. They are located lower in the *Valle*, it's hotter than the other communities, plus they have a larger population. The people in Palmar have no economic incomes, and can't even buy salt. They produce lemons, corn, tomatoes, etc., but no meat. They cultivate and consume all their own products, but this is not enough to sustain them throughout the year. There is a pre-school in Palmar; they give the children rice and sardines, but no salt. "They live there because they are accustomed to it." There are three pre-schools in this sector: in the communities of Puma Punku, Carasi and Juliaca. In the central valley

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<sup>105</sup> At each CAI, the health services analyze the current health status, as reported by each of their respective sectors. These data are used for epidemiological surveillance and health intervention planning purposes. CAIs are implemented at different levels, ranging from departmental (SEDES), to municipal and communal.

community, Juliaca estimates that malnutrition is approximately 15 – 20%. [Why? This community has lots of products to sell, and they frequently go to Sucre.] Juan said that it's because they sell their products in Sucre to buy noodles, clothes, soap, and are not that concerned with eating. [At another time, I asked if Juan taught about nutrition, and he said that he had a flipchart. However, he couldn't find it in the depository when I asked if I could see it.]

Juan's comments acknowledges an awareness of what is going on (can't cross the river, not enough food for yearly subsistence, and monetary exchanges for lesser nutritious foods), but it also reveals a lack of deeper analysis, and interdisciplinary support and creative options to address these fundamental community needs. Similarly, I listened to other health professionals talk about malnutrition is tones of sympathetic recognition, while simultaneously stating that there was not much that they could do about it. As the auxiliary nurse, Valeria, who worked for a year and a half in the Cordillera corroborated:

There is a lot of malnourishment in the Cordillera; probable more that 75%...We're always thinking about how we can solve this, but most times there is no solution. What we generally do is educate the people, explaining how they should take care of their children, and how they should eat...We teach them how to prepare foods with what they produce.

Malnutrition is not only limited to children under five, but appears to be fairly endemic with youth, and most likely older people, throughout the municipality. The medical profession told me that undernourishment is high among youth and adults; lifecycles of nutritional needs are not discussed nor addressed in the municipality. This was substantiated in a study conducted by a university nutrition student: of the 128 students aged 8 to 23 (the average age of most students was 13 – 16) living in the three boarding schools (*internados*) indicated that 32.2% of males



and 37.5% of females are at chronic malnutrition levels (Paita Aucatoma, 2005: 19).<sup>106</sup> As portrayed by two auxiliary nurses that work in the *Cordillera*: “There are many youth and adults who are malnourished. They were born like that, in other words they grew up malnourished, and I believe that they will continue to be malnourished as they get older, it is very difficult to help them out of this situation” (auxiliary nurse Juana.).<sup>107</sup> “There is nothing that we can do for older children and adults. SUMI<sup>108</sup> doesn’t cover these people, it only covers children under 5 years old and pregnant women; after this the rest of the people are not covered by health insurance, therefore there is nothing that we can do for them” (auxiliary nurse Félix.).

Even though the region holds much agricultural potential and the data supports that malnutrition is a problem, ironically many of my interviews and conversations with locals displayed little recognition of the magnitude of the data and the root causes of the social determinants that cause malnutrition. When I asked

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<sup>106</sup> The study acknowledges the limitation of height/weight/age measurements to determine nutritional status of adolescents due to indeterminate factors, such as, climate, hormone, genetics and the nutritional content of foods consumed.

<sup>107</sup> The national program, “Desnutrición Cero,” principal emphasis is on children under 5 years of age, and pregnant and lactating women because of the integrated and prolonged role this population has in reproducing poverty. As explained in a country study by the World Bank:

The 1998 Demographic and Health Survey shows that the nutritional status of poor, rural, and indigenous children deteriorates most from birth to 24 months of age. By their second birthday, many Bolivian children have become pathologically short and anemic. They cannot fully recover, and because of this they are not likely to do well in school. Such children grow up to be short, physically weak adults with low educational achievement and low earning potential. The female children grow up to be short women who are much more likely to have a small baby and pass malnutrition on to their children. Thus poverty in Bolivia is reproducing itself through malnutrition (2002: xi).

<sup>108</sup> SUMI (*Seguro Univesal Maternal Infantil*, Universal Mother and Child Health Insurance) covers all pre-natal care, birth and children’s health care up to age 5, and maternal health care up to six months after the pregnancy. SUMI is currently planned to merging into the proposed *Sistema Unico de Salud*, which is essentially single payer, universal health care.

people if they knew someone that was malnourished, I generally heard something to the effect of: “Not nowadays, but there could be.” Furthermore, some non-clinical NGO staff did not think that malnutrition was a major problem, as vocalized by three NGO workers: “In what we have been able to see in the schools, we hardly see any malnourished children with the food rations [school breakfast and lunch donation] they receive” (two urban managers for PAE)...” “No, there isn’t much malnutrition. They eat a lot of lemons and citric fruits. It is possible that they don’t eat enough protein to combine their foods. But they do have a lot of fruit for a good part of the year” (PROAGRO worker).

Recognizing these acknowledgements, denials and contradictions, I interviewed many people about the dilemmas of malnutrition in the municipality, participated in several workshops, and had numerous informal conversations with people about these topics at opportune moments. The following section discusses how the ecological landscape is changing in relation to agricultural production. I then present the most commonly expressed beliefs of the causes of malnourishment in the municipality of Rumi Mayu; analyze some of the major cultural interpretations of malnutrition; and follow this with a consideration of the changes in local practices that may be affecting nutritional intakes.

### **The Political Ecology of Land and Food**

#### **Food Consumption Changes**

Bolivia produces a wide variety of highly nutritious foods. Up until approximately the mid-1990’s, the great majority of the population lived in rural

areas and were peasant farmers; recent complex system of trade enabled the exchange of diverse foods between the varied ecological figures (INE 2002)<sup>109</sup> indicate that currently only 37.6% of the population continues to be rural based. Historically, the Inca Empire is recognized for its elaborate agriculture and irrigation system (e.g., terrace farming), despite harsh geographical conditions. Their highly developed roads and regions of Bolivia (Klein 2003). Not only in Rumi Mayu, but also in many isolated regions of Bolivia, this non-capitalistic or “livelihood”<sup>110</sup> economic system of exchange, *trueque*, is still common, providing the primary apparatus for food distribution and consumption.<sup>111</sup> These were significant reasons for why Bolivia was essentially self-sufficient in food production until approximately the early-1960’s, when a variety of factors—intimately tied to issues of political instability, economic dependency, and international interests—began to debilitate local systems of crop diversification and distribution (Wilkie 1969).

Few policy makers seriously encourage the expansion of local staple food crops, such a corn, manioc, wheat, and potatoes, that peasants know how to produce

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<sup>109</sup> The Bolivian national census is taken every ten years; the next is planned for 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Escobar defines a livelihood economy based upon Taussig’s work in the 1970’s, highlighting “two clashing cultur[es]” in which one is based on “use-value—a peasant economy geared toward the satisfaction of needs defined qualitatively; and another based on exchange value, with its drive toward accumulation and profit and its quantitative rationality.” Also, on Gudeman and Rivera’s (1990) distinction in Latin American peasant societies of the coexistence of two different economies: livelihood and market: “the livelihood economy is not ruled by the rationality laws of the market system. Peasants, for instance, keep accounts of only those activities which are fully monetized. They continually innovate and attune their practices through trial and error, in a manner more akin to art than rationality, even if the transformation of the former into the latter is taking place steadily, driven by the acquisition economy.” Escobar sees the continuance of a livelihood economy as a form of resistance in which “peasant cultures... contrast... dominant European cultures, in terms of cultural constructs and practices regarding the land, food, and the economy” (Escobar 1995:168).

<sup>111</sup> Previously, cloth (clothing), soaps and ceramics were included in this economic system. However, with the prevalence of used clothing from Western countries, including both donations and products associated with the informal economy; and the importation of cheap aluminum pots and other household goods (principally from China), the production and exchange of locally produced artisan goods has been greatly undermined.

for their own subsistence, yet ceased to do so, because "cheap food" policies have kept prices so low that their sale cannot provide adequate incomes (Léons and Sanabria, 1997: 25). The outcomes have led to a steady deterioration of inter-generational knowledge, the environment, and food production, and the undernourishment of large segments of the population. In Bolivia, according to ENDSA (2003), 26.5% of children under 5 years of age demonstrate chronic malnutrition (manifested in low stature)...with similar magnitudes of moderate and severe malnutrition registered in 1998" (MSD, 2006: 6). Rural children are 2.6 times more at risk to suffer chronic malnutrition, and the departments of Chuquisaca and Potosí demonstrate the highest malnutrition rates in the country (ibid: 6, 7). The Bolivian Ministry of Health and Sport (MSD) emphasizes that these figures are "unacceptably high, they are way above the majority of countries in the region,...[and] reflects the inequitable economy and sociopolitical crisis that afflicts our planet" (ibid: 3). The National Development Plan of 2006 identifies high malnutrition rates as one of a number of structural problems inherited by colonialism, and another justification why the colonial structure needs to be overhauled.

When discussing issues related to nutrition with Rumi Mayuns, the conversation almost always veered to, and became dominated by, comparing some of today's foods with those of their ancestors. Local foods are a central integral part of the culture and livelihood. Foods are a status of wealth, and a major component of social cohesion. Celebrations for carnival, weddings, graduations, birthdays, etc. draw together groups from 50 to a couple of hundred people. Food preparation takes

weeks, and everyone judges the amounts and quality. Leaving a cattle branding carnival *chall'a* party with my neighbor one evening, she commented, "Oh, they just gave us a little piece of meat, and just two small pieces of potatoes, but lots of rice. There was only a little bit of *llajwa* (spicy salsa), too. They must be poor, or maybe they just forgot how to cook." The quality of foods eaten and their amounts were some of the most dominant reasons why there is malnutrition expressed by some locals, as well as by some professionals. Listening to people's stories reveals how the environment has changed, and with that agricultural production and what people eat, and how they interact with their environment. The following are synthesized viewpoints from numerous interviews with women and men from the four ecological regions about environmental, agricultural and food consumption transformations:

**Before:** There wasn't any contamination, no one dirtied the water and everything was natural. There were many flowing rivers. We raised 150, 160 animals because there was a lot of pasture. We had lots of cows, sheep, and donkeys. We had 10 to 13 hectares of land, and we had enough to eat. Our grandparents ate all of their own production, and they were healthier. There was a lot of meat and cheese. The foods were corn, wheat, quinoa, potatoes, *habas*, peas, and other cereals. There were no vegetables, rice, noodles or cooking oil. The foods were healthier and the people stronger. We took care of the trees: *thola*, *quewiña*, *molle*, *yerba santa*, *chillque*, *chirchircoma*, etc. There were lots of wild animals: lions, mountain cats, foxes, rabbits, etc. I like my land, because I was born here; I *appeared* on this land.

**Now:** There are fewer goats, so you have less animal manure, so we prefer to plant with chemical fertilizers, and then after three years this soil isn't worth anything ("*no sirve*"). It doesn't produce, whereas before it produced a lot; it appears that the soil is tired of all these chemicals ("*abono urea*"); at least this is what I've noticed. Things are worsening, we are ruining our land; the land is drying out because there aren't even grasslands. When we use chemical fertilizers it makes everything green, but it has a bad flavor, the food is bitter. Talking about fruit, before we didn't know of so many birds by the river, it was full of nice healthy white grapes, now it's full of birds and

they eat everything. Sometimes diseases now get into the grapes. It's the same with the figs, before the birds didn't eat figs, they flew over the trees, and when figs fell to the ground and dried out, then the birds would take those. Now they take everything. Before in this zone we planted *papa jallparuna*, and then these Holland potatoes appeared, the pink ones (*papa holandesa*). They are the best potato seed for the valley. But now diseases have been appearing. There is a worm (*polilla*) that has appeared in the last two years. This *polilla* is finishing off our potatoes, like the worm (*gorgojo*) that eats our wheat and corn. Maybe it's because we are using chemical fertilizers, which we learned about 30 years ago; before that it was pure animal manure, and everyone had sheep that produced manure, so with that we all produced very well.<sup>112</sup>

There are a lot of differences between the foods we eat today, from that of our grandparents. Now almost everyone eats rice and noodles, whereas before they only ate wheat, maize, potatoes. Today it is very different. We do not only eat the products from our land, but we now buy rice, noodles, and oil depending on our money. We sell our products in Sucre, but we still eat the potatoes, maize and peanuts from here. We don't eat vegetables, not even carrots. Everything is changing. In our community we don't eat the ancestral foods because we hardly produce enough barley and wheat, but we still eat maize; we eat *mote*, and we buy wheat to make bread and *lagua*. I suppose in the higher altitudes they still eat wheat and barley, but in our region it is more tropical. We have fruit; during the whole year we eat fruit.

Environmental and agricultural changes have sparked increased migration, NGO assistance and food donations. While most people recognize these changes, contradictory rationalizations are revealed. For example, salient "reasonings" expressed by many Rumi Mayuns when asked why food consumption is inadequate and why local schools require food donations (generally, from the United States Agency for International Development [USAID] and the United Nations World Food Program) of canned sardines, cooking oil, salt, rice and flour, responses include

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<sup>112</sup> According to first mayor of Rumi Mayu from some 15 years previously, don Eulio, *papa holandesa* and chemical products were introduced to the municipality of Rumi Mayu approximately 40 years ago by evangelical missionaries from Santa Cruz. The local priest who worked in Rumi Mayu, but was from Sucre, had invited the evangelicals; they "gave everyone five quintals of potato seed, it was a totally free...so every family received five bags, they at also gave us chemical pesticides and fertilizers, it was all a gift."

representative conceptualizations such as “laziness”: “if they wanted to, they could produce lots of food;” and “people here can produce so much, but they don’t recognize this wealth; they think of themselves as poor, because they’ve become dependent on the many development projects, and just wait for hand-outs.” These perspectives demonstrate how discrimination, internalized colonialism, and limited historic memory have a hegemonic effect in which “the profound psychological power of racism (particularly in the veiled shapes of cultural racism) and its capacity to invalidate insurgent actions, neutralize and disqualify the subaltern population, and introduce them a reproduction of the subjugating framework of the dominant culture” (Rivera Cusicanqui, unpublished working paper 2002). Furthermore, Zulawski’s study of early 20<sup>th</sup> century indigenous citizenship, health and health services (2000) makes a connection between the stigmatization of Indians as “dirty” and as sources of contagion, thus justifying their position to be third class citizens (or citizens at all) in need of professional health services from the elite classes.

Obviously, many of the underlying social, political and economic constructions are overlooked; as Escobar points out, “the daily practices of institutions are not just rational or neutral ways of doing. In fact, much of an institution’s effectiveness in producing power relations is the result of practices that are often invisible, precisely because they are seen as rational. It is then necessary to develop tools of analysis to unveil and understand those practices” (Escobar 1995: 105). A major influence on present day and future food production and consumption is the environment, and vice versa; how human actions affect ecosystems. As Eyles highlights, “the relationships between the environment and human health are multi-

directional, and that just as environments affect human health so too do issues of human health and well-being affect environments” (Eyles 2000:460).<sup>113</sup>

One prominent example is that of the persistent contamination issues plaguing the Pilcomayo River that passes through the *Valle* communities in the municipality of Rumi Mayu. In previous generations, the river provided fish for the *Valle* communities and the entire municipality, through *trueque*. Dating back to the mid-1500s, enormous quantities of silver and other minerals were extracted from the Potosí mining district, releasing heavy metals from the mining sites located in great part at the headwaters of the river<sup>114</sup>. While the mining wealth (silver) was exported to the northern hemisphere (Spain and greater Europe), what was left was a legacy of poverty, cultural damage, health-related problems, and contamination. “Today Potosí is considered one of the most impoverished cities on the continent” (Rodriguez Carmona 2009: 53), and the Pilcomayo River as one of the most contaminated rivers in South America (Rodríguez, 2008; Flores, 2003; Cortéz, 2005). Although mining has greatly decreased in the subsequent centuries, it continues today but on a smaller scale. According to the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Planning (MDSP), since 1992, approximately 4 million tons of mining residues (heavy metals) have been dumped into the Pilcomayo River (cited in Rodríguez, 2008: 24). However, the heavy metals released during colonial times (as well as those of today), “can be incorporated into floodplain deposits where they are eroded and reintroduced to the river at some later time” (Jerry Miller Geosciences, 2001).

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<sup>113</sup> Boyce succinctly reiterates that “since at least the advent of agriculture, we humans have shaped and reshaped our environment” (Boyce, 2003: 11).

<sup>114</sup> The Pilcomayo rises between the departments of Potosí and Oruro and flows southeasterly for 2,000 km through Chuquisaca and Tarija, and then into Argentina and Paraguay.



Therefore, the contamination of the river by a toxic substance such as lead may be seen as a direct descendent of a colonial history and outcome of exploitation and oppression, which occurred centuries ago with effects still taking place today, but in a different form. For centuries, the social, cultural, economic and environmental consequences have affected people along the river's course. Fish production has dramatically decreased,<sup>115</sup> and agricultural lands are verifiably contaminated. Investigations (under the auspices of Canada, the Netherlands, and various universities in Bolivia) confirm extremely high concentrations of heavy metals—primarily lead, zinc, arsenic, copper and cadmium, in the sediments and fish species in the Pilcomayo River (Smolders and Smolders, 1998; Guerrero Hiza, 1998).<sup>116</sup> Numerous documented studies have linked the absorption of these heavy metals to the impairment of the intellectual growth (cognitive development) and physiological health (nervous system, cancer) of both children and adults (Markowitz and Rosner, 2002; Warren, 2000).<sup>117</sup> There is also anecdotal evidence of birth deformities, both in animals and human infants, in the communities bordering the Pilcomayo River. I myself personally heard numerous stories, from both

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<sup>115</sup> Rodríguez estimates that the “losses incurred to agricultural, animal husbandry and fishing industries to exceed 62.44 million US dollars per year, accumulated to more than 600 million dollars every decade; furthermore, this does not include the consequences that future generations will endure due to the accumulation of heavy metals in the food chain and the rivers ecosystem” (2008: 24).

<sup>116</sup> In 2001, water samples were collected from the Pilcomayo River in the Sotomayor region in the municipality of Yamparaez that revealed “concentrations of heavy metals, such as cadmium, arsenic, and lead that were 3 and 35 times greater than the allowed limits by the World Health Organization” (Rodríguez, 2008: 24).

<sup>117</sup> As cited in *Lead-Part 2: Learning from a National Scourge*, “Children are particularly susceptible to lead's toxic effects because they absorb lead from their food more readily than adults do; children absorb 50% of lead in their food, whereas adults absorb only 8% to 15%. Lead crosses the placental barrier, passing from a pregnant woman's blood to the blood of the fetus; red blood cells of fetuses attract and hold lead more readily than do red cells of adults. Children do not get rid of blood lead as readily as adults do; the half-life (time for the body to excrete half of some amount) of lead in blood of adults is 36 days; in children it is 10 months (Environmental Research Foundation, 2001).

community members and local health personal; however, it must be recognized that there has not been any verifiable medical documentation of these cases. (With the single important exception of my own neighbor, doña Julia, who gave birth to a severely deformed stillborn infant while we were living in Rumi Mayu. The causes of the defects were never medically established, although the attending physician did pointedly ask her about consumption of agricultural products irrigated with Pilcomayo water.) Yet, water samples have *not* been taken in the communities that border the Pilcomayo River, and water testing is not a municipal political priority in Rumi Mayu. This has also affected the municipality's nutritional "food basket," as fish are no longer a dietary or livelihood option. Hence, and coinciding with Eyles's point, "nutritional diseases are diseases of impoverished environments, modifiable with economic and political will" (Eyles 2000: 454). In conjunction with the Pilcomayo River, there are many other water sources that have a major role in food production. While some NGO develop approaches are attempting to improve water sources, others have continued to contribute to river contamination. For example, the sewage system that was haphazardly installed in 2004/5 continues to dump raw wastes into the Rumi Mayu River. Although several projects have addressed water issues (i.e. storage tanks), it remains an area greatly under addressed, and also viewed in isolation from ecological interactions (i.e. forestation).

### **Dialectics of Modernity: Land, Soil Conditions, and Water**

In 1993, in a short column piece by Cancio Mamani, "Agua por desarrollo" (Water for development), in the Bolivian journal *Unitas*, Mamani concisely links the

essential connection of water with agricultural production, a productive environment, nutrition and health. At the time the population of Bolivia was approximately six and a half million people. An assemblage of what Mamani had to say follows:

Of the six and a half million habitants only 500,000 are well fed, but what about the other 6 million? They are eating soup broth or noodle soup. For this reason we cannot live the 100 years like our forefathers did, for this reason we are without strength and are sick...We want to die on our feet and not on our knees begging.

To guarantee a dignified life and health, we need an adequate policy of food security. In Bolivia we can produce our own nutritious foods because we have sufficient lands...but what we lack is water. With water and the application of some technology it is possible to overcome hunger and misery. We are just 6 ½ million people, we are the least populated country on the continent. According to a study by the Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario (CEDLA), there are 10 thousand communities in Bolivia. It would be excellent to plan 1,000 micro irrigation systems every year, and in this way 1,000 communities would have water. In ten years, the 10 thousand communities would be able to supply the elemental liquid. In the community Jichusirka Grande...of the periurban area of La Paz, they installed an irrigation system with the solicited support of approximately US\$ 18,000.  $18,000 \times 1,000$  (communities) = 18 million dollars. This signifies that if you invest 180 million dollars we can install micro systems in all of the 10 thousand communities. All that we lack is political will, nothing else (1993: 139).<sup>118</sup>

In many of the communities of Rumi Mayu, open ditch irrigation systems have been in place now for a number of years; however, the availability of this water

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<sup>118</sup> Thirteen years later (2010), the Bolivian population stands at slightly over 9 million. The current MAS government has increased the focus and importance of water, investing in numerous water projects. As expressed by President Evo Morales, "I am convinced that wherever there is water, there not only is life, but there is also production; where there is water there is also food, and for that reason one of the policies of this new administration will be to guarantee economic resources for irrigation and the protection of production, but it will also be important to provide safe drinking water" (*El Deber*, March 24, 2010). In 2008, Bolivia signed a contract with the Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID) for \$34.3 million to construct 33 community water irrigation systems that will cover 9,000 hectares in seven departments, with a projection of increasing agricultural cultivation and economic development for 7,500 families, in addition to guaranteeing national food security (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua, March 22, 2010). The municipality of Rumi Mayu is not included in this project.

is located in the principal route of drainage from the higher elevations to the lower, which limits irrigation availability for the majority of agricultural production.<sup>119</sup>

Almost everyone I spoke with complained about how the weather was unpredictable: shortage of rainfalls—droughts; sudden violent storms—flash floods; and untimely golf ball sized hail storms—crushed flowering buds. One *campesino*'s observations reflect what I heard from just about everyone: "Agricultural production, it hasn't improved, but rather we have many more disasters with occasional downpours, and then during the season it doesn't rain, and we don't produce much."

There is one major river, five minor rivers, twelve tributaries and six ravines that also provide irrigation to those who live downhill near their banks. One woman from the *Valle* notes: "Just a little water maintains us; the ravine dries up, and it only gives us a little water." Given the inadequacy of these water supplies' reach and the change of climate, in the past few years several NGOs, in conjunction with the municipal offices, have focused on building water storage tanks and ditches in three of the communities, with intentions to expand in the future. Results have been mixed, mostly due to inequitable distribution of water, and the usage of poor construction materials. A civil engineer, who moved to the area in the year 2000 and benefits from a newly constructed communal water tank irrigation system commented that it was shabbily built, and that he didn't expect it to last long. In another community, it was discovered that the water pipes were replaced with

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<sup>119</sup> According to a municipal report, "the major disadvantage to access water is that the availability of the hydraulic resource are mainly located on the floors of the principal and secondary drainage ridges, which precludes a better utilization of water resources for the farmers cultivation of their crops." (*Diagnostico Municipal de Rumi Mayu*, Entidad Ejecutora: Consultora CEA-Rsrl, Gestión 2000, Sucre, Bolivia).

smaller diameter and poorer quality pipes during renovations. A man in an *Altura* community told me that the two year old installed irrigation pipes in his community have cracked in a number of places; thus, siphoning off a fair amount of water along the way, resulting in dribbles of water at the end of the route. And, a recently finished water reservoir (2008) that was to provide irrigation to a large expanse of land for numerous families was already filled to the brim, when someone intentionally opened the valve, allowing all of the water to drain away—a possible indication of how inequities lead to envy, jealousy and acts of revenge and general disharmony/distrust among community members. (The community has since put a lock on the valve.)

The functioning of the local water committee is representative of disunity and mistrust among the community. All irrigation systems are supervised and operated by a local water committee, which is elected by the community. Community members continually complained to me about unequal distribution of water: those with larger portions of land are deprived of sufficient water; those at the end of the line, in turn, are deprived of water from those at that are closer to the water sources and capture more than their fair share; thus, the water barely reaches those at the further extremes. As one older woman from the *Cabecera del Valle* expressed: “Below, they produce because they get a lot of the water; here, we don’t receive much.” Though the law stipulates that only national born citizens can serve on the water committee, two years ago a foreign evangelical missionary who had only recently moved into the community was elected as treasurer. Although he was not soliciting the responsibility, the locals told him that they wanted him as the treasurer

because “they can’t trust their own.” To address the problems of inequitable water usage, in 2010 the missionary proposed to put water meters on everyone’s homes and fields and charge them for water consumption. Thus, addressing local concerns by monetary measures, rather than addressing the insecurities, anxieties and conflicts caused by unequal distribution. Size of land and access to water appear to be the main ingredients for a sufficiently abundant harvest.<sup>120</sup> Of course, soil conditions and fertility are part of this trinity, but at this time it was not the most prominent problem compared with water shortages. Although there are many signs of soil erosion and depleted soil conditions, for the most part when there is sufficient water sprinkled at the correct time, sufficient productions happen. However, this is not to say that equal importance should not be given to soil conditions, especially as a means to enhance food production and the nutrient quality of plants for future generations, especially for families with smaller land plots. Besides the role of soil fertility in agricultural production—which contributes to increased harvests, food availability and /or monetary income—there is a direct correlation between nutrient rich soil, nutrient rich foods, and health. For example, Mira Shiva points out that iodine deficiency diseases, such as hypothyroidism and goiter, can be associated with iodine and other nutrients being flushed out of the soil from intense flooding, and /or the use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and sewage contamination (Shiva, 1993: 62). In the municipality of Rumi Mayu there do not appear to be regular soil sample

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<sup>120</sup> Obviously, land sizes vary between families and communities. In the *Cordillera*, in one community each family has approximately five hectares; in other areas, in contrast, the average land holding is approximately between ¼ to 2 hectares. However, two agronomists pointed out that with improved agriculturally techniques (i.e. permaculture, terracing, etc.), and reliable water sources, agricultural production and food sovereignty could greatly increase.

tests, or a focus on techniques for sustaining and improving soil conditions.<sup>121</sup>

According to the *Diagnóstico Municipal de Rumi Mayu* (2000), information regarding soil conditions dates back to 1994 from the *Estudio Integrado de RR.NN. del Departamento de Chuquisaca*. Soil conditions are “heterogeneous” ranging from low capacity of humidity retention to good internal drainage, with chemical compositions variations from low to moderate amounts of alkalinity, low levels of nitrogen, moderate to high levels of potassium and some acidity.<sup>122</sup>

There is a direct correlation between soil conditions (clay-humus mixture, minerals, and soil and plant interactions, such as *mycorrhiza* and chelating agents),

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<sup>121</sup> In general many campesinas/os still fertilize their land with at least some sheep and goat manure. There was a period from the 1970's – 1990's, when chemical fertilizers were highly promoted and used. Most of the campesinos/as that I spoke with commented on how they eventually depleted the soil, increased insect and fungus susceptibility, and affected production levels. As I commonly heard from so many people: “the land is tired” (“la tierra está cansada”).

Although many campesinas/os have returned to using animal manure, they also continue to put a handful of urea in with each potato seed. The traditional way of planting potatoes is highly practiced and involves a system of oxen plowing, followed by an person carrying a sling of animal manure depositing a coating into the furrow, trailed by another person strategically placing the potatoes seeds grounding them with a gentle touch of the food, next comes a handful of urea, all in time before the oxen turns around to cover it all over with a heap of dirt.

Access to sheep and goat manure can also be linked with wealth, power, environmental usage and food security. In order to maintain these animals, corral space is needed to protect the animals, and this provides an enclosed area for manure to be accumulated, in the end contributing to food production and soil stability. Sheep and goats are escorted to the bush to graze for approximately 6 to 8 hours daily. Goats are known for degrading rangelands and the environment, resulting in deteriorating land quality and the creation of barren lands. Maintaining healthy goat populations and feeding crop residues and left over plant materials can address these issues (Knight, 2007).

<sup>122</sup> The following is a direct translation of everything that the *Diagnostico Municipal de Rumi Mayu* (2000) has to say about the soil “behavior” in the municipality of Rumi Mayu: “The soils have a moderate alkalinity reaction in the superficial cap, a gentler alkalinity in the subsoil and is neutral in the substrata level; the fertility is moderate, but in terms of nitrogen the levels are low, phosphorous is moderate in the arable cap and very low in the deeper levels.

The soils at the foot of the mountains have a low capacity due to high amounts of gravel and stones...; the chemical reactions in these soils have gentle amounts of acidity and neutral amounts in the deeper levels, these soils are a little unstable, and are currently in a process of accelerated erosion. In the hills, the internal drainage ranges from good to excessive at the superficial level with a rapid permeability. Due to the steep slopes the soils are unstable and highly susceptible to hydraulic erosion. In the highlands the fertility varies from low to moderate, the contents of total nitrogen is very low, phosphorous is found at different levels, and potassium is found in moderate to high levels. Due to very steep slopes, the soil is unstable and prone to elevated susceptibility of hydraulic erosion” (45).

with the agricultural production of healthy, nutrient rich vegetables and grains. As Rudolph Ballentine, a medical doctor, explains, “Ecological health depends on keeping the surface of the earth rich in humus and minerals so that it can provide a foundation for healthy plants and animal life[...]. Ecological stability leads to cultural stability” (1978: 36-37). Furthermore, a paper presented by Donald R. Davis at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) demonstrated that the nutritional value of plants have decreased in the United States and Britain over the past 50 years, mainly due to “dilution effects” occurring when crop yields are not matched with soil fertility.<sup>123</sup>

My point for this brief (yet pertinent) discussion of water and soil is to highlight how these can play a major role in agricultural production, regional ecology and social/cultural capital (reciprocity)—especially *trueque*—and thus are obviously key for people to access nutrient rich foods, reciprocal assets, and monetary incomes.<sup>124</sup> Land size is definitely another major factor, however, the main anxiety of the campesinos revolves around climate changes and poor harvests, as one man from the *Cordillera* told me: “[Agricultural production] has changed a lot; before we would plant on small pieces of land, and it gave us produce in good quantities. Now we plant on big pieces of land, and it gives us a small amount of produce — it’s not the same.” As another man also from the *Cordillera* explained:

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<sup>123</sup> In a 2008 APHA paper, Donald R. Davis, demonstrates that nutritional values of plant foods decreased when crops do not have a sufficient uptake of nutrients. Nutritional concentrations of protein, minerals and vitamins declined between 5 to 30% in the last 50 years in parts of the United States and Britain. Davis also discusses the nutrient loss occurring in the post-harvest refining of major staple foods, which have a broader and deeper nutritional consequence than fresh crops (added sugars, added fats and oils, and milled grains). To improve nutritional intake, Davis suggests, the consumption of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and less of badly depleted staple foods.

<sup>124</sup> In a coordinated report organized by the Liga de Defensa del Medio Ambiente / LIDEMA, they articulate that “health and nutrition greatly depend on environmental conditions” (2005: 10).



“The erosion is caused by big storms, a lot of wind and heavy downfalls, but it doesn’t rain seasonally or consistently, so you can’t recuperate the land. Before, our elders and ancestors said that you could recuperate the land by doing *q’oas* to the Virgin and the Pachamama, and some people are still doing this. But we are using up the land, and that’s why there isn’t any rain—because there aren’t any trees; it’s we people who are destroying the land.” But, a civil engineer who has worked throughout the municipality for 2½ years, now currently employed with a food for work program, had a more optimistic outlook for the *Valle* communities: “Wonderful potential; their lands have nice gardens, but sometimes agricultural production doesn’t only depend on the physical aspects or the geographical nature of the region, but also on social factors (*factores sociales*).” For the most part, I agree with his observation, because the land possesses much potential and that this highly depends on social factors; however, I do sense that more blame is being placed on the local “social factors,” in terms of their inadequacies which overlook historical influences, contemporary power relations, and possibly the outcomes of climate change.

Central to my argument is that the environment and its reproductive abilities are natural resources that have sustained, and continue to sustain, *campesina/o* populations due to their locality, affinity and history. The ability of rural peoples in Bolivia to maintain their ecology and food production, and their perceptions about environmental changes (land titles, contamination, erosion), have been consistently ignored and undermined by state policies and national/international development programs, and even excluded from school and health curriculums/protocols. As noted, rural communities are frequently seen as a set of “problems” to be addressed

by outside “experts,” in the formation of specialized projects: undernourishment is viewed as a mother’s inability to feed her child; underproduction of food falls under the responsibility of the father; low literacy is an underlying cause of these issues, and the reason for ignorance. Within this theoretical context, coupled with ethnic, gender, and class segregation and blatant racism, peasants are viewed as ignorant, and are frequently seen as bearing the principal responsibility for their own poverty conditions.<sup>125</sup> Their labors are generally underrated and underpaid;<sup>126</sup> their perceptions and knowledge undervalued, misunderstood, and trivialized.

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<sup>125</sup> An example of how perspectives and judgments are made without understanding historical influences and contemporary consequences that can feed prejudices, is given by Charles C. Mann in his book, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*. During a research visit to the Beni region of Bolivia, Mann met some of the Sirionó people, which led him to explore what he labels, “Holmberg’s Mistake”: “Between 1940 and 1942, anthropologist, Allan R. Holmberg lived with the Sirionó. In Holmberg’s published dissertation, *Nomads of the Longbow*, he deduces that the Sirionó “were ‘among the most culturally backward peoples of the world.’ Living in constant want and hunger, he said, they had no clothes, no domestic animals, no musical instruments...no art or design...and almost no religion...Holmberg was a careful and compassionate researcher whose detailed observations of Sirionó life remain valuable today... Nonetheless, he was wrong about the Sirionó. And he was wrong about the Beni, the place they inhabited—wrong in a way that is instructive, even exemplary... Before Columbus, Holmberg believed, both the people and the land had no real history. Holmberg believe, the Sirionó were among the most culturally impoverished people on earth. But this was not because they were unchanged holdovers from humankind’s ancient past, but because smallpox and influenza laid waste to their villages in the 1920s...So catastrophic was the decline that the Sirionó passed through a genetic bottleneck...Even as the epidemics hit...the group was fighting the white cattle ranchers who were taking over the region. The Bolivian military aided the incursion by hunting down the Sirionó and throwing them into what were, in effect, prison camps. Those released from confinement were forced into servitude on the ranches. The wandering people Holmberg traveled with in the forest had been hiding from their abusers...” (2005: 8-10). In the 1960s, this region of the Beni was explored by other scholars, and described as, “the most ecologically rich artificial environments on the planet” (ibid: 11-13). The previous inhabitants, the ancestors of the Arawak-speaking people now called the Mojo and the Baure, and where the Sirionó lived, who arrived around the late seventeenth century, had “built up the mounds for homes and farms, constructed the causeways and canals for transportation and communication, created the fish weirs to feed themselves, and burned the savannas to keep them clear of invading trees. A thousand years ago their society was at its height. Their villages and towns were spacious, formal, and guarded by moats and palisades...a completely humanized landscape” (ibid: 11-13).

<sup>126</sup> Highlighting an interview with a campesino from the municipality of Irupana, in which the interviewee comments that the newly constructed health post is appreciated, he unfortunately doesn’t have enough money to buy the medications, Bolivian economist, Javier Zubieta, relates the following. “As a reference mark, the Human Development Index for health, education and income measurements of individuals, reveals that the [Bolivian] national situation by the end of the 1990’s shows variable increases in health and education, but low variable results for income; indicating that the challenges in

Obviously, there are no easy solutions to issues regarding impoverishment of the environment, hunger, and malnutrition. However, the major complexity of these concerns does not stem from the laziness and ignorance of rural citizens, but rather has everything to do with historical events related to class, gender and ethnic racist segregation, and “socially constructed scarcity” (conscious policies of the state, the emergence and transformation of international organizations, and multi-national strategies). As geographer Lakshaman Yapa “argue[s] that poverty is not the result of lack of development, poor technology, or scarce resources, but a normal manifestation of the very process of economic development that is supposed to cure it; development causes modern poverty through ‘socially constructed scarcity’” (1996: 69). In using improved seeds as an illustration, Yapa explores “social construction of scarcity” by focusing on five particular relations: technical, social, ecological, cultural and academic. He illustrates, for example, how technologies—in this case to increase crop yields—are “reductionist description[s] that ignores how scarcity was constructed in the nexus of relations” [Thus] scarcity is not a general condition; it is always socially specific (ibid: 82). Expanding on this example, in reference to improved seeds, Yapa concludes how the “Green Revolution created a technology which required poor farmers to buy inputs; it ignored other appropriate technologies of food production such as rain-fed farming, multiple cropping, growing of legumes, and so on. Its productivist logic marginalized political economists’ concerns for people’s access to land and productive resources. It devalued the ‘reproductive power’ of nature by substituting

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the process of Popular Participation that was developing during those years has yet to address this local issue, i.e. economic development” (Zubieta, 2009: 17).

the ‘productive power’ of industrial inputs. Further, the ecological degradation caused by the use of these inputs reduced the subsistence capacity of land. By marginalizing traditional knowledge it robbed the culture of poor people of its power/agency to address problems of everyday life. It produced an academic discourse that concealed how production can also destroy use values, creating social scarcity as each node of the nexus; thus it disempowered poor people and misled people of good-will” (ibid: 82). As previously discussed throughout this chapter, there exist many parallels between Yapa’s analysis with what is occurring in the development goals and actions in the municipality of Rumi Mayu.

Once again, this viewpoint is not to degrade or discredit the numerous accomplishments of professionals, workers, social movements and organizations that have promoted and continue to work towards a socially just agricultural, health and educational system; nor am I aiming to idealize peasants and indigenous culture. My interest has been to historicize the role of different actors (peasants, NGO’s, state politicians and workers, social movement actors and labor unions, etc.), and their place in rural development plans and their implications for the environment, pedagogical relations, food production and consumption, and nutritional status—in short, well being. The large majority of Rumi Mayuns spend their lives toiling with the earth to eat and scrape together some cash. The days evolve from planting potatoes to cleaning wheat to pruning trees, according to the pace of the season and one’s geographic location. Daily rituals involve pasturing the sheep and goats, and eating. The rhythm of life is a mixture of reading the environment, calculation, and spontaneity. In spite of the land’s productive potential, in silence undernourishment /

malnutrition continues to exist throughout the municipality, with higher rates observed in the *Cordillera* and one *Valle* community according to data and interviews with health professionals and locals.

### **“Tulluapusan”: Malnutrition**

Cultural beliefs are how people make sense of their world; it involves a process of socialization in which knowledge and abilities are acquired and evolve. More so, “cultural transmission implies a molding of attitudes and values” (Nanda, 1994: 119), and this influences how a family views and responds to malnutrition, (Quechua: *tulluapusan*; roughly, “skin and bones”), as well as other health issues. The differences of thoughts and opinions are all equally valuable to better grasp the nutritional epistemology of the region’s population; thus clarifying strengths and obstacles.

The most common cultural belief about the causes of malnutrition that I heard about in the municipality of Rumi Mayu was “*susto*”: the spirit / soul (*ánima*) is frightened, and may remain at the sight of the terrifying experience. The causes of *susto* are frequently linked to the supernatural world; i.e. devil, *duendes*, dead people, and superstitious places (for example, big old trees, where *duendes* roam, wet swampy areas, etc.). In addition, very old grandmothers and grandfathers are also thought to have the ability to scare children into a state of *susto*, and Quechua terms categorize different types of *susto*, as described by one woman from the Cordillera:

Some people say that malnutrition occurs because of being “*asustados*, *wirjinados*” (frightened).<sup>127</sup> Before we would call this “*urijado*,” in other words, the old grandmothers would grab the children, and this would frighten them. In the pampas there is the “*sagra / diablo*,” (devil) who moves when you fall down, or fall sleep in any old place. If this happens you have to call your “*anima*” (spirit, soul) to be cured. Also, if a pregnant woman goes to a funeral, or where there is a dead person, the newborn baby will be born “*urijando*” (frightened). Sometimes, we can be *orijando*, even if we sit near a “*hormiguero*” (ant hill), or at the foot of a very old tree; this we also call “*wisa urijo*,” or in Spanish “*oreja de estómago*.” When you’re very frightened (“*asustado*”), you can’t be cured, and almost always die.

The primary person to help cure *susto* is a *curandero / jampiri* (native healer), who possess the knowledge and skill to call back the person’s *animo* (spirit/soul). As another woman explained:

Sometimes people who are *asustado* are bathed with plants. Today they use many different plants, but before only specific plants from the high mountain areas were used to cure *urijado*. Just as we get sick from the earth, it also cures us. You have to boil the plants and bath in that. If this doesn’t work, the *jampiris* (natural healers) will use other remedies to cure people who are *asustado*.

Of greater concern here, is the dying out of this “traditional” medical profession in the municipality of Rumi Mayu. The few *curanderos* that live in the municipality live in remote places, they are getting old, and no one seems to be replacing them.<sup>128</sup> The need for *curanderos* is accentuated by auxiliary nurse Félix’s

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas, et.al, conducted a study with the Trinitario people in Bolivia about the etiology and treatment of *susto*, or “fright sickness,” and its relationship with the “masters of the animal species.” In this context, “*susto* is locally believed to originate through soul theft by a variety of masters of animal species and landscape spirits” (2009: 298). My study does not focus on, nor did it seek information about “*susto*” or other Bolivian folk syndromes. However, as noted from my interviews, numerous people thought that the cause of childhood malnutrition was due to *susto*. Thus, in terms of interculturality and health, it is important to recognize these cultural beliefs and its role in malnutrition and wellbeing.

<sup>128</sup> Although not specifically related to the ailment of *susto* and nutrition, a family in Rumi Mayu told me that they had to travel outside of the municipality to locate a *curandero* to help treat their mother, Dionesia. She suddenly became ill; she couldn’t walk or talk. Initially they took Dionesia to the

understanding of the local culture, combined with a recognition of his own medical limitations when he recommended to a mother take her malnourished child to a *curandero*, which is to be commended. As narrated by Félix's in his own words:

When a child is *asustado*, their *animito* stays in that spot. When the parent brings the child to the health post we can't do anything for them, we cannot cure them even if we give them medicine. One time, after I tried to help the child and nothing happened, I told the parent that I have done everything that I can, that the treatment didn't help, and the child is the same. I told the señora that the child must be *asustado*, and that she should take the child to a natural healer *curanderos*, (*jampiri*). There the *curandero* will call their *animito*, and read coca leaves. I too believe in this, because these are our beliefs. Anyway, the mother told me okay, I'll go cure my child. Then in one week, or a few days later I saw them and asked, how is your *wawita* (baby), señora. And, she told me, 'He's fine, I took him to the *curandero*, and he called his *animito*, he was *asustado*.' The child was cured; he had gained weight.

However, this is not a common practice. Félix grew up in a rural area, and seems to understand the power that cultural beliefs can have on everyday life, including health and disease. He also lived and worked in the *Cordillera* for three years. I perceive that the auxiliary nurses who live in the communities gain deeper insights into the culture, but that does not necessarily translate into an equitable respect and working relationship between the two dominant medical professions, bio-medical and traditional. However, in the particular case described above, Felix

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Rumi Mayu hospital, where they gave her some injections for "paralysis." No one in the family knew what was in these injections, but Dionesia did not get better, so they took her to Sucre. Although the doctor got angry about the injections, he did not do anything else for her; nor, did he give the family a diagnosis about her illness, but just told them to take her home. They contacted the *curandero*, and he came to her house. The next day she was walking better with assistance and talking. I visited Dionesia couple of days after the *curandero* was there, and although she was not her usual self, she was walking and talking. Dionesia was one of the women that I interviewed for this study. Dionesia is an older woman, and my own personal assessment is that she might have suffered a mild stroke. No one in the family that I spoke with that day (three daughters, one son, two teenage granddaughters) had heard of a stroke. The point here, however, is the lack of information and care given by the medical system, and the confidence given to the *curandero*. Ironically, Dionesia lives three doors up from the hospital.

exhibited an innate sense of “interculturality” in the comprehension and integration of his own personal cultural background with that of the Cordillera (where he lived and worked), and with that of his formal training in western-based nursing.

Not everyone believes in *susto*, as two sisters in the *Altura* told me: “we don’t believe in *susto* anymore. Here in the community we don’t have this sickness [malnutrition] anymore because we take care of our children, but maybe this still happens in other places.” And, although every health professional that I spoke with had varied descriptive stories to tell about *susto*, most stressed a biomedical approach and the need to integrate locals into this system. This is observed in the comments from the municipal physician, Dr. Carmen:

Some mothers tell me that the child is *urijado*; their spirit, soul has been *asustado*, and that the only way that they can be cured is by a *curandero*. They do some rituals, but I don’t know what they are; it works sometimes and other times no. We try to tell them that it is good that they call their *curanderos*, but that they also need to help the children with a doctor from here [health post / hospital] who has studied. We hope to change their way of thinking, but it is difficult; they don’t want to accept it.

Dr. Carmen here demonstrates an acceptance of the principles of interculturality—by what appears to be uncritically advocating that people consult with both kinds of health providers—but then seemingly contradicts herself by also asserting that it is necessary to “change their way of thinking.” I identify this as an observed instance that demonstrates a lack of what I would call “critical” interculturality: a space to critically reflect and analyze dominant western scientific culture (epistemological hegemony) and push forward an inclusion of a “plurality of knowledge... in search of epistemological equilibrium” (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009:



10). The current dilemma is to limit the knowledge being lost between now and when these policies, programs and practices can actually come to fruition. Unlike biomedicine, much traditional medical knowledge is stored in the mind; proficiency is attained through intergenerational comprehension, intuition and experience. As Félix recounts:

You learn many things from the people; we know the theoretical stuff, but not its practicality. We're professionals, but we continue to learn everything from the people. One time a child was very malnourished, and we took her to the *curandero*. He read coca leaves and said, "Your girl is *orejuado*, that's why she is ill, we have to change this." The *curandero* boiled water with *molle*; the girl drank some of the *molle* liquid, then she bathed in it, and they also performed a *q'oa*. They did this on three different Mondays; you cannot bathe any old day. You can also cure on Tuesdays and Fridays, but the coca has to read on either Monday or Tuesday, no other days or the cure would not work.

In this particular case, the malnourished girl did indeed improve and regain her health. While I certainly cannot assert that her cure had anything to do with the coca leaves, Felix here demonstrates his own recognitions of, and appreciation for, local cultural knowledge, and effectively incorporates it as a way of practicing health in the community. More so, Felix's approach is an example of the ways in which to protect, preserve and recuperate traditional knowledge that is at risk of becoming absorbed and subsumed by the dominant western medical model.

### **Local Thoughts and Perspectives**

The change in foods consumed today is directly related to the political ecology of the region. Undernourishment and malnutrition are an outcome of soil erosion, rangeland degradation and water management, the inequitable distribution of land after the 1952 agrarian reforms, and an impoverishment of knowledge.

Government policies had basically ignored the region until PPL funds provided cash that has sparked more interest in the municipality. Since then municipal projects and NGOs have aligned to carry out infrastructure projects within the mandates of their financial institutions, and occasionally training workshops for teachers and health workers. This is not to say that many of these projects are not necessary (i.e., new school buildings and hospital, educational workshops), but they have overlooked the core life support of the municipality: a healthy and culturally productive environment; access to, and the production of, information; decent monetary compensation for their labor, and community solidarity and participation.<sup>129</sup>

As observed from local narratives, most people associated the past with larger harvests, access to a variety of foods (*trueque*, meat, goat cheese and milk), and healthier foods (directly from the land, no chemical fertilizers or pesticides). Ancestral foods were described as “whole foods” that were directly harvested from their fields. The land was also thought to be more fertile and natural (no chemicals). *Trueque*, an exchange of foods between the four ecological floors was commonly practiced and provided a variety of foods. Staple foods that were stored included:

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<sup>129</sup> A study conducted by Mario J. Gutiérrez analyzes the relational effects of land ownership and landless agricultural workers (sharecroppers, wage laborers, or land renters) with the nutritional status of 1,331 Bolivian children between 1 and 59 months old. His findings reveal no significant effect between the two, but when “disaggregating the effects by region, the outcome underlines the importance of geographic characteristics of the individuals and their environment” (2006: 23). Gutiérrez points out that “in the highlands adverse geographic characteristics would induce to higher proportion of malnourished children compared to other regions with better climatic conditions” (ibid: 23). However, when comparing the two regions, “the solid community society of the [highland] region permits the landowners and landless agricultural workers to deal with possible agricultural shocks. On the contrary, in the lowlands, large plots of land suitable for agricultural production and appropriate weather conditions favor agricultural workers. However, the fact that most of the arable land is in the hands of a few individuals plays the counterpart role in reducing malnutrition in that region” (ibid: 23). Thus, these findings support the importance to strengthen community solidarity and family agricultural land sizes as a means to maintain and improve the environment and agricultural production, which in turn, could have positive outcomes on nutrition and well being.

potatoes, corn, wheat, quinoa, barley, *habas*, peas, figs, onions, and winter squash. Seasonal foods included: grapes, pomegranate, oranges, lemons, peaches, cherimoya, avocados, etc. Pasturelands of grasses were more in abundance; hence more animals and the consumption of meats, goat milk and cheese, and eggs. Not mentioned here so far is also the daily practice of chewing coca by most adults, which contains numerous vitamins.<sup>130</sup> Obviously, a balanced diet of these foods depends on their amounts and combination, which is contingent upon a healthy ecology and unwavering weather conditions. However, on the surface, the combination of these foods can provide a balanced nutritious diet, especially when land and knowledge is equitable shared, and acts of solidarity pursued.

The market is not the sole attraction to why people are changing their food behaviors. Soil depletion, lack of water, and climate changes that affect agricultural production leaves people with little options other than to purchase foods from the city. Their financial restraints have limited their abilities to improve their environment and agricultural production. A major issue is that many people are frequently poorly informed about the general nutritional values of these foods, in order to make better choices and food combinations.<sup>131</sup> This observation is illustrated by a conversation I had one afternoon with the high school biology

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<sup>130</sup> According to a study published by Harvard University in 1975, chewing 100 grams of coca is enough to satisfy the nutritional needs of an adult for 24 hours. Coca contains calcium, proteins, vitamins A and E, and other nutrients. (Duke, et. al., 1975). Also, a report from the Coca Museum in La Paz, states that coca is “an important source of vitamins and minerals, particularly phosphor and vitamin B complex, quite beneficial for the brain” (Museo de la Coca, “Fisiology” section).

<sup>131</sup> Misconceptions and understandings about nutrition are prevalent from ordinary citizens to professionals. As pointed out in the World Bank report, “Misinformation about nutrition—including the belief that meat and milk are required for a healthy diet—is pervasive, particularly among health personnel. Hence, training and education in nutrition for doctors, nurses, and nutritionist must be overhauled and focuses on prevention and counseling” (2002: xiii).

teacher, and her 2 year old son. Her son wanted some candy and she gave it to him; she then turned to me and said, “Candies are good for little kids.” Initially I thought that she was joking, but soon realized that she was not. I responded, “Well, candies are really not that good for you, as they’re full of sugar and don’t have much nutritional value.” She reacted in surprise, and genuinely wanted to know more. In reflection, I believe that many products associated with the “west” are automatically considered good, or at least cannot be that bad. For example, even though most people I interviewed expressed that the foods they produce are healthier, when the trucks arrived for the Friday night market on the plaza with white bread from the city, it quickly sold out; being the first choice of preference over the whole-wheat bread made in town from the wheat grown in the fields and milled at the river.

Nonetheless, the incorporation of new foods does not necessarily lead to, or have to lead to, undernourishment and/or malnutrition. In addition, this does not imply that local people are not aware of the basic nutritional importance of foods, as demonstrated by the conversation with don Calixto (narrative follows below), and what most people said during interviews and in casual conversation. However, food combinations are changing that do not necessarily meet daily nutritional needs, and may actually contribute to “modern” health problems. And, the cash attained by selling their products on the market is not always sufficient to purchase an abundance of nutrient rich foods. Be it that agricultural production is increasingly unreliable, or for reasons of cooking convenience, or to eat something different, regional foods and recipes are being supplemented and in some cases dominated by industrialized foods. Most often, people are not combining a variety of nutrient rich

foods with packaged foods; for example, they eat plain noodles that have be fried in oil first and then boiled. Incorporating a variety of vegetables and protein sources would improve the nutritional value of this meal. In addition, traditional dishes are seen more and more like cultural relics, similar to how traditional clothing, dances and rituals are increasingly viewed and performed (I show examples of this below). As articulated by Nélide Faldín, a local political leader of the Chiquitano indigenous population in Santa Cruz, in regards to the principal problems and obstacles that limit cultural practices:

The problem is much larger; our actual laws do not protect [our culture] but simply [treat us] like folklore, like artisan crafts, not like a specific culture with political rights, and this does not allow us to develop [according to our own cultural ways] (cited in Radhuber, 2009: 111).

Despite recognition of the whole foods consumed by ancestor as being healthy, ancestral foods are generally consumed less today depending on one's location (ecological floor), production capability, monetary income, and choice.<sup>132</sup> Whereas *trueque* played a major role in food circulation of the past, and although it continues, customs are increasingly changing, and are geared toward the market. Cash obtained on the market allows for the increased substitution of “whole foods” for “packaged foods.” Lack of enduring discussions about local nutritional needs contributes to poor food combinations and nutrient deficiencies. Nonetheless,

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<sup>132</sup> In the Riberalta nutritional study, the investigators highlight similar narratives: “Our grandparents ate better because in these times there weren’t any fertilizers and chemicals, the majority of the people lived in rural areas where they did not pay for water, lights, gas, rent and they cultivated vegetables, fruits, rice, beans, maize, yucca, they raised pigs, chickens, and ate only fresh foods and used brown sugar and they were healthier” (Plaza, et.al., 2002: 4). They also conclude that “many projects...try to resolve rural malnutrition from an economic perspective (access to the market, exportation and productivity), aiming to increase the economic incomes of campesino families without taking into account improving their diets” (ibid: 2).

although increased awareness about nutrition is essential, this is not enough, as demonstrated in the following encounter.

Walking back to town one late afternoon, a local man, don Calixto, joined me, and our conversation turned to nutrition. He surprised me with his wealth of knowledge about basic nutrition. Don Calixto told me about how healthy the foods were that they grew in the municipality, “more nutritious than the noodles and rice that you buy in Sucre.” He talked about the importance of eating vegetables and fruits, proteins, etc. I asked where he had acquired this information. Don Calixto told me that several years ago a woman that worked with PROAGRO would attend the weight/height control meetings, and bring foods to cook with the mothers while teaching about nutrition. But, when that program ended, so did the cooking and nutrition discussions. Others confirmed this as well. As one ex-PROAGRO employee, who then worked with the mayor’s office as the agricultural extension worker for the entire municipality proudly explained, while yet another current PROAGRO employee presented a different point of view,

PROAGRO donated milk, and fruits (apples, bananas), and once a week made a meal in the “*olla común*” (communal pot) for mothers and their children. We brought the foods from Sucre, and sometimes we purchased them from the region. Approximately four years ago the project ended, and there wasn’t another institution to help us continue. Neither did the hospital and health posts have any interest to continue with the program to eradicate malnutrition. We developed a portfolio of materials and audiovisuals, but they disappeared with the project; the technician became possessive, and didn’t hand over the materials. (Ex-PROAGRO employee, current municipal agricultural extension worker.)

Another viewpoint:

At the time we were wrong, even with the foods that we distributed (apples, bananas). It was a bad strategy. We recognized this, and that we shouldn’t

continue with this project. But at the margins of these bad experiences we decided to change various strategies. We now wanted to focus on agricultural production because we really weren't working with nutrition, just with mothers. Now we are going to start another project with Plan International. We'll train local trainers in agriculture starting from their local production. The project has a three year duration period, and we'll begin with hygiene. (PROAGRO employee) [As far as I know, this project never materialized. In 2008, after completing a few small dams, PROAGRO downsized to only one agricultural worker, stationed in a *Valle* community.]

It is difficult to assess how information / knowledge is captured and processed. Here, four years after the “*olla común*” nutrition project, in casual conversation, a man, not a woman, is talking with me about the knowledge that he acquired about nutrition. It is possible that these meetings were effective in increasing nutrition awareness. Also, that men can play an important role in the nutritional consumption of foods in the family and community. However, the sustainability of the project could not continue to rely solely on donated foods that bring women and their young children together once a week or so, to eat out of the “*olla común*.” Also, the fragmented, inconsistent nature of these programs provides a temporary dissemination of basic knowledge to the “target” population of the time, generally women, and did not address the root problems. Although the second man recognized the limited nature of the program, and the importance to focus on agricultural production, this too had had a segmented orientation that sees the problem in isolation; i.e., “train local trainers in agricultural methods.” The orientation of these projects also reinstates or reinforces a gender division of male/female health responsibility as Dr. Carmen said to me during an interview: “the men do not participate in health issues, some maybe participate a little.” It is not that people do not know how to eat, and cultivate, or that men are not interested in health

issues. What is happening is a confluence of factors that are influencing people's understanding and access to foods: cultural beliefs about malnutrition; their relationship with health professionals, the biomedical health system, and other NGO and municipal workers; agricultural production (land size, irrigation, climate patterns); institutionalized violence of resource allocation and usage (Navarro, 1979: 34)<sup>133</sup>; the influence and access of new modern foods (packaged rice, noodles, oil, canned sardines, white flour, sugar, cookies, candy, etc.), the socialization of gender roles; and materialism (saving money for material purchases rather than food).

Despite numerous NGOs working in the municipality, mostly in the lower three ecological floors, nutritional concerns were not a major focus of theirs during my field research period. Agricultural issues were addressed in a few strategic locations, but in superfluous ways; however, environmental concerns were not dealt with.<sup>134</sup> Connections between the relationship of healthy environments, abundant

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<sup>133</sup> Navarro explores the “institutionalization of power and control in the mechanism of distribution of resources, inside as well as outside the health sector,” as explained by Myrdal (1970): “In the Latin American situation gross violence is...exerted all the time, mostly against poor people to keep them suppressed. The whole economic and social order...must rightly be seen in ‘institutionalized violence.’” Navarro continues to point out that when the “disenfranchised majority rebels against the institutionalized violence...almost universal revulsion is expressed by the organs of communication (which are controlled by the groups that also control those structures)”. Navarro elaborates on this by citing Moore (1966): “The way nearly all history has been written imposes an overwhelming bias against revolutionary violence...the use of force by the oppressed against their former masters has been the object of nearly universal condemnation. Meanwhile the day-to-day repression of ‘normal’ society hovers dimly in the background of most history books.” (1979: 34).

<sup>134</sup> During a field visit in December 2009, I learned of an environmental project called *Cambio Rural* (Rural Change) that is financed by the Japanese development agency JICA, who work in coordination with the Universidad de San Francisco Xavier in Sucre to reduce poverty by conserving natural resources. The Rumi Mayu *Cambio Rural* pilot project is designed for five years (2009-2014), which began in April 2009. One coordinator and three technical assistants work with four communities (2 in the *Cordillera* and 2 in the *Altura*) carrying out reforestation and soil improvement activities. If the project is successful it will expand to other communities. The coordinator, Pablo, explained that the project has built green houses to germinate tree seedlings, and although *Cambio Rural* promotes native trees, the community wants pine and eucalyptus because they grow fast and they can sell them. Pablo clarified that they are supporting the community with this, plus planting some native trees; their strategy is to teach about the problems of eucalyptus in hopes that the community will



agricultural productions and the consumption of nutritious foods were not discussed in meetings, or observed in programmatic actions, but it was acknowledged in interviews and informal conversations. As noted in the section “Paradigms of Development” in the previous chapter, NGOs and the municipal government approach the land for its ability to produce a commodity for state and global markets, and not in terms of livelihood, the consumption of one’s own product, and a supplemental or primary monetary income. In fragmented ways, some of these issues were addressed on varying levels, but more as protocol and/or as completing a job requirement / function. Yet, my contention is that as a baby dies behind an adobe wall, youth and adults are compromised by hunger, and an occasional deformed infant and animal is born, is not one way in which to make meaning of the consequences of colonialism and neoliberalism, and the deterioration of one’s land, an association with the “cultural” magical realism of *susto*, *duendes* and devils?

### **In Conclusion: An Arboreal Illustration**

There are numerous illustrations of local cultural /agricultural practices to work from and enhance. One ancient exemplary of ingenuity and resilience that I would like to end this chapter with, as an example of the intertwined relationship between the environment, resource production (utilization), cultural practices, food

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understand the importance and benefits to plant native trees. To improve soil fertility they are teaching communities to cover their manure for better fermentation and soil absorption. As Pablo explained “the local people just spread dry manure, but it’s doesn’t decompose well and it is not that effective.” The program also emphasizes the involvement of women. One strategy that is being incorporated in one of the *Altura* communities is to give women wool for weaving in exchange for their participation. At the time (November, 2009) the project did not have any educational materials, and were in the process of putting together their POA (Annual Operative Plan).

consumption and health, is the role that the *molle* tree has in the *Valle* and *Altura* communities in the municipality of Rumi Mayu. Apart from its arboreal biological function, the *molle* tree is a livelihood resource and a food supplier; it has also been a long-time symbol of family and community wealth. Most families have several *molle* trees on their land, which surround their homes and/or grow in their fields. *Molle* trees support the grape vines that climb up and cling to their trunk and outer branches. The trees produce a natural chemical that acts as a pesticide and fungicide, thus allowing for the production of organic grapes without extra costs, labor, or the health risks associated with industrial chemical pesticides. Their leaves help to fertilize the roots of the grape plants, and their limbs provide shading and protection. Pruned branches are utilized according to their sizes: small branches serve as mini brooms to brush out adobe ovens to bake bread, etc.; and the larger branches are carved into soup bowls, special sandals that are *only* used to crush corn for *chicha* (corn beer) production, and to carve the long wooden narrow receptacles to crush the corn itself in.

The first thing that most of the local people mentioned when I talked with them about the building of new streets, or of their widening, was the loss of the *molle* trees and grape vines: “it really pains me to see them cut down” was a typical comment. But, the response of many municipal employees and NGO workers were said in tones of indifference: “it’s for the progress of the community,” they would say. The main difference here is that most local people have witnessed and /or lived with a dependence on these trees as a part of their livelihood, often for as long as they can remember. The presence and memory of *molle* trees are part of a collective

communal psyche; many people could tell me exactly where the cut down molle trees had been located. Grapes that grow up the trunk and branches of the molle trees are locally consumed, sold, and /or traded in *trueque* practices.<sup>135</sup> In addition, a major portion of the grapes are distilled into *singani*. This brings a higher price than fresh grapes; plus, given the limited preservation period of grapes, *singani* extends its marketing capabilities and value, and serves as a monetary savings account. There are also secret “traditional” foods made from the molle tree, that are only prepared now in some isolated communities, and *curanderos* use it for medicinal purposes, such as for curing *susto*. Communities themselves are named after the molle tree, and some agricultural departments in the universities have developed natural repellents from their seeds for mass production, and continue to research the potentials of these trees.<sup>136</sup>

It is these interactions with the environment—social reciprocal exchanges, with nature and between communities, in the manner of *trueque*—that hold the potential to contribute to remedying some of the capitalist development model’s historical injuries, as well as contribute to environmental and cultural rejuvenation, which could potentially enhance the quality of health and life. These practices can

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<sup>135</sup> During harvest time grapes are a major part of daily consumption and nutritional intake. Grapes contain moderate amounts of vitamin C and K; although, some varieties have higher vitamin C content. They have trace amounts of protein, B vitamins (B6, riboflavin-B2, niacin-B3, folate-B9, and pantothenic acid-B5), and assist in the absorption of B vitamins. Grapes have small to trace amounts of minerals (potassium, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, selenium, zinc, magnesium). They are also rich in antioxidants and dietary fiber. (USDA, 2010; Margen, 1992)

<sup>136</sup> A young biology student, who is a friend of mine, and his mother is a biology professor, would frequently complain about Bolivia not investigating and protecting the scientific and medicinal wealth of its biodiversity. He talked about the numerous scientists that come to Bolivia to study their plants and ecology, and then take that information back to their country of origin. His point is the lack of interest and value that the Bolivia government and academia dedicates to the country’s ecological diversity, and the potential wealth and knowledge that could be gained, developed and /or deepened.

be associated with what Zimmerman calls “overlapping patchworks [that] focus on interconnected spatial, environmental and human-induced qualities of mountain land use;” different ecological regions provide the “integration of diverse Andean foods...[that] are valued by farmers for reasons of agroecology, taste, nutrition and culture (such as identity formation)” (1996: 245). Furthermore, reciprocity is imbued with social justice practices: women and men participate more equitably; there is a more evenhanded exchange of resources; nutritional and health needs are addressed; solidarity is promoted; and the environment and culture are valued—in addition to what have been referred to as “simple affirmations of potential value in oneself as a member of a social group” (Ferguson, 1998: 105).

## CHAPTER 6

### GOVERNMENTAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO MALNUTRITION

The *dirigente* (union leader) for some of the valley communities, Don Eliseo, concurred during an interview that, “some NGOs are okay, but for the people to understand these projects you have to explain the relationship of the project with the roots of the problem; be clear and straight forward. Some projects leave the community worse off than before (“*a veces nos hacen peor estas insituciones*”). For example, several years back one NGO promoted planting tuna cactus to propagate *cochinilla* [small red bug used as a natural dye] to sell on the market. They cut down the lemon trees and planted tuna. Well the market for cochinilla went down, and a heavy wind blew away the cochinilla. People lost their investment and also their lemon trees. They have since replanted lemon trees. A family can survive on 30 lemon trees. They’re like a bank account; you can harvest lemons year round. Plus, you can plant winter squash, corn and sweet potatoes under the lemon trees. With tuna there is no space to cultivate nutritious plants between them...One reason that people don’t progress much is because they aren’t well informed about these facts, and don’t truly understand what it’s all about. The problem is that they can get stepped on.” Don Eliseo repeated numerous times, “*falta orientación para saber, para que no nos pisen*” (“we lack orientation to know better, so that we don’t get stepped on”).

Don Eliseo’s story illustrates an openness to try new socioeconomic ventures, and how they can easily backfire when development models foster modalities of knowing and doing that largely ignore a deeper analysis of the environment, local sustainable agricultural production practices, local livelihoods, and diverse information. PPL funds provide the cash for municipal changes that often pick up where NGOs leave off, or vice versa. Furthermore, the development plans for the municipality do not seem to differ much from one elected political party to another, regardless of their ideological affiliations. The development plan set in motion by the *Union Nacional* (National Union, UN) political party mayor in 2004 continues to

pursue the same routes of the previous mayors, and the 2010 *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism, MAS) mayor. These development venues (roads, hospitals, markets, dinosaur museum) are the main arteries to access cash, and seduce locals with visual changes that appear “modern” and “progressive.”<sup>137</sup> Unfortunately, these projects do not allow many opportunities for introspection, critical analysis, and inclusion of intra-culturality that seek solutions based on the cultural and ecological dynamics of the region.

Much of the re-territorialization that is occurring has been, and continues to be, promoted by NGOs and municipal employees, most of whom have been trained with materials from North American and European academic models, appropriating technological approaches that align with the market and frequently overlook the local social, cultural and ecological context. The municipality is being sectionalized according to its economic potential for external markets that ignores the support of many local agricultural practices, such as, improve land fertility and irrigation system, and decontaminate rivers to enhance the “circulation” of natural resources (i.e. *trueque*), and the local consumption of diverse foods. The interests of financial institutions and municipal employees are the link to economic transitions oriented around extraction models and the market system.<sup>138</sup> Their interests are marked by

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<sup>137</sup> In 2008, an indigenous man, born and raised in the *Altura*, who dresses in community spun traditional weaved clothing, became the mayor. At the end of his term in office, I asked don Sabino and doña Julia about the results of his work. They replied, “he seemed to do good...he built himself a house in Sucre, and now has a *camion* (truck).” Exploring this further, their opinion was that if he could financially self-benefit, he was smart, and thus he must be doing something right. My own reflection is that people who gain access to positions of power (i.e., patrons, now mayors) are expected to skim something for themselves; in many ways I think that this self-enhancement has become normalized.

<sup>138</sup> Refer to the book, *Dying for Growth, Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor*, edited by Jim Yong Kim, Joyce V. Millen, Alec Irwin, and John Gershman (2000), for a historical and in-depth

the actions of their approach: the unnecessary wide roads being built that destroy productive lands, give access to the few large agricultural producers to export their products, but to many are a mirage of progress; the promotion of mono-crops for specialized markets (i.e. peanuts, oregano); select communities for irrigation systems due to their enhanced market capabilities; a tourism industry promoted by a small business class (one or two extended families) and municipal politicians that will most likely benefit from skimming project monies. These western models of development may bring in more cash for some families, but at the same time it overlooks the revalorization of “reciprocity” and “solidarity,” and the sustainable production of a variety of nutritious whole foods—fundamentals to a “quality of life,” food sovereignty and well-being, i.e. “*vivir bien*” for all, if not the majority, of Rumi Mayuns.

Contrary to autochthonous concepts of “*vivir bien*,” these development approaches align with Bebbington’s analysis in ways that produce three main dynamics: 1) “*more uncertainties*,...as the concessions of these territories to extract their riches and lack of consultation with the affected population can generate uncertainties and sensations of vulnerability that can also generate bad feelings;” 2)

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analysis that link causal relationships between socioeconomic policy and development strategies with inequality and poor health indices and suffering. Combining academic research, numerous case studies and ethnographic narratives they explore “how the structure and current rules of today’s market-led economic globalization widen the chasm between the privileged and the destitute, imperiling the lives of the world’s poor” (3). Vandana Shiva’s work exposes the dire situations of India’s farmers incurred by multinational corporations (Monsanto, Cargill, and Syngenta), unfair trade policies (agribusiness trade subsidies), the manipulation of seed supplies and the promotion of monoculture crops, land grabs, etc. These actions have lead to “corporate feudalism,” farmer[s]...losing her / his social, cultural, economic identity as a producer,” and an astronomical loss of life and suffering through farmer suicides (Znet, 2004). In a report released from the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at NYU, and discussed in an interview with the co-author Smita Narula on Democracy Now “every 30 minutes an Indian commits suicide” (Democracy Now, May 11, 2011). Several of these agribusiness “corporate feudalism” trends have begun to take place in the department of Santa Cruz (genetic seeds, mono crops, expansive productions of soya, etc) .

*“new local institutional dynamics,...the arrival of [newer formations of] extraction tends to debilitate local institution, generating inequalities, and inducing divisions and disagreements at the core of the community [between] those in favor of the extraction and those against it, generating negative affects in the population;”* and, 3) *“new forms of clientalism,...as external actors to the territory, such as industries, ONGs, and the church look for sources of assistance within the local communities, generating a tendency to distort [local] politics and institutions. In the context of leadership in conflict and new organizations, the possibility to arrive at collective actions of consensus becomes much more complicated”* (2010: 77). And thus far, PND nor LPP, are not offering many nourishing options or alternative functional leadership possibilities.

As I wrote in the previous chapter, I was surprised by the high malnutrition rates among children in such an ecologically rich area, and the limited attention that this had received; the health post and NGO generally focused on collecting data, and the schools distributing food aid. The World Food Program donations appeared to be the main solution from the municipality and state. During my field research food was distributed to the schools, and a couple of work programs. Paradoxically, while discussing the food donation program with the mayor at the time, don Jorge, the nurse came to the mayor’s office to inform him that a malnourished nine year old girl arrived at the hospital. The nurse explained that the girl was very ill and needed to be transferred to a more equipped hospital for treatment; however, the family did not have any money for transport and other expenses. Don Jorge proudly said that he would give (or lend) the family some money. He never asked much about the girl, or



her family, or how this happened, but rather boasted: “These are my people, and if I have to help them out with some of my own money, occasionally I will do so.”

In this chapter I focus on the municipality’s responses to the pervasive malnourishment in the community, and how it reproduces colonial relations between the state and her subjects and disempowers the community. I expand upon my main argument that (post)coloniality perpetuates ecological neglect and reproduces the hierarchy between professionals and *campesinos* that denies local knowledge and equitable dialogues and relationships pertaining to health issues, while curtailing access to formal, “official,” education (e.g., academic diplomas). For example, on the one hand, access to medical education is restricted; on the other hand, when access is granted, it only educates students in western medicine—thus producing the expert, and also what counts as knowledge. I also examine the World Food Program, its shortcomings and challenges.<sup>139</sup> My observations and analysis lead me to consider what health literacy/education would look like in ways that incorporated an inclusive and ecologically sound approach to knowledge, and therefore a pedagogy that respects local perspectives, histories, and the desire for empowerment and self-actualization.

### **Local Health Services and Programs**

The municipality responded to malnutrition via four main venues: local health services, which included CAI (Information Analysis Committee) meetings;

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<sup>139</sup> This too, may be changing, given that since 2010, the World Food Program is coordinating with the Ministry of Health’s *Desnutrición Zero* program.

health fairs; nutrition workshops, and food aid (work for food programs and school food donations). The health services largely focused on data collection (detection), vitamin supplementation, infant formulas, and sporadic education; more specifically: weight/height control of children under 5 years of age; dispensing vitamin A capsules, vitaminized oil capsules, and ferrous sulfate tablets (when in stock, which was very inconsistent during 2004);<sup>140</sup> collecting data through weight and height controls; and, sending severe cases of malnutrition to the closest second level hospital, approximately 30 kilometers away on a mountainous dirt road. In reviewing these programs, the hospital's head nurse in 2004 said, "Cure malnutrition? We hardly ever do that." She summed up the hospital's medical role and limitations as follows:

We don't give them anything, only advice. Our advice is based on the availability of foods that are in the region, and how the people could prepare them. We tell them how much to feed their children. We also coordinate with the SEDES and PROSCAM; they collaborate with supplying some powdered milk, oats, and sometimes soy flour. I'm not sure where they get it, but it's not sufficient, they only send small quantities. It's not enough, that's why we prioritize, and only give it to the youngest and most critically malnourished children. We categorize the children, and for those that are only a little malnourished we educate their mothers. But it should be the reverse. I believe that it is better to prevent malnourishment than have to cure it, because once a child becomes malnourished, it is difficult to prevent them from becoming moderately malnourished, and then severely malnourished. Therefore, I would opt for doing a project with some organization that could collaborate with us in preventing this downward spiral type of malnutrition.

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<sup>140</sup> In their nutritional study of three communities in the Riberalta municipality, Plaza et al. highlighted experimental investigations being carried out by medical doctors at the University of McGill, Montreal Canada. These doctors are exploring alternative practices and economic viabilities for addressing mineral deficiencies caused by malnutrition. They report that "changing aluminum pots and pans for iron recipients is one remedy that is much more simpler, cheaper and popular...Children in Ethiopia who were feed with foods cooked in iron pots had higher quantities of hemoglobin,...and also grew quicker than the children that ate foods cooked in aluminum pots...Instead of spending approximately \$20,000. for dispensing iron supplements to 10,000 people each year, [it]...would cost only \$5,000... to provide the same amount of people with iron pots and pan" (2002:16).

We all know how malnutrition can jeopardize children for their entire lives; they will never develop to their full capacity, especially in their studies. For us, good nutrition is elemental for the caring of children less than 5 years of age.

Up to a point, I agree with this particular nurse, especially in her desire for “preventing this downward spiral...of malnutrition;” however, her opinion overlooks innovative ways to improve nutritional standards, and the resourcefulness of people and the regional ecology. In addition, when analyzing the education approach in the municipality toward nutrition it has been inconsistent and fragmented, and culturally inappropriate pedagogically. Furthermore, the underlying socioeconomic, environmental and political problems go “untouched,” while an “endless leap-frogging of one ‘pilot project’ over another owes far more to the ambitions and political stills of the project entrepreneurs than to convincing results” (Taussig, 1981: 144-145). Or, as a Rumi Mayu woman simple stated, “they’re here for themselves, not for us.” Julio, the municipal accountant, expressed, as did many others that I spoke with, and noted in chapter 4, that “the institutions lack coordination, each one does their own thing. Sometimes they don’t even participate in the workshops that they themselves offer, and there is no follow-up with what they begin.” The overriding perception was, as expressed by one NGO worker toward the end of a NGO organized workshop for health professionals about CAIs, that “It is important that the community has information—this is their right; but, the doctor is the man in charge.” In other words, the professionals are the ones who know better, and decide what and how much information should be disseminated. Overlooked is the

exploring the wealth of knowledge within communities, and vertical discussions between locals, municipal workers and professionals.

Therefore, a health/nutrition literacy program did not occur at the time, or as far as I know up until 2010. As noted above, local people are interested in learning about nutrition, but this knowledge can cause frustration if presented inefficiently or inconsistently, especially in conjunction when harvests are insufficient, and/or economic incomes inadequate to meet daily food consumption needs. Therefore, deeper discussions need to include the daily realities that people confront in order to seek possible and long-term solutions. The national program known as “Zero Malnutrition” (*Desnutrición Cero*) aims to strengthen an interdisciplinary approach to malnutrition, but it has been met with many obstacles in Rumi Mayu. In August 2008, I asked the two hospital nurses how they were implementing the Zero Malnutrition program. They showed me a 3 x 6-foot garden that they was planted with lettuce and onions, and said “we’re going to promote family gardens.” The family gardens were never initiated, and the hospital garden is overrun with weeds. However, at the time this was their main understanding of what “zero malnutrition” was about.

These perceptions expanded in mid-2009, when a couple of rooms in the old hospital were given the UNI program, and one nutritionist was hired and a hospital nurse was transferred to work with him. When I met them in November, they were systematizing nutritional data into a computer, visiting communities and designing their municipal program and strategies. This suddenly slowed down in December 2009 when the municipal administration claimed they did not have enough funding

for the nutritionist. This has resulted in the nurse being the sole UNI staff, and in essence the nutrition program being run basically how it was by the hospital before: community visits and weight controls, vitamin supplements, giving talks to the mothers, and entering data. Given the rugged geographical terrain and complexity of the task, it is highly unlikely that one UNI personal would have sufficient time for inter-institutional coordination or innovative approaches.

Similarly, NGOs mainly focus on monitoring and education campaigns (via *madres vigilantes*, visits with mothers clubs, infrequent workshops, first time health fairs in 2004, scattered home visits by a UNICEF worker), data collection via communal CAI meetings, and the promotion of gardens with the three boarding schools. At the time, trimester CAI meetings were divided between municipal CAI's and communal CAI meetings. I attended most of the municipal CAI meetings, and observed that nutrition was seen mainly in terms of data. The hospital doctor, nurses, and the auxiliary nurses from the 5 health posts;<sup>141</sup> occasionally, a representative from Plan International or Esperanza Bolivia attended the meeting. In addition, periodically a nurse from Plan International, or the regional coordinator for Proyecto Esperanza attended the meetings.

Trimester communal CAI meetings were facilitated by Plan International and the hospital, with the *madres vigilantes* participating, and held in chosen communities; they collect data on nutrition, as well as other basic health indicators (diarrheas, respiratory infections, etc.) in their community, but that is about as far as it goes. Unfortunately, health promoters are not always respected by people in the

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<sup>141</sup> Between 2006 and 2010, two additional health posts were constructed; one in the Altura and another in the *Cordillera*.

community; as one woman asked me in regards to the promoters, “What can they teach us? They’re one of us.”<sup>142</sup> Other problems include the fact that the *madres vigilantes* are volunteers; they work inconsistently according to their free time; are not truly integrated into the national health system; and receive only sporadic basic training, and little recognition.

### **Nutrition Workshops**

Over the span of a year (2004) there were two health workshops organized that included a nutrition component. One was about reproductive health, facilitated by the SEDES and oriented toward young women who live in the town of Rumi Mayu and the surrounding communities; the other was a UNICEF coordinated workshop for 19 community representatives, mostly from the from *Cordillera* and *Altura* communities.

I participated in the UNICEF workshop, which invited a few local NGO professionals working in the municipality to give talks on different health aspects (diarrhea, respiratory infections, and nutrition), and the human rights worker (*Defensora del Pueblo*) to talk about children’s rights and violence issues. The workshop was for two days, and divided into four sections (morning, and after lunch), with 14 women and 5 men participating. One afternoon was dedicated to nutrition. The UNICEF nutrition coordinator for the municipality, Manuel,

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<sup>142</sup>I heard this from a number of women in the town of Rumi Mayu. In addition, UNICEF had trained a local woman in another community to train / talk with other women in her community about nutrition. She put together several posters and went to visit women in their homes. Several months later she stopped visiting the women, and when I asked why, she said: “They don’t respect what I have to say. They tell me how can you know more than us if you’re from here, just like us.”

facilitated this session.<sup>143</sup> The lecture focused on a poster of a hand-made drawing of a woman, who had the appearance of the Virgin Mary, surrounded by drawings of foods from the three food groups. Manuel explained the three food groups, and the importance to combine them. A few questions were directed to the women about if they cooked or combined any of these foods. Given the women's reluctant to respond, the men would try to prompt them, while simultaneously speaking for them. During the session, most of the men would periodically leave the room and come back, demonstrating this topic of nutrition and the preparation of foods were more directed toward the women, reinforcing their role as the one mainly responsible for feeding the family. Manuel's pedagogical and informational approach was very basic and matter of fact. There was no discussion or dialogue about how the participants understood nutrition; the cultural value of foods; the nutritional benefits of the foods that they produce and purchase, the relationship between nutrition and health; the common myths about foods and their nutritional values; the different nutritional needs of children, adults and older adults; the nutritional and health benefits of breastfeeding; the relationship between the environment, agricultural production and nutrition; their perceptions of the how they could eat healthier, or how they might overcome obstacles of food sovereignty; etc. This coincides with the observations by McGuire and López in their study that includes an analysis of nutrition programs in Bolivia:

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<sup>143</sup> Manuel is not a trained health worker. He worked with literacy programs, and this was a major part of his job function in Rumi Mayu. Manuel grew up in one of the *Altura* communities but then went to Sucre to study in high school. I interviewed him shortly after he arrived in Rumi Mayu. Manuel was very sincere, seemed to understand many of the local concerns and issues, and wanted to help out. After about only six months he left town.

Nutrition education, the most important intervention, is generally of very low quality, based in obsolete concepts and incorrect beliefs about nutrition, y presented in ways that are not efficient [and effective]—for example, how lectures (talks) give little attention to the needs, comprehension or abilities of the individuals. (2001: viii)

While I understand and basically agree with McGuire and López’s critique, on the other hand, it omits how people are situated.<sup>144</sup> For example, most workshop arrangements are designed like mainstream western classrooms, with preconceived role expectations for facilitators and participants. Manuel was from an *Altura* community, and appeared well aware of the nutritional situation. Previous to the workshop I interviewed Manuel for over an hour, and conversed with him many times on the streets. Furthermore, I separately interviewed a handful of the participants during their 2 hour lunch break or in the early evening. Despite some keen insights about agricultural and nutritional problems, these never surfaced during the nutrition workshop. The expectation of the facilitator (institutionally and participant perceived, and internally believed) was to present the Virgin Mary and the three food groups to demonstrate his own knowledge and fulfill the nutrition education requirement. The participants expected this, fulfilling their own role to jot down some notes in their supplied notebooks, quietly acknowledging the three food groups. In short, this is an example of how “internalized colonialism” and the

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<sup>144</sup> At the same time it is important to recognize the potential of individual and group agency, as Bebbington points out, “it remains important to understand that they are agents *situated* in cultural, economic, agro-ecological, and socio political contexts which influence how, and why, they manage resources in particular ways” (1996: 88). Furthermore, the inclusion or hearing of marginalized voices does not equate to “celebrate all that they do—for much of this may be ineffective, undemocratic, authoritarian, frequently male, and so on. However, if our analyses recover and understand the ways in which actors are situated, and how this affects their rationales, this will draw attention to the limits on their capacities to compose viable and democratizing programs, and to the reasons for the limited impact of these programs” (ibid: 88).



“coloniality of knowledge” play out. Similar scenes took place at the communal CAI meetings. Anyway, reflecting back on Manuel, his stance and performance were well received. As far as I know, his identity with an *Altura* community was never acknowledged; he left at a young age to study in Sucre, the participants were from remote communities in Cordillera. However, what I would like to point out here is that whereas Manuel’s narrow and stifling pedagogical approach was praised, a more innovative nutritional approach, also simultaneously being promoted by UNICEF was debunked. Another man, Edwin, had been working for UNICEF for several years in communities. His current position was to train a woman, doña Marlene, in the community about nutrition and together they would visit different women at their homes to discuss nutrition. Similar responses to that of the *madres vigilantes* ensued; the women would not accept one of their own teaching them. As the doña Marlene elaborated, “we would go to my neighbors’ house, and try to talk with them. They wouldn’t even sit down with us, they’d just walk away and say, how can you know more than us, you’re from here.” I heard these comments from many different people, but did observe that when someone left the region to study in the city for a year or two, and then returned, the knowledge that they came back with was generally respected. For example: two nurses that attended elementary school in the town of Rumi Mayu, went to Sucre to study high school and later nursing; both of them returned to the region temporarily to work, and their knowledge was respected. Internalized colonialism has a dual effect of disregarding your own knowledge and ways, while aggrandizing and reinvigorating western knowledge and ways.

I would like to tie up this sub-section with thoughts that coincide with an inability to talk, converse, dialogue from one's own place; or in other words, with developing an ability to see and make good use of what is right in front. I did not attend the SEDES reproductive health and nutrition workshop, but my neighbor doña Julia did. One night I noticed the light on in her room, way into the wee hours. The next day, in conversation doña Julia told me that she was reading the SEDES workshops materials about nutrition. She was apparently very interested in nutrition, and if she had had the opportunity she would have wanted to be a nutritionist. What fascinated me at the time, and still does, is that doña Julia's garden is a cornucopia of nutritious vegetables and fruits. She is the person who makes the most delicious bread that I have ever eaten. The wheat is grown in their own fields, fertilized with the manure from their goats and sheep, the grains are spread out on a tarp that is gently waved in the air to allow the wind to blow away the chaff, and finally the grain is milled at the river's water wheel, later to be kneaded and baked in their adobe oven. Almost all the food the family eats is home grown. In addition, doña Julia lives approximately only one block from the hospital, and rented out rooms to Plan International staff that periodically passed through the area, and also to two PROAGRO employees. For several months a room or two were rented out to a couple of nurse interns, a high school biology teacher, and a doctor. Yet, no one at the hospital, school, Plan International, or PROAGRO seemed to recognize or support her interest, knowledge, and natural skill. I had often thought: how come this garden is not valued and promoted to others in the community and elsewhere? Contrarily, doña Julia was treated more like a cleaning lady by the Plan International

and PROAGRO employees, as she swept their patio and washed their sheets. As for doña Julia, she did not particularly care for them; she told me that they were “*ingratos*,” (ungrateful people), and referred to one of the Plan nurses as “*esa abuela*” (roughly, “that old biddie”).

This quasi-feudal relationship between the outside professionals and the local residents was tragically communicated when doña Julia almost became another maternal mortality statistic. She was eight months pregnant at the time, when she presented with signs of severe fetal distress, and attempted to travel with don Sabino to Sucre on the daily truck. It was only through frantic and almost desperate measures that we managed to get Dr. Eduardo—who doña Julia had been afraid to go consult—“he’ll just yell at me,” she said—to agree to take her to the city in the ambulance. I found myself in the position of cajoling and pressuring the doctor to take emergency measures, as he first was unsure where doña Julia lived—two blocks from the hospital—and then insisted on performing an exam before ordering any trip to Sucre; it was only once he discovered that there was no fetal heartbeat that he began to truly move. The news that arrived later, however, once doña Julia was at last transferred to Sucre, was not good; she gave birth to a deformed and stillborn baby (with which there was an unconfirmed suspicion of heavy mineral intoxication from the contaminated Pilcomayo River, as briefly alluded to in Chapter 5), and the medical report was that she had been very close to death herself—almost assuredly so, if she had indeed taken the long truck ride into the city.

This abbreviated version of doña Julia’s experiences demonstrates some ways in which many “professionals” are removed from the daily lives—people’s interests,

skills, understandings, and needs. Many professionals work within their own bubbles, aligned or strapped to the mandates of financial institutions. With many professionals narrowly following sterile educational teachings (i.e. Manuel), which tend to be segmented and subdivided; i.e., nutrition and agricultural are addressed separately by different professionals that do not sit down together, let alone with the locals.<sup>145</sup> Some of these attitudes and lack of concern could be the legacy of colonialism. Scattered attempts to incorporate locals into the volunteer positions in the system (i.e. madre vigilantes and nutrition home visitor) have potential; however, so far their curbed positioning recycles attitudes of inferiority.

Within the geographic confines of doña Julia's yard to the expansive one block radius that includes the hospital—four institutions, the hospital, school, Plan International and PROAGRO, did not seem to pick up on her skills and interests. Despite doña Julia's lush garden, numerous animals and the preparation of nutritious foods—illustrations of environmental care, agricultural practices and nutritional knowledge—professionals seemed to respond to her only as a pregnant Quechua campesina with domestic skills. More profoundly, as exemplified above, under the noses of all three institutions, doña Julia slipped past several professional disciplines and almost passed away forever.

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<sup>145</sup> Even the World Bank acknowledges this: “Nutritional ignorance is particularly problematic at the municipal level, where many programs that affect nutrition-water and sanitation, health, roads, agriculture, employment, social protection, education—are delivered in uncoordinated ways, without communication among agencies, without linkage to macro policies, and sometimes in direct conflict with each other. As a result synergies are not exploited, services either overlap or leave gaps in coverage, and nutrition does not improve. Better knowledge about the importance of nutrition and how to improve is critical to making the most effective use of existing resources” 2002: xiii).

Reflecting on doña Julia's character, interests and skills, and the local dynamics, several observations come to mind. Firstly, her interests in health led her to participate in the reproductive health workshop, which included a nutrition component. Relational skills are her extensive knowledge of growing a variety of vegetables and grains, raising animals, trading foods, and cooking diverse nutrient-rich meals. She raised five healthy children on a few hectares of land. Her knowledge is not credited by the "modern" system; the system overlooks (or discounts) her, or opens up just enough to let one foot in. The trainings offer just enough to gain some basic information, but not sufficient enough to be equally valued or admitted into the system with certifications that meet job requirements, even the local ones that are beginning to open up. Secondly, her belief that the "*Madres Vigilantes* [don't] know more than [other community people], do because they are the same as them," reflects an internalization of colonial notions, that the knowledge and capabilities of indigenous women are limited and inferior. Higher education is concentrated in the cities, available to those that live there, to rural people that have acquired the means to get there, and to those that have attained a level of specific background education to enter the gates. The rural/urban dichotomy is factual, with their knowledge systems opposed, instead of complementary determined and based on local culture, needs and interests. But, what if programs such as the reproductive health and nutrition, or *madres vigilantes* expanded, and offered locals culturally inclusive continued education that developed critical thinking skills, and the opportunities to achieve accredited "credentials" that lead to a paycheck? What if training programs valued and incorporated "multiliteracy"

approaches? Couldn't doña Julia (and, doña Marlene) work with the *Desnutrición Cero* program? Wouldn't their background and social-cultural awareness be an asset to the program and community? Wouldn't this level of involvement help to debunk colonial internalization, and constitute steps toward "interculturality" and "decolonization?"<sup>146</sup>

### **Health Fairs: Ceramic Bowls of Quinoa, Metal Plates of White Rice, and Plastic Bucket Prizes**

In the past generations, harvest times were celebrated with festivals. Families with the larger harvest would sponsor these food feasts, and the community would get together. As the harvests decreased, so have the celebrations.<sup>147</sup> In 2004, for the

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<sup>146</sup> Since the inception of the *Desnutrición Cero* program in 2009, it has advanced slowly. As several health staff have commented, "The coordinator is more in Sucre than Rumi Mayu," and his assistant just quit. I asked them, "How does the *Desnutrición Cero* program differ from the previous hospital's *Control de Peso* program?" They all basically replied, "Not much, just that now it's a separate program."

Until July 2010, the *Desnutrición Cero* program has not evolved into the dynamic program it was intended to be: they register childhood weights into the novel computer data system, assist the weight control sessions, providing some educational information to a select group of mothers, and in 2009 year they distributed vegetable seeds. During the last three years, the hospital vegetable garden continues to display a few scattered lettuces; but, for the most part it is bare, weedy and shabby. According to one hospital nurse, "The people here aren't interested in growing a vegetable garden. We should have a nice garden at the hospital as an example. We could produce all of our own vegetables here. There's space, and I love plants. But the hospital caretakers [night watchperson, cook, and cleaner—all local hires] are too lazy to do it." As she sat there cutting and folding white gauze into individual squares, I wanted to ask, "Why don't *you* take the initiative to organize the garden?"

<sup>147</sup> Since around 2008, a portion of municipal PPL funding is to be allotted to strengthening local cultures. Most of these funds, currently a token amount, support the revitalization of a local carnival celebration (harvest time). Each year a different community is chosen to host the celebration, and they're given money to construct a *Pucara* (symbol of harvest), that consists of two large polls, approximately 300 feet tall, planted in the ground about 20 feet apart, and draped in vertical rows with local products, such as an assortment of homemade breads, grapes, figs, oranges, lemons, *charque* (dried meat), cans of beer and soft drinks, etc.. This cultural event strikingly demonstrates the diversity of local foods produced; plus the interrelation between agricultural production, the local ecology, and its foundational link to "*vivir bien*." Frequently these events turn into a big drinking binge, which could be rooted to a colonial past, as some analyses have associated these cultural events with the patron appeasing the peons with feasts of food and alcohol; however, here my point is the need to expand beyond the actual event of the *Pucara* to other ways that revitalizes the culture, and the solidarity of the communities and between the communities (i.e improve agricultural production

first time there were three health fairs organized by two NGOs and the hospital: one in the town of Rumi Mayu; one in a community in the *Altura*; and one in a community in the *Valle*. I participated in two of these health fairs, but will focus on the larger one that occurred in the town of Rumi Mayu, because approximately half of the fair's orientation had a nutrition focus.

The fairs were initiated by the NGO Esperanza and were coordinated with Plan International and the hospital. Other NGOs, the school, and the mayor's office were invited to be part of the planning process, but none did so.<sup>148</sup> However, the school played a major role in the health fair. Coordinating with Esperanza, many classes developed different educational materials and displayed them at the fair. This was contingent upon the teacher's interest to participate, and what activity that they would like to do. Different materials included: stories; drawings; dressing up in costumes of *vinchucas*; and an assortment of models of houses and *vinchucas*. A couple of classes wrote and performed role-plays, which received the most attention, and were very well received. Another NGO that participated was CEDERTA; they had a booth with a large condom covered penis to draw attention, and an array of reproductive health and family planning materials.<sup>149</sup> The hospital had two booths

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and the system of *trueque*; restore or support local artisan production; develop a cultural and information center that disseminates diverse sources of information and develops educational programs; encourage local dialogue between local citizens; and with state and institutional employees ; etc.).

<sup>148</sup> Local residents were not invited to participate in the planning process. They were to be the performers and audience (not the directors, producers or screenplay writers)—the fair was designed to teach them how to eat better, eliminate *vinchucas* and Chagas disease, and improve their hygienic skills.

<sup>149</sup> I discussed other aspects of CEDERTA in Chapter 5. At the time of the fair, the director of CEDERTA, was planning to run for mayor. His exposure during these fairs, plus the two charismatic employees that conducted reproductive health workshops in each community could have enhanced his political rise to be the mayor. Interestingly CEDERTA's reproductive health program appeared six

that were attended by one or two health staff: one of the booths dryly exhibited posters on respiratory infections, diarrheas, etc.; and the other took blood pressure, provided health advice and answered questions when asked. No agricultural, environmental or municipal programs participated.

The nutrition element was coordinated by Plan International; they organized the *madres vigilantes* from the *Cabecera del Valle* and *Valle* communities to prepare some traditional foods and design a poster or two displaying nutritional messages. Approximately 15 booths lined two sides of the plaza, each manned by groups of two to five women, and one man. During the morning, hardly anyone (locals or institutional staff) checked out the nutrition booths. Then shortly before noon, they held a food tasting and nutrition knowledge contest. It was decided—by whom I do not know—that the director of CEDERTA and two intern doctors and the dentist would be the judges. With clip boards in hand, they moved from booth to booth, tasting the foods, asking basic nutrition questions, and grading the *madres vigilantes*. Surprisingly, only a handful of locals tagged along to observe. Some of the *madres* seemed very uncomfortable, as they would retreat to the back shadow of the booth and shy away from answering questions; others *madres* giggled, covering up their mouths and feelings of unease, while some just stared, and others responded in a matter-of-fact tone of voice. Frequently they could not answer the questions, which most likely were due to their nervousness, or that they did not fully understand them. Most of the women speak Quechua as a first language, and the questions were presented in Spanish. After they visited the last booth, they walked away to tally up

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months before the elections, with the project ending shortly after the elections. The other two employees were given political positions in the municipality.



their grades, and later in the afternoon the winner would be announced and given a prize—a plastic bucket. These were all women who have varying years of experience taking care of their siblings, later on their own children, and some now have grandchildren, yet they were placed in an inferior role position, judged on their ability to comprehend and regurgitate nutrition information. While the preparation and intent of the exhibition was very informative and held much potential, it became subsumed by the “professional” judges, their superior knowledge, and the symbolic nature of the shining plastic buckets. What does this information mean to them and their lives? How do they understand and internalize this performance?

It was well into the lunch hour now, and most locals meandered home to eat, while the NGO staff, municipal workers, and visitors walked off to one of the two local pensions (restaurants that offer a set meal). One pension was serving fried chicken and French fries; the other, noodle soup, a thin slab of fried beef, and white rice. No one purchased a meal from the *madres vigilantes*. More ironic still, the morning elementary shift of students piled out of the school with their metal bowls of white rice topped with a few shattered slivers of canned sardines—food donations. While their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, neighbors were dishing out locally produced nutritious foods of quinoa and other products in ceramic bowls to the NGO and health evaluators, the children were eating imported processed foods. I watched a few young students go to their mothers in the booths; they offered them some “traditional” foods, but their children refused. They did not eat much of their rice and sardines either: one gave her remains to a stray dog; another left her metal bowl

three-quarters full on the cement post in the plaza and ran off to play; and one other left his bowl with his mother.

Why was not much interest expressed for the “traditional” foods? Could it be that many people are becoming more accustomed to packaged goods or “industrialized” foods, and associate them more with “modernity” and “progress?” Packaged foods have increasingly trickled into their lives via several venues: 1) School food donations; 2) Boarding school meals; 3) Frequent visits with the city and other regions; and 4) The promotion of these foods on television programs and commercials.<sup>150</sup> Most of these foods require less cooking time, and can free woman up from longer hours of food preparation. When I asked several women why they did not cook quinoa, they replied that it was too labor intensive, and that it was easier to just boil some rice. While on the one hand I can certainly relate to women not wanting to spend hours each day cooking, Field raises a question in light of nutritional/health and cultural aspects: “Has this rejection of home cooking enhanced the quality of life for the majority of people?” (1999: 198). Field points out it that if you have the money to purchase nutrient rich prepared foods, without having to cultivate your own foods, this can be a good option. However, eating at fast food

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<sup>150</sup> One woman who was recently chosen from the community to act as a community education coordinator with the schools told me that approximately 50% of the children in their community are mildly to moderately malnourished because they mainly eat lots of noodles and rice. In regards to agricultural production she responded, “There is enough land here, and if they improved the soil fertility and planted more efficiently most families would have enough nutritious foods to eat.” When asked, “So, why aren’t they doing this?” she elaborated, “There are four main influences: 1. Children and young people go to the city and get accustomed to the foods; they think that they are more gentrified. When they’re at home that’s all they want to eat. 2. When NGOs come and are invited to eat our foods, they refuse it, they don’t like *lagua* and express their dislike. So the people feel rejected, and that their food is no good. 3. Advertising; the radio and television promote noodles and other packaged foods. 4. Food donations promote noodles and rice. In the preschool that’s all they feed the children, and in the elementary and high school, too.”

restaurants, or pre-packaged foods, has contributed to families eating less together and experiencing commensality; becoming “deskill[ed] in food growing and preparation,” and alienation from agricultural knowledge and practices.

Furthermore, given that most women have limited economic resources, their options are to purchase less nutrient rich foods; and become “caught in a constant struggle to find enough money to play the marketplace food game” (ibid: 198).

In many industrialized countries, numerous studies show the relationship between increased consumption of fast foods and/or pre-packaged foods with a higher prevalence of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular problems, and cancer. As MacRae explains “that diet is a significant risk factor in close to 60 percent of diseases:”

All of these chronic diseases are related to nutrition. They affect the food-rich (those with sufficient income to acquire whatever foods they desire) and the food-poor (or those experiencing food insecurity). Very significant percentages of the Ontario population are at risk of these diseases because they do not eat in a manner optimal for health. We all pay, through publicly funded health insurance, for the costs of individuals’ poor food choices and for hunger. The food system, through which most people acquire food, carries no responsibility for the consequences of consumption of these products. Yet estimates of avoidable mortalities and costs associated with poor nutrition show that millions of dollars can potentially be saved annually (cited in Field, 1999: 199).

Throughout Bolivia, obesity and diabetes is on the rise, and is increasingly a public health problem.<sup>151</sup> According to PAHO and the World Bank (2008),

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<sup>151</sup> A 1999 study conducted by the Bolivian Ministry of Health with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), estimated the prevalence of diabetes in Bolivia to be 7.2 % in 1999, with projections of up to 10 – 12% by 2008 (*La Razón*, March 30, 2008). In another study conducted by Barceló, et al., that consisted of 2,948 selected participants, they “measure[d] the prevalence of diabetes mellitus (DM), hypertension, obesity, and related risk factors in major cities in Bolivia” (2001: 318). They also determined the prevalence rates to be 7.2%,

preventable strategies are imperative to curtail the number of people with diabetes from escalating and resulting in unexpected and unaffordable cost (economically and socially) to most Latin American countries. Yet, in spite of these experiences and warnings, and ironically in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, where most traditional practices are still in place, they too are on the verge of transition to consuming more industrialized foods. Patterns of diet and cultivation are breaking with traditional food consumption. A confluence of factors has opened one main door: the market. In addition to the four venues of how packaged foods have made inroads in the municipality, it is through the PPL that cash is now available to expand partnerships with international agencies who implement many programs that are luring campesinos/as into capitalist markets. Injecting cash into the municipal economy (mono crops, tourism), practically at whatever cost (inequality, environmental degradation, cultural deterioration), is what some NGOs, numerous municipal workers and locals alike are doing—either consciously, conscientiously, or

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in the cities of El Alto, La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Rates were similar between male and females, “with the illness being more common among older persons and those with less education... Thus, the poorest people in one of the world’s poorest countries are the most affected by the disease” (ibid: 322). According to their findings, “a high proportion of Bolivian diabetics are overweight...[and] displayed a lack of physical activity” (ibid: 320).

According to PAHO: “Obesity and diabetes are affecting the peoples of the Americas at high and increasing rates...

The estimated number of people with diabetes in Latin America is expected to increase by more than 50%, from 13.3 million in 2000 to 32.9 million by 2030. Diabetes and obesity are no longer “diseases of affluence,” and disproportionately affect the poor and the less educated of the region. Type 2 diabetes is the most common and accounts for approximately 85% to 90% of all cases. It is related to modifiable risk factors such as obesity or overweight, physical inactivity, and high-calorie diets of low nutritional value. No breastfeeding or breastfeeding for a short duration during infancy is also associated with increased risk of overweight/obesity and type-2 diabetes compared to breastfeeding for a longer duration...” (PAHO, 2008: 1-2). They concur that, “Primary prevention at the population level through activities such as health promotion, creation of healthy public policies focused on food, diet and physical activity, and creation of healthy environments” (ibid: 7-8).

unconsciously.<sup>152</sup> Thus far, how this affects culture, health, family and community integrity appears to be of a secondary concern. As Navarro points out, “the nature and control of investment is more important than the size of investment” (1979:21).

Instead of revitalizing the environment and cultural practices, strengthening sustainable agricultural practices and *trueque*, valuing local foods, and exploring healthier modes of change, the municipal and state government have stood by and watched its disintegration. It does not have to go that way, but the mainstream international agencies dominate program focus, influence policies, and state institutions tend to follow this trend.<sup>153</sup> For one thing, agricultural production is approached as the development of a commodity and not for its cultural, livelihood and nutritional values for the community. Much of this can be associated with a development model that aims to emulate the “developed” countries, pursue their scientific technologies, and pattern educational curriculums that are alien to Bolivian rural society. As discussed above, most of the NGO workers, teachers, health professionals, and municipal employees have been trained by western designed materials and curriculums. Another example, “most medical curricula in Latin America have been patterned on German, French-Spanish, and, more recently, American models, and these are models that, as McKeown has indicated, reflect an engineering approach to the understanding of the body and its diseases and tend to

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<sup>152</sup> Following trends and aspirations similar to the industrialized countries whereby “the majority of the population is made to aspire to ‘more,’ when ‘more’ is always unattainable” (Marcuse, cited in Navarro, 1979: 26).

<sup>153</sup> In Nérida Faldín’s opinion, paraphrased by Radhuber, “Modernization does not have to contradict with indigenous culture’s type of development, quite to the contrary, they can pursue this road [modernization], if and when respect for the specific culture is always maintained” (cited in Radhuber, 2009: 111).

ignore the understanding of the socioeconomic environment that brought about the diseases” (Navarro, 1979: 20). At the same time they are unaware of, or overlook “the nature, subject, and control of economic and social investment leading to a pattern of production and consumption aimed at optimizing the benefits of the foreign and national controllers of that capital, and not at stimulating the equitable distribution of resources” (ibid: 23).<sup>154</sup>

### **Food Donations**

#### **What is Free Food About?**

School food donations and work for food programs are regional and national political responses and (temporary) fixes that are supposedly meant to meet local food needs, yet over the long haul they may actually undermine local healthy practices, culture, and avenues of sustainability. On the one hand, food donations can save lives during emergency situations (i.e. natural disasters), and can help ensure that school children have something to eat each day; but, on the other hand (and as discussed below), they usually cause dependency, deflect from local agricultural production, and interrupt communities to seek their own solutions. Furthermore, many of the donated foods are alien to regional diets, disrupt social life, and rarely

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<sup>154</sup> Radhuber’s study on land use and its relationship with the social economic inequalities in Bolivia, concludes that within the “different perceptions of territory [in Bolivia], you can detect liberal and indigenous holistic visions. The indigenous conception is characterized by a social economic, cultural and religious use of the territory, coming from an integral perspective of territory and with demands for political autonomy. The liberal perspective, on the other hand, is an enterprise perspective, focusing on the generation and accumulation of profit gains. From this perspective, the land is conceived as capital and agriculture as a business” (2009: 192).

turn into nutrient rich meals.<sup>155</sup> While most local people were grateful for the donated foods, many were critical of the program. The following interview excerpts reflect these varied opinions and viewpoints.

### *Advantages*

A compilation of food donation favorable outlooks were: “We’re happy when the food donations arrive, because it’s nutritious. The majority of children don’t eat breakfast, and they start the day with lunch because our money isn’t enough to have breakfast too. In the house we have only a little food. This year was a dry season, we didn’t produce much, and so in this case the food donations are a benefit. The children have improved; they’re much fatter. They’re gaining weight in the pre-school. But what I would prefer more is seeds to plant.”

The nurse Marta provided a suggestion on how to convert food donations into a local sustainable endeavor: “Sometimes this type of help is better if the people themselves organize it and make it sustainable. It could start as a gift, like one quintal of flour. With this quintal of flour they have to make bread for their children, and then they can sell the leftovers. With this money they can buy another quintal of flour, and if they gain more profit they could buy other types of foods. This way they’ll have their own financing and wouldn’t have to wait for help. I believe this way because there are children that don’t eat in their house, and plain white rice at school is not very nutritious.”

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<sup>155</sup> Corresponding conclusions regarding food donations were acknowledged almost 20 years ago in a report by the Misión de Cooperación Técnica Holandesa (MCTH) and the Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales (ILDIS), based on materials obtained from the *Seminario de Seguridad y Ayuda Alimentaria en Bolivia* (Food Security and Help in Bolivia Seminar), held October 30, 1991. Some of their most prominent findings concur that the population “becomes accustomed to receive food in a paternalistic manner and this generates a disarticulation within their community organization...Other effects of food donations is manifested in the demand for their own foods....[whereby] the demand for national foods is less...provoke[ing] diminished prices that disincentive national production. [Also] when importations of wheat and wheat flour are increased, national production decreases...What follows is that there is no correspondence between the model of consumption and national production capacities. The national model of consumption adapts more and more to massive food donations and the politics of liberalized [trade] importations. Thus, food donations are orienting the structure of national production to a new structure of consumption based on imported prime materials” (1993: 44-47). Furthermore, Plaza et. al. study in Riberalta, discusses that “municipalities demonstrate that instead of looking for solutions for the problem [of malnutrition], they always maintain the traditional distribution [of food donations] of milk, cookies; foods composed basically of carbohydrates, sugars and oils. These attitudes demonstrate that [municipalities] want to only satisfy the desire to eat, more than provide nourishment. This also occurs in the municipal city of El Alto in La Paz...which shows that high costs, lack of quality, credibility and transparency are outcomes of contracts for the implementation of school breakfast programs” (2002: 3).

### *Disadvantages*

Syntheses of numerous unfavorable opinions were: that the food donations are a deception. Since it is food from other countries we don't know how long it has been stored. When we get together in the mother's meetings, we talk about how these food donations are *not* nutritious, but that the quinoa and wheat that we produce *are* nutritious. Some children say that some of the foods from the donations make them ill. The canned sardines are not good, they make our children ill."

The auxiliary nurse, Ivan, explained: "at the last CAI meeting in the hospital I told them that the sardines are giving the kids diarrhea. Also that before the food donations, the kids used to eat puffed wheat and other products from home, and now they don't eat these anymore."

As is evident by the opinions of both the local beneficiaries and the professionals who work in the region, the general tendency among the population is one of somewhat ambiguous acceptance. While some people have a blind faith that it "must be good if the institutions are giving it to us," others are more reluctant because they do not know much about the origin of these foods, plus that they are somewhat alien to their "traditional" foods. But, worries about the foods "not being fresh," "smelling bad," "causing diarrhea and malnutrition," and "changing food behaviors," does not warrant the attitude that "because it is free, you have to accept it." As one man stated, "If the institutions give it to us, we can't reject it because some of us do not have anything to eat in the morning." Coming to a head here is a lack of historic memory, political connections, and institutions replacing communal organizing and solidarity. Historically speaking, the region is being culturally and environmentally degraded to the point where some people cannot feed themselves properly, while simultaneously "traditional" foods are being replaced with "modern" foods that undermine traditional meals and their nutrient values. Food donations are



not “bad” per se, as one man expressed how they help during droughts and poor harvests. But they are a drop-down imposition from the outside, and do not support dialogue and solutions from the inside. Or, as the director of a grassroots ecology organization in Sucre said, “The [food donation programs] do not build from local knowledge and practices, but rather ignore them.” As another man commented, “I’d prefer seeds.” The outcome of the changing food behaviors is showing results of an increasing incorporation of locals into the market system. As numerous people expressed, “People are more likely now to sell their crops and buy noodles, whereas before they would trade them for fruit from the *Valle* and quinoa from the *Cordillera*.” Thus, food donation can also contribute to jeopardizing centuries of *trueque*—the social cultural exchange of a variety of nutrient rich foods between the four ecological floors.

The municipality of Rumi Mayu receives food donations for three programs, from three distinct national programs that link back to one main food source distributor —the World Food Program (WFP). The elementary and high school breakfast and lunch programs are headed by the PAI; the pre-school food program is run by PAN<sup>156</sup>; and the food for work programs is overseen directly by DRIPAD, which is also responsible for overseeing the financial and administrative component of all three programs and reports back to WFP. While all of these programs donated enriched white flour, white rice, sugar and oil, there were some slight variations of foods, and the scheduled delivery times and variety. For example, the pre-schools

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<sup>156</sup> Each of these programs has a counterpart. For example, PAN is financed by five counterparts: the state government; municipalities; Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); WFP, and bilateral Italian development aid. IDB pays all of the salaries, except those of the director and the administrative staff.

would alternately receive powdered soymilk, *api*, quinoa, and lentils, while the elementary and high school would receive tea, *api*, and canned sardines. On extremely rare occasions, the municipality would purchase marmalade from the women's cooperative in the *Valle* communities. Although I was aware of the foods prepared in the pre-schools and in the elementary schools in the other communities, I would see on a daily basis what was served at the Rumi Mayu elementary / high school during 2004 and some of 2005, as my son studied there. Breakfast was a standard diluted tea with sugar and occasionally *api*, and bread. Lunch varied a little between rice soup, boiled rice with a few slivers of sardines; rice with some potatoes and sardines; etc.

The intention of the World Food Program, PAN, and PAI was not for children to just eat white bread and diluted tea heavily sweetened with sugar, with the main lunch staple being rice. Families were to contribute potatoes and vegetables. They were also responsible for making the bread with food donations, and providing the firewood for cooking. Potato quotas per family were allotted according to the number of children that they had in school; likewise for the firewood quota. Sunday was bread-baking day, which followed a rotating list based on the families of each student. Four to six mothers would take turns baking breads; occasionally the fathers would work the wood-fired adobe ovens.<sup>157</sup> Bread was

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<sup>157</sup> During one of my turns for baking bread, my husband helped out preparing the dough, etc.; he was the only male. Only three other mothers showed up that day. Working from 8:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, with a lunch and dinner break, we baked 796 individualized round breads. One father was in charge of totaling up the breads, storing them in the depository and doling them out each day during the school week. After adding up our day's production, he said, "It's not enough; you need to produce 850 breads in all." Tired and sweaty, we responded, "Sorry, that's all we're doing for today."

calculated for the week and stored in the dispensary with the donated foods. There was no required quota for vegetables or other foods, but families were expected to provide some; this rarely if ever happened. A school garden was planted on approximately a  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre space; some cabbage and green onions survived on the rains, as the garden was extremely neglected. According to a PAN employee at the time, “The teachers have no interest. Plus, the water is irregular, as it’s frequently cut off, or by the time it reaches the school it’s only a trickle. Also, the animals would get in, and no one would fix the fence.” In the end, the garden turned out to be a garbage dump for sardine cans and plastic bags; literally hundreds of rusty metal cans were piled up in the corner of the garden.

Potatoes dominated the conversation at the family school meetings. The school director or teachers rarely attended the meetings. It was run by the school committee, who were voted in by the families. Meetings were monthly and obligatory for at least one family representative to attend; my husband and /or I would participate in the meetings. They started out with a roll call, readings of the notes from the previous meeting, and then who owed what. Payments included the fines owed for not attending a previous meeting; and who owed their monthly quota of potatoes and firewood. The list was always extensive, and much debate would ensue. Meetings began around 8:00 pm, and would continue until 11:00 to 1:00 am. During our attendance, no other topics relevant to education or nutrition occurred, with two exceptions: first, was the major scandal of the year, when food donations were stolen from the depository; and secondly was when the new district director

attended a meeting with a majority of the teachers, to present himself and his educational agenda (see Chapter 7).

The break-in occurred over the week-end; foods stolen from the school food dispensary included flour, sugar, oil, and rice. Everyone was baffled, and there was no indication of who it was and why. At the parent-teacher meeting it was decided that the best way to find out was to consult with the local traditional healer and quasi-shaman; in the end, however, it was unsuccessful. But in the meantime there were no supplies for the school breakfast and lunch program for the remainder of the school year. An attempt was made to collect money to purchase foods, and one of the local family storeowners volunteered to buy them. However, the plan fell through when it was learned that she was going to buy the foods in Sucre, and then sell it out of her store at retail prices for a profit (i.e., cooking oil purchased in Sucre for 6.00 *bolivianos* would be sold from her store for 7.50 *bolivianos*). Around the same time the pre-schools had run out of food, and waited two weeks for the next delivery. During this time the families stopped sending their children to school (9:00 – 12:00), indicating that perhaps the education that the children received there was secondary for them. Since there were no students, the teachers and cooks did not work, and their pay was reduced. The coordinator of the program said that this and some of the other ways that they are treated (see references to educational workshop in Chapter 7), “really affects their interest and enthusiasm for their work.”

As noted, there are many factors affecting the daily consumption of nutritious diets. A better understanding of this by all could lead to increased participation and support for school gardens, and home and hospital/health post gardens, and for better

use of food donations through the preparations of more nutrient rich food combinations (combining local whole wheat with the wheat flour, preparing *lagua* with vegetables and a protein source, etc). Furthermore, if families believed that school meals were important, and wanted them to continue, they would be better prepared to continue the program on their own with local agricultural production. It was also a lost opportunity for health professionals and teachers to develop better relationships with families, and to discuss nutrition within the local context along with other health issues, and how to better meet these needs.

An interesting observation is that when the schools did not have the food donations, they did not try to organize a collection of foods from their own production. The elementary and high school had made an attempt to purchase similar foods to replace the stolen foods. But why did they not want to contribute their own foods, or purchase other foods that were more nutritious? Could it be that they did not have enough production, or enough cash? But, many people did seem willing to chip in to purchase oil, flour, rice and sugar from the local storeowner, until they realized that she was in it for a profit. Could it be that these food donations are not only changing food behaviors of the children, but that families also view school breakfast to *be* white bread, and lunch to be based on rice?

Lastly, food donations in the municipality appeared to be utilized as a political ploy by the mayor; feeding all of the children could make him look good and help in gaining votes. It was one of his pet projects and a way that he could reach into almost all households, as almost everyone had children or grandchildren in school. Food donations were also highly visible, with children running around with

their bowls of food in hand. The high malnutrition rates enabled the mayor to establish project proposals with the international food programs, and *could* have been used as an avenue to long term nutritional improvement of children and their families; however, the mayor's actions did not display such a goal. For example, the municipality budget included the purchase of vegetable seeds and for travel expenses and lodging for the two coordinators of the PAN and PAI program to attend nutrition workshops in the city. Both of the coordinators were male, had children but were not responsible for preparing their own children's meals, and had no prior experience with nutrition programs. One of the coordinators had attended a nutrition workshop prior to starting his job, while the other coordinator had no nutrition related education. Earlier on in the project, both coordinators were scheduled to participate in a week-long UNICEF sponsored nutrition workshop in Cochabamba.<sup>158</sup> However, they did not go; as the coordinator of the PAN program, Gerónimo, explained, "The money was in the budget, but the mayor wouldn't give it to us." We also discussed the seeds and garden programs. Gerónimo told me that not one of the pre-school programs or elementary schools had gardens, but that the year before a few pre-schools did. "This year we have no seeds. The mayor bought some seeds with UNICEF funds but we haven't received them. The UNICEF coordinator from Cochabamba came to Rumi Mayu about a month ago, to talk to the mayor. She told him to give us the seeds. But so far he hasn't given them to us, and I'm afraid to

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<sup>158</sup> UNICEF provides supportive services (educational workshops) and other minimally financed assistance to the municipality, which is included in the POA (Annual Operative Plan). In 2004, the financed vegetable seeds for the pre-schools. In 2005 they financed kitchenware (pots, pans, dishes, etc.) for the pre-schools.

bother him because I could lose my job.”<sup>159</sup> Another major obstacle to the garden program is water. The mayor did not attempt to improve the town’s flow of water to support the garden. He also never met with the school director and teachers to promote the importance of these gardens and/or develop strategies for their sustainability. It was more about bringing in project money and to enhance political performance.

### **Folklore Performances in Exchange for Food Donations**

Several months after living in Rumi Mayu, I heard that a group of foreign evaluators were coming to assess the school food donation program. The mayor announced that even in Europe “people are talking about Rumi Mayu’s school lunch programs”; the buzz was that don Jorge was putting Rumi Mayu “on the map” with his great projects. I later attended the evaluation meeting, which was held at the school in a *Valle* community; there I learned that the evaluators were from Bolivia, Peru, Canada, and the Netherlands.

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<sup>159</sup> While the coordinator of the PAI program is locally hired by the mayor, the coordinator of PAN is indirectly paid by BID. The following is a synthesized version by the PAN coordinator, Julio: “Apparently the mayor don Jorge gave the seeds to the elementary schools. When doña Ellie went to visit several communities, she asked the pre-school educators about the gardens, and they told her that they didn’t receive the seeds. However later on she noticed some pathetic vegetable plants growing in the elementary schools. She later found out that the mayor had given the seeds to the elementary schools, but no one was taking responsibility for these seeds. The schools didn’t even take care of the planting, care and harvesting of the garden. That’s why the Rumi Mayu school garden hasn’t produced much. Infuriated, the doña Ellie went to talk with the don Jorge. When he opened his door to let her in, he tried to shut the door on Gerónimo and me. However, doña Ellie insisted that we come in too. She asked about what happened to the seeds. Don Jorge tried to pretend that the seeds were in the dispensary, and didn’t acknowledge that he gave the seeds to the elementary schools. [Why did he take the seeds from the pre-schools and give it to the elementary schools? Was it a political move?] Anyway, don Jorge sent doña Ellie to the dispensary with Jaime [accountant, who is in charge of the dispensary]. Jaime showed doña Ellie, Gerónimo and me some left over seeds packets. Doña Ellie went back to talk with don Jorge and demanded that all of the seeds be replaced, and that a receipt be given to, and signed by, the pre-school educators and facilitators on receiving the seeds. Since then don Jorge hasn’t spoken with me [they live in the same boarding house], and Gerónimo’s job is on the line—he’s paid by the municipality, whereas, I’m paid by BID.”

The evaluation process was slow to begin; first, we had to wait for the evaluators to arrive (two hours), and then we waited more for the “traditional” looking school children from the higher altitude community to come and entertain the evaluators (another hour). This particular *Valle* community is on a slice of fertile land that hugs the river’s edge, and is hedged between steep mountains ranges. Family farms interlace the area, with the center of the community containing the school, small family store, and the agricultural forestry nursery of PROAGRO. The mayor had organized the following activities: a dance performance in the school courtyard; informal talks between himself and the regional director of PROAGRO, with the PMA evaluators; a performance from the traditionally dressed school children from the higher elevation community that included singing, poetry recitals, brief interview demonstration, the gifting of locally weaved wool ponchos for each of the evaluators, and a focus group session with eight local women and two men leaning against the window observing. Other attendees were mainly local children and some adults checking out the event, several local teachers, a few WFP employees, one regional PAN and PAI employee, a man selling local oranges, and one television cameraman, who had been brought from Sucre to capture a segment for the evening news.

While waiting for the school children from the *Altura* to arrive, the evaluators (and myself) were invited to sit in a classroom. The mayor introduced me to the three woman evaluators: Canadian, Peruvian and Bolivian. The Canadian and Bolivian women were friendly and fairly open, but the Peruvian, who appeared to be in charge, refused to shake my hand, and while turning her head murmured, “She



looks like a gringa.” The Bolivian woman, an economist, was implementing the regional diagnostics that had 20 indicators for criteria analysis (droughts, poverty levels, electricity agricultural conditions, production levels, food security, etc.). At one table sat the two evaluators, the mayor and the PROAGRO employee. I sat at the adjoining table with two of the evaluators, and two teachers. We were served boiled peanuts, *mote* (large corn kernels), and local goat cheese. After chit-chatting for a bit, we then talked a little about the local agriculture. The Bolivian economist said, “If they don’t commercialize their products, they will lose all of their traditional crops.” This led the conversation to how people sell their local products to buy noodles. The two evaluators suddenly noticed that the rest of the evaluation team was talking with the PROAGRO agricultural director and mayor, so they moved to their table. I could hear them talking about the agricultural potential of the region, and the projected goals of PROAGRO; a major goal was increasing the production of lemons “because like coca, there are three harvests per year.” The point of this conversation was to demonstrate that the communities should have a more stable agricultural production and income in the future. (As mentioned previously, PROAGRO pulled out their programs in 2009.)

The children from the *Altura* arrived; dressed in their hand-woven traditional clothes, they were left waiting in another classroom. (Apparently, they had been told only that that morning about the evaluation.) All the kids were sitting at the desks in a semi-circle. Chairs for the three woman evaluators were placed in a straight line facing the students. The mayor, don Jorge began with his introduction of thanks to the evaluators for the food donations, and then the teacher presented the fifteen

students (first to fourth graders), and asked them to talk to the evaluators. Prolonged silence ensued. The teacher, Verónica, then explained, “They’re timid, they don’t know what to say.” Veronica prompted the students some more, while telling the evaluator about how well these students do in school. However the students were apparently uncomfortable, and struggling for something to say; so, the teacher asked them to sing a song. Afterwards, she had two girls write on the board to demonstrate their bilingual skills; one student wrote a song in Quechua, and the other a song in Spanish:<sup>160</sup>

Quechua: Takiy muyuq wayra

*Muyuq wayrapi muyuririspá  
Ripusaq Kaymanta  
Sichus chinkasaq sirhus  
Wañusak nirikuwankinachu*

*Ima llapaqchus pakayllamanta  
Munasakurqahchiq  
Larq’a kantupi chhullunkajina  
Wáqanakunapaq.*<sup>161</sup>

Spanish: Los días de la semana

*El Lunes nació una niña  
El Martes la bautizaron  
El Miércoles fue a la escuela  
E Jueves se casó  
El Viernes ya estaba vieja  
El Sábado se murió*

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<sup>160</sup> Although the 1994 education reforms stressed bilingual education, this was poorly implemented in the municipality. However, to the best of my knowledge, profesora Maria was the only teacher who systematically taught elementary school in both Quechua and Spanish. She would teach the first half of the school year in Quechua, and the second half of the year in Spanish.

<sup>161</sup> Quechua translation to Spanish: “*El canto del viento que gira: Viene el viento gira, me voy de aquí, quizás me pierdo. Me estabas diciendo que voy a morir, que haría para ocultarme de nuestro amor; igual que el hielo de los arroyos, lloraremos.*” Spanish translation to English: “*The song of the spinning wind: The wind comes spinning, I’m leaving here, perhaps I’ll lose myself. You were telling me that I’m going to die, what will I do to hide myself from our love; just like the ice in the streams, we will weep.*”

*El Domingo la enterraron  
Con flores en el cajón.*<sup>162</sup>

These poems were chosen to demonstrate bilingualism acquisition, and make public an inter-cultural dimension that valorizes a regional ethnic dress, language, culture and tradition. On numerous other occasions these same school children were chosen by the mayor, don Jorge, to perform at similar events because of their colorful appearance and bi-lingual skills. Although don Jorge illuminated their culture and skills, this did not go much further; for example, he did not promote bi-lingual education in any of the other municipal schools, or enhance other cultural practices. In this sense, the enactment also reveals how the children are made to perform for the evaluators, and demonstrate their worthiness to receive food donations. Máximo Quisbert, an Aymara sociologist in his essay *Dilemas de los caminos de interculturalidad en Bolivia* (Dilemmas in the road to interculturality in Bolivia), correlates that “through interactions with the disciplinary colonial [government] and later the State, the indigenous pueblos have been converted into intercultural subjects, as evidenced in economic activities that develop fairs and [festivities to attain financing]” (cited in Koen de Munter, 2009: 35).

The singing and poetry reading of the two girls was followed by a recital of another girl, who asked the teacher if she could recite a poem that she had learned at home; it was about the rich people buying and taking over the land of the campesinos, and how they are exploited. It was a lovely poem, recited with feeling, which seemed to make an impression on the evaluators. I was truly surprised, and

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<sup>162</sup> Spanish translation to English: “The Days of the Week: On Monday, a child is born. On Tuesday, she is baptized. On Wednesday, she went to school. On Thursday, she was married. On Friday, she was old. On Saturday, she died. On Sunday, she was buried, with flowers on her casket.”

thought that the teacher had revealed herself to be a radical—however, afterwards I learned that the poem had been improvised by the girl; the teacher was unaware of the content that she would recite, and had been embarrassed. The mayor, don Jorge, interjected that the students had been asking him about the food donations. Obviously, he did not want a spontaneous interaction or conversation to surface, but rather a controlled performance, and so here re-focused the group: “The children are concerned if you’re going to discontinue the program.”

Then Verónica came up with another activity, one that she was just starting to teach them in school. The students played reporters; they pulled out a few small tape recorders and briefly interviewed the evaluators. Apparently this was unplanned, as the students had no formal questions prepared. The interview went as follows:

*Student:* What was your motive to come here?

*Canadian Evaluator:* To visit, to see how things are going.

*Student:* What do you think of our traditional clothing?

*Peruvian Evaluator:* Very nice.

*Bolivian Evaluator:* How was your harvest this year?

*Student:* This year is was very poor because it didn’t rain much.

*Mayor (don Jorge):* The students really value this project. They are very content with the donations that you give us.

*Bolivian evaluator:* What foods do your families give to complement the school meals?

*Students:* Potatoes, sugar, all that they can, some give what they can.

*Peruvian Evaluator:* How many years have you been teaching these students?  
(*Question directed to the teacher.*)

*Teacher:* 5 years.

*Peruvian Evaluator:* Is it difficult to teach them in both Quechua and Spanish?

*Teacher:* I haven’t had any problems. For me it’s better to teach in the mother tongue. I teach the first half of the year in Quechua, and the second half of the year in Spanish.

*Peruvian Evaluator:* Your traditions are very nice, they’re marvelous. They value their identity. Has this had an impact on the adults?

*Teacher:* Of course, but the adults want the children to learn Spanish.

*Evaluators:* Thank you very much.

*Teacher:* We’re here to serve you. Thank you.

The evaluators got up, talked briefly with a few people standing outside the classroom, and then went to another classroom to conduct their focus group with the women who work with the marmalade cooperative (see Chapter 4). After that, they left. The meeting about food donations was held at the elementary school in a *Valle* community. Yet, for the planned performance for the evaluators, the mayor had the school children and their teachers trucked in from a higher elevation community in the *Altura*, because their appearance was more “indigenous.” Obviously, the scene was designed to dazzle the evaluators with traditionally dressed Quechua Indian children who were literate in both Quechua and Spanish, yet set in the physical surrounding of a valley community that had changed their clothing fashion a long time ago, but which holds much agricultural potential due to its lush environment and semi-prosperous women’s group who produce marmalade.<sup>163</sup> Although most children in the valley continue to speak both Quechua and Spanish, they do not read and write in Quechua, nor do they fit the stereotypical “native” Indian profile. The mayor’s actions coincide with what Quisbert articulates as the ways in which, “the creole and mestiza elite have appropriated interculturality in their discourses, as a strategy to stay in the spaces of political power. They appropriate the discourse of inclusion, recognition, acceptance and respect for the indigenous cultures to gain important electoral candidacies” (Quisbert, 2009: 240).

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<sup>163</sup> The communities in the *Valle* produce lemons year-round, peanuts, and other fruits and vegetables have brought them into closer contact with city life and forms of Bolivian modernity. Their traditional dress of cotton spun from local trees, has long been replaced by western clothing mostly obtained from shop after shop of used clothing stores and outside venders on the streets of “Mercado Campesino” in the city of Sucre.

In sum, let me state clearly that I am not against school meal programs or food donations for addressing undernourishment and malnutrition. Obviously, during crisis situations food donations are imperative to prevent starvation, and the physical and cognitive irreversible consequences of malnutrition. And, although the prevalence of malnutrition is high in the municipality, the food donations might have filled bellies but they did not turn into nutritious meals, nor improve understandings about nutrition. As one *Cordillera* man connects, “If the institutions give it to us we can’t reject it, because some of us do not have anything to eat in the morning. Therefore we have to take the food, but I don’t think that it’s nutritious.” Instead of bringing people together to better understand the root causes of malnutrition, and plan ahead, outcomes led to changing food behaviors and increased participation with the market. It could also affect the cultural economy” of exchange (*trueque*), and undermine the consumption of local nutrient rich crops that help form a balance in the regional diet. As described by another *Altura* man, “It’s another type of food...My children eat at the school, they’re becoming more accustomed to these foods [rice], and they don’t want to eat our foods, our cereals.” Areas that seem to be overlooked are related to how the neglect of the school curriculum or the teachers to attach importance to local food production could undervalue local knowledge and healthy food consumption; how the disregard of the local health post to work with schools and agricultural committees and programs can turn a blind eye to changes in production and consumption of healthy foods that contribute to the health of the community; and, finally, how the failure of local politicians and citizens to develop a critical conceptual understanding of long-term outcomes to such programs and

changes may undermine the ability of local communities to maintain their local ecology as a natural resource base.<sup>164</sup> In this way too food donations could also produce not only a disintegration at the social level, but also a divorce from our surroundings. As one woman from the Cordillera analyzes:

Before we received food donations we knew how to cook everything, *aji de papa*, *sopa de quinua*, queso con papa, all of these foods; these are the foods that the children took with them for lunch...Now they eat boiled white rice; I believe that they get this every days...I think that they should give them *tojorí*, bread made with whole wheat, or side dishes like *mote* because pure rice is not that nutritious, and also bread made with white flour is yucky. I think that the food donations are given in vain because they don't make us stronger.

### **Inferences and the Appeal of “Para Vivir Bien”<sup>165</sup>**

What I try to show in this chapter is the process in which environmental change and food production and consumption is occurring, and the responses (or lack of) to these changes, and the actors involved. Malnutrition is a significant problem, yet it is not prioritized as one. Resigned local acceptance could be linked to a colonial past manifested in self-blame (i.e., laziness); an infatuation with “progress” (large superfluous buildings, parallel wide roads, etc.); limited access to information and/or alternative options; and/or an uncritical analysis of historical evolution and

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<sup>164</sup> Grillo discusses how “food aid” ... “weaken[s] the agrarian capacity of the ‘benefited’ countries by competing with national production. Through this massive exportation of food imperialism is able to make the food demand of the big cities of the Third World independent of the agricultural and pastoral production of their own countries since their food provision depends on what is imported” Grillo, 1998: 264).

<sup>165</sup> In addition to the state’s concepts of *vivir bien*, the World Bank country report presents how economically disadvantage people view a similar concept, that of well-being. “To the poor, of course, well-being and being well fed have always been synonymous. When they are asked to define “well-being,” poor Bolivians respond with “food” (youth in Cochabamba), “to be well fed” (middle-aged men in Oruro), “not lacking food” (women in La Paz) or “not to be worried because we know we will have food every day” (women in Tarija). They define the absence of well-being as “bad food” and “to be worried about food” (2002: 1).

contemporary political ecology. Similarly, the work of outside employees to the region might be influenced by a colonial past that view campesinos/as as “just campesinos/as,” and accordingly they fulfill their job functions; some with more cultural understandings than others, but few with a deep understanding of the region’s historical past, or inclinations to seek innovations based on the contemporary socio-environmental situation. For the most part, there still are no inclusive or robust coordinated efforts between the actors (local to state to financial institutions) to better understand and dialogue about the ecological dynamics and changes, its relationship with food sovereignty and “living well.” These outcomes coincide with Escobar’s analysis of nutrition policies in Colombia over 15 years ago, “Planners are notorious for not seeing themselves as part of the system for which they plan...bypass[ing] local situations and concrete historical forces” 1995: 122). But, as pointed out in Chapters 2 and 3, this does not signify that local people have become “*vencido*” (defeated), but rather that they work around the issues, utilizing what they can in the best ways that they can, instead of being able to work with the national, municipal, state, and institutional financed employees in actions of “collectivity.”

When municipal coordination does occur, meetings are generally held between the top officials (mayor, town council members, school district director, and departmental district health director) and NGO directors. PPL is designed to bring representatives of all local actors to the table, such as the DILOS<sup>166</sup> and *junta*

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<sup>166</sup> The Local Health Directive (*Dirección Local de Salud*, DILOS) in each municipality is comprised of the mayor, the health center director, and the president of the Civic Committee. It is technically the highest decision making body in regards to health, at the local level.



*vecinal*; however, the members of these committees generally go along with the “leaders” of the municipality, and many newer suggestions (i.e., installing the water tank, fixing the sewage filtering system) are frequently ignored, or are overly prolonged. Also, as previously mentioned, municipal meetings are open to the public, but they are rarely attended, unless it is a personal affair (pigs shot in the plaza), or a major community issue (compensation for lost agricultural products because of flooding).

Food donations by the World Food Program can save lives in emergency situations; however, school food aid and work for food assistance programs can provoke more problems than solve. As discussed throughout this chapter, food donations distract from addressing local agricultural needs and production, analyzing the broader social, political and economic conditions, and building upon health cultural and solidarity practices, such as reciprocity and *ayni*. Although the intention of the food aid delivered to Rumi Mayu was to be complimented by local foods, this rarely happened. To the contrary, families frequently cooked less and relied more on the school foods to feed their children. Breakfasts and lunches generally consisted of foods that are high in carbohydrates and sugars; thus, they were not nutrient rich meals. Over the long run, these foods were recognized for changing food behaviors, and run the risk of contributing to newer health problems associated with western societies, i.e. obesity and diabetes.

If *vivir bien* is widely undertaken sincerely and genuinely with intellectual thought composed of intersectional analyses and inter-disciplinary participation, policy programs such as zero malnutrition and decolonized education, could guide

the processes of beneficial and healthful changes. For example, zero malnutrition policies comes out of a fundamental recognition that to confront “ the problem of malnutrition will require an intersectional intervention, that is massive, coordinated, integral, sustained in the time [place], and with the majority participation of a organized community” (MSD, 2006:3). It is a program that views malnutrition as a “reflection of economic inequality and the infliction of a sociopolitical crisis” (ibid: 3). Its intersectional approach is:

based in the coordinated work between various sectors, ministries and government institutions that look to optimize the use of resources and intervene not only in the detection, treatment and rehabilitation of malnourished cases, particularly in children under 5 years of age and fertile women, but also in the other causes of the problem: endowed water security, food security and sovereignty, education, local productive projects, etc. that modify and improve not only the food consumption of malnourished children and their family or those in risk of malnourishment, but also their surroundings, that allow them with dignity to achieve a longer and better life expectancy. (ibid: 4).

In light of the national program *Desnutrición Cero*, and its affiliation with interculturality and decolonization, consorted intersectional efforts could take a curative and preventive measure, simultaneously focusing on immediate and long term resolutions. Corresponding with the testimonies of local citizens and my observations, high priorities for the municipality of Rumi Mayu—in addition to early detection and treatment—are water and ecological rejuvenation (forestation, soil and grassland improvement, and enhanced agricultural practices), and the building of solidarity “across the borders” (Mohanty, 2003)—geographic space, class, gender and ethnicity that aim to dismantle patriarchy and other power hierarchies. Healthy culturally practices should also be recognized, fomented, and supported (i.e.,

*trueque, ayni*, traditional healing, etc.). An important distinction analyzed by the Mexican social anthropologist, Salas Valenzuela, in regards to food consumption in the context of interculturality is that:

The question of food has been well studied by the biological sciences, as well as the social sciences. However, in terms of elaborating public policies and specific programs to improve the conditions of life, health and nutrition of poorer populations, the theme of food has a hegemonic dominance over nutritional sciences—amid various kinds of tensions arising from the vagueness and lack of clarity on key aspects of the object of study, as a result of a predominate adhesion with the positivist paradigm. Its public health origin, its affiliation with medicine, and the fact that this is sustained by biology has influenced the conceptual development of the discipline with an undeniable bias in favor of biology, standardization, [and] pharmacology, that gives power to issue self-attribution judgments about the ways individuals and populations eat (2009: 279)...An integrative comprehension of food means recognizing that food is not solely reduced to questions of diet or adequate consumptions and nutrition, but also it implies an equitable distribution of development resources, the design of effective interventions that considers a profound *emic* point of view, the sensitization / training of health personnel in interculturality, etc. (ibid: 283).

On all levels (from early detection and curative measures to preventive actions, and from the local people to state employees), education is a fundamental key to acknowledging, understanding, and valorizing the importance of nutrition, food consumption changes and their nutritional implications, and the ethical morals of food sovereignty.<sup>167</sup> In this regards, much can be learned from the fields of health literacy and ecological literacy. Both aim to enhance learning that builds from personal experience and knowledge, extending outwards towards the development of

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<sup>167</sup> Numerous studies conclude that “maternal knowledge of nutrition is an important determinant of a child’s nutritional status (Webb and Block, 2003, cited in Morales et. al., 2005: 12). “Barooah (2002), in line with Basu and Foster (1998), uses a broader concept of literacy and indicates that importance of a literate person’s influence on a illiterate mother when they have a good degree of interaction.” (ibid: 13). According to the 1998 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), “a third of [Bolivian] mothers have fewer than three years of schooling, and less than 10 percent have completed secondary education (ibid:13).

analytic skills, which are then transferable into meaningful actions containing positive impacts on living systems and the lives of people. Both build on what Columbian sociologist Fals Borda calls a “people’s science” (1987: 330).

### **Health and Ecological Literacy**

The relationship between the environment and nutrition is multi-directional, and their healthy interrelationships are imperative to adequately achieve “*vivir bien*.” The role of health literacy, as well as ecological literacy, could open venues for locals to gain a fuller conceptualization of changing environments; its effects on agricultural production, the consumption of nutritional foods, and its effects on health and well-being. With apertures opening up through new government policies, local citizens need to be informed and part of the change to actually put in practice the concepts of decolonization and interculturality. Thus, a vital position of interculturality is to gain deeper understandings of history (memory revitalization) and its influences on the present as a means to dismantle the consequences of colonization (racism, sexism, patriarchy and oppression) in order to build, broaden, and deepen respect for oneself and the other; “a respect that means taking seriously the other culture [and gender inter-relationships], giving opportunities to develop in interaction with other cultures, and for that to be possible, it is important that these cultures have a public status” (Ansion, 2009: 56).

Health literacy is still considered a “newly emerging field of inquiry and practice, focuses on literacy concerns within the context of health” (Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2004: 20). It explores the accessibility and

dissemination of comprehensible health related information, and medical misconceptions, within the cultural contemporary context.<sup>168</sup> Health literacy is considered as “a shared function of cultural, social, and individual factors...[therefore,] both the causes and the remedies for limited health literacy rest with our cultural and social framework, the health and education systems that serve it, and the interactions between these factors” (ibid: 32). A straightforward, concise definition of health literacy used by the Institute of Medicine of National Academies is:

The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. (Ratzan and Parker, 2000, cited in Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2004:20.)

As noted throughout this thesis, health (nutrition) is intrinsically connected with the environment (ecology). The goal of ecological literacy implies more than simply developing a basic knowledge of ecological concepts and the natural world. It means seeing the world as an inter-connected whole, and the ability to understand elemental constructions, patterns and processes of scientific knowledge, and their complex relations to both people and nature. Educational processes should re-

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<sup>168</sup> As pointed out in a study by McGuire and López, “the major part of the [Bolivian] population does not understand the damage caused by malnutrition in the capacity of learning, resistance to diseases and productivity. The misinformation about nutrition—including the belief that you have to eat meat and drink milk to have a healthy diet—is circulated, especially between health personnel. For this reason, nutritional education and trainings should be revised for doctors, nurses and nutritionists, and they should focus on preventive measures and advise...Nutritional ignorance is especially a problem at the municipal level, where they enact many programs that affect nutrition—water and sewerage systems, health, roads, agriculture, employment, social protection, education—without coordination, without communication between agencies, without linkages with macro politics, and sometimes in conflict with each other. The result is that these synergies are not exploited, the services overlap or leave gaps in coverage, and nutrition does not improve. A better understanding about the importance of nutrition and how to improve it is very important in order to use the existing resources more efficiently” (2001:viii)

connect or strengthen people with their habitat; enhance an understanding of living systems and core ecological concepts; and develop a sense of collective responsibility to solve ecological problems, while simultaneously building nurturing and resilient communities. Pragmatically, an interdisciplinary, exploratory and experimental approach is necessary to effectively approach the complexities of social and ecological concerns.

Malnutrition is complex, and has been studied from all angles. Its causes and consequences are well documented, but the political willpower or the importance allocated to nutrition in Rumi Mayu is bureaucratically controlled, piecemeal and discontinuous. Strengthening and rejuvenating local knowledge and practices about food consumption, and examining new foods available on the market in light of experiences and nutrition science could help unite forces to eliminate malnutrition. “For knowledge to be useful, it must start with the peasants’ self-understanding, and then proceed to build a system of communication involving peasants, [state] functionaries, and researchers” (Escobar, 1995: 152). These approaches need to be multi-pronged and consider local culture and the historic, social environmental content. In order to truly eradicate malnutrition, deeper understandings about the importance of nutrition, its relationship to health, well-being and society need to be critically discussed and valued by all who live and work in the community.

## CHAPTER 7

### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND RURAL SCHOOLING: CHALLENGES FOR DECOLONIZATION, INTER/INTRACULTURALITY, AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

*I'm not a writer or a mestizo literary person. I'm indio. An indio who thinks; who has ideas; who creates ideas.*<sup>169</sup>

--Fausto Reinaga

Six male high school students from the *Altura TP internado* (boarding school) organized an environmental /health exhibit stand to share their knowledge, concerns and interests of local ecological issues to the larger community. Hearing about the upcoming health fair being sponsored by the NGO Esperanza Bolivia, the students took the knowledge that they developed from their interactions with a group of university student volunteers (*Ecoclubes*) associated with the *Asociación Sucrense de Ecología* (ASE), with what they learned from their biology/chemistry classroom teacher, Marisol. Bridging their learnings and conversations, they enthusiastically developed an informative community venue to further open up awareness and dialogue around the local environment and its relationship with health issues. Their stand stood out, literally and thematically, in a sensational way. The other stands—which were certainly of equal relevance and importance—displayed themes directly related to health topics (respiratory infections, diarrheal disease, Chagas disease), in relation to the work of the local health services and the NGOs. However, the students' ecology table showed something a little different: it demonstrated how local knowledge and knowledge acquired through academia sparked a sense of self-actualization based on an affinity of place and a concern for its well-being. Locals meandered around the table, as the six proud teenagers engaged them in conversation about their huge poster and soil samples that illustrated the environment changes occurring in their communities, and how this is affecting their health.

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<sup>169</sup> *No soy escritor ni literato mestizo. Yo soy indio. Un indio que piensa: que hace ideas; que crea ideas* Fausto Reinaga (1906-1994), was a prominent indigenous intellectual figure, a “writer, thinker (ensayista), philosopher, activist, and Quechua-Aymara indigenous ideologue...who published around 32 works” (Ticona Alejo, 2010: 36). Reinaga drew the theory of decolonization to the forefront to combat indigenous domination stating that “it wasn’t enough to know colonialism, but it would have to be destroyed” (ibid: 38).. “Mi ambición es forjar una ideología india; una ideología de mi raza” [My ambition is to forge an indigenous ideology; an ideology from my race.](Reinaga 1970/2001: 453, cited in Ticona Alejo, 2010: 38). Ticona explains that Reinaga is calling for “a commitment to Indianidad (Indianness) or the reversal of colonialism and the re-establishment of Tawantinsuyu [the pre-colonial four *suyu* regions of the Andean indigenous territory]...his conviction is to think and construct something new and different from colonialism, starting from what exists. In other words, based on the experiences of the indigenous pueblos, to annihilate colonialism and re-establish a postcolonial *Pachakuti*. The criolla-mestiza [racially mixed] intellectuals criticized him by their interpretation as simple a return to the past...Indianidad is equivalent to a Pachakuti. Literary in Aymara and Quechua it means ‘time-space, cosmos, deep change.’ This refers to the reversal of one era to another that is liberating” (ibid).

In diverse ways Rumi Mayuns continue to respond to the practicality of their daily situations, juxtaposed with how “knowledge is situated,”<sup>170</sup> as alliances, struggles and power are re-configured. The opening illustration to this chapter demonstrates how some new ideas and knowledge are introduced into communities — how they get picked up, circulated and incorporated with local knowledge. New thoughts and concepts are — and can be — introduced, digested and exchanged within the community in varied forums. But, what ignites deeper thought processing and expressions of knowledge to be comprehended and utilized in ways that do not impose, but rather provoke solidarity and altruistic expressions for social justices and a quality of life for the larger community and region? For comparative purposes, the school exhibit, along with the *madres vigilantes* and the hospital, was organized by the NGOs Esperanza and Plan International, plus the hospital, while the *internado* environmental health exhibit was self-initiated by six high school students.<sup>171</sup> What dynamics coalesced to spark the students to spend their leisure time to meet, develop their exhibit, and stand for hours under the sun to share information on a topic that people weren’t really asking for? What can we learn from this that could contribute to increased incidences of similar spontaneous surges to address local issues and concerns?

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<sup>170</sup> For a feminist analysis on the relationship between science and knowledge see Haraway, (1988), Lather (1991), and Harding, (1987). Of particular relevance here is Lather’s scrutiny on the myths of scientific neutrality and objectivity, and Harding’s emphasis that all knowledge is situated and all knowers are socially located. For me, this does not imply that any knowledge is pure or solely right. All knowledge, like people, consists of varying shades of good and evil. Knowledge is imperfect, subjugated to how it is interpreted, quantified, fractionalized, molded, disseminated, discarded, reassembled, utilized and recycled. All of which is influenced by personal cognition, mental propensities (empathetic to cold hearted), and experiences, that is situated historically, socially, and economically.



In reflection, for many years the school teachers had been teaching students about biology and chemistry; however, we do not often see how students understand and incorporate this knowledge, especially in relation with their everyday lives. Plan International has been working with schools and the hospital for years. In recent years, they have focused on training elementary teachers about how to incorporate play-like teaching methods into their classrooms. Plan nurses taught, and had continued to train, *madres vigilantes* to recognize respiratory and diarrheal diseases, and malnutrition, and to refer sick children to the hospital.<sup>172</sup> Yet despite nearly two decades of these particular learning instructions and interactions, not many, or any, notable acts of self-actualization were very apparent. For example, while the *madres vigilantes* would occasionally visit a mother and child and, if need be, refer them to the hospital, they did not organize on their own. They acted more as receptors and transmitters of other's knowledge, rather than incorporating these concepts into newer formations that could evolve into their own ways of doing things—contributing to communal ways, and being pro-active agents within the development paradigm. Contrary to this, the *madres vigilantes* get together if and when Plan calls a meeting; they participated in a health fair when Plan organized it, being rewarded with prizes of plastic buckets and blankets.<sup>173</sup> But when it was over, they went home.

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<sup>172</sup> In 2004, all of the *madres vigilantes* were women, with the exception of one man from a *valle* community who had recently joined. Plan International continues to work in the region; however, their presence in the health sector has dramatically decreased.

<sup>173</sup> Plan would organize communal meetings with the hospital and *madres vigilantes*...The meetings are good...but lacked handing the car keys over to the driver...Plan structured the meetings very well with posters, and ... that would demonstrate how many children are malnourished...diarrhea....

In comparison, the events leading up to the six high school students' ecology exhibit was a confluence of several factors. I first met the high school boys and Marisol, their teacher, when they participated in my narrative project. Marisol was also the supervisor of the *internado*. Although she was very supportive of the narrative project and the *ecoclubes* program, she did not have the time to actively participant; she already had two jobs. I linked up the *ecoclubes* with the *internado* high school students. The *ecoclubes* also worked with one of the other *internados* (*Internado Altura C*). They offered to work with the *Cabeza del Valle internado*, but the priest alleged that the students had no time (although he did support their participation in the narrative project).

I had stumbled upon the university students' *ecoclubes* when I visited ASE one afternoon, to interview the director.<sup>174</sup> Their work came up in our conversation. The *ecoclubes* were self initiated, and consisted of approximately 12 university students studying in Sucre. Although they were not on the ASE payroll, they did provide the *ecoclubes* with materials and logistical support. The uniqueness of the *ecoclubes* was that the participants came from varied academic disciplinary studies (accountant, singer, artist, physical education teacher, elementary teacher, computer

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All of this is extremely important data, but a deeper analysis was missing, and innovative action plans for addressing the root issues were overlooked. ..

<sup>174</sup> The Asociación Sucrense de Ecología (ASE) was founded in October 1989 in Sucre, Bolivia. Their overarching goal is to "protect, defend and promote the conservation of the environment and natural resources in the Department of Chuquisaca" (insert website). ASE focuses on implementing small studies and projects, and educational campaigns. In 2004/05, the university students had self organized, meeting at the ASE office and café that was next door. They developed most of their own materials with the some financial support from ASE, and logistical collaboration from the secretary. Unfortunately, some internal disagreements surfaced between the group, partly due to differences in opinion regarding the level of radical approaches they should pursue. The group split; the members that continued with ASE shortly afterwards went their own ways, and I lost contact with the others.

science, environmental sciences, biology, etc.), and were united by their interests and concerns about the environment. They were not yet “professionals,” or environmental “experts,” or worked for an NGO. Using their assorted knowledge and experiences they communally sought political ecology, social, cultural, health, and environmentally related information, and taught each other. They self-organized and developed educational materials, made different products with recycled materials (trash cans, book marks), participated in urban educational events, and organized environmental youth clubs.

Impressed with their energy, inquisitiveness, and creativity, I asked if they would be interested in helping to form ecology clubs with the high school students at the *internados* in the municipality of Rumi Mayu. Given that most of their work occurred in the peripheral barrios of Sucre, they were thrilled to have the opportunity to have some practical contact with the rural environment that they were learning about and defending. They had had very little experience with rural areas and communities; some of them had had no contact with rural communities and culture at all, and none of them had previously been to the municipality of Rumi Mayu. On the other side, in Rumi Mayu itself, the high school students learned about their environment through the practicalities of their lives and family livelihoods, and through biology and chemistry books being taught by Marisol. They had very limited contact with other youth around their age from urban areas, especially those that shared an interest in their rural communities. When these two groups met, a

synergy of learning sparked, later resulting in the self-actualization of the ecology exhibit.<sup>175</sup>

In a much simplified interpretation, a mutual exchange of respect, sharing, and knowledge occurred between the two groups. The ASE ecology club took the time, effort, interest and care to arrive at the *internado*, after an exhaustive ride in the back of a truck, lugging environmental manuals and brochures for each student, in addition to an array of ideas and activities to engage with. The similarities between the young people—students who appreciated and were concerned about the environment—trumped their dissimilarities: urban/rural, university/high school, ethnicity, gender, and class. The ecology club discussed with the high school students their concerns and experiences: what they learned from books and conversations with others; environmental rights and Bolivian laws; the mechanics to organize an ecological club; and displays of an array of recycled artisan products that they had produced. Intermingled with these conversations, the ecology club organized several interactive activities, such as the writing and performance of short theatrical skits, artisan paper making, and the making of recycled products. The *internado* students took them on walks around the community, exploring the natural environment and life in the *campo*, and discussing their agricultural practices, culture and traditions. The high school students took care of the university students; they shared their “place,” inviting them to their foods and daily routines, accommodating

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<sup>175</sup> In another event, the ActionAid evaluation of Proagro in the region, some of these students as well as other,...Knowledge was being discounted because of a sort of territorial ownership...All the great work that was being displayed and videotaped was to demonstrate the success of the Proagro efforts carried out with ActionAids money. The worker felt that this might jeopardize her position, instead of enhance her professional career by showing collaboration and innovation. While this act seemed to cause her annoyance, the high school students acted befuddled and hurt.

sleeping spaces, playing soccer, and making sure that they were as comfortable as could be.

As noted, a spin-off of the synergy of these events led to the high school environmental/health exhibit at the health fair; the encounters and exchanges between high school rural Quechua campesinos students, with a woman biology/school teacher, urban university female and male students from diverse disciplines, and a gringa who loves “places” in rural Bolivia (its people, culture and ecology), were drawn together around a similar, yet broad concern: the environment, health and development, with ideas materializing through the Community Fair, coordinated by two NGOs and the municipal hospital. The confluence of these events exemplify what the Colombian sociologist Fals Borda termed “a new type of ‘revolutionary science’ that integrates academic research and scholarly knowledge with that of popular culture and local knowledge that will transform the relations of power, by means of sharing historical, cultural and daily experiences (Fals Borda, 1987: 330).<sup>176</sup>

This chapter examines different sites of everyday “place-based knowledge”<sup>177</sup> and knowledge production, which occurs in schools as well as in non-formal settings. Building on the previous chapters, I explore how these different

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<sup>176</sup> This methodology pursues avenues that do not negate the relevance of academia, nor diminish the richness of civil society, but rather aims for approaches that extract and enhance the more positive contributions of both realms of reality, and formulate techniques which unite them: “reenchantment bridges,” which “work towards producing a science that truly liberates, a knowledge for life” (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1991: 32). Similar alliances are also promoted by Escobar collaborative solidarity “to build bridges between political-intellectual conversations in social movements about environment, development, and so on and conversations in the academy about corresponding issues...[so] the academy [can] be closer to the drumming” (2008: 25)

<sup>177</sup> See Escobar 2003 ad 2008.

venues of knowledge compete, outrank, corroborate and complement each other, despite their lack of prearranged coordination. The chapter is divided into several sections. Following a background synopsis on schooling in the municipality of Rumi Mayu within the context of national policies, I explore and discuss influences of schooling on every day practices, and some of these effects on local knowledge, self-actualization, and the present directions that the municipality is embarking upon. Secondly, I discuss a high school narrative project that I organized to value local knowledge through the eyes, ears, and minds of two small groups of high school students. While this small project did not evolve as intended or meet its goals, the outcomes do reveal the contradictions that teachers and schools face as part of a liberating process within a culture of enduring colonialism. In an attempt to contribute to the current overall national goals for “decolonizing education,” and constructing “interculturality” in Bolivia, I conclude with thoughts on how critical pedagogy (predominately of the feminist and revolutionary veins) and “multiliteracies” could play a role in the self-actualization of indigenous communities, in order to construct actions and changes that build upon local knowledge in solidarity with regional and global social movements—forces which strive for local sustainable and healthier practices of development.

### **Rumi Mayu Schooling and National Policies**

Since I began my field research in 2004, much has changed around the official state vision of formal education in Bolivia. At the time, Rumi Mayu teachers were still struggling with how to incorporate the 1994 Bolivian Education Reform

Law #1565 into their classrooms. Major contentions revolved around the usages of both the Quechua and Spanish languages, interactive teaching methodologies, constructivism, lectures and rote teaching, getting children to learn, and the participatory involvement of teachers, parents, students and administrators. These daily challenges are imparted from the incorporation of intercultural and bilingual national policies into the educational system, which can be traced to two main influences: the 1990 World Conference of Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand; and, the neoliberal ideologies to increase and strengthen human capital for economic growth through education (see Contreras, 2000; Albó and Anaya, 2003; Machaca Benito, 2005; and Gustafson, 2009), that included the reorientation of teacher formation, regional / cultural focused curriculums, and parental involvement.<sup>178</sup>

Although the theoretical terminologies and concepts of “interculturality” and “decolonization” teaching/learning strategies had *not* been part of local language throughout the municipality of Rumi Mayu, the general concepts of what they stand for and imply have been, and continue to be, there in both subliminal and cognizant ways. As noted throughout the previous chapters, the inflictions of a colonial past scarred the municipality; its diverse geographical contours and cultural roots transforming in response to daily occurrences and interactions. These transitions are voiced by the elders throughout Rumi Mayu, with some traces recorded in historic documents and writings.

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<sup>178</sup> Lopez and Jung (1998) points out that the Summer Language Institute was among the first to solicit bi-lingual education as a way to teach the “indios” Spanish, evangelizer and acculturate them to fit into the national life.

The concrete building of the schools began in the municipality of Rumi Mayu after the 1952 Revolution. As one man from the Altura community summarized, “we got together...built a school, and solicited a teacher...At that time we would always go by the school to see what was going on.” As the schools multiplied and expanded their grade levels and subject areas, a dependence on national and provincial resources (teachers, curriculums, textbooks) increased. Local knowledge became increasingly separate from school knowledge. Local knowledge is expressed orally in Quechua, and school knowledge is taught through reading and writing in Spanish. Many parents complied with this, and continue to, as a means to learn the language of the “oppressor” to not be bamboozled, and to “get ahead.” However, much of the directions that schooling took were part of a civilizing and homogenization process. As Choque Canqui and Quisbert Quispe describe:

The rural school, according to its methods, according to its programs, according to its language is foreign to the reality of our culture and it not only looks to convert the *indio* into a mestizo species without definition or personality, but it equally persists on their assimilation into an occidental and capitalistic culture (2006: 194).

How has this “homogenization” process played out in Rumi Mayu? What have been the responses to the three educational reforms, as they have been remodeled from a neoliberal discourse to an “Andean” socialism that amplifies “decolonization” and “inter/intraculturality? It is necessary to keep in mind that although the municipality is considered as one cultural and ethnic group (Quechua), the people and communities vary in ways influenced by the evolution of their geographic place (i.e., four ecological floors), as well as individual, family,



communal, regional, and global experiences. For example, some individuals, families and communities are more isolated, while others have more experiences and interactions expanding from frequent visits with other families and communities, to migrating to the Chapare region (Bolivia), Argentina, and Spain. And although some people may rarely leave their communities, more and more of the global world is visiting them through their radios, televisions and, in very recent years, computers.

### **Schooling: What's it Good For?**

Each year, increasing numbers of rural young adults graduate high school throughout Bolivia. 2004 was the first high school graduation in the town of Rumi Mayu; a total of seven students graduated. There are two other high schools in the municipality; one located in the *Altura*, and the other as you begin to ascend to the *Cordillera*, where the six high school *ecoclubes* boys resided at the *internado Altura TP*. Each of these communities has an *internado*, for the youth whose communities are a long walking distance from the high schools. Students generally attend the high school nearest to their community. As students progress through the grade levels, their daily lives shift from five hours of schooling intermingled with the family/communal rural responsibilities immersed in cultural rituals, to a prominently institutionalized school environment surrounded by concrete and bricks, enmeshed in rational thoughts, and technological and market oriented curriculum subjects.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Regalsky and Laurie refer to this as the “hidden curriculum,” in other words, “the hidden political signification of schooling” (2007: 232). They “explain how interactions in the classroom are not only connected to hidden or unconscious meanings but also to more materially rooted power structures” (ibid: 234). Peter McLaren uses an example by Australian educator Doug White to compare the

Throughout these years, in so many different ways, parents, grandparents and other Rumi Mayuns have contributed to the construction, maintenance, and functioning of the schools and the *internados*. They chip in with the building construction and renovations, clean up when school is not in session, sleep on the school grounds to protect its infrastructure and contents, collect fire wood for cooking, share portions of their potato harvest, make bread for morning breakfast, and observe teachers and directors from a distance. Teachers come from faraway places to teach their children. The school directors and district director are also transplants to the municipality, working to make sure that the teachers teach, the students learn, and the schools are maintained. A whole network is in place to keep the schools functioning for the dissemination and sharing of knowledge, so that Rumi Mayuns and their municipality can “develop,” and “progress.”

To better understand what parents want from the schools that they work so hard to have, I interviewed and conversed with parents about what they would like their children to be learning. Most people reacted with surprise to the question, as if no one had ever asked them this before. Many responded spontaneously with, simply, “I don’t know.” But, within minutes, other thoughts came to their mind. I soon noticed distinctions between the limited responses given about the *academic orientations* of learning, versus its *abstract components*. Regarding the academics, almost everyone’s main concern was for their children to learn to “read and write,”

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hidden curriculum with multinational curriculum. “[T]he multinational curriculum is the curriculum of disembodied universals, of the mind as an information-processing machine, of concepts and skills without moral and social judgment but with enormous manipulative power. That curriculum proposed the elevation of abstract skills over particular content, of universal cognitive principles over the actual conditions of life” (McLaren, 2003:88) For other perspectives on the hidden curriculum, see Henry Giroux (1983); Jorjo Torres (1996); Michael Apple (1990); and Peter McLaren (2003).

although relatively few people demand that students being able to read and write in Quechua. Several other parents mentioned math; one man was especially concerned about his child being able to “multiply.” Comments about art were mentioned, and music was referenced with concerns of it becoming a “lost” skill. Besides music, art, and reading and writing in Quechua, no one mentioned other aspects of local knowledge (agricultural, medicinal). No one talked about different subject areas, or more specialized forms of academic learning, such as, history, biology, chemistry, algebra, etc. However, what was more fascinating was what parents had to say about the abstracts of learning. Although I did not separate my questions into academics and abstract learning because I believe they are intertwined, I did notice a more relaxed and familiar response and conversational tone about the more intangible aspects of learning. They said:

Students should learn not to be timid, like we adults. They should learn about their rights. They should think (*que tengan un poco de mentalidad*)...and comprehend what is happening in the community. They should learn to be respectful...and respect the community. The young people (*los jovenes*) should greet us when we pass each other on the street. They need to acquire more knowledge...and, develop more practical skills for a quality of life.

These responses left me with the impression that parents expect schooling to instill “character” in their children, and to develop an ability to comprehend and analyze, in order to become strong leaders who can move their communities to a better “quality of life.” The prominent importance given to reading and writing could be related to their own struggles with this, and their parents and grandparents

being denied access to it, and the humiliation and degradation that they encountered—lived—by not understanding laws written in Spanish that denied them.

Although most people in the municipality appear to be highly literate in a cultural sense, demonstrating strong oral skills and abstract thinking, the inability to *read and write* is snarled in these painful experiences, and with an association of inferiority that has been used to marginalize and suppress them—the illiterate ones who cannot read the Spanish written words. As one woman expressed, demonstrating the lingering of colonialism: “I know very little because we’re not very intelligent; although our husbands do know a little more than us. Everyone [referring to Spanish speaking mestizos and whites] knows better than we do because we’re like animals. We don’t know anything about the written word; this is the fault of our parents. For this reason, we say, ‘Do you think that they’re just going to give us animals’ knowledge?’ No, so we need to learn to read. Now age is of no relevance, all ages can read.” Thus, a priority is given to reading and writing of words, which became a necessity to be able to acquire and maintain their rights (land, culture, language, ways of being), and seen as the way to live with dignity. Enmeshed within an increased valuing that is placed on the reading and writing of the written word, is the danger of ways in which it could undermine the power of abstract and analytic thinking and oral expression. I will return more to these thoughts of cognitive thinking and orality, at different places throughout the chapter.

These sacrifices, these goals, are largely driven by a common belief, or expectation, throughout the municipality that high school graduates will move on to

become “professionals,” thus avoiding the personal economic struggles of their parents, and with outcomes that could potentially benefit their families and communities. As summed up by one man who lives in the *Cabecera del Valle*, “Our children have to continue studying to become professionals; they should at least become teachers,<sup>180</sup> so that they don’t suffer like we do here in the countryside (*campo*).” Many parents stressed that they would like their children to return and help in their community. A synthesis that represents what parents said follows:

After our children graduate, they have to help the community, do something good for the community. They need to learn to read and write, learn the laws; we need leaders in our communities, in our organizations. I’d like my son to help the community become more comprehensive and understanding of the changes. The youth should keep studying and become professionals. It depends on them what they want to be, but we need lawyers and doctors in our communities. We need doctors or dentists to help improve the community. I would like my son to be a professor. I would like them to keep studying to become professors and nurses. The youth should learn about growing fruit, because we parents aren’t always going to be here to maintain them, but if they learn about agriculture they can take care of themselves. We would like our children to learn about land rights, so they don’t abandon our land. They need to help improve the quality of life here, the plantations, provide technical assistance, become an agronomist or veterinarian, so the *campesinos* will return to their communities.

These aspirations demonstrate a connection to the land and an affinity and desire to take care of, and better, their “place.” They have hopes that the youth will study and return to the region to help move it forward both financially,

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<sup>180</sup> I understand the usage of the wording “*at least a teacher*,” to infer that it is a more attainable job profession for rural youth, and not in terms of teaching being a lesser profession. It is more common to see rural youth study at the Normal School than at the university, which until recently was dominated by the lighter skin middle / upper classes, studying for professions such as lawyers or medical doctors. It is a well-know common irony in Bolivia that there are numerous medical doctors and lawyers, yet there continues to exist much injustice and unnecessary suffering, as illustrated from poor health indicators. Most medical doctors and lawyers strive to work at higher status jobs in the cities, and thus earn higher salaries.

professionally and in practical terms (“growing fruit trees...to maintain them[selves]”). Although many of the parents defer career choices to their children’s discretion, most expressed that in general the youth should choose professions that correspond to status jobs or what they see as “modern” day jobs. Thus, higher values are placed on “professions” such as doctors and nurses over previous local positions such as *curanderos* (local healers) and *parteros* (midwives).<sup>181</sup> Schools and other venues of learning, such as knowledge disseminated in NGO workshops, and health trainings (weighing babies, *madres vigilantes*) tilt what is learned, and the values that are placed on learning. It is part of the dominate discourse that these professions can bandage the wounds, and that progress is attained by becoming a “professional”. Aspirations to better the community are seen through the profession in which people get ahead financially—the learned professions of the NGO and health care worker. Not to deny that the beneficial aspects of the learning that come along with these professions can contribute to the community, as demonstrated by the convergence of learning by the six *internado* students environmental exhibit, but that the flip side is that it is often accomplished through an actual *devaluing* of local knowledge through the placing of “western” knowledge and professions on a high pedestal, or as the only option for “getting ahead.”

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<sup>181</sup> During a conversation in 2010 with some young people, they told me about Zulema. She had graduated high school in 2007, studied auxiliary nursing for 2 years in Sucre, and recently landed a job in one of the more remote Valle communities. They expressed an awe about her accomplishment, ability to land a job in the municipality (not far from her home), and earn a good steady wage. Zulema’s pay seemed to astonish them the most; they repeated several times her earnings.

In this way, schools and other institutions (mainstream development NGOs and municipal employees) tend to disseminate basic standardized knowledge to the youth (and other rural citizens), that respond to and fill the niches for global mercantilism (“*mercantilismo mundial*”), demonstrating contemporary reconfigurations and realignments within a neocolonial discourse. Although in time a few graduates will achieve a university degree, and possibly earn decent wages and work in the municipality, the majority of graduates will most likely earn bare survival (low paid) wages, fulfilling the new modern needs sectors in the lower level labor niche, in an increasing market and urbanized economy.<sup>182</sup>

Consequently, many youth are being compromised from developing deeper understandings, and other ways of being, seeing and doing, and developing constructive criticism and analytic skills which might contribute to a more well-rounded awareness of socio political issues to enhance healthier and innovative participation in their communities, as well as the larger picture. Anthropologist Denise Arnold and Aymara linguist Juan de Dios Yapita trace an “ontological

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<sup>182</sup> A few might become teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, architects, agronomists and so forth; so will fortunately return to the municipality, but much of this depends on employment opportunities. According to the Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario (CEDLA), “While the economy generates an employment at an annual rate of 4.8%, the destruction of jobs has reached a rate of 8.9%. 8,9%. In absolute numbers, it is estimated that between 2008 and 2009 about 74,000 jobs have been destroyed in the central cities... Unemployment has risen significantly among young men and women (15 to 24 years), with unprecedented rates that exceed 21% (5 to 7 points over the previous year); in these groups there is a high percentage of first time job seekers (applicants) who encounter a more restrictive situation in which to find employment than before... The risk of prolonged downturn in the demand for labor will not only result in high levels of unemployment, but also in the intensification of work exploitation, poor working conditions, and the violations of worker’s rights within the working class. This trend will be exacerbated in the country because of the profound weakening of organizational and collective action of workers, compounded by unemployment, a greater subordination to corporate interests and government policies, that instead of protecting workers, they continue to function to maintain the privileges that benefit the accumulation of capital, at the expense of the lives of the majority of the population” (CEDLA, December, 2009).

depredation” of indigenous peoples in Bolivia to a colonial discounting of orality, including weavings, ceramics, and other forms of non-western textual literacy, that is then superimposed with alphabetic writing. Incorporating a theoretical lens taken from Jacques Derrida’s analyses of “the violence of the letter,” they explore systems of textual domination in “the Western world’s arrogance for thinking of writing as if it were a form of knowledge superior to the orality of other cultures” (2006: 7).

### **Rumi Mayu Schools**

Elementary school sessions began at 8:00 during the summer months, and 8:30 during the winter months. The town of Rumi Mayu held school hours on split class sessions for lack of space; elementary students passed classes in the morning, and middle/high school students in the afternoon. Two black iron rod metal gates opened onto the center cemented patio of the school, which was surrounded on three sides by single adobe classrooms and the director/administration office, whose doors opened onto the patio. Behind the administration office was a dingy, smoked stained lean-two one room kitchen, a large outdoor adobe oven, a mound of gnarly firewood, a large barren garden area, and two neglected open-aired narrow bathrooms. In one corner of the patio was a raised cemented stage, with the graceful dangling limbs of a *molle* tree intruding over the wall from the adjacent neighbor’s yard, providing a large circle of shade, color, and character.

Depending on the season, the town livened up around 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning as the children from the outer communities emerged from the three entering roads to Rumi Mayu, and meshed with the town’s children. They chattered and fooled around in a chaotic childish rhythm as they filed into the school. Hanging from a limb belonging to the *molle* tree was a big old rusty bell. Its deep, metal clang announced the start of the school session; the time for the children to form their respective lines facing the cement stage draped by the tree. Horizontal rows of school children were arranged according to grade level, gender (boy or girl), and size (smaller to larger). A teacher or two would hop on the stage to bring order to the school day, while the teachers for each of the respective classes would pace up and down the rows telling the children to be quiet and stand straight. All caps were to be removed to demonstrate respect and civilized behavior. Under the intense morning sunrays, the teacher(s) would say a few disciplinary words, and lead a patriotic song. On special occasions, such as *Día del Niño/a* (Children’s



Day), some children would get on stage and recite a poem, sing a song, or perform an act. After the ceremonious day's commencement, like novice little soldiers, the rows of children marched into their respective classroom.

The black iron rod gates closed anywhere from the chiming of the school bell, to the end of the performance. The gate was guarded by either the director or a teacher holding a long bamboo rod. Latecomers were required to stand quietly on the external side of the doors for 10 - 15 minutes or so, waiting for the remainder of laggards to accumulate. At the appropriate moment, the director or teacher would say some scolding words, open the gate, and whack the buttock of each student as they singled filed into the school patio. Our son was occasionally among the latecomers, so I would later ask if he had missed part of the lesson. His usually response was, "no, nothing," or "the teacher wasn't in the classroom yet," or "she was busy checking some kid's work."

While the structure and mask of schooling can still be very colonial, there are differences in the ways that teachers, students, parents, grandparents, administrators, and others are molding schooling with varying ideologies and tools, and their own interpretation and incorporation of these within the constraints of the overall system (personnel wise and bureaucratically). In many ways most of these actors seem to conform to most of the rules of the system, but in small ways are localizing and personalizing their implementation. The principal or teacher who guards the black metal gate to halt all latecomers to teach students a lesson by whacking their buttocks—a learned act of how to discipline that they have softened to be somewhat of a light tap on the backside. Many mornings the gates are unattended, and left a crack open.

Teachers are in a very influential position, as they belong to "the only state institution really to take root in Bolivia after the National 1952 Revolution...until the 1994 Popular Participation Law": the school (Regalsky and Nina, 2007: 235). Although other institutions (the Church, health, town government,

NGOs) have intensified their presence throughout the municipality of Rumi Mayu, the schools have a greater influence on the minds and future of the youth, and consequently the region. There are numerous factors that influence how the structure of education enhances or disadvantages local knowledge. Here, I would like to continue with what I perceive as the top three outstanding challenges to formal education valuing and support of local knowledge in Rumi Mayu: 1. the domineering position of the school and the hierarchical structuring of school directors; 2. the insular consideration toward language, culture and a sense of place; and 3. the myopic view/presence of parent and communal participation in the school system.

Imbued throughout the educational system is not only a hierarchical structure, but also a stifling presence. The school (physically and instructionally) marks a clear distinction between two living/operational spaces that periodically overlap: the knowledge and practices of rural agricultural daily existence; and standardized (civilizing / technical) knowledge and routines that tend to come from urban centers. It is not that the knowledge attained from schooling cannot, or does not, help local knowledge and communities, and vice versa; it is that these connections are rarely made and built upon. The Bolivian educational system is an evolutionary adaptation of early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century mainstream western formal education systems, and acts as an institutional link between the local/regional population and the jurisdictional authority of the state.<sup>183</sup> As Regalsky and Nina elucidate:

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<sup>183</sup> In 1944, the Bolivian government signed a contract with the United States that resulted in establishing the institution known as *Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Educación, SCIDE* (Inter-American Educational Cooperation Service i), to provide assistance and technical cooperation in the field of education. In 1948, this evolved into the *Programa Educativo Cooperativo* (Cooperative Education Program) that promoted rural education, industrial education, and vocational

Historically the school has introduced itself as directly representing the nation state authority and its symbolic system within the rural community space. As part of a 'foreign' power it has spoken a 'foreign' language, endangered the cohesive effects of oral institutions and has given urban answers to rural problems. It has been seen by rural people as a convenient exit door to help the migration of excess population to cities. At the same time, however, it has also become an entry door to legitimate the state *criollo* hispanicizing hegemony through its hidden and explicit curricula. Hornberger (1988) and Aikman (1999) note that the authoritarian Spanish-language pedagogy reinforces the school's character as a non-indigenous island within the community. However, Aikman (1999) concludes that, from the point of view of the indigenous people with whom she worked in Peru (the Arakmbut), 'a limited period of attendance is a *rite de passage* to becoming part of the national society; that is, to being recognized as 'civilized people' with a modern consciousness' (2007: 89; 239-240).

The phrase "non-indigenous island within the community," provides a visual representation of how the school, as well as the health post and mayor's office, operate within the shared geographical space of Rumi Mayu. More cumbersome than the actual "foreignness" of these institutionalized infrastructures, are the stark differences between their ways of thinking, communicating (Quechua/Spanish), daily livelihoods and lifestyles, and the uncomfortable expressions that many *campesinos* reveal when they pass through these institutional doors. Actually differences can be very stimulating, enriching, and creative; however, it is how these living space separations are maintained and the impositions of one mind thought and action over another without much dialogue and deeper reflections and analysis of

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agriculture. "The majority of the teaching in these rural schools was routine, formal, verbal and almost completely foreign to the basic requirements of the life in the community and the real interests of the children and general population... Furthermore, the educational materials that were adopted for the whole country, were originally prepared for use in solely in urban education... At the same time, it can be perceived as pedagogically poor, and lacking in social sensitivity" (Choque Canqui and Quisbert Quispe, 2006:182-183).

one's actions with the local to global context that is problematic. It is like neighbors who live side by side, wave when passing, but never talk.

In Aurolyn Luykx's book chapter about sexual discrimination in Bolivian schools, she relates her own observations with Erickson (1950: 258-61), whereby he "notes that entering school is a special time filled with danger for children; it is a period in which he or she discovers new interior resources, or succumbs to feelings of inferiority and alienation in finding one's inability to confront the present challenges" (Luykx, 1996: 227). While Luykx focuses on Aymara school children in the altiplano region of Bolivia, Erickson's concepts are analogous with my own observations of school children in the municipality of Rumi Mayu, as well as with many adults when they go to the health post/hospital and mayor's office. As further explained by Erikson, " 'the school appears to be a culture within itself, with its own objectives and limits, its own achievements and deceptions.' Children's concepts of their own self value become threatened when they 'begin to feel that the color of their skin, the origins of their parents, or the style of their clothing, and not their desire and will to learn, determines their value' " (cited in Luykx, 1996: 228).

In many ways the school culture in Rumi Mayu is different from the local/regional culture. Although appreciations of cultural ways are portrayed (mainly dances and some music), a strong desire for newness, change and renovation is expressed. Prejudices were more livelihood based, than on skin color. I would hear derogatory comments around the origins and professions of parents and ancestors, accompanied with labeling people according to their clothing and level of cleanliness. An association of the colonial linkage of rural life as backwards seems

to be what most people are trying to shed; ironically, the profession of most rural people is connected with being a *campesino* (farmer). Endured economic hardships and lack of regional/national support for small farmers has contributed to acts of self-deprecation and a devaluing of rural livelihoods (campesinos, weavers, wine/singani makers/ cuaranderos, pateros , etc.). Most of the teachers (as well as school administrators, doctors and municipal workers) come from humble rural backgrounds. Their successes are entwined in a school system that provided them with opportunities to explore new regions of the country, meet other people, have a job that holds an appreciable level of status, provides them with more clout, and pays them enough to survive on; in other words, “discover[ing] new interior [as well as exterior] resources” (ibid: 227). That system is the one main venue that they know of as a means to help others out of their rural conundrum. In diverse and contradictory ways it has also become a dividing line.

The top echelon of the educational hierarchy in the municipality of Rumi Mayo is the district director and five local school directors. Each community with a sizable school has a director. In the three communities that house both a high school and an elementary school, there is one director that oversees them both. There are 24 elementary schools with a small student population located in remote communities; eight of these elementary schools have only one professor. These schools fall within the jurisdiction of the nearest school system under the rubric of a nucleus (*nucleo*) supervised by the *nucleo* director. The district director and *nucleo* directors are all male. From 2004 to 2010, there have been three different district directors. Teachers are frequently rotated in and out of the municipality; generally staying for

one to three years. A few have been transferred to another community within the municipality, and I know of five teachers that have stayed long term, over five years. Although several teachers express an affinity to the region, most of the teachers that I spoke with did not want to work in Rumi Mayu, and were counting the days to be transferred.

While the district director has the first and last words on the overall education plan (this includes teacher transfers), he coordinates with the *nucleo* directors to elaborate the yearly POAs (*Plan Operativo Anual*, Annual Work Plan). It is the directors who are largely responsible to see these plans through, and for the everyday functioning of their schools. The directors are in daily contact with the teachers, and are highly influential in the quality of education provided to students, the school dynamics, parent relationships, etc. Four out of the five male directors have worked in the municipality for over 10 years, and one was there for approximately three years. They form a sort of “boys club,” and I doubt that they realize the magnitude of influence they have on the lives of the youth, their families, and the directions of the communities. The directors would exude a profound sense of pride when they would gather in the town of Rumi Mayu to plan the next year’s POA, and the near future of the municipal educational system. Since teachers were not present at these meetings, and their inputs were not visibly sought or considered, I often wondered what the directors based their plans and strategies on.<sup>184</sup>

Coincidentally one afternoon after one of these POA planning meetings, one of the school directors and I both bummed a ride to an *Altura* community.

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<sup>184</sup> I spoke with several teachers about the POAs, and they complained that they were not involved in the POAs.

During the course of our one and a half hour truck ride, he enthusiastically explained their newly devised *educación humanística* (humanistic education) plan for the municipality. Similar to the mayor's and USAID's development visions to divide up the municipality economically and agriculturally (mono crops), the directors were segmenting the high school curriculum according to gender and geographic locations. The town of Rumi Mayu's high school was to focus on academic subjects to prepare students for the university, while the other two *Altura* high schools were to focus on technical skills (carpentry and metalwork for the boys, and sewing for the girls). I asked, "How did you come up with this plan?" He proudly remarked, "We thought it up in our meeting. We've been discussing the plan all morning, and tomorrow we have another meeting." I mentioned that there have been similar curriculum focuses elsewhere, and published studies that have analyzed their benefits and drawbacks; I inquired, "Have you read any of the literature or studies on these curriculums?" With a stunned expression, he responded "No, we just thought it up ourselves." Our conversation continued:

Karen: Why are you separating the curriculum into academic and vocational skills along community lines?

Director: It's because the students from the town of Rumi Mayu and also the *Valle* communities have less land, and have more contact with the city. The town of Rumi Mayu is also considered urban, so these students are more apt for academic subjects. However, the students who are from the dispersed communities, their families have larger parcels of land, more agricultural skills, and are more apt for manual labor.

K: What if a student from the *Altura* high school wants to study at the university?

D: Of course they can still do that, but we want to give them a skill that they can earn money with if that doesn't work out, or if they have to work while they are studying. Most of the families do not have enough money to help support their children through the university, and anyway we doubt that many, if any, will study at the university.

K: Why do you have separate vocational skills for girls (sewing) and others for boys (carpentry, metalworking)?

D: So the girls can have a skill to earn money. Most girls will not study at the university, but she can learn to sew and knit. We are starting with carpentry and metal working for the boys, but we hope to have more workshops too, like electricity and computer sciences.

K: Can the girls study carpentry, metalworking, electrical skills, and computer sciences?

D: Right now it is only for the boys; we are still setting it up. We have a small carpentry workshop in the *Altura* community, but next year we hope to expand this and add other vocational skills. Maybe in the future if some girls are interested, they can participate in the classes.

K: Can the boys study sewing and knitting?

D: If they want to.

K: What about learning about history and other academic subject, and developing critical thinking skills?

D: Oh, they'll still learn those subjects, but they need to learn a skill so they can work and earn money.

Our conversation drifted into other alternative and innovative curriculum approaches in Bolivia, and throughout South America and their accessibility online. “Wouldn’t it be interesting and helpful to learn more about these experiences and analyze them in relation to the dynamics and needs of Rumi Mayu?” I asked. Acting perplexed, he shrugged his shoulders, as if replying, “*para qué?*” (what for), “our ideas are good.” As I saw it, this train of thought for a “new” curriculum continues along the line of “the education of the indian in his medium,” which evolved along the line of “environmental determinism,” (Larson, 2004: 38),<sup>185</sup> to a contemporary pragmatic take on education as a means to help students access employment.

Obviously, employment opportunities are fundamental for taking care of oneself and

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<sup>185</sup> Franz Tamayo, a Bolivian poet, politician and pedagogue, declared that Bolivia’s Indians supplied ‘ ninety percent of the nation’s energy,’ because the Indian was born for only one destiny: ‘to produce, to produce incessantly in whatever form, be it agricultural or mining labor, rustic manufacturing or manual service in the urban economy’” (Tamayo 1910: 64, cited in Larson, 2004: 36).



one's brother's and sister's, but what about the quality of life that is associated with these employment opportunities and the outcomes of these labors.<sup>186</sup> Garces deciphers these historical trajectories as exemplifiers in the “vigorous” adaptable nature in which subalternization “rearticulates and remodernizes itself” (Garces, 2009: 12). These plans could be associated with the background of each of the directors, who came from rural communities, and have worked their way up to positions, such as school director. Their experiences are valuable, but may lack deeper analyses on alternative ways to approach “employment ” goals that could help students to question the capitalist production model, and explore alternative “living well” employment opportunities.

Further observations in respect to the director's line of curricular reasoning are the following. First, how profound minimal access to information and diverse ideas are endemic throughout the educational institution—from those who design its orientation, to the teachers that implement visions and tools, to the students who absorb them. Lack of diverse and critically constructive information constrains understandings, informed and balanced decisions, and can place the population in a disadvantaged position.<sup>187</sup> Secondly, the insular nature of dialogue and decision-

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<sup>186</sup> While driving down Route 2 in Orange Massachusetts, in route to the dentist, I heard an NPR report of Vandana Shiva who was to be giving a talk in the region. I have searched for this news report on the NPR website, but to no avail. So, as I recall Vandana Shiva talk focused on Pakistan and about addressing poverty through the provision of economic opportunities. Her point, though, was the ironic and inhuman twists of the economic opportunities that consist of jobs in factories that build fighter jets and bombs. Is that what our education is all about? Is climbing the economic ladder to be built on the literal destruction of other people's places?

<sup>187</sup> There are numerous innovative ideas and programs that the directors and teachers could analyze and explore. For example, Arnold and Yapita (2006) emphasize ways to utilizing multiliteracies (orality, textual articulations), to enhance educational curricula, pedagogical practices, teaching/learning skills, and a sustained access to, and analysis of, information. Other works hat come

making among the several male directors, who appear to overlook the participation of teachers (those who are in daily contact with students), the students and their families, and the community (which as a whole might have other visions and ideas). Thirdly, is the narrowly boxed-in way of thinking about vocational and academic oriented professions, segregated subject areas, and gender roles. And, fourthly, are the heavily masculine perspectives and its direction that can imbalance the curriculum in favor of macho like ideas and behaviors.

### **National Educational Policies: LRE to Interculturality ↔Decolonization**

Prior to the current 2010 MAS reforms and goals, there have been several educational reforms since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. “Decolonization” first entered the picture, as one of the four pillars presented at the 1992 Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación to “achieve a society without exclusion” (Instituto Internacional de Integración Convenio Andrés Bello, 2008: 13). In 1991, the Technical Team for Aid to Education Reform (*Equipo Técnico de Apoyo a la Reforma Educativa*, ETARE), was created to develop an educational reform proposal based on the innovations of cooperative agencies, NGOs, and the Catholic Church, and the experiences of teachers and professionals, many of whom consisted of indigenous peoples (Albó and Anaya, 2003: 62). Funded by the World Bank, ETARE’s investigations and proposals highlighted the importance and benefits of sociolinguistics resulting in a

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to mind are Albó and Anaya, Benito, Cochabamba school, Reglasky, Warasata, Beni community (study on missionary), etc.

major transformation and emphasize of bi-lingual education<sup>188</sup> and its linkage with interculturality and decolonization, that transitioned into the Educational Reform Law 1565 (LRE) of 1994.<sup>189</sup> Its cornerstone was interculturality, legally inscribed in art. 1°7, stating that the Bolivian education is “intercultural and bi-lingual because it assumes the socio-cultural heterogeneity of the country in an atmosphere of respect among all Bolivian, men and women” (ibid: 73). The execution of LRE confronted “all kinds of shortcomings, gaps, and constraints accumulated over decades of collective neglect” (ibid: 87), that tripped up its implementation, refinement and evolution. Acknowledging the limitations of evaluating the advances and impacts of LRE after 20 years, Albó and Anaya highlight several major improvements: the elimination of the major bureaucracy between urban and rural education; the incorporation of professionals with diverse specialties (pedagogies and curriculum experts..., linguistics, psychologists, economists...); the existence of social participation in the educational system; the first created space of intercultural coexistence and work focus within the Bolivian state; and expansion in the teaching of bi-lingual education (ibid: 97).

Granted that these important headways have taken hold in various degrees throughout Bolivia, overall it was common knowledge that the results are still too

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<sup>188</sup> In 1989, UNICEF financed a bi-lingual project with the Guaraní to write cultural oriented school books in Guaraní. Much of these experiences, along with Guaraní writers, were incorporated into the 1994 EIB national policy (Gustafson, 67; Albó and Anaya, ).

<sup>189</sup> LRE was developed and legalized under the first administration of the now discredited Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, and was renowned throughout Latin America as being a “progressive” model; among other things, it was one of the first laws anywhere to tenuously incorporate the concept of interculturalism, which included as one highly significant aspect, in a multilingual country, bilingualism (Albó 2001: 3).

few and far between.<sup>190</sup> Opposition to LRE was swift and decisive, most importantly from the powerful teachers unions; as Luykx (1999:60) points out, the intent of the reforms was to decentralize administrative decisions, disperse the collective power of the teachers' union, and thus defuse what was traditionally one of the most serious threats to political stability. Albó and Anaya's analysis of the *sindicatos*' rejection of LRE was largely due to their fear of "losing power and control" by the reform stipulations to decentralize its administration, transfer social control to the participation of school families, and to unify the urban and rural educational systems (2003: 96). To gain acceptance and support for their dismissal of LRE the *sindicatos* "stigmatized the Reforms as alien to the reality and needs of the Bolivian education, which were imposed by North American imperialism through the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)" (ibid: 96). Gustafson points out how ETARE, and its spinoff EIB were "vilified by reform opponents as another manifestation of neoliberalism," inflaming opposition to the reforms by many teachers and NGO education workers (2009: 268).<sup>191</sup>

In my own experience, the opposition was apparent: the principles of intercultural and bilingual education were seldom, if ever, fully accepted and

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<sup>190</sup> Despite its neoliberal and World Bank connections, LRE is frequently regarded as the vanguard to the MAS educational reforms.

<sup>191</sup> Gustafson makes connections to how transforming EIB's into "neoliberal" policy created set-backs and "weighty" complications for indigenous leaders, movements and education. As he observed, "the understanding and practice of indigenous education as grassroots struggle was made more complex through its absorption into a deeply conflictive process of state transformation, EIB as an indigenous agenda had now shifted from its local conflicts in Guaraní country, where it was arrayed against the conservative racism of landlords and the assimilationist mestizaje of traditional schooling, to a distinct national frame, where its officialization tied EIB to the 'demand laws' of a 'neoliberal' regime. Reform opponents attacked EIB as a World Bank imposition aimed at busting unions and balkanizing the country or as an inauthentic and cynical embrace of indigenous languages that masked western ideologies (Patz 1999; Arnold Yapita 2006) (168).

instituted in Rumi Mayu, even as late as a decade after the original reforms. Despite the fact that the great majority of teachers were from rural communities themselves (although most were not from surrounding northern Chuquisaca department, but rather from other communities from throughout the country, including Aymara speaking communities on the altiplano), and who had managed to “urbanize” themselves through study in one of the national Normal schools, they would seldom, if ever, incorporate the principles of interculturality and bilingual education into the classroom. A prominent example of this was the general lack of any serious attempt at true bilingual education; in this particular case, the teaching and strengthening of Quechua within the Spanish pedagogical context. If performed at all, this was typically done in a perfunctory fashion: the teaching of isolated vocabulary words, an occasional short song, etc. Any bilingual Spanish / Quechua textbooks that existed—and there were indeed a number of these, published by the Ministry of Education in the late 1990s—were simply never used. Untouched stacks of textbooks were collecting dust on cluttered shelves and in locked cabinets in the school principal office.<sup>192</sup>

When I would ask why the texts were not being utilized, the answer was invariably that they were “written by outsiders and not culturally appropriate to the town and surrounding communities”; “The books for my class are pure text, the students want drawings,” “The Quechua in the books was not the same as the

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<sup>192</sup> In 2004 I took a picture of the textbooks collecting dust in a corner of the director’s office. In 2009, I took another picture of the textbooks; they had not moved. As pointed out by Anaya and Albó, “one limitation of this noble effort [production of books in different native languages] is that their usage by children is restricted to school libraries and some directors and teachers that jealousy keep them under key; they’re more concerned about inventory controls than their didactic use in the classroom” (2003: 157).

Quechua used in the communities;” “It’s better to teach in Spanish so the students will not make mistakes and develop good pronunciation.” Another reason stated was, “We don’t want to be responsible for losing or damaging a book.” My own assessment of several of the Quechua language (literature) books published in 1998 were that they were well designed and illustrated, attractive, had healthy messages, and portrayed many aspects of the Quechua culture that I had experienced. From my observations and interviews, I think that the rejection of the textbooks may reflect teachers own limited experience with reading, and more so with how to effectively teach reading to children who exhibit a broad range of learning styles and levels of cognitive abilities and nutritional well being. As one teacher from the Cordillera, Gabriela, explained,

We have books from the Education Reform, but the children don’t understand them...they’re pure text...letters and letters...they want drawings...something more didactic...I teach the fourth grade and I have students from 9 years old to 16. Most of them understand at first, but then they forget. It could be a nutrition problem...they don’t eat much.

So what texts and materials did the teachers use to teach with? They seemed to chose a variety of texts from pre-1994 teacher resource educational materials, work books published by Semilla and other Bolivian editors, and photocopied novels and academic texts purchased in the city. In 2004/5 my son, Natán, studied in the fifth and sixth grade at the Rumi Mayu elementary school. His teacher, doña Hortencia, mainly taught from the same teacher instructional materials she began teaching with over 25 years ago, and maintained comparable pedagogical techniques. This is not that unusual, as Mariana (Plan International consultant), who works with

all the municipal schools, confirmed my experience: “They are teaching just like they did 30 years ago...the methodology is the same when I learned to read and write.” However, in 2010, in conversation with the high school social studies teacher, Hernán, he told me that the “pedagogical approaches are improving because there are younger teachers being employed in the municipality, who are incorporating the *transición* (transitional) teaching model into their curriculums”; which he described as subjects areas that provide students with academic skills for the university. I asked Hernán if they knew much about the 2006 proposed educational law, “Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez.” His response was, “no.”

Students are required to purchase loose-leaf paper, and several 15cm x 15 cm binders that are held together by a string. Each subject area requires a different binder; by the end of the year the papers on which the daily lessons are written eventually bound into self hand-written books of dictation. The subject areas were math, language (Spanish orthography and literature), social studies, English, and religion. The materials are very dry and factual, generally based on a theoretical explanation followed by practical exercises (i.e. mathematical theory followed by an equation). Doña Hortencia would ask the students questions, but no classroom discussions pursued. They never heard stories or wrote their own, nor told stories (orality). (Albeit for one exception: at the end of the year the NGO Esperanza solicited stories and poems about *vinchucas* and Chagas disease to exhibit at the health fair.) Students were tested on their memorization of the subject materials at the end of each trimester. All exams were jammed into a period of approximately one week.

Doña Hortencia's teaching style was fairly representative of the mainstream approach of many teachers throughout the municipality in 2004/05, and I have yet to notice much change into 2010. Obviously, I did not observe all of the teachers, or get to know their particular "ins and outs" as I did with my son's teachers. What goes on in the classroom is greatly related to, or influenced by, the personal background of teachers and administrators, the relationship between the two, and the national/departmental/municipal educational structure. As Hargreaves and Fullan state, "teachers are largely what their schools allow them to be" (1997: 10). This, for me, includes teachers' own experiences as school children and their studies at the Normal, and how this is cycled back into the school system, community and nation. Gabriela talked about the need for depth in knowledge: "We'd like to teach more, but we need to know more...we learn the basics in the Normal...and Plan and Proagro help, but it's not enough....We need more depth."

### **School Knowledge / Local Knowledge**

Most of the teachers in the municipality of Rumi Mayu exhibited little connection with the environment and local culture, and as mentioned above, did not teach or communicate much with students or locals in the Quechua language.<sup>193</sup> The national curriculum was referred to as the "*tronco*" (trunk, as in tree), which provides the basic knowledge concepts and programs for all Bolivian children. From this, teachers should expand and develop diversified "*ramas*" (branches), according to the

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<sup>193</sup> Albó and Anaya highlight that adapting the curriculum to the rural reality was requested by social organizations in 1991-1992, and incorporated into the 1994 Educational Reforms. Article 8 stipulates that "the educational process is organized around the daily lives according to the interests of the people and the community" (2003: 69). Their 2003 assessment of the incorporation of this law into teaching practices is that "many teachers have been gradually internalizing this new orientation in their everyday practice. Others have difficulty" (ibid: 69).



local and regional needs and environment. However, the development of curriculum *ramas* is very weak, as Mariana of Plan International observed, “the curriculum is part of the law, it’s in the documents, but in practice it is not working. I would dare to say that hardly anywhere is the curriculum being implemented correctly—well, maybe there is an exception in Santa Cruz, but not in Chuquisaca. I’ve seen very little relationship with what they learn in school, with their lives in the community.” The district director, César, had similar thoughts: “Within the *reforma educativa* there is the *tronco común* (common trunk), which is the set of national plans and programs; but, within this we have an educational assembly that has specified that the knowledge in the *tronco* has to be contextualized to the region, we are *not* doing this.”<sup>194</sup>

Rarely did I see teachers talking with locals, being involved with students outside of classes, exploring the area, or showing an interest in agricultural or other activities and cultural practices. This disconnect, or disinterest, was exemplified in the attempts to implement school garden programs in a historically agricultural

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<sup>194</sup> The district director, César, expressed an awareness to adapt the curriculum according to the diverse culture and geographic needs of the region: “I believe that the history of Rumi Mayu is similar to other municipalities where I have worked before, in respect to their geography, culture, educational ambiance, health, and other aspects. Although it’s a very unique situation here in Rumi Mayu, as the culture is reflected in every community according to their geographic situation. We have high altitude regions and low valleys. Talking about this reality, I believe that we are talking about three different types of inhabitants, of three types of people with different needs with different realities. Most would say that the educational system has a single focus approach, one that does not differentiate between the three ecological regions.” Ironically, César had all the jargon and focus down, but he never demonstrated this knowledge in his actions within the school system (teachers, students, parent/school meetings, etc.). Mariana (Plan International consultant) noted a similar trait with teachers. “Every four years teachers have to update their knowledge and skills, and take an exam; achieving at least 75% to pass. This demonstrates that they have learned about constructivism theories and pedagogical practices, but I don’t see the teachers using these models in their classroom.”

region. Over the past five years, the DRIPAD food donation coordinator, Roberto, organized vegetable gardens with the high school students; ironically, the vegetable gardens have never been successful, at least not so far. The first garden attempt involved teacher participation. The garden produced some scattered cabbages and onions, but it was poorly attended to, eventually dried up, and turned into a dumping ground for the food donation sardine cans. The second garden attempt was to involve the parents; it is in the field next to the newly constructed elementary school. One parent related her experience and opinion of this:

Roberto called a meeting with all of the parents. He told us that he wanted us to help our children plant a vegetable garden. We told him that we could help build a fence, but why should we plant the garden? The teachers should teach them. We have our own fields to plant and take care of, we don't have the time. Roberto said that he would talk with the teachers. But, I don't think that the teachers want to teach about planting. They don't like to get their hands dirty.

Later on, I asked several students if they were planting a garden with their teachers. One student explained:

Yes, sometimes we go to the garden with our teachers, but they don't know how to plant. They don't really want to be there. They just stand there, and ask us to show them. They don't even know how to turn over the soil, and they're not interested to learn.

Six months later, I inquired again about the garden. The students said: "It dried up. Roberto never came back, and the teachers aren't interested."

In addition to a lack of connection to this "place," as I mentioned above, the associations with farming as a "backwards" skill—not truly considered a profession, unless these skills are acknowledged through a degree in agronomy—have

contributed to a disassociation and devaluing of farming related activities and skills.

If teachers come from a rural background inflicted with discrimination, why would they want to get involve with something that they have strived to distance themselves from? The intricacy of teaching requires more than passing on knowledge through curriculum, but also entails the internalized hang-ups of each teacher, and the ubiquitous penetrations of dominant societal prejudices.<sup>195</sup>

In discussing the lack of contextualizing the curriculum with the local and regional environment, Mariana outlined three major areas in need of attention: administration, pedagogy, and discrimination. Synthesizing Mariana's words, the following is a chain of her main thoughts:

*Administration:* One problem is administrative, because how can the district and nuclear directors send monolingual Spanish speaking teachers to communities that are Quechua? In 2003 they began what is referred to as the "*nueva estrategia de la educación boliviana* (new strategy for Bolivian education), a proposal that came from the ministry to improve some aspects of the educational reform. For example, before the disappearance of the pedagogical advisors, the ministry implemented training programs to strengthen the directors' capacities to support and help with pedagogical techniques, to take on more administrative labors, and to improve the social participation of families. But up to now, this hasn't advanced much, because of change in governments and the postponements of the educational congress.

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<sup>195</sup> Not all teachers are narrowly focused, or greatly isolated from the community. For example, the *Altura* high school biology teacher, who also worked as the supervisor of the boarding school, promoted and oversaw the care of the Proagro garden planted behind the boarding school. She also helped to organize the parents to plant a potato field. Furthermore, during a donor evaluation of Proagro's educational programs, she organized the students into groups according to their communities, and helped them prepare exhibits about their culture (food, dress, weavings, artifacts, agricultural practices, festivals, etc.). For the Esperanza health fair, she helped the students prepare an exhibit on the environmental health project, which incorporated aspects of the ecology club organized by the *Asociación Sucrense de Ecología* (ASE) and myself (I explain more about his below). Out of all of the community / school fairs, this was the only student self-initiated activity, with teacher support, and it presented a unique critique of, and in favor of, their local environment. This teacher had worked in the *Altura* school for two years, but was then transferred.

*Pedagogical:* The ministry terminated the pedagogical assessors at the beginning of last year, or the year before. There was some uncertainty about their work; supposedly they made some mistakes, and they weren't well understood by the teachers. They were too theoretical, and didn't show how to put this into practice. You know that the teachers were trained in a different way, and have years of experiences with different practices. Therefore, the teachers didn't understand how to put these theories into practice, and it's possible that the pedagogical advisors didn't explain it well. The Educational Reforms pedagogical proposal is based on the new currents of constructivism, and the different ideologies that have contributed to these theories, such as Vygotsky, Piaget, Bruner, aus dem Jahr.<sup>196</sup> In Bolivia, every four years the teachers take an exam to move up a category. An average of 75% of the teachers pass the exams. Therefore, this implies that these teachers know the new theories and program focus; but, so far they have not engaged it in practice. This is to say that it is difficult to implement these theories in the classroom, although sometimes a teacher does put the theories into practice without knowing it. It'll still cost a lot to link theory with practice.

*Discrimination:* There is a way of thinking that is somewhat discriminatory and negative towards the Quechua language, and subsequently their culture; the language is scorned. The Spanish language has been normalized, its value overestimated, compared to the Quechua language. There is no literature in Quechua, no scientific writings. I believe that the depreciation of Quechua stems from experiences. Lots of the teachers today come from rural communities, who they themselves were scorned for not speaking Spanish well. 'Ah, this *indio* doesn't know Spanish well,' is commonly heard. People are valued on how well they speak Spanish, and they probably internalize this, and they don't want to repeat it with their students; it's a question of discrimination.

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<sup>196</sup> Social learning theorists basically view learning as occurring in the context of the social environment, a reciprocal approach in which "people influence their environment, which in turn influences the way they behave" (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999: 260). Social constructivist theorists maintain that learning occurs through constructing meaning through conversations, discussions, shared activities and dialogue. "This approach involves learning the culturally shared ways of understanding and talking about the world and reality" (ibid: 262).

Mariana emphasizes that the major contributing factor to cultural and relational *disconnects* is language barriers: “most teachers don’t understand Quechua...there is a disconnect between teachers and students. When the teachers do not speak the same language as the student, the students feel inferior to the teacher. But, if the teacher doesn’t speak Quechua, how will they understand the student?” The importance of bi-lingualism and teaching in the local language was long ago emphasized by Daniel Sánchez Bustamante and Felipe Pizarro at the 1925 Bolivian Pedagogy Congress (1928), stating that: “The deep and collective soul of a race is its language. To systematically destroy it is like breaking the fine attributes of humanity” (Albó and Anaya, 2003: 23).<sup>197</sup>

In addition, these epistemological disconnects have to do with recognizing, understanding and valuing local cultural knowledge. Discussing intergenerational local knowledge with an NGO agronomist, Noé César, he told me that the older people continue to use the stars and moon as a guide for planting, pruning, and harvesting, but that the youth are not receiving this, or similar, information. School

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<sup>197</sup> Nearly a century later, clearly defined educational laws are moving closer to enforce a valorization of diverse languages. In article 7 of the 2006, yet to be ratified (2010) educational law, “Ley de Avelino Siñani y Elizardo Pérez,” clearly states the use of official and foreign languages in education, which include: “1. In monolingual populations or communities, where the dominant spoken language is the indigenous language, the first language will be the indigenous language and the second language Spanish; 2. In monolingual populations or communities where Spanish is the predominant spoken language, the first language will be Spanish and the second an indigenous language; 3. In trilingual or plural-lingual communities or populations, the election of an indigenous language is subjected to the criteria of the territory or trans-territory, which will be defined by the community council; 4. In the case of a language being in danger of extinction, linguistics policies will be implemented to recuperate and develop the indigenous language with the direct participation of the speakers of these languages” (Ministerio de Educación, Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia).

science classes do not cover these materials, and families do not seem to ascertain that this knowledge is passed on. Expanding into a more general talk about the generational exchange of local knowledge, Noé César elaborated:

I believe that there isn't a regeneration and feedback of local knowledge; that they have lost the culture to transmit local knowledge due to the breaking up of relationships. [Noé César stated the main reason being a lack of economic opportunities that impel the youth to migrate.] The youth reach a good age in which they could really help with the family livelihood, improve agricultural production, but then they migrate. The learning relationship between parent and child changes. The parent doesn't teach their children; instead, the parent wants to know about what it's like to live in urban areas, and what happens there. The parent overlooks teaching their children. Even the grandparents forget to transmit what they know; their history, anecdotes, even local knowledge. There is a break in relationships. Unfortunately, there are not many good options in urban centers either. So, the youth go and come, many of them come back to their communities in worse conditions. They pick up more and more urban life mannerisms, and continue to migrate temporarily, in this way gradually annulling practically all of the local knowledge of their family culture.

Noé César stated, "they don't value what is theirs." When I inquired why, numerous people similarly explained, "many people associate their houses and ways with being backwards, with a past stained by oppression and depression. People are trying to disassociate themselves from the ill feelings of the past by taking advantage of anything new that comes their way. They try to blend into the urban culture to avoid the pains of discrimination and poverty." I would suggest that some parents and grandparents do not, in fact, see the importance of passing on local knowledge to their children; this is, then, an outcome of "the profound psychological power of racism (particularly in the veiled shapes of cultural racism), and its capacity to invalidate insurgent actions, neutralize and disqualify the subaltern population, and introduce into them a reproduction of the subjugating framework of the dominant

culture” (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2002: 3). These are manifestations of how indigenous people interact with modernity. In analyzing social historic influences and transformations, Fernanado Prada Ramírez says:

On the one hand, the indigenous society is not traditional, nor is it opposed to the supposed modernity; on the contrary, they try to incorporate it, divide it into fragments and with a logic of bricolage, as Lévi-Strauss pretended; in the composition of these fragments they build new meaning, at the same time recoding past memories. Indigenous populations incorporate new technologies, respond strategically and politically to national States, negotiate with transnational capitals and are permanently building their cultural identity in a continuous process of ethnogenesis that never ceases to learn, to recode, but incorporates these new developments in their historic logic, rearming the senses, adapting new technologies to its already long mental logic...It is not the dialectic of oppositions, but a logic of multiplicities in which modernity, from the crisis of this paradigm, seeks to produce new environmental knowledge and indigenous knowledge which is constantly changing, it becomes bilingual, acquires new tools and incorporates new technologies, this is articulated in the market and waged labor, but continues to reproduce different logic, articulating distinct individual life projects, and establish other relational systems between the society and nature (2005: 147 – 148).

Given that local knowledge, place, or culture is “not a fixed, bounded, or natural geographic space [or mind set]” (Haugerud, 2003:62), the evolution of local knowledge is intertwined with nature and culture, “in which the natural world is integral to the social world” (Escobar, 2003: 44). As Escobar further conveys, “cultural models and knowledge are based on historical, linguistic, and cultural processes that, although never isolated from broader histories, nevertheless retain certain place specificity” (ibid: 45-46). In a similar vein, Ansion understands “culture as a dynamic historic process in which groups of people construct and reconstruct in their own way of appropriating and transforming the world, producing ways of being and meaning in response to the multiply challenges that they encounter” (2009:52). In this sense, “culture is the product of a long process of

incorporating external influences, processes in which every once in awhile invents something really new. In this way, the knowledge of a specific culture, and their ways of doing things, results from particular importance given to the ways that they incorporate external influences” (ibid: 53). It is also tied to a politics of identity that has been historically constructed.

### **Parent /Communal Participation**

Given that our son studied at the elementary school, my husband and/or I would participate in the monthly parent/teacher school meetings; together with the other parents, we would cram into one of the school classrooms. The *Junta Escolar* (parent school committee: president, vice president, secretary and treasury) would sit in a row behind three or four worn wooden desks, at the front of the classroom. Scattered wooden chairs lined the walls, but most parents and siblings sat on their *awayus* (traditional weavings) on the floor. Teacher participation was rare and inconsistent; when they attended they would sit on a chair, or stand leaning against the wall. The structure of the meeting was very formal. The secretary read in Spanish the notes from the previous meeting, and the agenda for this evening’s meeting. The rest of the meeting was conducted in Quechua. In general, the main bulk of the meeting was about what parents owed: fines for not participating in a previous meeting; potato quotas for school lunches; firewood for cooking; whose turn it was to bake the week’s bread; and so forth.<sup>198</sup> On a rare occasion, a curricular

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<sup>198</sup> Each family is required to pay 2 *bolivianos*, and 1 quintal of papas for each student per month for school lunches. Also, each time a family misses the school meeting without previous notice and permission, they are fined 5 *bolivianos*.



topic would come up, such as that the fourth grade students “still cannot read,” but these exchanges typically never led to any noticeable resolutions, just complaints. The only time that I observed teachers come to a meeting to discuss actual student progress was when the new district director arrived. The following narrative is synthesized from my field notes.

Tonight there was a school meeting to introduce the new district director, César Romero. It was June 22, the beginning of the second trimester. Approximately 40 parents were there (30 *mamás* and 10 *papás*). I arrived a little late, when the second grade teacher was finishing up her report, stating how the students come to school dirty, that they are way behind with their lessons, and that the “moms” need to be more responsible, collaborate with materials, etc. This was the general tone set for the evening. The third grade teacher ranted about how she had to start from 0; expressing frustration with the students’ slow learning ability, and in tones of exasperation she threatened to quit. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Max was the only teacher who spoke to the parents in Quechua. What I understood, and afterwards had confirmed by another mom, was that Max told them that the students were reading and learning new stories, songs, riddles, and writing letters. He did not blame anyone, or make any reference to the moms or dads. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, doña Hortencia, of our son Natán’s class, presented her summary in mathematical terms, stating that in some subjects the students had completed 30% of the work that she programmed for that term period, and in other subjects 45%. The reasons that the students are behind is because they are late for school, and that the mothers are irresponsible (but she hadn’t stressed the mom blame game as much as the other teachers did, just a slight mention here and there). The harshest teacher was the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Inés; she repeatedly emphasized that poor student performance was due to the “negligence of the mothers.”

Next we proceeded into the subject areas teachers for middle school and high school grades. The math teacher reported that lots of the kids in these courses weren’t prepared for the grade level that they are in. Therefore, she has adjusted the math to their levels, but still encounters difficulties because many students don’t even know the fundamentals of math, such as basic multiplication and division. The literature teacher stressed that the students have materials to read, but don’t. That it’s the mother’s role to make them read; even if the mothers themselves cannot read, they can listen to the stories. Next, was the natural sciences teacher, followed by the English teacher. She explained that she doesn’t teach much English because the kids can’t pronounce the words well, so she focuses on Spanish; “lots of kids

don't understand words and have difficulty with comprehension." She went on to comment that the students never ask questions, and if she asks them if they understood, no one speaks up. The social studies teacher followed, her main comment was that the kids are not interested in learning, their "lazy" (*flojos*). The last teacher to talk was the gym teacher, Ester. Ester complained that the kids come to class dirty and she doesn't like it, that the moms are responsible for sending their kids to school clean, and that if they don't she will take them to the "cold river and wash them in it herself...I mean it"—she stressed.

The general scene was one of the parents sitting there, looking down and occasionally at the teacher that was speaking, with blank, yet glum—here we go again, expressions on their faces. Occasionally a parent would specifically ask about how their child was doing. Short responses were given ("regular," "getting better," "was behind but is now catching up"), but the teachers *never* gave any real insights to what exactly they were teaching, or their teaching methods, etc.; where the learning blocks occurred; what they were doing to help the students, or what the school or municipality could do; nor did they invite the parents to come to their class at a certain hour to talk or assist the parents in ways that they could guide their children's education; and so forth. Periodically the district director would pipe up after the teachers, talking loudly to the point of shouting his comments of a sort of "shame on you" to the parents. Instead of guiding the meeting in a diplomatic and respectful tone, he would reinforce what the teachers said. His facial expressions and verbal comments were as if he has seen this before, and that this is the natural state of rural education and students limited accomplishments are largely the parents' fault (mainly the mothers).

When it was over, I felt the parent's relief to see the teachers and district director exit. The room livened up without their presence. Not one word was mentioned about what the teachers or director had said; no opinions, nothing, as if the whole scene never took place. The school committee went back to controlling the meeting, proceeding to the next point on the agenda. Parents focused on the final topic for the evening: the dues (usually) owed, and potato quotas. The noise level rose, as the parents became more animated debating their payments—a place of familiarity and battle. As my neighbor, doña Julia, has frequently mentioned to me, "these meetings are just about how much we need to pay and do." She never mentioned the new director, the teachers report, the student's poor performance, or mother's being cast as irresponsible.

This condensed illustration of the five hour parent school meeting (8 pm to 1 am) speaks to the historical evolution of education, ethnicity, class, and gender

struggles in rural Bolivia. Spatial orientations continue to demonstrate the self-imposed power differentiations of those in charge with those being governed. This sets a tone for horizontal interactions, limiting comfort zones for vertical exchanges. Performances continue to be largely geared to report to (entertain) the director, and not necessarily to inform parents or discuss the course of the children's education. The positioning of most teachers relayed an inability to recognize or express objectively the either advances and limitations of classroom teaching. The director maintained his role of being in charge—attained through his formal educational training and contractual position; he exuded an authoritative-like stance—as he stood by his underlings (teachers), and reaffirmed what he most likely had heard throughout his life in his actions with local populations, especially women. Could it have been different? Could teachers admit the limitations of their pedagogical practices and discuss the need to explore new approaches? If so, how would the teachers appear in the communities' eyes? Would women have been able to change generational conditioning in a couple of years? In many ways, wasn't this performance also part of a type of handed-down script? Neither the parents nor the educational staff was inclined to disrupt the power relation that had been sanctioned and internalized. In order to affectively shift the power equation and bridge the divide between both actors, the intercultural approach was the one eventually adopted by the state.

Interculturality is promoted and relied on as the means to heal wounds and bring ethnic, economic, rural/urban and class diversities together. Popular participation, as well as the MAS government's educational reforms, view the

logistically legal incorporation of parental involvement in schools as a main avenue to increase their voice and participation in their local schools and educational system. I believe that working toward inclusive forms of participation, and the formalization of these processes, like *juntas escolares*, takes time to mature. However, just assigning people to get together (parents, teachers, and directors) will not necessarily invoke comprehensive participation, or lead to culturally sensitive and innovative educational practices (refer to the Rahnema thoughts on the dimensions of participation in Chapter 3, page 52). In many instances it can backfire, reinforcing hierarchies and reshaping inequitable roles. As noted from the school meeting discussed above, a dialogue was not pursued, but rather finding fault in the community was (i.e. the mothers, for not keeping up, or for not meeting state educational standards). The directors and most teachers took on the “all-knowing,” authoritarian role, while the *campesino* parents were turned into their audience and scapegoats, becoming the relief valve for the educational staff weaknesses and limitations. This is not to imply that the directors and teachers are inherently malevolent, but rather that this meeting demonstrates the more insidious outcomes of diverse forms of internalized colonialism, unjust societal and educational systems, and ethnic, class and gender (re)structuring. Proceeding on the above questions regarding teachers positioning, I continue with inquiries into the parents positioning: Why didn’t the parents, especially the moms, question the teacher’s academic focus and pedagogical methods? Why don’t parents ask the district and school director their opinions on how to better address these issues and what can be tried to improve the education system? Why are the teachers and directors positioned to condemn

and blame? Why are the parents positioned to listen and take verbal abuses? How does this positioning come about? Why “mothers?”<sup>199</sup>

Mothers are largely seen as the main “caretaker” of children. Almost everyone—male and female—that I interviewed had something similar to say about the women’s caretaking role, as articulated by the following two people: “The men work the land and the women attend to the children and knit” (*Cordillera woman*). “The women always have to worry about the household labors; she cooks and waits for their man to come home from work... she takes care of the children, feeds them, and makes sure that they study” (*Cabecera de Valle man*). However, although these views and actions play out throughout the municipality, there are some people who are thinking differently, as expressed by a man in the *Altura*: “although for now the women are responsible for taking care of the children, in the future this will change. We both have to educate our children because if we leave it all for the women she won’t be able to do it all alone.” Unfortunately, these gender roles and responsibilities continue to be widespread and deeply engrained in a “coloniality of being,” as construed by an *Altura* woman: “I don’t know much because we’re not very intelligent...we don’t know how to read...this is the reason why we are ridiculed.”

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<sup>199</sup> Ironically, I have encountered a similar experience with one of my son’s high school teachers in Massachusetts. During a meeting with his teacher and department head to discuss what my son, husband and I considered inappropriate and unjust pedagogical practices and teacher behaviors, we came to a standstill. The teacher held her stance that she did no wrong and her pedagogical practices were for the good of the students, while we held ground about it’s not so much about what she is teaching, it is how she is doing it and her bullying demeanor. In the end, although nothing was outwardly resolved, our voices were expressed, and maybe in some small slow steeping penetrable ways, we listened to each other. Furthermore, no one was outwardly intimidated by the other.

Most adults have little experience with what is taught in a classroom, and only a few have observed a teacher teaching their children; many adults did not go to school, and those that did only completed a few years of elementary schooling. The unknown, and the air of arrogance associated with western knowledge, may contribute to feelings of inferiority. This does not imply that either local or western knowledge is inferior to the other, but that experiences, epistemologies and *pensamientos propios* are different. Detrimentially, society has positioned the formally educated male professional on top, and the indigenous *campesina* woman on the bottom (*geopolitics of knowledge*).<sup>200</sup> Education is seen as that which occurs within the four walls of a classroom, while local knowledge and skills are associated more in terms as being “folkloric,” agricultural, or antiquated skills and traditions. Opening the classroom doors to more indigenous or *campesinas/os* children may demonstrate political changes, but not epistemic changes, as summarized by Quijano:

In spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between the European—also called ‘Western’—culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial dominations. It is not only a matter of the subordination of the other cultures to the European, in an external relation; we have also to do with a colonization of the other cultures, albeit in differing intensities and depths. This relationship consists, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it. (2000: 23).

### **Knowledge, Culture and a Sense of Place**

*May 3:* Clara, Angelina, Teresa, Rodrigo, Natán and I walked down the narrow dirt back street (used also as an outdoor bathroom), then through the

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<sup>200</sup> See Walsh 2003.

cactus patch (that is used as a town dump—lots of trash spewed about); and down a cliff that overlooks the river canyon. We carefully descended down the narrow path to the river, coming out at the last water mill in town; the owner, an older man, had recently died in Sucre, never recovering from surgery. The water mill has never operated since. All four kids jumped from rock to rock, full of sprint and knowledge about the river's edge. Natán moved with caution, as I nervously kept harping, "Don't go near the edge, be careful, slow down." I was extremely uptight because of the canyon's high ledge formation jetting over the river, with 50-100 foot drops to huge boulders below. We were heading to the *tinku* (junction), where the two rivers meet (the *Altura/Valle* river with the *Cordillera* river). Clara said that "the *Cordillera* river is known for its unique rock formations and sharp angles, and that it's cleaner than the *Altura/Valle* River, which is not so clean." As flocks of parrots fluttered above, the kids pointed to where a young man had recently fallen to his death as he tried to collect wild honey from a protruding tree from the ledge. They talked a lot about *diablos* (devils), and pointed out the design on a rock and said it was a *diablo*—it had an outline figure resembling that of a person. With Natán and myself, the children would speak Spanish; among themselves they spoke Quechua. Prancing among the rocks, we found some cactuses on the higher ledges. They broke off some spiny leaves, stripped off the thorns, peeled it open, and sucked out its juices. They said that this particular cactus staves off thirst on long journeys, and helps you to be strong. We hung out and played for an hour or so, and then walked back along the slanted, narrow rock formation at high altitudes, which gave me a fright whenever I looked down. At one point I had to crawl on all fours, beneath a rock overhang on a narrow ledge, to continue on our path. Clara hopped along, Rodrigo flew, Angelina pranced and Teresa walked swiftly, as Natán and I stepped with great caution.

After climbing back up the mountain, we crossed through the town (five minutes), to go check out the higher end of the *Cordillera* river. Angelina and Teresa got jittery, and said that they didn't feel comfortable going to this place. As we were beginning to go down the path, a flock of sheep approached us, accompanied by an older woman. In Quechua the woman asked, "Where are you going?" The kids responded, and they talked briefly with the woman. Not understanding, I asked about what they talked about. Rodrigo said that the woman warned us not to go down the path because the devil is there, and people who go there die. Well, we decided it was best to turn around...

*May 23:* Natán and I went with Clara to the *monte* to find the goats; along the way, Clara starting naming all of the mountains. She said that all the mountains here have names and the trees too. I asked if she learns any of this in school, and she said no, "we just do studies there." I said that knowledge about mountains and trees is also a part of studies. I asked about how she

learned all this: “My father taught me.” She also knows edible wild plants; today we ate wild cactus fruit (red skin with white insides, and lots of tiny black seeds). Clara found two large ones that had burst open; they weren’t as sweet as the smaller ones, the bigger ones were a bit starchier. On previous walks she pointed out other edible plants. I asked if we could later draw all the mountains, and write in their names, etc. Clara really liked this idea. What happens to local knowledge if children don’t have parents or other elders to teach them about their surroundings, their environments? Where does an affection, a connection, a value for one’s place come from?

This narrative depicts inter-generational learning (local knowledge), work, and play; an awareness and affinity of place. With a sense of deep pride Clara, Angelina, Teresa, Rodrigo enthusiastically taught Natán and I about the local landscape and cultural aspects that they acquired from daily chores (work) and play (carefree). We were neighbors and daily they would share what they knew about the plants, agriculture, animals, environment, politics, social issues, food preparation, cooking, constructing, etc.

It is here, that schools can potential open up multiply spaces of learning from the youth. Despite numerous obstacles that teachers confront, there are a number of comparatively innovative teachers who do manage to incorporate some creative teaching activities and intercultural theories into the classroom. Reglasky and Nina point out how the physical and intellectual space of schooling can play multiple roles whereby “teachers provide a point of entry for state power relations, but at the same time the school space is appropriated for indigenous rituals which are crucial to the social reproduction of cultural values, norms and forms of collective decision-making which potentially question homogenizing constructions of the hispanicizing nation state” (2007: 238). Cultural events consisting of indigenous dress (costumes),



music, and dances are yearly events at all the schools throughout the municipality, attracting the majority of locals as spectators demonstrating their appreciation and valorization of these. Teachers are the main organizers of such events; generally developing these theatrical performances from spaces of respect, kinship, and congeniality. In this way, Arnold and Yapita (2000) warn about the inaccuracy in locating all “teachers as unilateral agents of the state, rather...they act to maintain an intertextual ‘game.’”

One of the most exemplary examples of a self-actualized innovative teacher is the elementary teacher Verónica. I introduced Verónica in the previous Chapter 6; it was her class that presented their hand woven “traditional” dress and dances to the World Food Program evaluators, and demonstrated their bilingual skills; furthermore, it was her student (a young girl) who instinctively and spontaneously volunteered to recite a poem about land appropriation and labor exploitation. Verónica self-initiated and meshed bi-lingual education and cultural appreciation (local history) into her curriculum. She told me that her main challenge to teaching from a basis of local knowledge was winning over the approval of the parents: “For a long time the parents were resistant..., but after a while when they saw how well their children were able to speak and write in Quechua and Spanish...understand their local history... rejuvenate local arts and custom... and learn math and other skills..., they were supportive.”

Although Verónica was well-known throughout the municipality, at the time I never met another teacher that followed some of her pedagogical practices. On the contrary, when I inquired about her teaching methods with a number of teachers,

they acknowledged her successes but diminished her pedagogy because she never studied at the Normal school. This reflected, to me, a precedence of learned professional snobbism over an importance of relevance given to the social benefits of “intercultural” pedagogical practices, and place-based education. Furthermore, it demonstrates a lack of administrative solidarity for innovative place-based pedagogies that go beyond the show case appreciation organized for visitor evaluator events. One hopeful venue for expanding upon Verónica’s place-based pedagogical efforts is her daughter, Silvia. In 2010, I ran into Silvia in the town of Rumi Mayu. While inquiring about her mother, I learned that Silvia had recently graduated from the Normal school and was teaching at the elementary school in the Altura. A disciple and staunch supporter of her mother, I have hopes that her “formal” education from an “accredited” teaching school will increase the acceptance and practice of her and her mother’s experiences into the curriculum.

There are numerous other examples of teachers developing intercultural approaches to relay knowledge or help children to read and write. There is Noelia, the *Altura* high school biology teacher discussed above, who helped the students with their ecology exhibit, emphasized the importance to learn more about the communities, respect their own culture and environment and plant gardens.<sup>201</sup>

Another teacher is Hernan, the social studies teacher that advocated for a telecentro

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<sup>201</sup> In addition to these activities, Noelia oversaw the care of the Proagro garden planted behind the boarding school. She also helped to organize the parents to plant a potato field. Furthermore, during a donor evaluation of Proagro’s educational programs, she organized the students into groups according to their communities, and helped them prepare exhibits about their culture (food, dress, weavings, artifacts, agricultural practices, festivals, etc.). For the Esperanza health fair, she helped the students prepare an exhibit on the environmental health project, and supported the creation of the ecology club organized by the *Asociación Sucrense de Ecología* (ASE). Noelia worked in the *Altura* school for two years, but was then transferred.

(computer center with internet connection), encouraging students to use the Internet to find information and to think critically about what student's are researching and writing. (Find Hernan social studies assignment.)

Occasionally the Ministry of Education provided workshops for teachers in Sucre; however, Plan International also provided occasional in-service trainings and workshops in the municipality, and together with PROAGRO they increasingly provided funding for school constructions, furniture and school supplies. Their educational philosophy was well aligned with the constructivism approach outlined by the Educational Reforms, as they supported teachers to incorporate didactical methods in their pedagogical practices. While a few of these curricular creativity was self-enacted (i.e. Verónica), most others were largely the result of Plan International's and PROAGRO's efforts. For example, the fourth grade male teacher, Germán, frequently expressed his exasperation to me about teaching his students to read. A year later on a return visit after completing my field research, I stopped by Germán's classroom; his students surrounded me to show me the second edition of the school newspaper. Plan International consultant Marina had designed the newspaper program and supplied Germán with tape recorders and a camera, a computer program and other supplies, and pedagogical methods. Germán described the process of using tape recorders and working together in groups to write their stories and see it printed in the Rumi Mayu Monthly Newspaper: "it has really helped the students improve their reading and writing skills." Students would hand write their stories, and Germán would enter them into the computer and make copies. Photocopies were sold in the community for 20 centavos. Unfortunately, none of the

others teachers wanted to participate in the program, the following year Germán was transferred, and the project ended.

The point here is that spaces are opening up for placed-base knowledge, but they lack continuity and coordinated efforts that work in more meaningful acts of collaboration with local actors. While much attention and effort is oriented toward formal education, deeper reflections and analysis are needed regarding the diverse motivations and goals. Relayed throughout the chapter are snippets of different groups and individuals all working for the schools and students in different ways, in diverse ways, yet deep discussions of what it is all about are not inclusively and vertically discussed. Plan and PROAGRO develop proposals and present them to the mayor. School directors design humanistic curriculums and hand them to the teachers. The Ministry of Education and NGO workers provide sporadic workshops and teacher training. Teachers piece together what they feel is best for the students, and pass this knowledge on to them. Parents dream of the children becoming professionals, getting jobs that will directly and indirectly help their community and municipality. But where are the discussions about how what is learned in school derives from, connects to, and moves forward, not only local communities, but a healthier society? Where are the self reflections and constructive critiques about our own perceptions and understandings? How are each one of us influenced and affected by colonialism, preconceived notions, western knowledge and racism? How can historical understandings, self-criticism and present situations help everyone to better understand current places that can widen spaces for inter/intracultural critical pedagogy that decolonize minds?

### **High School Student Narratives**

In an attempt to capture and value the history, environment, people and culture of the region, I developed a narrative project with a number of high school students. My intention was to provide a space for them to talk with their families, friends, and neighbors about their “places.” To hear people’s voices, reflect on their surroundings, in order to strengthen the context in which all the newness from school, media, and people enter their lives. To direct a strong light on their families, environment and culture, so changes occur with deep thoughts and values predicated on “place.”

Shortly after I arrived in Rumi Mayu, I became intrigued with the fairly new constructions and the existence itself of the *internados*. I thought that an interesting project would be to organize local knowledge narrative groups with tenth to twelfth graders at the three *internados*. In short, my mini project consisted of students who would design and conduct informal interviews/conversations with their families and other community members as a means to stimulate verbal exchanges, learn more about their communities and culture, strengthen family/community relationships, develop analytic skills, and enhance local / cultural appreciation. My own experiences with students and communities were that they had a poorly formed awareness of literature about their own history and culture, and thus less exposure to knowledge, varied perspectives, and critical thinking. Furthermore, I noticed less attention and value placed on local knowledge (agricultural, medicinal) and practices (weavings, wooden and ceramic products), as it appears to gradually submerge below western knowledge. For example, several small texts were recently published

about some of the local traditions in one of the *internado* communities; e.g, *Todos Santos* (All Saints Day). Yet, I did not meet one student or teacher who was familiar with these texts. When I presented them to the students, they were fascinated and wanted to read and discuss them.

I designed a proposal for my project, and an outline of thematic areas and sample questions. My objective was threefold: one, provide a space for local voices to be expressed about family and communal activities (local knowledge, practices, needs and expectations) related to food production and consumption, and related nutritional outcomes within the larger context of health, environmental and educational services; two, gain insights into how families think about these issues in relation to other broader concerns—for example, land use, environmental changes, and how socio-political, economic and cultural questions influence community nutrition; and three, give something tangible back to the communities that have greatly contributed to my own intellectual, academic, and emotional growth. I had hoped to collect the written narratives and photographs, and collate them into a document, book form, or artistic creation, and return it to the students, schools and their respective communities.

I presented and received approval for my mini-project from the two directors of the schools for the *Altura internados* and the Padre Sixto, who supervised the *Valle internado*. My intention was to work with at least one teacher; however, this did not work out. A few teachers helped to organize the groups, but none of the teachers had the time, or took an active interest in this project. Student participation was completely voluntary, and consisted of eight teenagers in the *Altura TP*

*internado*; 10 in the *Altura C internado*; and eight in the *Valle internado*. We would meet in the early evenings after classes, once every two weeks or so, depending on such factors as their school schedule, my ability to get a ride to the communities, and the weather.<sup>202</sup> I developed simplified materials (hand-outs and charts) about qualitative research methods; presented and discussed some examples of Bolivian community research studies, two of which were about *Todos Santos* and other local traditions in a couple of their communities; and presented two books from the *Firefox* series,<sup>203</sup> reviewing the photographs and verbally translating some stories. Each student received a notebook and my outline of potential themes and examples of interview questions (same presented to the two directors and the priest); however, each group would decide on the themes that they were most interested in learning about, and formulate all of the open-ended questions in their own words (in Spanish and Quechua). I also gave each group an inexpensive camera to share, and rolls of film. Meetings consisted of explaining and discussing basic qualitative research methods; thematic interests; developing interview questions; practicing asking questions and tape recording, writing notes, and taking photographs. The intention was not to read questions, and immediately jot down responses, but rather that the

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<sup>202</sup> During 2004-2005, transportation was very limited. In general, one truck would leave for Sucre in the morning, and another one would return in the evening, on one of which I could hitch a ride as far as the communities. The transportation to the *cordillera* was even less frequent, however, mainly on week-ends. Therefore, I tried to coordinate with the NGOs, and with official municipal visits with the town hall staff

<sup>203</sup> *Firefox* is a series of copyrighted anthologies of articles that were first published in *Firefox* magazine series in the 1960's, and later developed into a series of 12 published books that focused on capturing the wisdom and life worlds of the mountain people living in rural Appalachia. Its sociological premise is based on the loss of inter-generational knowledge because of a devaluing and decrease in other forms of knowledge transmission, such as orality, local craftsmanship, etc. Although the educational philosophy is based on the principles of John Dewey and constructivist methods, my purpose was just to demonstrate to students the richness of diverse knowledge and ways of being and doing, and its relevance and importance to current and future generations.

students have these questions already in mind, as a means to guide informal conversations with their parents, grandparents, or other family or community member during their week-end visits. Afterwards, in reflection, students were to jot down what they learned, their impressions, etc. In our following meetings we would discuss their experiences, data (notes, observations, interpretations), and concerns, and then move on to the next theme and set of questions. Only one student's family, Enrique's, expressed concern and suspicion about the student local narratives project; they wanted to know why we were doing this project, and what we were going to do with the information. They also wanted to know more about my own personal motives and intentions. Enrique—who had come very much “on board” with my project—explained the objectives to his family, and they eventually agreed.

Although all three *internado* groups expressed interest and enthusiasm in learning about their community's history and changing culture, the *Altura C* and *Altura TP internados* were more active. One student pointed out that “we don't know much about our grandparents, many of them have died.” Other students agreed and discussed their interests to know more about their ancestors, and how they had lived. Each group discussed what they wanted to know more about, developed prospective questions, narrowed them down, and then translated them into Quechua. (The translation process would typically entail some debates about the best way to capture the respective meanings.) Practicing interviewing techniques with the tape recorder was also an inspiring activity for the students, although the tape recorder was only used to help students gain familiarity and have fun with asking questions. Although taping the interviews would have enhanced the success



of recording full conversations, and eased the writing component, I did not have financing for such a large purchase. Furthermore, I was concerned that it might distract or diminish the natural flow of conversation that I had hopes of supporting. However, they did take photographs of their families, cultural activities, weavings, clothing, and other artifacts, and their favorite places in their communities. Unfortunately, I showed these photographs to the education coordinator of PROAGRO, and she asked if she could take them to Sucre to make copies. I agreed, and since she was going to the city I asked if she could also develop some rolls of film. She lost them all.

Although I learned a lot from the students, and hopefully they all did from each other, the project never came to its full fruition, which was to collect all of the students' descriptions and notebooks and transform them into a final text (Spanish / Quechua), and capture other forms of text through photographs of weaving, ceramics, wood work, gestures, ceremonial performances, and other cultural relics. The rolls of film were lost, and students never had sufficient time to collect enough information, update their notes, or attend all of our meetings. This was especially difficult for the students who bordered at the *Altura TP internado*, because they went home less frequently. In addition to the logistical drawbacks, and other confluences of events that impeded progress, were writing skill challenges, school projects, final exams, no support from the teachers or directors, and the rapid advancement of the end of the school year. The lop-sided focus of schooling illustrates the need for what Arnold and Yapita refer to as "multiliteracies," signifying the replacement of the "current debit-based models, which reject aspects of Andean rural languages and

cultures for their supposed limitations of expression and organization (a rejection founded in the inherently racist notion that ties language to race), [with] greater attention...given to regional conventions in numerical, vocal, and oratorical writing and textual practices” (2006: 287).

After a couple of months of meetings with the *valle internado*, the students there decided to not continue with the project. Our meetings were continually postponed or interrupted by a variety of activities, such as the soccer practices and *campeonatos* (sporting meets / competitions), exams, parties, trips to Sucre, school performances, etc. On top of all this, the students complained about too much homework and not enough time. Although this was what they verbally expressed, from their actions I suspected other reasons for their lack of interest. During our meetings, only one or two students would speak up, the rest appeared disinterested. Even though I repeated that this was voluntary, and they could leave at any time, they would only sit silently. I wondered if it was the looming authoritarian presence of Padre Sixto that held them there. I thought about what doña Julia had recently told me, that “most students that board at the *valle internado* don’t want to return to their communities, they want to go to the city to work or study.” Could that be why they appeared not the least bit interested to interview their families and neighbors, about the history and culture of their communities? Their dreams and aspirations lay elsewhere. Or, was it just another burden on top of all of their studies? Was there just not enough time?

At the end of one of our meetings, unconsciously sitting and pondering the “whys”, I must have looked sad, as one of the students, Cristián, came over and

sat down next to me. With much sincerity, he told me that he was really interested in participating in this project, but that he really had no time. He worked during the week to earn spending money, went home on week-ends to help out his family, and that his only time to study was at night. Cristián suggested that I get some kids together in the community of Chullpas who were no longer studying in school, for whatever reason. For example, he said that his cousin had dropped out of school to take a year's vacation. Cristián mentioned that there were a number of older youth in his community who had never gone to high school, and that others had dropped out. This led our conversation to the difficulties that the students face in school. The exams, generally given at the end of the trimester, are especially hard on the students. I mentioned that it might be helpful if teachers gave periodic exams or quizzes after covering new materials when the information is still fresh in the student's mind, or design other ways of evaluating the acquisition of knowledge. This could also help students to process the information, and highlight areas that need clarification and strengthening. Cristián agreed, adding "it is really hard to remember everything by the end of the year, especially with the number of subject areas we have to learn. Reading and writing is a real struggle." Most of the students' grades are a direct result of how well they test—read and respond to questions. Schooling is reduced to cramming information in order to take and hopefully pass the exams.

Although regretfully we never achieved the end result—consolidating everyone's written narratives—there are lessons learned. As noted, each of the *internados* has their unique dynamics; here I will focus on the commonalities I

experienced in relation to this project. On my part, I should have adamantly pursued the active collaboration of one teacher at each internado, the possibility of students receiving extra credit for their work, and periodic visible support from the school director. Secondly, as well noted, the scope of this project required more time. Another option would have been to organize groups of older youth who had not completed high school and had more time, as Cristián suggested. However, by the time he suggested this I did not have enough time to organize the group, or reliable transportation to get to his community.

Reflecting on the school and *internado* involvement, they were open to my mini project, as long as the teachers or directors did not have to get actively involved. I have had this experience previously working with teachers in other regions of the country. Teachers are open to new projects, as long as it does not imply more work for them; most are overwhelmed with fulfilling ministerial requirements. On another level, the directors appear to be more open to ideas and projects coming from an outsider (myself and NGOs) than to those of their own teachers. Ironically, the directors and priest never questioned my work, or checked to make sure that what the students and I were doing was “on the level.” While on the one hand this demonstrates openness, it also shows a lack of support and attention indicating that the teachers, directors and priest did not see the overall value and potential of this project. Is this because they are overwhelmed with their respective responsibilities? Or, could it be that they cannot see beyond their own specific subject area and pedagogical approaches? Or, could it be that the hierarchical structure and the nature of their teacher training inhibits them from

going beyond basic job requirements? Or, could it be that developing and/or improving “multiliteracies,” investigative skills, self-learning, and critical thinking skills are not seen as a necessity or priority? Or, could it be that they do not see the need or purpose in learning more about the communities and their culture?

In respect to the students, most of them were not comfortable with reading and free style writing. For example, they would not read the simplified hand-outs that I wrote on qualitative research methods. They also did not like writing down their notes. Although the students enjoyed talking to family members, their notes included only choppy salient points from their interviews and conversations, but not the richness of what they would orally express and reveal during our class sessions. Regarding the specific topics that the students chose to learn more about varied between the three groups. The students from the Altura TP were most interested to know more about the history of their communities and the environment (different flora and fauna). The Altura C students talked with their families about cultural events, such as Todos Santos. And, the Valle students were interested in who their ancestors were. And as previously noted, bi-lingual translations were another challenge for the students.

Their interviews were conducted in Quechua, but the students had not developed orthographic skills in Quechua, and thus found it too time consuming and frustrating to translate, and then write it in Spanish. Although I told the students to write in Quechua to the best of their abilities, and later we could have a professional Quechua translator correct it, they still jotted notes in Spanish—as if Quechua were their preferred oral form of communication, and Spanish their written. (They had

learned to verbally express themselves in Quechua, while they learned how to write in Spanish.) In this way, the limitations of writing in Spanish prevents capturing richer expressions and deeper understandings of cultural beliefs, thoughts, and opinions, and the “lived orality [that] emerges from Andean territory and textural practice such that textile and song, braiding and music, narrative and oral history, are all part of a common pathway, with its own norms of learning, expression, and performance” (Arnold and Yapita, 2006: 289).<sup>204</sup>

### **Conclusions: Placed-based Knowledge, Inter/intraculturality and Critical Pedagogy**

Overall, the educational system in Rumi Mayu, as one indicative municipality, shows the struggles and contradictions between schooling and local knowledge. Presently we see two separate systems of thought and uses of physical space, in some ways maintaining their distances and in other ways coming together, based on a variety of different interests and motivations. The hierarchical structure of schooling, the formal relationship between director and teachers with students, families and locals, and misunderstandings of both systems of knowledge hinder / slow down / distort the process of inter/intraculturality and decolonization; but most

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<sup>204</sup> When I visited the different communities, I would ask people that I interviewed if there were any good story tellers around. With a taken aback facial expression, most people would have to think for several moments, as if they had not thought of this in a while. Then they would say a name or two, and respond similarly as one woman told me in the *Valle*: “Oh, but they don’t tell their stories much anymore, no one listens.” However, one time in the *Cordillera* I was directed to the house of an elderly man; I was told he was the only story teller around. With my friend doña Celia, who was helping me with Quechua translations, and dressed in the “traditional” Quechua woman fashion, we approached his rock home in the midst of a small open field on the top of a windblown mountain. Sitting below one of the lone trees scattered about in the field, he rose up when he saw us nearing, but instead of approaching us, he walked to his house, waving us to go away, implying “leave me alone.” We respected his silence, and left.

importantly, that of a quality of life. As one teacher in the *valle* commented, “Here we don’t practice interculturality, but as teachers we should try to help *them* maintain their cultures, and develop them more.” The district director, César, stated that “Well, our teachers reject the reforms. Firstly, they are *not* convinced of intercultural education, specifically bilingual education. They argue that they do not agree with teaching reading and writing in the mother tongue.”

Several distinctive observations can be made to think of ways in which to move closer toward a “revolutionary science” based on inter/intracultural and decolonizing practices. To begin, today’s Rumi Mayu is politically and socially different from when I conducted my original field research (2004-2005). LRE has been taken to newer heights within an official political scene that places deeper values on indigenous cultures and languages. In December 2010, the fourth Minister of Education under the MAS government, Roberto Aguilar, ratified the new educational law, “Ley Educativa Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez,”<sup>205</sup> which advocates a social, collective and industrious educational model. The new law contains 92 articles; the primary goals are outlined in the “Foundations of Education” Articles 3.1 and 3.8, which defines them as the following:

3.1. It is decolonizing, liberating, revolutionary, anti-imperialist, de-patriarchal and transformative of the economic and social structures; oriented toward the cultural reaffirmation of nations and pueblos of the indigenous

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<sup>205</sup> Avelino Siñani (1881 - 1941) and Elizardo Pérez (1892- 1980) were Aymara educators who, most notably, in 1931 established an experimental school on the Bolivian Altiplano in the community of Warisata. This was the first significant experience in creating an indigenous pedagogical institution oriented around language, history and cultural structures. It was created as “an instrument for liberation in the struggle against repressive regimes” (Perez, 1962: 11). Although it was forcibly closed by the government for political reasons in 1941, it was later reopened as an official Normal School.

*campesinos*, intercultural and afro-bolivian communities, in the construction of a Plurinational State and to live well.

3.8. It is intracultural, intercultural and pluri-lingual throughout the entire educational . From the potential of know-how, knowledge and languages of the indigenous campesino's nations and pueblos, the intercultural and afro bolivian communities, it promotes the interrelations and coexistence of equal opportunity for everyone, through the valorization and reciprocal respect between cultures.

In reflecting on my data and how they might contribute to current schooling and local knowledge, firstly, as pointed out by several participants (as well as scholars), re-valorizing one's native language is fundamental. The challenge is how to do this. To begin with, the racist and negative connotations associated between language and culture should be interrogated and discussed. One key step acknowledged by two anthropologists, Verónica Cereceda and Gabriel Martínez, from years of working in rural communities in Bolivia, is that: "To learn how to speak the community's language fluently, it would be necessary to become immersed in its culture" (Healy, 270). Teachers and administrators need to become more immersed in the communities, and vice versa: local people need to feel more welcomed and comfortable in newer spaces, to be able to interact on equitable terms (i. e., parent-teacher school meetings). Immersion means to plunge into, to become engrossed, absorbed; and thus, to do so requires an ability to be open-minded, self-critical and willing to change. Words are associated with meanings, and it is through these meanings that the meeting of minds can talk. Meaningful talk requires literacy. Literacy is attained through exposure, connections, thinking, exchanging, analyses and actions. Isolation can curtail literacy, as well as arrogance. Therefore,



“deprofessionalizing knowledge” through two way dialogues between local knowledge and school knowledge (academics and research) will bring about “multiliteracies.” Combining concepts of literacy discussed here in this chapter with those presented at the end of Chapter 6, I advocate for multiliteracies that address diverse forms of cognition (learning comprehension / outward expressions), grounded in placed-based knowledge explored through health and ecological literacy utilizing critical pedagogy.

Scattered teachers, as well as NGO and municipal workers in Rumi Mayu, are using, or have used, multiliteracies to different degrees. The experiences of teachers such as Verónica and Carmen, as well as NGO workers like Noé César, need to be illuminated and discussed on a large scale. Intellectual and leisurely exchanges, as demonstrated between the ASE ecology club and the *Cordillera* high school students, is an exemplary venue for reciprocal exchanges based on local ways of *ayni*, or analogously speaking, an intellectual form of *trueque*. Returning back to Chapter 5, reciprocity can bring with it aspects of competition and obligations, which can be beneficial or disadvantageous; this should be kept in mind. As Noé César cautions, changes in family lifestyles can sidetrack and/or bury local knowledge under new experiences. Both of these are equally valid, and need to be discussed in a balanced fashion.

Typing out the thoughts and analyses in this chapter is much easier than putting it into action; this is the dilemma of research and theory. From our learned history of educational struggles ensnarled within an ex-colonial state, illuminating flaws, weaknesses, strengths, and providing suggestions will not necessarily do very

much. Many NGO workers and municipal employees (teachers and health workers) have been doing this for the past two decades. In addition, social movement and unions have been instrumental in opening the door for new actors to play a larger role in the direction of education, as well as the country as a whole. Internal drives need to be expansively switched on, with ample space for creativity, innovation, mistakes, reflections, exchanges, and revisions. Much of this is found in the local knowledge and culture, and for generations Rumi Mayuns have been doing just this, albeit frequently under cultural duress.

In many ways LRE and the Ley Avelino Siñani y Elizardo Pérez provides some solid roads to experiment with, and to pursue. However, to develop the law's central axis—interculturality—ultimately implies dealing with the root problem of domination and segregation, which is racism. In most instances, the dominant class will not easily share their power or wealth, or readily value the diversity of indigenous knowledge and ways. In a similar vein, indigenous populations will not straightforwardly recognize the value and worth of their own cultures, place and local knowledge. Thus, “the possibility to build an intercultural society implies to affect in some way the structuralism of racism that inflames cultural barriers and establishes interethnic frontiers between the indigenous and Creole castes” (Quisbert, 2009: 253). It will not be enough to open up political opportunities for the indigenous population or “transfer political power to the so-called indigenous autonomous institutions, which will not be the solution to overcome racism; it will only persist in different expressions of racism, that will continue to affect the quality of life of the *indios*, [and other national ethnicities]”(ibid).

In this way, critical pedagogy can play a major role in illuminating the roots of racism, and understanding its detriments (classism, sexism, patriarchy, loss of knowledge, etc.); in other words, to put into practice interculturality and decolonization on a more extensive and profound level. Critical pedagogy offers diverse strategies that aim to unravel and link underlying social factors, encouraging people to be more critical in thought and action.<sup>206</sup> There are diverse explanations of critical pedagogy; Lather provides a straightforward characterization to build upon: "post-critical pedagogy is positioned as that which attends to practices of teaching/learning intended to interrupt particular historical, situated systems of oppression" (Lather, 1992: 212). Exploring open terrain in areas that deconstruct our theoretical conceptions and uses of critical thinking, she proposes a way in which to move beyond a "framework that sees the 'other' as the problem for which they are the solution" (Lather, 1992: 132).

Crucial to these ends is that these ideologies, teaching / learning tools, and knowledge provide the spaces and opportunities in which diverse ethnicities can realize their own "places of self-actualization" (Haymes, 2003). Thus, critical

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<sup>206</sup> However, several major concepts of critical pedagogy include, but are not limited to, the following: to name, to reflect critically, to act; democratic participation of all people (sharing power); starting from where the students are (variety of experiences, divergent backgrounds); open-ended questions, dialogue, analytically thinking, honesty and transparency; gathering information, interpret, analyze, reflect and critique issues of public concern; bringing together an array of divergent views and perspectives to the table; eradicating "politics of domination" (racism, classism, sexism, patriarchy, authoritarianism); unravel contradictions, make connections, ask how and why; and dialectic and constructive collective effort and action. Critical pedagogy is not limited to formal school settings, as Giroux explains: "The educational force of culture redefines the politics of power, the political nature of representation and the centrality of pedagogy as a defining principle of social change; also, it displays our understandings of the scope of public pedagogy as a educational practice that operates inside and outside the academy, expanding its reach across the multiple sites and areas: (1999: 58).

pedagogy could provide many of the tools needed to put into practice Anison's concepts of interculturality:

Interculturality is “associated with a process of transformation, understood as a pursuit for equity between cultures (48)...The potential strength of [schools] is to recollect, articulate, systematize, and discuss the ways of acting and being in the communities in the region, in order to build knowledge from there. All fields of knowledge can open up in this way...This does not imply to return to the past, but to recollect from the past that serves for the now and future, in connection with current knowledge in all fields. In other words, to return to a general process of participation...of research and development [that shows] new ways to articulate diverse cultural sources, so we can understand the world. Not to return to individualism, but to develop a new form of universalism, always open and critical, based on mutual enrichment from every possible cultural horizons. (Anison, 2009: 48; 67)

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: LOCAL KNOWLEDGE LOCAL SOLUTIONS

*The indigenous movements...aren't against the process [of change], they don't want to be 'soldiers' of change, but rather critiques and thinkers of change to avoid failures in the process.*

Celso Padillo, president of the Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní, APG<sup>207</sup>

Throughout this dissertation, I portray the richness of the municipality of Rumi Mayu, and the people who live there, to show its uniqueness, local knowledge, cultural practices, economic and technological practices, and its potential for what might be included in regional and national discussions of decolonization and alternative development. Cultural practices in Rumi Mayu evolved over centuries of working within and with one's environment, human encounters and relationships. Local cultural beliefs and knowledge are ways in which Rumi Mayuns respond to building upon struggles, challenges, accomplishments, losses and gains. Some of these practices can be associated with how they utilized endogenous knowledge and customs to feed and clothe themselves, and deal with negative experiences of domination, subjugation, sexism and racism. Cultural beliefs and practices—such as ayni, mink'a, as well as q'oa and ch'alla—bring people together in work and

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<sup>207</sup> An article published by the Bolivian non-profit environmental group Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (FOBOMADE), presenting the complaints and critiques of Evo Morales's environmental and development policy by three major Bolivian indigenous organizations: the Consejo de Nación de Marcas y Ayllus de Qollasuyo (Conamaq), the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano (Cidob) and the Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní (APG). The article, "Evo dice que defiende a los indígenas, pero alienta el extractivismo sin consultar a las comunidades," was posted February 5, 2010, on the Foro Boliviano sobre Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (FOBOMADE) website: <http://www.fobomade.org.bo/art-713>.

ceremonial events to relieve psychological violence and to take care of their land. The intensity of each of these practices obviously varies across time and location.

Colonialism has had varying influences and effects on Rumi Mayuns, some of which were incorporated into local traditions in creative ways—for example, the incorporation of patron saints and virgins into religions, and traditional practices such as of *ch'allas*—however, overall the encounters with colonialism and neocolonialism have had devastating effects on the land, communities, and people, as manifested in depleted soils, hunger and malnutrition, marginalization, hierarchical relationships established through internal colonialism, clientelist relationships, multiple forms of oppression, and the geopolitics of knowledge. While so much of this lives on in day to day encounters and in the psyche of Rumi Mayuns, postcolonial theories offer ways in which to see the “messiness” of it all.

Postcolonialism is not about wiping the slate clean and starting anew, but it *is* about coming to terms with history, with the policies of today, and with their practices, implications and outcomes through acts of decolonization and reconciliation. This dissertation has attempted to show the struggles and contradictions experienced by Rumi Mayuns, as well as a few paths that their experiences illuminate, in order to provide some ways in which to put decolonization into practice. Agency and different kinds of resistance should not only be recognized in social movements, indigenous organizations and civil society, but should also be recognized in the context of rural people’s struggles, resistance and accomplishments as an important resource for movements to build on, and with. Getting an indigenous person elected to the presidency is a major triumph, but it is not enough; it is more important to

maintain, build, support, and strengthen a movement of well informed citizens as another source of power to continue with the ongoing struggles against covert and overt oppression.

Serendipitously, the writing of this dissertation coincided with what Dunkerley refers to as the “Third Bolivian Revolution” (2007). Since the 2005 election of the MAS government, Bolivia has embarked on the road towards becoming what it refers to as a “Plurinational State,” and has gradually passed through an assortment of legislature oriented towards achieving decolonization and inter/intraculturality. Although it is too soon to tell how these policies and strategies will eventually turn out, the past several years (2006 – 2012) have indicated many contradictions between the rhetoric and the implementation of theories and philosophies. These terms have increasingly become part of a national discourse, and contributed to an array of debates and promises; however, overall actual policy and program implementation have unfortunately been abstract and shallow. Much of the problem lies in the inability of the MAS government to embark on systematic changes that can gradually turn theories of decolonization and “vivir bien” into actual practices on national development and educational levels. Instead, Morales’s social, political, and economic policies and practices moved steadily “toward a reconstituted neoliberalism, one that abandoned features of neoliberal orthodoxy, but retained its core faith in the capitalist market as the principal engine of growth and industrialization” (Webber, 2011: 232). Consequently, the struggle of the indigenous peoples, social movements, and of the left continue to contest “the contradictions of Morales’s moves to endlessly extract and industrialize raw materials with the

‘partnership’ of transnational mining and petroleum capital—leading inevitably to the exploitation of workers and the dispossession of indigenous peasants located on and natural resource deposits” (Webber, 2011: 234).

While the MAS administration’s close alliance with indigenous populations and social movements has sparked a renewed awareness and appreciation of indigenous ways and technologies, and has opened newer possibilities for social change, the government is not fully reading the agendas of the progressive social movements, indigenous organizations, and the left, nor is it responding well to critiques of the government’s “reconstituted neoliberal” policies and practices, unless extreme pressure is applied (i.e., the TIPNIS march), and even then it tends to manipulate the actions towards its favor. The opening remarks of this chapter were taken from an article in which three major national indigenous organizations critique Morales’s environmental and development model, lay claim that they have been excluded from a say in national policies, and that they feel deceived by the government’s economic “development” policy decisions (see footnote 1). Calling to attention the contradictions of Morales’s double standard discourses, the Malku from Conamaq states, “In Tiwanaku, the president said that we should respect the Mother Earth, but then the next day he lays out a development model that violates the rights of Mother Earth. To the indigenous people he tells us to defend our interests, and on another day he changes his position talking about the promotion of mega projects” (cited in FOBOMADE, 2010). Celso Padilla claims, “Since Evo Morales has risen to the government, he thinks he’s king, the new boss of the indigenous, and *he* needs to be decolonized” (ibid.).



The outcomes of the 2005 landslide election of Evo Morales have many positive aspects: for example, the greater inclusion and participation of indigenous peoples; and the ratification of the new constitution in 2009, which began an accelerated change towards increased national control and state intervention. However, results have been mixed not only nationally, but also in the rural communities such as Rumi Mayu. To conclude this dissertation, I summarize some main insights of the changes that are going on in Rumi Mayu today, that have most relevant to forging a new path to development and well-being in Bolivia, and in conjunction with the new push (imperative) for decolonization in national politics. I discuss the important role that the cultural economy plays in ensuring the self-sufficiency and authentic development of the municipality, as well as being an example for putting aspects of interculturality into practice. I discuss this in relation with the need for a critical recovery of history, a valuation of local knowledge and practices, an understanding of national and international socioeconomic politics, and the production and diffusion of old and new knowledge. I intertwine examples that show possibilities for putting decolonization into practice that includes the people of Rumi Mayu in a national discourse for social change. The point here is to value and constructively critique the past in view of its evolution into the present, and its rightful place to recall indigenous circumstances and move from being seen and treated as “spaces of opposition” and oppression to “spaces of self-actualization” (Haymes, 2003: 230). I conclude with ways in which these changes interact, or may interact, within a dialectic relationship with the state.

### **Living off the Land: Past Harvests, Newer Uncertainties and Horizons**

I have argued that the cultural economy of Rumi Mayu was essential for caring for the local environment, agricultural production and circulation of goods (foods, animals, clothing, etc.) of the municipality for centuries. I do not think, or ever intended to portray, that this is a perfect socioeconomic system, nor that everyone was equitably taken care of; however, their cultural economy exemplifies the difference between livelihood and labor, and between self-sufficiency and dependence. It is difficult to ascertain how well-nourished Rumi Mayuns were years ago because there are no written records, but there *are* oral accounts handed down throughout the centuries. Be it close to truth, legend, local pride, or a mixture of all three, everyone animatedly speaks of the agricultural harvests of their ancestors in terms of there being an abundance of foods, a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, and fish. They talked about different traditional plates, and claimed that their ancestors were stronger, healthier, lived long, and had all their teeth. Most likely there is some exaggeration in these tales, but for the most part people believe them, and I can see why. After watching my neighbors live off of their land, exchange foods through *trueque*, and share parts of their harvests with us, I had little doubt about how well nourished this place was, or could be.

In the introductory chapter, I mention that my focus is not just about the causes and consequences of the physical nature of malnutrition or undernourishment, but also about the concepts of “nourishment” and its relationship with the mind, soul, and the environment that surrounds us and sustains us. Initially, when we arrived in Rumi Mayu, I was not expecting to see such high levels of undernourishment and

malnutrition. Although I was well aware of the nutritional indices in the region and throughout Bolivia, I was somewhat blinded by the ecological diversity and the richness of the culture. Yet, in spite of the ecological potential, years of overworking the land, changes in agricultural techniques (the use of chemical fertilizers), unpredictable weather (droughts, floods), and limited financial resources, have all contributed to inconsistent and / or decreased productions, and thus to food insecurity. During the last couple of decades, the state was significantly absent around these issues, and the NGOs worked in a spotty manner, resulting in both gains and losses. Rumi Mayuns have responded to these challenges in different ways: migration; local manual labor (sweep the school; haul rocks for the road construction); get elected to mayor or town council; dig into the previous year's storage; plant new crops; get involved in an NGO project; and / or eat less.

If the rains were as predictable as before, and the soil as fertile and the rivers as clean, I highly doubt that agricultural production and access to nutritional foods would be so jeopardized. These changes have caused a domino effect that shreds apart the soul of the region. As the soil deteriorates, it threatens not only food production, but also the cultural economy that sustains the main livelihood and social networks. The NGOs continue to, in varying degrees, assist in exploring and implementing agricultural projects to improve some of these conditions. Despite some failed attempts, such as the goat and cochanilla projects, they have implemented a number of beneficial projects, such as irrigation systems (albeit of inferior quality); the introduction of fruit trees, potato varieties, and peanuts;; developed the marmalade artisan factory for women; three school gardens; etc. All

of these projects have contributed in one way or another to the agricultural needs of the region. However, they fall short in not working inter-disciplinarily with locals, other NGOs, and the municipal workers. They fall shorter yet, in not working with the locals as partners, learning from them and teaching them, and making decisions together that include ways in which a cultural economy could flourish. Not in its “traditional” sense, but in ways that will grow over time, keeping its roots firmly planted in the social orientations of its economy. This has been one of the major strengths of the municipality; it is a place that *demonstrates* interculturality. It is also a fertile ground in which to truly put decolonization into practice.

Overall, the municipal annual strategic plan continues to adhere to previous goals of municipal infrastructure and market oriented economic development projects. They are also obliged to implement the novel national policies of “Zero Malnutrition” (*Desnutrición Cero*) and “decolonized education.” While these two new state policies are acknowledged by municipal workers, their incorporation into the local context is highly contingent upon the orientation and preferences of those in authority positions. So far, these national policies do not seem to be well understood by local or municipal workers, as most employees continue to focus on previous policy implementations hinged to visions and development beliefs from western models. Both of these policies hold much potential for social change, but the practicality of including local knowledge, cultural practices and beliefs into their formulas is difficult for most workers and locals to grasp or create. This is where the state should be paying attention and working with locals: exploring ways to put these policies into practice. Rural communities have much to offer, and society has much

to gain from seeing and listening to one another. The major contention is knowledge and sharing information (not misinformation), in order to develop keener and broader insights to what has happened (inclusive and honest history), with what *is* happening (consequences of sociopolitical, economic and development policies), in order to make well-informed, thought out, healthy and inclusive decisions.

However, if Rumi Mayu continues on a market-based economy path, the consequences of this will result in wider and deeper impoverishment of the health and well-being of its population. This could lead to a mono crop system that could destroy the biodiversity of the region, promote a labor system regulated by market standards, enforce standardized curriculums to develop market related skills, and create newer divisions of gender roles to meet the market needs. Thus, centuries of self-sufficiency will be undermined, and concepts of interculturality, decolonization and *vivir bien* will be rendered meaningless.

### **Newer Imaginaries of Development**<sup>208</sup>

Numerous stories throughout this dissertation display the complexity of the multiple sides taken by the diverse actors in development plans, economic ventures and systems of knowledge (school curriculum, traditional medicine and biomedicine). While the Bolivian outsiders to the region bring with them a host of foreign ideas, infrastructure plans and shiny prospects, the locals, in varying degrees

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<sup>208</sup> I derive the meaning of “imagining” from Escobar’s usage within the concepts of positioning alternatives to modernity that is not about “point[ing] towards a real *pristine* future where development or modernity no longer exist;...[but] rather to intuit the possibility of *imagining* an era where development and modernity cease to be the central organizing principles of social life—a moment when social life is no longer so permeated by the constructs of economy, individual, rationality, order, and so forth that are characteristic of Eurocentered modernity” Escobar, 2010: 206).

are open to this newness, yet each in his or her own way continues to relish their inter-generational knowledge and local ways. It is what they know and feel most comfortable with. However, many people have expressed that by engaging in “western” modernity, these changes will help them to shed their oppressive past. The façade of a brick house versus an adobe house is viewed in terms of “clean,” “successful,” and not “dirty,” and “backwards.” These are the modern traps of life that deter people from seeing the beauty and strength in the so called “dirty” and “backward.” For the adobe house is more durable than the brick house. Change is what happens in life, but covering up historical wounds of oppression and marginalization with shiny band-aids of infrastructure and mono crop agriculture will not address nor cure the infections of inequality, social maiming and land degradation. These dilemmas can be associated with how change is occurring through acts of blind faith (dinosaur museum), corruption (shoddy hospital, monstrous market), newer forms of inequities (access to development programs), classism (new entrepreneur class), gender stereotype (school curriculums), and not through practices of decolonization. These are the dilemmas of capitalism that get reenacted through neocolonialism, such as “reconstituted neoliberalism.”

Throughout the previous chapters I integrate the development plans of the elected mayors and some of the town council people, which show how many of their visions are coextensive with colonialism and western modernity that has ideological, institutional and material dimensions that are incongruent with one another. The mayors are positioned as major “deciders” who can choose or align with certain development plans as based on ideological and political beliefs and economic

opportunities (e.g., funding and access to projects/aid agencies). Their power was greatly enhanced through the funds distributed by the 1994 Law of Popular Participation that decentralized monies to rural municipalities. Over several municipal elections, these financial opportunities, and paid salaries, seemed to lure a number of candidates to the mayoral seat, with increased competition for the town council also. In addition, the gender laws that stipulate that 30 % of political seats are to be filled by women has enabled at least two women town council members to be elected over the past decade, to each administration. Ironically, however, over the past decade many of the mayoral candidates elected came from the mainstream NGO sector, whose style of leadership and visions of development have been very much aligned with western thoughts of modernity.

In the 2010 mayoral election, the unopposed MAS candidate was also a local who was employed as the driver of Proagro, and who over the past eight years has switched party allegiance three times—MBL to UN to MAS. He ran unopposed because no one thought that they could beat him, owing to the strength of the MAS political party, and the need for the municipality to align with the MAS in order to obtain funds and political backing for municipal works. Yet despite national political party changes from MNR neoliberal stance to MAS's socialist policies, so far the municipal development plans continue on the path that the UN mayor Jorge put in place in 2003—infrastructure projects and tourism. Although many of these are not necessarily harmful, and could be potentially helpful, many of them obscure and deter from more prevalent needs and desires, and innovative approaches that could enhance local practices, livelihoods, and strengthen newer practices of

reciprocity, trueque, etc. Therefore, it is not necessarily about what is being constructed, but more so how these constructions do not meet or obscure local needs. A new school building is wonderful, and can provide a comfortable ambiance that can enhance learning, but this will not guarantee that the teacher values and seeks to understand local culture, or national educational policies and curriculums which aim to understand and build across cultures and epistemological borders. Appearances can be a distraction—a façade, from addressing fundamental problems and issues.

Many of the obstacles revolve around Rumi Mayu's newness to municipal government and judicial laws. After the 1952 Revolution, Rumi Mayuns took things into their own hands, and worked to maintain and develop the municipality with their limited resources: no money from the state, and poor compensation for their crops. The lack of state assistance coupled with climate change and soil degradation impeded their progress. The funds from the 1994 Popular Participation Law changed this, with money being funneled to the municipality. This opened up opportunities that were largely taken advantage of by people who held western concepts of development, and had developed administration skills from working with NGOs. Their main challenge is in learning and applying judicial legislature, administering finances, writing proposals and thinking creatively from their bases. One afternoon, I visited two town council people (man and woman), who were sitting uneasily in a dark corner of a cold room in the town hall. When I entered they were ardently studying the new constitution, and explained how challenging it was to comprehend these terminologies, but how important it was for them to know. On walking back home, I ran into don Julio, and we talked briefly about my visit. He commented,



“Yes, they are all new now, and I noticed how nervous they are about having these new responsibilities, but give them a little time and they’ll get it.”

Many of people of Rumi Mayu are taking notice of what is working well, and what is not. For example, the many complaints and refusal to sell their products out of the large impersonal market building. Obviously not all see or think this way, but there is hope that newer imaginaries of development will be explored. After the local indigenous mayor Gonzalo’s term was over (2010), in a conversation with the departmental health coordinator, Dr. Amparo, and myself, he reflected on his term in office, remarking, “I wish I would have used the money for human resource development, instead of all of the infrastructure projects.” Similarly, when my husband and I had visited him in his mayor’s office a year before, on top of a small table sat a model of the dinosaur museum. Don Gonzalo noticed our faces as we stared at this toy model, and in tones of reluctance, he inquired: “What do you think about this? I’m not sure this is what we really need in the municipality. It’s the department that’s giving us the money, and pushing us to build it. But, what will it do for the community?”

The mayor is not alone in thinking of healthier ways of developing the municipality. As demonstrated through my interviews and many of the voices that I present in the third chapter, most people are concerned about the deterioration of their land, and are aware of the years of unsustainable agricultural practices and climate change that compromises their livelihoods and harvests. Many are continuing to take action into their own hands; and some of the younger folks are starting to join in. For example, in one of the Cordillera communities the majority of

families have organized and formed an agricultural cooperative; youth are going to college to study agriculture and rural development in order to return and help revitalize the municipality, but with a vision that comes from their communities, as demonstrated in exhibits designed by the ASE ecology groups; and the Japanese NGO is working in several communities with tree seedlings greenhouses and organic manures to rebuild soils and forested areas. These practices along with other alternative economic and agricultural systems from *trueque* to changing sociopolitical dynamics and market practices, need to widen the avenues and multiple ways in which to work with (“manage”) the environment, through a combination of “reciprocal” and culturally enhancing practices that enable people to be part of the processes of change. The information that people access and receive, the knowledge that they have and expand on, the dialogues, conversations, and debates that take place, provide food for thought and nourishment for actions.

### **Circulations of Knowledge**

Since my family and I first stepped foot in Rumi Mayu, we have witnessed numerous changes in communication, workshops, and schooling, exemplified in the expansion of one telephone line for the entire municipality multiply to two lines, with a couple of used computers thrown in, to almost everyone having access to a cell phone and the opening of an internet center with six donated computers. When we first arrived, terms such as reproductive health and climate change were not part of the lexicon, yet people experienced it, and while they did not name it as such, they talked about it with their own terminologies and language. Over the years, more people began to “westernize” these concepts, such as the man who elaborated on

climate change issues from information that he read on the internet, and the women's focus group that diverted the conversation from school food aid to discuss reproductive health issues. The number of development agencies went from thirteen NGOs and three bi-lateral assistance programs, down to six NGOs and no bi-lateral assistance programs, bringing with them an increased number of people from urban centers with higher levels of formal education mainly based on western curriculums—and, also bringing with them newer brands of controversies. The number of primary schools has increased and a high school was added, as well as one night school program started for adults who had never received their high school diploma. Several more health posts popped up, with more health professional assigned to work with the communities. All of this, and more, has highly influenced exposures to different ways of thinking, different knowledge to work with and to address issues, new ideas to reflect on and incorporate into one's own knowledge, and so forth. Rumi Mayu is developing, and has always been doing so; and, it is doing so with what it can get its hands on, and with what comes its way.

The circulation of knowledge is socially constructed and inherently political, and influences local knowledge. Both forms of knowledge—cultural and scientific—incorporate and resist the other, demonstrating the postcolonial condition of borderline epistemologies in which knowledge is not about binaries, but crossing borders. As Mitchell points out, change does not necessarily come about by “the things people [believe] but in the ways that their lives [are] disciplined, both by methods of self-discipline and by the emergence of modern collective discipline is such forms as schooling and the law [i.e., agrarian reforms, the PPL]” (2000: xviii).

Municipal employees, NGOs, the schools and health system, television and radio are the major influences on the lives of middle aged and younger generations in the municipality of Rumi Mayu.

However, for the most part most Rumi Mayuns live a very self-sufficient existence that consists of an outdoorsy lifestyle that is much in sync with nature; it has its own time and rhythm. The knowledge of most adults has grown, deepened, expanded, and evolved from their conversations, experiences, exchanges, ancestral oral histories, and observations. Ideas are exchanged in the fields and around bowls of soup, concerns expressed on the streets and tiendas, and remedies shared through observations and the grapevine. Thus, walking into a shiny, white-tiled floor hospital with people that you do not know, “professionals” dressed in white jackets, who pose differently and speak differently, can be both intriguing and unnerving. The same can be said about entering the closed spaces of classrooms. Approaching a teacher, someone you do not know, who is portrayed as possessing knowledge that is more important and valuable than yours, can be both stimulating and intimidating. Similar encounters and experiences can be said for entering the municipal offices, and NGOs buildings. The spaces, movements, languages, are different. It is more comfortable on the outside (open fields), then the inside (cornered rooms). In all of these buildings, I rarely came across locals in their corridors. The buildings were occupied by their employees, schools by teachers and students, and everyone else in the community were out doing their thing.

Yet, ironically the fixed-up rooms and new buildings symbolize progress to many Rumi Mayuns, and they see it as the main corridor to escape racism and

marginalization, and to develop the tools necessary to cross borders in order to save their place(s). As portrayed in the narratives from the interviews that I wrote about in Chapter 3, parents want their children to study so that they can do better for themselves, and many expressed that they would like them to come back and make the municipality a better place for all. Although not everyone thinks this way, or is so altruistic, for the most part schooling is highly valued. Similar to how more local people are elected to municipal political positions and accommodating themselves to the rooms of the town hall, in the last couple of years I heard about a high school student whom I know graduate as an auxiliary nurse, and is now working in the health post in a valle community. In conversations with the youth, many of them told me that they would like to come back, sharing similar hopes with their parents, to be critical actors in the further development of a self-sufficient municipality. The challenge will be, and time will tell, if they can break the ties of shiny development schemes, utilizing their critical thinking skills to build upon their own imaginaries from their bases.

The buildings are one aspect; and the papers that stuff their filing cabinets, the medicines that line their shelves, and the bureaucratic regimens, are another. Locals do not generally understand what is written on these papers, and the implanted workers do not generally understand how locals can read their land, and why they live the life that they do. There is an assumption that they are just poor campesinos struggling to survive, with the minimal quantities of “things” that they have. It is a meeting of different worlds that have been separated at birth, but have been raised on different cultures, ideologies, languages, concepts, misinformation

and plain old lies. I am not talking about binaries, but of the fabrications of different colored lenses in which one becomes oriented to see the world.

We are not aware of the complexity of our own histories, and how that has influenced who we are today and how we think, react to one another, and do what we do. Most adults know their Bolivian history only from conversations, and from their children. The teachers and other municipal workers learn from similar school books as our son did. These books and teaching practices continue to instill the binary conceptualization of inferior and superior—be it race, gender, knowledge, etc.—and support an economic model that is highly skewed toward extraction, exploitation, and capitalist markets. This continues on a national and regional level. History needs to be explored and rewritten from the lived experiences and perspectives of the dirt roads and pot-holed streets. That knowledge needs to be reconstructed—historiography, world literature, politics, sociology, science, economics, etc.—to present a more profound pluri-versality, to envision other ways of being with a multiplicity of living and non-living beings, human and not” (Escobar, 2010: 198).

I am not saying that all western knowledge is evil and should be chucked out the window. It is part of the human evolution; is an integral, complex part of our existence. It has created diseases, as well as cured them, and prevented others. My major contention is that knowledge is very lopsided and cunning; it buries different ways of thinking, other languages, and other logics. And, time is not always so kind for resurrecting the dead: while schools are having more influence on the young, the old are dying. They held a wealth of knowledge in their heads, and a deep

connection to their place. Like old algarrobo trees, their roots were deep, their trunks thick, and their branches extended outwards. I spoke with many, on many occasions, and found their passing an unfortunate loss. Therefore, it is urgent to capture the multiplicities within our diversity, and sooner than later. When I would visit the different communities, I would ask about who were the local story tellers, who were the walking books of local history. Only a handful of names were ever mentioned, and I have only been able to talk with one of them. He was one of the people who passed away in 2009; a humble, kind, thoughtful, renegade who valued his land, knew it like the palm of his hand, and who loved to share what was in his head; he will be greatly missed. The narrative high school project was one attempt to capture these treasure chests of history and contemporary thoughts, and oral literature. It was also way to begin writing the past anew from the eye and ears of the young, through the voices and depth of their elders; a way to put it into print for others to read and pass along. Although this small project did not come to full fruition, I did learn that the young people who participated wanted to learn about their history and culture. They were excited to have the opportunity to talk with their family and neighbors about their experiences and perspectives around the environment, agricultural production and harvests. Hopefully, it somehow took off in ways that I could never really see or know, but had strived for.

### **Local to National: Revolutions and Pathways to Vivir Bien?**

The municipality of Rumi Mayu, while geographically and culturally distinct, is representative of the changes that are occurring in many places throughout Bolivia

and elsewhere. On a national level, increased possibilities are opening for promoting multifaceted approaches of decolonization; however, there are also contradictions that need to be identified, discussed, interrogated and addressed. For decolonizing to occur in Rumi Mayu, as well as in other places like Rumi Muyu and beyond, we need to take into consideration what is happening on all levels: local, regional, national and international. As Fanon observed, “the process of decolonization represents a calling into question (and ultimately a changing) of the entire colonial social order of things” (1963: 35).

The contradictions occurring in the municipality of Rumi Mayu are reflections of a historic national / global capital economy, inflicted by colonial discourses and actions. While the tendency of the “colonial gaze” has been to project the marginalized and indigenous peoples as inferior, faulty and in need of assistance, these distractions continue to play a large role in deflecting much of contemporary national and global politics and economic development. Perhaps one of the most significant contradictions that we are *not* paying sufficient attention to now in Bolivia and Latin America in general, relates to the monstrous “neo-extraction” economic model. As a case in point, in Bolivia, there is little mention of the Initiative for Integration of Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA) in the media. IIRSA, initiated in 2000, is a geopolitical and economic plan that consists of 514 projects “under which a network of inter-oceanic roads, ports, waterways, hydroelectric plants, pipelines, and other major pieces of infrastructure are being built in order to integrate (but also open up) the continent” (Bebbington, 2009). According to Bebbington:



IRSA has been a massive initiative agreed to by presidents and international financial institutions with scarcely any public or parliamentary debate at all. With just a few exceptions (such as the Bank Information Center), social movements, NGOs, academics, and others became aware of it only very late in the day, in much the same way as the expansion of oil, gas, and mining concessions has crept up behind them. It was only in 2008 that the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (CAOI), together with the Bolivian NGO CEADDESC, presented a strategy for reorganizing IIRSA, eight years after it was launched. (ibid.)

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The Uruguayan ecologist Eduardo Gudynas (2010) refers to this as “*neoextractivismo*” (neo-extraction), comparing the new left governments in South America with the previous “*extractivismo convencional*” (conventional extraction) governments of their predecessors. The biggest change has been with the re-nationalization of state industries, and the utilization of incurred profits used to finance social welfare programs. However, Gudynas is quick to point out that these strategies are primarily used to pacify social protest, while the negative cultural and environmental consequences of “*neoextractivismo*” continue to snowball.

It must be acknowledged that progressive moves to the left in “Central / South America [make it] the only region in the world where some counter-hegemonic processes of importance might be taking place at the level of the State, and certainly at the level of some social movements” (Escobar, 2010: 391). But how can we decolonize if we continue on a similar economic path built on exploitation and the raping of the earth? How will we be able to maintain and/or restore our cultures, lands, and livelihoods? I am not denying the bind that the MAS government and other Latin American countries are facing after centuries of impoverishment, and the urgent need for cash. But, will these megaprojects be any

better *this* time around? According to a report presented by the School of Economics and Commercial Law, “although these revenues are badly needed to generate cash and assuage poverty, the Evo administration seems less concerned with reversing the loss of environmental resources, as exemplified by the rapid deforestation and loss of productive soil through soil erosion processes” (2007: 9). Given the precarious state of the Bolivian environment from centuries of exploitation, “reforms and investments that reverse the land degradation and improve agricultural productivity are of crucial importance” (ibid: 13) for food security and to “live well.”

Instead of destroying what is left, we should be rebuilding, strengthening what we have, in order to flourish anew. Therefore, decolonization will only begin to come about when it takes place on multiple levels, including the local, regional, national and global. National governments need to work in coordination with local and regional levels to strengthen their positions, and to work with other open-minded nations with similar positioning, to change global socioeconomic and political capitalist paradigms. If a municipality such as Rumi Mayu has been able to survive after centuries of (neo)colonialism, albeit under much duress, why is it then that the contemporary progressive countries of Latin America cannot unite to build a progressive, “greener” economic system?

The challenge in developing a pluralistic decolonizing inter/intracultural framework for "embracing [the environment and] positive health (rather than disease), questioning the discourse of causality, celebrating multiple perspectives and subjectivity, championing multi-disciplinarity, and valuing diversity and fragmentation over universality and generalisability" (Watson and Platt, 2000: 79),

lies in an indeterminate number of places throughout the world, such as the municipality of Rumi Mayu. The municipality is not merely a collection of “imagined communities,” but rather a bio-diverse region that consists of four ecological floors interacting with each other to produce staple foods that nourish the people that live there, and all other living things within its domain. Much can be learned from the inter/intracultural relationships of *trueque* and reciprocity, and the damages inflicted by colonialism, in order to seek ways in which to rejuvenate and build upon these principles.

Environments conducive for positive change require collective participation, and dialectical interactions and analysis that contribute to multiple ways of knowing and understanding, which can be examined through forms of praxis. Drawing on a Gramscian idea, I believe that critical knowledge should include transforming “common” sense into “good sense,” contributing to multiple perspectives that include experiential and theoretical knowledge. Spaces in which dialectical processes circulate should involve collective actions that share multi-knowledges for deconstructing, critically analyzing, and debating historical, cultural and daily experiences; these processes need to have precedence in striving to include socially oppressed peoples as equals in working towards transforming the relations of power/knowledge. We need to look at what is working (or sort of working), and build on and out from there. Street art and plaza educational displays, and the numerous seminars that discuss the new constitution, autonomies, environmental issues, energy resources uses, etc. need to occur more frequently, and across and between geographical places. As Giroux stipulates, “in the absence of a vital public

sphere, criticism has no opportunity to be debated and institutionalized in a collective context that allows it to be mobilizing political force” (Eagleton cited in Giroux, 1988: 208).

We need to look for ways in which to make these locations more inclusive and understanding to all in civil society, but also to encourage meaningful interactions, dialogue and actions. These venues need to take place in rural areas, also. In Rumi Mayu, for example, one of the more informative, interactive, and stimulating events that took place was the history classes that doña Julia attended, organized by women’s organizations from Sucre. I was impressed when she told me, “I didn’t know that much about our history, and how this has affected our communities.” In order to see and deal with the roots of colonialism, we need to interrogate our histories, re-write them to accurately tell what happened and learn the past, so as not to repeat what is wrong. My attempts with the high school students to explore and write narratives of local memories and experiences were based on these aspirations. We need to find ways in which this can happen and multiply; to provide teachers and others with the proper space, tools, resources, and support for self-expression and knowledge creation. There are scattered examples of similar and more elaborated programs happening throughout Bolivia that we can constructively critique and expand upon, such as with UNICEF (see Albó and Anaya, 2003), Agroecología Universidad Cochabamba, AGRUCO (see Delgado B. and Escóbar V., eds. 2006), CENDA’s work in Raqaypampa (see Regalsky, 2007), FUNPROEIB ANDES (see [fundacion.proeibandes.org](http://fundacion.proeibandes.org)) and the Guaraní (see Gustafson, 2009). Furthermore, the creation in 2009 of three indigenous universities (Aymara, Quechua

and Guarani) in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Chuquisaca, will hopefully contribute to these ends by fulfilling many aspects of their intended objective to reaffirm and strengthen, as stated by Roberto Alguilar, Minister of Education, “the wisdom, knowledge, culture and organizational forms of the indigenous and original peoples, with the incorporation of interculturality and pluri-lingual” education. (*Los Tiempos*).

We need to extend the “inclusion of different knowledges...that shape relations of power not only among people but...among counties and historical traditions” (Rodríguez, 2008: 57). This was exemplified for me by the exchanges between the urban university ASE ecology club and the high school internado students. These explorations and actions should work in conjunction with civil society, social movements, unions, state ministries, schools, health workers, businesses, industries, grassroots NGOs, scholars, and all others. We need to build collaborative models that open up spaces for different means of cognitive thinking to develop, and places to exchange and enhance knowledge in order better equip ourselves, and local places to develop analytic tools that can detect the dynamics of power, and use it for the “well being” of individuals and places. We need to be well prepared to confront and change “the notion of governmentality...experienced by liberal societies and their transformation into neoliberal regimes, [and the] new technologies of the self that have come to the fore and that, unless questioned and subverted, would inevitable legitimize the neoliberal version of the modernist, autonomous subject that takes the shape of ‘homo economicus’ (Peters, 1996), or ‘enterprising self’ (Rose, 1992)’ ”(Rodríguez, 2008: 54). We need to be equipped to question and talk with our government officials, businesses, organizations, schools,

etc. so we may make “critiques” and be “thinkers” for change, and not just “soldiers for change.”

The critiques of different indigenous social organizations discussed at the outset of this chapter, continue and have gained more momentum in recent experience with the latest national development moves. In early June 2011, the MAS government confirmed their plan to push through the constructions of a 274 kilometer road that threatens one of the most biodiverse places in Bolivia (and the world) , the Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore (TIPNIS). This endeavor will affect three ethnic groups in 33 distinct indigenous communities, “permitting the advance of settlers and the expansion of coca production; the northern [section of the road] would provide access for hunters and large scale logging companies who have been waiting for many years” (Jordán, La Razón: 2011). On top of this, the MAS government also reneged on their position to phase out genetically modified (GMO) foods over a five year period, with aims to recuperate local seeds, and will now “ease the use of genetically modified foods... for some export-oriented soy crops...[but] will be broadened to other products” (Associated Press, June 6, 2011). The TIPNIS issue has caused much national and international consternation, and the allowance of genetically modified seeds has caused much controversy and heated debates among social movements, NGOs, and civil society. A couple of years ago, I asked several campesinos in Rumi Mayu if they knew what genetically modified seeds were, and they did not, but wanted to know more. It is these places of new knowledge production (western scientific) that need to be discussed and understood, in order to equip civil society to not be co-

opted, and to make healthier decisions for local places, and for national and global levels to understand that, for example, “GM seeds as the solution to the problem of world hunger...These GM seeds are not the product of nature or God, and therefore rather than being of benefit to the campesino farmer, they risk contaminating wild, local genetic resources as well as consumer” (Mendieta-Chávez, 2010).

In conclusion, focusing on food—malnutrition and nourishment—demonstrates the need for an “integrative comprehension [of knowledges, the environment and development] that recognizes food is not solely reduced to questions of diet or adequate consumptions and nutrition, but also it implies an equitable distribution of development resources, the design of effective interventions that considers a profound *emic* point of view, the sensitization / training of health [education and other professionals, as well as civil society]...in interculturality, etc.” (Salas Valenzuela, 2009: 283). Linking the macro and micro levels, and the local and global levels, connects “causal links between marginalized locations and experiences” that enable the possibility to “decolonize knowledge and practice anti-capitalist critiques” to take place (Mohanty, 2003: 7, 231). Listening to lived experiences requires “empathetic connections;” or, as Emma Goldman states (quoted in Moya), “entering into the lives of others” (Moya 1997: 148). I believe empathy enables us to see others in a more objective light, horizontally learning and giving meaning to the richness of local, as well as national and global, struggles and resistance. However, “emancipating knowledge,” sharing experiences and empathy, are still not enough to attain a level of solidarity. We need to constantly keep ourselves in check—to reflect, critique, analyze and build upon our own work, and

do so in coalition with others. We need to cross-examine our own susceptibilities, such as high-powered careers or professions that are used for our own self-advancement (cf. Mohanty, 2003: 6; hooks, 2000:106). This applies to both western worlds as well as to indigenous worlds. “Critical” interculturality provides the space to critically reflect and analyze dominant western scientific culture (epistemological hegemony), and push forward an inclusion of a “plurality of knowledge... in search of epistemological equilibrium” (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009: 10). Networking is a central means to connect and communicate between the local, the regional, and the global in order to dismantle the cycle of colonial forms of domination and co-optation, and build alliances, civil society organizations, social movements, coalitions, networks—local-regional-nationally, South-South, and South-North—partnerships and modes of financial sustainability that explore alternative post-development models and social transformations that build within and expand between local ecologies of place.



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