

Abstract: The Populist Chola: Political Prospecting, Semiotic Mediation and Engendered Ideology in Quillacollo, Bolivia

This paper examines the political status of “native” women in the context of the local electoral process in the region of Cochabamba, Bolivia. In a populist climate such women, called cholas, have become strategically important, as a necessary component of local politicians’ cultural identity. Native women in fact symbolically mediate political access to the popular sector for men. Politicians engage in “token” exchanges with these women as a way to simultaneously participate in a popular cultural milieu, and to claim a heritage from the Andean cultural world, through supposed genealogical descendance from native women. This paper explores several interrelated themes of regional popular culture, including the development context, the domestic economy, agriculture, and folkloric practice, which constitute cholas as a popular “root metaphor.” Yet while an increasingly key part of local political image-making, these women themselves remain shut out from direct access to political power.

Key words: [Bolivia, gender, politics, popular identity, brokerage]

## 1. Introduction: Electoral Populism

A mere handful of months after the unexpected death in March 1997 of Carlos Palenque, founder and leader of the populist CONDEPA (*Conciencia de Patria*) party, the task was left to Remedios Loza as the party's presidential candidate and new de facto leader to negotiate a coalition government with the president-elect and former dictator Hugo Banzer. Usually referred to by the press simply as the "Chola Remedios," in reference to her "indigenous" Aymara *chola* garb of gathered skirts called the *pollera*, Remedios Loza -- along with the former vice-president and Aymara Indian Victor Hugo Cárdenas -- is a powerful testament to the newly visible role of the "popular sector" on the national political scene. And as explicitly "populist" political parties, CONDEPA and the UCS (*Unidad Cívica Solidaridad*) are now proving their staying power, since they first burst onto the Bolivian political landscape in the late-1980's. But despite Loza's high profile political career, we should not hastily assume the improved political fortunes of popular women. Rather, the "chola" (woman *de pollera*) is instead proving indispensable as political symbolic capital for *men*, who are looking for avenues of legitimation in an increasingly populist climate. As we shall see, in the provincial context of Quillacollo this "image" of the chola is the animus behind male popular identity. And this image perhaps displaces direct political intervention by women at the municipal level (cf. Caero 1997). Why then has the chola proven to be such vital symbolic capital for men?

Up until Palenque's death, it would have been more accurate to suggest that, rather than acting on her own behalf, the Chola Remedios lent her charisma to the process of solidification of Palenque's own populist career. She skillfully acted both as social mediator and as cultural broker for her political patron the *mestizo* Palenque, bridging the gap between the politician and his largely Aymara constituency (Archondo 1991: 150-154), while herself remaining relatively powerless. This peculiar mediatory role of the woman *de pollera* in the Andes -- between the intimate and the public, rural and urban, *indio* and *mestizo*, and as market transactor -- has been identified: with the articulation of production and consumption across spheres of exchange (Rivera 1996), with the erasure of class distinctions and the maintenance of sites of particular

social *communitas* such as the *chichería* (Rodriguez and Solares 1990), as the “dynamic nexus” of a diversified household economy dispersed across space and types of social relations (Paulson 1996), and as fundamental for destabilizing and ridiculing the national “reification of ethnic categories” (Seligmann 1993), in the construction of alternative identities. The chola has thus put up particular resistance to imposed social classifications, while demonstrating a deft capacity to navigate among them. However at least for Bolivian populist electoral tactics this same mediatory potential, while politically crucial, makes of the chola a relatively powerless though highly visible reified image, inserted between *políticos* and their electorates. And it is this same mediatory potential which transforms her into a political caricature. In Quillacollo at least, in the words of one local folklorist, “Men themselves have gone about creating the chola.” The Chola Remedios is perhaps only the most flesh and blood of these engendered instruments of popular mediation. But what, then, makes the chola such an effective instrument of mediation for men?

The new orientation of the popular in Bolivia is a partial result of ongoing national realities of reform. Since 1982 Bolivia has seen the restoration of national elections after an extended period of dictatorships beginning in 1964. And as of 1987, elections have been held for local municipal officials as well. At the same time, governmental decentralization begun in 1985 has promoted an increased mutual investment between regional politicians and their electorates. Decentralization continued in 1995 with the new Popular Participation Law, which provides municipalities with direct access to and greater autonomy over budgetary expenditures, and recognizes “indigenous” forms of corporate identity and political leadership. These reform measures have been applied in a context of at times extreme economic scarcity and the failure of traditional political options to respond adequately to the minimal socioeconomic requirements of a “popular” underclass hit hard by neoliberal policies. The pervasive disillusionment with traditional parties has enabled these new populist parties -- CONDEPA and the UCS -- to forge a niche for themselves, galvanizing the electoral participation of diverse folks of so-called “humble origin” (*de origen humilde*). In short, in recent years regional cultural “traditions” and harsh economic realities have become unexpected political bedfellows.

Referred to as “one of the least precise terms in the social sciences” (Kuper 1987: 188), “populism” -- as with such terms as “fascism” or “liberalism” -- has proven notoriously hard to define except in concrete instances. Most attempts, such as one recent definition of Latin American populism as: “urban, multiclass, electoral, expansive, ‘popular,’ and led by charismatic figures” (Conniff 1982), become entangled in tautological reasoning, where “populism” first always seems to require the “popular.” Part of the problem with this definitional approach is the persistent desire to classify political engagement in terms of distinct “types” with identifiable features. But supposed populists of all stripes, it seems to me, are called so precisely because they are in some way taken to be “with” the people, “closer” to the people, or “from” the people. Hence this relation *is* indeed tautological, depending upon both parties to the equation -- the supposed populist and the “people” themselves -- agreeing to its existence. However, I submit that it is this more elusive relationship of apparent social intimacy, however specifically identified in terms of a combination of traits, which is more decisive for populism and for the understanding of at least one way that the Bolivian “popular sector” is politically constituted as a “populist” electoral object. This relationship of intimacy is elusive insofar as there is no general circumstance across cases that defines it. And it is precisely with regard to this rhetoric of intimacy where the engendered mediation of the chola has proven most effective in Quillacollo.

Considering the neoliberal slant of recent Bolivian national reform, the most compelling political issue for a popular sector that absorbed the greatest post-reform hardship remains relief from economic uncertainty. But, as suggested, the accompanying decentralizing measures have meant that specific regional economies must rely more on their own mettle. At least in Quillacollo, this economic turn inward has translated into a political recognition of household economies as the single most decisive regional economic variable. This turn is in keeping with the long-term history of the primacy of the diversified household as the basic economic unit in the region (cf. Dandler 1987; Lagos 1994; Larson 1988; Paulson 1996). To maintain local salience, then, contemporary politicians must keep in close touch with this intimate arena of the extended family. At the same time, populist parties have distanced themselves from the disenchantment with the

historical platforms of both the political Left and Right, instead opting for a direct appeal to the immediate needs of this demographically dominant and culturally “authentic” popular sector. To effectively position themselves as “from” this world, potential populist politicians combine these two factors: at once seeking symbolic access to the intimate household economy, but in terms of the specific regional cultural traditions associated with this productive domain.

In Quillacollo the chola is the best means for accomplishing this end. In the words of regional politicians and folklorists, the chola is a “basic symbol,” a “symbol of the valley,” and the “engine of man.” It is often said that out of pride the “real” chola never changes her costume; she never switches to modern “skirts” over the pollera. She thus literally embodies the regional intransigence of “tradition” itself in her unmistakable “social skin.” Second, the chola provides unique access as the critical link to key locations of the regional economy, in her incarnations as: market woman, agriculturalist, *chichera*, and bulwark of the household economy. These multiple roles of the chola define the parameters of engagement with a regional micro-political economy. As will become apparent, through these overlapping roles the woman de pollera indexes economic “productivity” and “exchange,” as well as social “reproduction.” She is what makes male popular identity in the region possible, and is thus a populist linchpin of the post-reform economic context. Hence, politicians make constant public reference to the valiant efforts of the woman “de pollera,” as a way to suggest that they themselves are also from humble origins, which implies that their mothers (or grandmothers, or great-grandmothers) are/were de pollera as well.

Speaking of the Bolivian case, Silvia Rivera has insisted that it is not enough simply to account for gender. Rather, “native” women must be able to realize their own historical agency as active “subjects,” rather than as simple objects of state action (1996: 24). In Quillacollo over the last decade a regional cultural movement has sought just that: to revalorize a stigmatized popular cultural milieu. The members of this movement have repositioned the chola as an active agent and as a positive basis upon which a regional *quillacolleño* identity might rest. In the rhetoric and activities of this cultural movement, the chola is viewed as a central regional protagonist “making” cultural history, rather than as simply a passive object and victim. This movement has also been

influential as one element in the regional populist arena, which in lieu of explicit political ideologies and platforms, has embraced the “logic” of popular culture where the woman de pollera fulfills her role as the “traditional” mediator between such venues as the household, the fields, the market, and in the chichería.

But nevertheless these increasingly prevalent engendered regional images of its “native” women have continued to elude the grasp of these women themselves. Why do these images, essential for men, remain significantly beyond womens’ control? In part this political fact can be traced to the continuities between the positive revaluation of the popular -- and the primary role played by images of “native” women in this process -- and an older regional corpus of “indigenist” writing and thinking upon which these contemporary images tacitly rely. As will become apparent, even amidst the positive revaluation of the woman de pollera by a cultural movement whose members are themselves of “humble origins,” her attributed “role” in the mediation of the popular has its roots in a preexistent folkloric discourse characteristic of a now bygone economic context of agrarian feudalism. In this now out of context and anachronistic mid-century idiom, the popular sector and indigenous women in particular lacked significant access to a political voice. And yet it is this semiotic structure of asymmetry that continues to give shape to the ways the image of the chola circulates.

Here I explore the male political imagination in Quillacollo, Bolivia, as focused upon the cultural attributes of the regional woman de pollera. In their significantly folklorized political dealings with cholas, men hope to take advantage of these women’s intimate brokerage of popular cultural and economic spaces. Regional populism has become the best strategy for electoral success in the wake of a national process of “neoliberal democratization,” which has indirectly promoted a renewed public investment in the cultural and economic venues associated with the chola. I treat this trucking in “native” engendered images as an intentionally deceitful semiotic form of populist legitimation in the regional context. And the political intersection of economic and popular cultural strategies is most apparent in the development context, where *políticos* regularly stage token interaction with the popular sector. I give particular attention, then, to the

various ways that the new regional political economy of development reflects the emergent mediatory electoral role of the “populist chola” for male political identity.

## 2. An Engendered Development Politics

In late 1993 just before local elections in the town of Quillacollo, I walked the dirt and cobblestone streets of the colonial center taking pictures of the colorful profusion of electoral propaganda. Such propaganda is usually painted by groups of young party “members” (*militantes*) under cover of darkness, often on ancient adobe walls. Oftentimes it is hurriedly slapped over storefronts and private residences against the owner's wishes. Accompanying typical campaign slogans -- “*el candidato de las manos limpias*” -- the propaganda featured both “regionalist” and “popular” images. Common images included: the Church of San Ildefonso, which houses the internationally renowned image of the Virgin of Urkupiña; ceramic *puños*, used in the elaboration and storing of *chicha*, a traditional brew of fermented corn; the regionally symbolic *molle* tree, expressing ecological concerns; and most common of all, the semblance of a *cholita*, with her typical stovepipe hat, earrings, braids, tassels, pollera, and wearing a provocatively seductive expression. With this ubiquitous and idealized semblance of the cholita parties hope to overcome a “native” distrust of politicians among the popular voting classes. These images are also meant to be visual projections of regional candidates' own past. A candidate's populist status significantly depends upon a self-identity which includes immediate female ancestors, ideally the mother, who are themselves *de pollera*.

Given the new electoral exigencies of regional politics in Bolivia, where local populations can for the first time elect their own municipal officials, these images seem to court the vote of a demographically dominant but historically disenfranchised population -- the popular sector, more specifically, the popular woman, even more specifically, the woman *de pollera*, with her conspicuously autochthonous dress style. And yet, conversations with politically active women suggest they are not taken in by this attempted electoral seduction. They claim the image of the cholita to be pure “political propaganda,” a superficial device to imply a phantom political

following. Such an image is a "manipulation" (*manipuleo*), "humiliating," and designed to "confuse people." Political parties, they say, want to refer to their "ancestors" in order to project an image as an "authentic creole party," that is "native to this place." People also recognize that this ubiquitous image of the *chola cochabambina* (that is, the regionally specific variant of the woman de pollera) is doubly problematic, since a large portion of the cholas living and working in the town and environs are from elsewhere, sporting a slightly different costume featuring a bowler rather than stovepipe hat. The desired electoral effect -- that the chola is being taken into account in the new populist moment -- might in fact backfire in this case, heightening a regionalist sense of exclusion of mostly highland Aymara-speaking migrants. Ironically, these women coincide with the políticos, themselves, in claiming that políticos merely wish to project a "populist" image. They are acutely aware of the ways that this "image" of the chola has been extracted from its regional cultural context for electoral ends.

But as one leader of a "mother's club" (*club de madres*) jokingly put it, once the elections are over, "They forget us. It's like [a married man] seeking out his sweetheart!" (*novia*). This comment, humorously tossed off by a female leader as a paraphrase of taken-for-granted political realities of exploitation, is telling for several reasons. In politics, goes the implication, men come to women only in the short term and for immediate gratification. Politics is equated allegorically with the love affair (*aventura amorosa*). From the point of view of politically active women and wives, the electoral courting of women is like a man's adultery. The relation of the novia to the husband is illicit, covert, risky, notorious, unreliable, based on self-interest, and temporary. In recognized contrast to the long-term commitment of marriage, with its obligatory embeddedness in a public landscape of social relations, the love affair is an ephemeral and significantly socially invisible relationship. Literally, this comment alludes to the strategic use of feminine wiles, at least in the narratives of male políticos, to gain political ends. In fact, the skills of intrigue and deception used in "womanizing" (variously referred to as *negrear*, *cholear*, or *k'alinchear*), vis-à-vis concealment from gossip and from the wife, are quite similar to the duplicity men often employ in their political strategizing. Such a comment thus further alludes to the seamy underbelly



of "corrupt" political intrigue, which Bolivians typically refer to as "creole politics" (*la política criolla*).

At the same time the implied relationship evokes comparison with an initial condition of the colonial situation in the Andes, where the *mestizo de sangre* (person of mixed race) originated via the often unwilling "sexual service" provided the colonizing Spaniards by Andean women (Rivera 1993: 62). While at the outset of the colonial situation, in the 16th and 17th centuries, such unions produced a violation of hierarchical social categories (that is, the "racial mestizo"), in contemporary Quillacollo they are the basis for a potential affirmation of a desirable popular identity. "Native" women, it seems, are all too aware of the form of their paradoxical political impotence. While vital to the political goings on, "legitimate" female political actors are nevertheless usually displaced by the symbolic capital they themselves generate.

Despite such open cynicism, women still have dealings with political parties. The acute need felt by regional políticos to carry the "Woman's Vote" is expressed in another more concrete and now almost time honored tradition of regional political parties -- the giving of "gifts," usually food staples, or so-called "articles of first necessity." Typically, these are quantities of flour, rice, cooking oil, or combinations of these given as a basket of foodstuffs (*alimentos*), or more sensationally, clothes, and kitchen appliances. At the regional level, parties establish a foothold through a local male leader, who uses personal contacts -- often his wife or female relatives -- to organize local women's groups. Such gifts are then given to the women of a specific barrio or to a mother's club, during an engineered public political rally (*k'araku*). These rallies also usually involve the distribution and consumption of chicha, amidst much political rhetoric, where políticos make a point to emphasize the "principal role of the woman as the family base." In the context of widespread domestic economic hardship, exacerbated by the MNR's neoliberal policy since 1985, such basic foodstuffs do offer much needed and welcome, if occasional, relief. Indeed, as people strive to make ends meet (*el pan del día*), such biannual political gifts have come to form a calculated part of many increasingly diversified household economies in Cochabamba's lower valley. Savvy individual families might even be able to take advantage of the largesse of several

parties at once during the several months that the regional campaign lasts. In a sense, then, political parties and popular women use each other.

And yet such gifts are often contemptuously labeled *prebendas* by grass-roots and opposition leaders, men and women alike, a word virtually synonymous with public political "bribe." At least since an earlier "populist" moment -- the entrenchment of the MNR political party in power after the 1952 Revolution -- this practice of electoral gift giving (*prebendalismo*) to the popular masses has become the standard *modus operandi*. And it is a practice rooted in much older established cultural expectations in the region between *patrón* and *peón*, where, for example, food and cigarettes were usually supplied by a *hacendado* and then prepared by the wives of field hands for the "traditional" *saqrahora* during planting or harvest. Yet this practice is still routinely cited in editorials of the regional newspaper as an important indication of the thorough corruption (*política criolla*) of the Bolivian political system, now more than ever based on the political party as the primary mediating agent between civil society and the general populace. Nevertheless, there is in fact substantial cultural ambivalence over the issue of the prebenda in part because, as a cultural activity, it seems to resemble much more acceptable and established practices. I want to mention only two here.

On the one hand, at least in theory the prebenda could be and has been viewed as a recognized sort of exchange relation expressing the well-known "Andean" principle of "redistribution and reciprocity," along with comparable forms of community or family self-help practices, such as *ayni*, *mink'a*, and the like. In a more general sense, such practices of exchange are typical of how social relations are managed in many other arenas. The nearby cult of the Virgin of Urkupiña is a case in point, where devotees carry out a yearly *ch'alla* (libation) to the Virgin, accompanied by food and drink. In exchange, devotees hope for diverse sorts of mostly material gain, such as a new truck, or house, or perhaps, academic degree. In this case, displaying sound Andean logic, local *políticos* exchange basic foodstuffs for needed political capital, the guaranteed vote of the regional popular sector. They hope to "influence" the popular sector in a way not dissimilar to devotees' propitiations of the Virgin with food and drink, designed to

appease her often "capricious" behavior. An important difference between the prebenda and peoples' exchanges with the Virgin, however, is the discrete transactional nature of the former, as compared to a hopefully ongoing productive commitment to the latter. Nevertheless, at least superficially, the prebenda seems in keeping with the new "democratic" spirit developing in Bolivia, since the end of the Banzer regime in 1977.

On the other hand, relations between popular women and civil society have for some time been publicly constituted via similar forms of "exchange" with national or local government, or national and international NGO's (cf. Sandoval and Sostres 1989: 109-145). And in fact, through their gift-giving political parties take on the temporary semblance of NGO's. As well, NGO's are, not surprisingly, themselves often small fiefdoms of political parties. A case in point would be the practice initiated during the UDP era and the severe economic crisis in 1984-1985 of delivering scarce basic foodstuffs in bulk to local civic organizations, such as the regional federation of "neighborhood clubs" (*juntas vecinales*), to be distributed to the population by several anointed "provisions committees." More contemporary is the case of the program of "food for work" (*alimento por trabajo*), organized by CARITAS. This Catholic charities program was inaugurated in 1986 on the heels of the MNR's new economic policy. It's stated goal is to provide a "palliative" to the popular "family basket" (*canasta familiar*) by mobilizing the available "unutilized" and "unskilled" workforce, who are primarily women. These unskilled laborers work on public projects, and in turn, are paid in quantities of wheat flour, bulgar wheat, corn cooking oil, rice, sugar and salt, rather than cash.

As a result of recent governmental decentralization, CARITAS now works directly with local municipalities (*alcaldías*), who in turn actually distribute the foodstuffs to the mostly de pollera workforce. Since approximately 1985, the local municipality, itself, has become the primary institutional medium of regional development, replacing the national government and international NGO's. In Quillacollo such food distribution programs have come to form a part of the alcaldía's own program of "self-help" (*auto-ayuda*), where community organizations contribute both financial and labor support for development projects (*obras*) in their barrios.

Women's groups themselves usually do the work, in a way reminiscent of "traditional" practices of communal labor (*faena*), such as the yearly cleaning of irrigation ditches, or the agricultural harvest. And in the view of municipal authorities, these economic and cultural goals coincide in traditional Andean practice. A member of the alcalde's staff equated this "self-help" program with an "Inca socialism" of the popular imagination, rooted in the *ayllu* (a traditional ethnic federation based on kinship), and reflecting the "Andean" institution of *ayni*, the strict exchange of equivalents. In practice, this relation can easily become one of patronage, a political carrot, between the party or parties in control of the alcaldía and women's groups.

Nevertheless CARITAS officials tend to view such projects in apolitical terms as fomenting the "welfare of the family," and these women's own "communal" identity. In their view, working together, they "become more united." One CARITAS representative in fact described to me the typical practice of the "communal cooking pot" (*olla comunal*), where women provide shared food and child care for each other during such work projects. This image of the popular woman, with an implicit emphasis upon her lack of professional skills, and primary role in the family, is in fact reproduced by local, including female, perceptions of the chola or cholita. While a distrust of political propaganda that uses the chola is evident among women in the town, women de pollera still appear willing to risk self-caricature by engaging in exchange relations with political parties based on these same propagandistic images. This suggests that cholas are willing to be defined in such terms under some circumstances, such as for short-term economic gain. Rather than simply treating these development exchanges in typical top-down clientelistic terms, we can view them as strategic maneuvers by women employing the diversified logic of the household economy.

### **3. Cholita Incarnations: Fields, Fiestas, and Folklore**

As a kind of regional "native" woman, the chola has recently emerged as a basic output of the entangled discourses of cultural identity and economic development in Quillacollo. As a populist construct, the woman de pollera has become a juncture between neoliberal realities and a

preexistent folkloric idiom. As the embodiment of a definite set of notions about “gender” and “tradition,” the chola points to the thorough interweaving of “ideology” and “political economy” in regional political practice (cf. Friedrich 1989). This, then, begins to explain the indispensability of the chola as political symbolic capital. As a critical mediating agent and trope, the “native” woman has been the object of a regional process of “root metaphoricization.” For quillacolleños, the chola is not just emblematic of women’s power. Rather, in the words of local men, she “represents the human being in this place,” as the “nucleus of the family and of society” in the process of consolidating “our cultural roots.” She serves as the present incarnation of a past economic context still salient as folkloric idiom. As we shall see, the contours of the chola as mediating political trope and root metaphor take shape across an array of rhetorical and folkloric evidence, including: political propaganda, direct dialogue with políticos, journalistic polemics, participation in fiesta and festive events, public municipal exhibits, “traditional” word play, and regional indigenist writing. This engendered tropic landscape should help to clarify why the development context has taken its present form in Quillacollo.

Typecast as domineering bulwark of the domestic economy, dedicated agriculturalist, or aggressive market woman, a pervasive image of the chola is that of invaluable “producer.” One conversation with a young follower of Quillacollo's alcalde -- who worked in the alcaldía's Department of Culture which organizes such traditional cultural events as Carnival, and who has also been active in the regional cultural movement *Itapallu* (a Quechua term referring to the need to cure “cultural rheumatism”) -- offered this strongly worded commentary on the perceived increase in women opting to dress *de vestido* (in “Western” skirts):

It's part of the alienation. It amounts to denying your own heritage, your own ways. What happens? They think that to wear skirts (*faldas*) [instead of the pollera] means to be more than other women. But seeing a woman de pollera do twice that of those de vestido, I know that these others feel much more incapable than the woman de pollera. And this is demonstrable, because she has a much greater capacity through her community, her simplicity, to be able to produce much more than those de vestido. At times the women de vestido don't even produce. They do nothing to help their families grow economically. This also underlies the importance of the woman within the house, because in terms of women today, for some time we've seen an evolutionary process of the working woman. The majority of women no longer work, but have become homemakers. They wait for the man's salary to arrive and invest it, but don't, themselves, produce. But cholas produce. They're active. They're workers. They have creativity. They produce. They go to their fields, and take care of business. They sell things. They trade (*rescate*) potatoes, sell food. That is the true chola, and the real woman, producing and seeing to the economic development of their

families. And so, there's a big difference. The chola speaks three languages -- Aymara, Quechua, and Spanish -- something the woman de vestido can't do. Sometimes those de vestido feel embarrassed to speak Quechua. She thinks, 'I'm no Indian (*india*)'! There's a total confusion of identity (translation mine).

This comment is typical of the recent and positive revaluation of the chola, viewed as animating the traditional regional economy. In this young político's extemporaneous lecture, himself with a mother de pollera that works as a street vendor (*vivandera*), one detects the repeated theme of chola productivity. In his view, such production -- whether in the market, the field, or the home -- is essentially female and creative, and is defined by the chola's multiple roles and skills. It is the "modern" self-limitation of women to a single nonproductive role which preoccupies this young político here. This sentiment of the chola as controlling the household economy is echoed in cholas' own image of themselves. For example, this from Silvia Rivera's recent analysis of the chola cochabambina:

In contemporary talk among male and female friends of the rural or urban middle classes, the informal reference to a Cochabamba 'matriarchy' is unanimous. This is expressed in the mode that women of the popular and middle class strata control their men through exuberant endearments, which include Quechua diminutives, and an abundant and varied regional cuisine (1996: 30; translation mine).

Peredo Beltrán's analysis of chola market women in La Paz makes a similar point: "In terms of men, or their husbands, the women interviewed develop self-images as independent and maternal, with the power of decision, a certain sense of emancipation and capacity to cut off their husband" (1992: 150). In this partially romanticized view, cholas are of more social account than their male counterparts precisely because they control, and mediate -- as economic and linguistic brokers -- essential productive networks of social relations.

This image of productivity is of course used by men for political ends as well. A 1994 photographic exhibit in the same Department of Culture, accompanied by folkloric music and featuring the town's mayor, documented the many "communal labors" (*faenas*) performed and public "works" (*obras*) delivered during his self-described "communal administration." The mayor appears in the recurrent guise of material benefactor and town patron. There is a special section devoted to his relation with mother's clubs. There are numerous photos of the alcalde lending a

hand in the different work projects, surrounded by women de pollera. There is also a photo of him handing out "baskets" of food to women in honor of Mother's Day. Below runs this caption:

The communal government has initiated action within a model of shared work and with the particular presence of women's clubs. With the characteristic beauty of the women, accustomed to responsible work, and the beauty of the *valluna* [a regional term for rural women of the popular strata]...The presence of the woman in this task especially marks the consequential nature of such everyday work (translation mine).

It has been suggested that the "exotic" chola corresponds exactly to the ideal image of Third and Fourth world women held by development agencies, and so, to the expected recipients of development aid (Page-Reeves 1996). A similar scenario has been noted for market women de pollera, who are viewed as more authentic by prospective customers (Paulson 1996: 88; Peredo Beltrán 1992: 36; Buechler and Buechler 1996: 171). And here the productive woman de pollera, as the "traditional" basis of the household economy, is viewed as the logical collaborator and exchange partner for the productive activities of the municipality. In fact, as the primary symbolic complement to the mayor's largesse, such "native" women bolster his public image as a selfless benefactor.

The chola's image of productivity extends into the more explicitly folkloric festival arena, where she is an essential protagonist. The cholita is intimately associated with traditional patronal fiestas, as well as periodic and increasingly frequent regional folkloric festivals. The *entrada* of folkloric dance groups during the fiesta of Urkupiña features a variety of dances which evoke Andean cultural practice. Perhaps most notable are the groups of mostly city girls who don "*mini-polleras*" to dance in the popular *caporales* fraternities. But "real" cholas also participate in large numbers as well, mostly in the more traditional *morenadas*. These mini-polleras, usually worn by women who are normally de vestido are festive costume versions of the "everyday" pollera, for folkloric purposes treated as "native" Andean dress. Some feel that this trend toward increasingly *mini* mini-polleras is little more than the "cult of the body," and represents the "exploitation of feminine beauty." They feel this distorts the solemn and religious nature of the fiesta, which they scoffingly assert should be renamed "*Urku-pierna*" (with "pierna" being Spanish for leg), to refer to the increasingly exposed sensual bodies of the female folkloric dancers, imitating "native"

women. But such criticism ignores the fact that this sensuous incarnation of the cholita as an erotic object is an essential ingredient of her symbolic capital.

During the *entrada*, políticos often come out of the crowd to "dance" with these folklorized cholitas. It is also typical for an important "populist" politician to contract dance fraternities to perform during regional visits. During a rally I attended for then UCS party leader Max Fernandez in 1995, a line of caporales literally followed the politician's entourage from the airport to the rally site several miles away! The act of a político and chola dancing a *cueca* -- a "traditional" creole dance described by quillacolleños as dramatizing an "amorous conquest," a "flirtation" (*coqueteo*) -- is an obligatory part of almost any sort of public and festive occasion. Dancing the *cueca* is thought to promote a spontaneous "affection" (*cariño*) between the leader and the assembled crowd. On several occasions, I have seen women decline to dance with a político, perhaps not wanting to be the object of a machination, but claiming that he should find a "real chola" with whom to dance. This performed flirtation between político and cholita is a reminder that the love affair is integral to the public folkloric identity of the "native" woman as a metaphor of social reproduction.

The association of the chola with agricultural fecundity in fiesta contexts is most clear in the annual fiesta of the Virgin of Urkupiña, the town's patron saint. This Virgin has achieved national prominence, now officially called the "patron of national integration." As both the Virgin María and *mamita Urkupiña*, this potent figure condenses popular folk Catholic beliefs about saints with Andean ideas about vital telluric forces. The fiesta's popularity skyrocketed in the 1970's, just as the ongoing parcelization of agricultural land in the valley was becoming an acute problem, and rural families were busy finding options other than as just small holding farmers. During the fiesta devotees enter the "mines" of the Virgin built into her Calvario, where they "work" (*trabajar*), striking the rock veins with a sledge hammer until removing a chunk. "Faith" (*fe*) in the Virgin is demonstrated by this productive work, first symbolically in the mines, and then throughout the coming year. This stone is then made the basis of a *ch'alla*, a ritual act of supplication and affinity carried out for the Virgin.



Using a social strategy reminiscent of the prebenda, in her incarnation as the *Pachamama*, *mamita Urkupiña* is propitiated and "fed" with a ritual libation of cigarettes, beer and chicha, streamers, fireworks, confetti, coca leaves, an aromatic "burnt offering" (*q'oa*), and sometimes prepared dishes of food. If properly satiated, she will in turn attend to the well-being of the supplicant, which traditionally includes insuring the continuity and equilibrium of reproductive forces, and so, success in agricultural production and human procreation, but which nowadays might mean anything from the purchase of a new truck to obtaining that desired Macintosh computer. If incorrectly propitiated, or left unsatiated, she can become malignant, causing "bad luck," including death, considered a "punishment" (*castigo*) of the Virgin. Particularly in her incarnation as the Virgin María, *Urkupiña* brokers the supplicant's relation with God, interceding positively on his behalf, putting in a good word to insure that his "petition" (*pedido*) is addressed. Just as the chola is the productive "engine of man," the Virgin is considered, "the *señora* of the home, of the fields, of the mountains, and of the vital cycle of men" (Rocha 1990: 74). The Virgin, in short, animates the frame of reference within which men traditionally operate. And development exchanges are transacted within and dependent upon this frame.

Many commentators have stressed that the term "Pachamama" is composed of the Quechua root "*pacha*," which means at once the "world," the "earth," and "time." Hence, the Pachamama has been conceived as the "ancient space-time concept immanent in the earth" (Nash 1979: 121-122), or defined as the "creator of time" (Girault 1988: 9), and embodied in pre-Conquest agricultural rites. Rather than as a case of religious syncretism, I wish to emphasize a specific folkloric implication of the equation of the Pachamama, and so the Virgin of *Urkupiña*, with time. In a region increasingly characterized by urbanization, a scarcity of fertile land, and the decline in importance of agriculture as a way of life, libations to the Pachamama signal a ritualized temporal displacement of the supplicant, a temporary return to a now mostly gone "utopic" time of traditional agricultural lifeways. In short, devotees engage in relations of reciprocal exchange with the Pachamama, who mediates their access to a vanishing allochronic "tradition" (Fabian 1983), via a popular folkloric culture. This is an important aspect of the process of root

metaphoricization, where key engendered concepts of productivity are made to under gird and frame the cultural logic of the regional economy.

This utopic and allochronic folkloric context is perhaps best illustrated by the recent emergence of regional folklore festivals. They first began to appear in the mid-1980's in the region through the impetus of the cultural group Itapallu, and have since grown in number. There are by now at least a dozen such regional festivals, creating a year long calendar of regional folkloric events. The themes of these festivals are resolutely agricultural, invested in the "mysteries and enchantments of the provinces," with festivals devoted to chicha, corn, the apple, the peach, trout, and *huarapo*, another regional beverage, among other things. The festivals take place over several days in different towns of the region, and promote a carnivalesque atmosphere designed to attract families from the nearby city. Employing a neo-indigenist logic, organizers of these festivals maintain that their popularity proves that diverse urban identities still have identifiably "provincial roots" as *qhochalas* (that is, "indigenous" cochabambinos), and that urbanites still wish to maintain rural "customs interred by false modernity" (Gonzales 1991). Each festival features an abundance of regional cuisine (*platos típicos*), live concerts by folkloric bands, performances by dance fraternities, games, and different special features, such as a cholas-only bicycle race, or a contest among cholitas to crown the "Queen of the festival."

Conspicuous, both in the city and rural province, are fliers circulated for these festivals, which always feature a cholita. As with the political propaganda, she is depicted wearing a shortened stovepipe hat, mini-pollera, and with a red-lipped sensuous expression and ample bosom. She is also shown in association with the festival's agricultural theme -- holding a bushel of corn, or a *tutuma* of chicha, biting an apple, or offering a toast with a glass of *huarapo*. Festival organizers offer a variety of reasons for why the cholita has become the poster girl for these festivals. One such organizer noted the need to "maintain this social category [of the chola] as a dignified tradition." Another festival organizer, and writer of a romantic regionalist literature in his spare time, claimed her image was used "to make the feria more authentic, because the chola is a very typical personage,...and the woman *is* the pollera." The chola cochabambina is also "more

colorful and provocative" than cholitas from other regions, and she represents the social class that is "closest to nature and most involved in agriculture." He concludes, "The earth [*tierra*] is her richness." Yet another organizer noted that her accentuated physiognomy attracts attention, and recalled Eve's role leading Adam into sin. The cholita displays, in his words, a "great capacity for work," and is traditionally responsible for "inviting" people to fiestas, a social fact that has received ethnographic support (Paulson 1996: 134). These cholita posters thus facilitate semiotic access for men to festival spaces. In fact, active participation in dance fraternities, with the concomitant need to don the expensive festive costume, has been cited as a strategy employed by women de vestido who wish to switch permanently to the pollera (Buechler and Buechler 1996: 183). Cholitas organize fiestas, then, but fiestas quite literally produce cholitas as well.

The association of erotic imagery with the cholita as a traditional cultural trope should now be quite apparent. An old standard of the Quillacollo entrada for Carnival is the "*chola k'alincha* and her *compadre*." A satirical feminine figure, described by a friend as "mischievous, a jokester, brusque..." the cholita k'alincha always appears in the company of her upper-class lover. Again, we encounter the illicit love affair. K'alinchar is an idiomatic verb that refers to the male propensity for womanizing. In reference to the *Feria de la Manzana* (Apple Fair) in nearby Vinto, one columnist wrote effusively about a "*coctelito* dubbed the *imilla kjalincha*, prepared appropriately from apples, which illuminated the eyes and whet the tongue of those who tasted it. I judge the spirit of this delicious liquor to be none other than that of Eve, revived and primal, in the fronds of the apple trees of Vinto" (Urbano Campos 1995). Here, "imilla" (Quechua for "young unmarried woman," but also "servant girl"), functions as an explicitly indigenist and regionalist synonym for "cholita." Notable as well is the pervasive association of the cholita with the Nature's agricultural gifts, and so, with the cult of the Virgin. And this relation takes on a particular force in the historically productive region of Cochabamba, euphemistically referred to as Bolivia's "breadbasket." In a sense, the Virgin and the cholita are telluric and terrestrial incarnations of each other.

And the close association between this erotic incarnation, agricultural productivity, and the Virgin, is an overdetermined theme in the regionalist folkloric literature. A typical sentimental sample, written in a Harlequin Romance style, is provided us by the aforementioned organizer of the apple festival in Vinto. His story tells a tale of love blooming and dying between a provincial youth and a cholita. They meet during a fiesta: "I met her in the fiesta of the *virgencita* of Rosario, where the pueblo lessens its sorrows and expands its gaiety. I saw her for the first time as she blessed herself next to the Virgin. Upon comparing her, she seemed prettier, satanically beautiful. Her grenadine lips shone with the flickering of the candles. For a moment time stopped, and the angels, the flowers, and the candles faded, and my heart sang..." The young man continues to expound upon the cholita's beauty with romantic descriptions that focus increasingly on the pollera: "Florinda, with her ardent multicolor pollera, went tracing flaming shapes through the paths of the countryside (*campiña*)." And again, "Her pollera formed of rose petals enveloped me in its turns, and I could drink your essence, Florinda, my candid flower." And finally, "Very quickly upon seeing Florinda, my eyes were adorned with the most beautiful of cholas, arising from the corn fields (*maizales*), with her sensual face projected onto the infinite and resplendent sky, and passion embedded in her multicolor pollera..." (García Canedo 1995: 45-49). The romance fades only when Florinda, supposing her lover would want her to, changes her pollera for pants (becoming a *chota*). Hyperbolic, yes. Completely fantastic, no. The story links cholas, fiestas, romance, and the fields, reproducing a regionally durable popular image, fundamentally linked to agriculture, itself a fast disappearing economic resource. And it turns on the notion that cholas are not supposed to change social status or class. Often commented upon, this element of the chola "cult" depicts her reification as a folkloric image as a conscious act of choice, as women's cultural stance against modernity. The possibility for social reproduction (implied in the intersection of eroticism and agriculture) is dependent upon the stability of this image, then, as a popular root metaphor.

Perhaps nowhere do the various elements of this image better coincide than in an extended description of provincial Carnival, celebrating the impending bountiful harvest, which appears in

Medinaceli's national folkloric classic, *La Chaskañawi* (Quechua: starry or velvet-eyed cholita), parts of which were first published in 1929, and from which I will quote at length:

For days the youth of San Javier worriedly fretted over [*curcuteaba*, from the Quechua: *kurkuy*, to worry, to harass] the preparations for Carnaval. This was the occasion where excess was indulged, the world and its rules forgotten, celebrating to the glorious god Momo, which there should have been called the god Mona [*borrachera*, drunken revelry], given the excess to which the men, and in no less measure, the women, were moved. In San Javier it was a time when no one, even the infirm, got by without at least moving their lips [to drink]: everyone, willing or no, was obliged to participate in the *fandango*, but above all, the element of the town traditionally called the "cholitas," those who best moved their hips and most often waved their handkerchiefs [that is, they danced the cueca].

These cholitas worked yearround in order to compete in the days of Carnaval, in their luxurious lambskin leggings, and in the elegance of their polleras and ample shawls. It was an almost liturgical point of honor that these cholitas should unveil a completely new outfit, from the blouse to the shoes, during the eight days that the constant dancing lasted, fifteen days in extreme cases.

Each social class had its place for its dances and feasts...the last, the highest level, was that of the "*cholas decentes*" (cholas of the town), who, due to the particular circumstances of the place, enjoyed the greatest control (*mando*) over the men. Because of her economic fortitude, she had more money; she managed the town's economy and commerce at a level equal to that of the *cocanis* [cholas of the highlands]. She bought, sold, bartered, and traveled to the nearby mines, carrying the region's products, and products from Oruro, and then returned with goods to fill the shelves of her store. She was a market genius, and, at least in the rural hamlet, and in the home, the person who directed the domestic economy.

While their husbands and lovers -- tailors, cobblers, shirt makers, or in the majority of cases, layabouts without a job or positive attribute, passed the time arguing over politics and drinking chicha in the hovels (*chujllas*) and *chicherías* of the outskirts of town, the women courageously conquered league upon league, tirelessly following their beasts of burden, challenging the dangers of the fords and the rigors of the storms, and in sum, fighting energetically for life. To live in San Javier de Chirca was to live in an authoritarian matriarchy. These *cacicas* [adapting *cacique*, female "strong men"] were the cholitas, with control over everything, and decisive influence in the política criolla (Medinaceli 1981: 104-105; translation mine).

This account becomes a paean to the woman de pollera in her productive mode. Medinaceli's novel, still a standard part of the Bolivian public school curriculum, equates the "traditional" provincial Carnaval with the chola. People in Quillacollo in fact sometimes use the term "Chaskañawi" to refer to a particularly striking cholita. And more than sixty years later the comment that began this section, by the young man who works in the Department of Culture and whose mother is in fact a chola, closely echoes Medinaceli's description. Here again it is the chola, and in particular her costume, that animates the frame of the fiesta. She is also intimately associated with the chichería, as we shall see, a political space par excellence. The chola in fact indirectly defines the contexts of political intrigue. As represented in the folkloric fiestas, it is precisely this "traditional" productivity which mediates the political engagement of provincial men, here considered extraneous, by way of a "matriarchal" but masculine creole politics. But at the same time, this novel of Medinaceli, written in the mid-century indigenist style and part of a

corpus of so-called “national” literature which sought to assimilate the “Indian” to a national discourse of *mestizaje*, is the basis upon which the regional revaluation of chola identity has taken place.

We can identify the operation of this chola cult in the development milieu. These regional folkloric festivals are also referred to as *ferias* (fairs or markets). And there is in fact a quite intentional relation between folkloric festivals and the “agricultural market” (*ferias agrícolas*). The latter compose a regional network of markets, greatly expanded after 1952, where sundry products not only from the valleys but from the highland regions beyond, are bought and sold on a rotating weekly basis. The folkloric version is meant to evoke the bustling atmosphere of the genuine agricultural market, where the chola as transactor predominates. When explaining the rationale for the festivals, organizers emphasize the familiar necessity of “recalling” or “rescuing” the “traditions most associated with the valley,” but also an economic angle. They talk of tourism, and the need to revitalize a flagging agricultural market, colonial in origin, and in which the newly autonomous alcaldía’s have an important economic stake. In these festivals, the municipality colludes with the small-scale agriculturalist, promoting their shared interest. For example, Quillacollo’s first *Feria del Maíz* in 1986 sought to “revalorize the culture of maíz, demonstrating its productive capacity, as well as its nutritional value.” To this end, the festival promoted the many traditional uses of corn in regional cuisine: in soups (*lawas*), on the cob (*choclo*), off the cob (*moti*), as an alcoholic beverage (*chicha*), or in baked goods (*humintas*, cornbread), and so forth. During the festival, colloquia were held for *chicha* producers, where “experts” offered detailed suggestions to further rationalize the *chicha* industry.

The festivals thus have a quite straightforward economic goal of stimulating the consumption of regional agricultural production, as an important regional “patrimony,” in the neoliberal context. As a regional journalist and folklorist stated the issue, these festivals are designed to encourage “the enrichment of Cochabamba’s gastronomic and gastroethyl [referring to the elaboration of *chicha*] culture,” but are also a means “to become aware that Cochabamba will be initiated on the solid road of progress only when it takes advantage of its farming and

cattle industries in the most optimal way” (Urbano Campos 1995). In this manner the cultural idiom of folkloric festivals shades into a quite serious attempt to meet the regional economic challenge at the level of the municipality, and with a focus on the productive transformation of a diminishing agricultural sector. This approach at the level of the municipality parallels that of CARITAS at the level of the household. And the symbolic appeal for economic stability is made through the woman de pollera, primarily in her guise as calculating market woman, who provides commercial access to the folkloric renegotiation of “traditional” identity.

#### 4. The Chola and Political Mediation

The "natural" habitat of the chola k'alinchá, it seems, is the chichería. In the folkloric mode, it is in the drinking context where she becomes especially libidinous, a virtual exhibitionist. The cholita of Medinaceli's novel, herself a *chichera*, dances the cueca with particular passion in the chichería: "...with a licentious grace, voluptuously wiggling her behind [*nalgueando*], and waving her handkerchief in the air" (1981: 58). In fact, in Quillacollo conversation among men about cholas often quickly shifts to a ribald innuendo with marked double entendre. Asked to describe the "typical chola valluna," one friend ticked off her braids, pollera, her *k'epi* (woven carrying sack), and stovepipe hat. Unsolicited, he then characterized her unique personality. The chola valluna is identified with "mischeviousness" (*picardía*), and "pride" (in that she does not change class). A companion breaks in, laughing, "With her milk cows!" (*vacas lecheras*), referring to her breasts. My friend continues, she is also "masculine" (*varonil*), and "sentimental." Beginning to laugh as well, he concludes, "She feels and loves strongly. With this love, she'll kill you if you cross her. She'll yank you by your plumbing (*pichula*)!" This sort of ribald word play, characteristic of drinking companions talking about womanizing, is quite common. In fact, I spent significant energy during field work extricating myself from attempts by político friends to set me up with different mythical but willing cholitas.

As her presence in Carnival attests, the figure of the chola k'alinchá is by now quite "institutionalized" in Quillacollo. A case in point is the local legend associated with the town's

popular watering hole, the chichería "Chola Milagrosa" (Miraculous Chola). As the story is told, the establishment is named after its owner, now an old woman and ironically *de vestido*. When a young cholita, she jealously shot and killed her lover, erecting a cross over the spot, and eventually starting up her chichería there. The fame of the establishment has persisted due to its consequently "miraculous" chicha. Another case of the institutionalization of the chola cult is the recently "renovated" tradition of the *wallunk'a* (Quechua: swing), which "traditionally" accompanies the celebration of the Day of the Dead (*Todos Santos*) in November throughout the region. Although it is historically unclear whether the *wallunk'a* was ever performed in the lower valley, where the town of Quillacollo is found, it has been an important part of the regional folkloric renaissance of the last decade. As Itapallu's founder, also a journalist, pronounced: "Despite what many insist to the contrary, the festival [of the *wallunk'a*] now forms a part of Quillacollo's patrimony, which has surpassed local frontiers" (Los Tiempos 1994). A local folklorist who recently published an authoritative account of regional agricultural ritual, written in a timeless ethnographic present, describes the *wallunk'a* in the following terms:

During *Todos Santos* the fiesta of the *wayllunk'as* begins, which lasts until the day of *San Andrés*, November 30th. On the 2nd of November the first swings are built, many of them several hundred meters from the cemetery...In each swing there is music (of accordions, guitars, and bands). Different sorts seek to be pushed on the swing, but above all it is the cholitas who stand out. One accedes to her requests (*pedidos*) with the condition that she sing a few couplets (*coplas*). If she does not carry out her promise, she is pushed even harder and is not permitted to get off until she begins with the first verses...Everything unfolds in an ambiance of enjoyment, laughter, whistles, and cat calls" (Antonio Rocha 1990: 64-65; translation mine).

At the apex of her swing, the cholita is supposed to try and seize with her feet one of several "baskets" of flowers and foodstuff, suspended in front of the swing. In the past, I was told, these baskets were adorned with real "money" (*billetes*), and the cholitas could win livestock as prizes. I was also told, by a guffawing former mayor no less, that "innocent" cholitas sometimes swung without undergarments, causing quite a spectacle. Sung in Quechua and "interpreted by pretty cholitas (*simpáticas cholitas*) and young men (*jovenzuelos*)" (Los Tiempos 1994), the couplets are resolutely bawdy in character, referring to amorous relations between the sexes, and utilizing double entendre almost exclusively.



One such wallunk'a I attended was advertised in the province with the following poster: "Popular artists of the Cochabamba valley. Platos típicos and the best chicha. Festival of the wallunk'a and couplets of the Day of the Dead. Homage to Encarnación Lazarte (a famous couplet singer and cholita of Cochabamba). Organized by the cultural group Itapallu" (translation mine).

The chichería that served as host for the event, on the town's outskirts and in a zone densely covered by zig-zagging agricultural plots, was owned by the sister of Itapallu's founder. Her brother, whose influence was apparent in the electoral propaganda adorning the town's adobe walls, was an ardent backer and client of the mayor of the town. In recent years he had made an unsuccessful foray into the regional political arena himself, as the local candidate for a "socialist" party of the reconstituted political Left. Another notable feature of this particular wallunk'a was the presence of the regional indigenist writer and journalist, Ramón Rocha Monroy, who gave away copies of his novella *El run run de la calavera*. Although written in a magical realist style, the novella supposedly "authentically" depicts the peculiar popular beliefs associated with the region's celebration of the Day of the Dead. As part of a literary corpus on regional cultural identity, the novella is thematically continuous with the earlier works of Medinaceli and others. Throughout the event, Rocha Monroy drank with these eroticized cholas, who we are to understand would otherwise be found busily selling, trading, harvesting, and managing their families, somewhere in the region's three valleys.

The owners of the chichería offered me their views on wallunk'a. For them, this is not a custom inspired by literary convention, but rather the wallunk'a has been practiced at least "from the time of the *tata-abuelos* [Quechua: great-grandparents] and the Inca, a custom of the ancestors." In a now familiar refrain, they also asserted, "The principle motive is to rescue and maintain the traditions of the *llakta* [town, but also region], but not to profit from it." And as root metaphor, the swinging chola represents "the alternations of life and death." Themselves *de vestido*, the owners insisted that the wallunk'a should be performed with "pure cholitas," since the couplets impart "something of romance, of mischeviousness (*picardía*), a little obscene..." They

added that originally those who practiced the wallunk'a "were not de vestido. It was a prejudice of the upper class (*alta estrata*). The cholitas liked these customs more. They are by nature happier, from more rustic parts (*tierra adentro*), more aggressive, open,...a symbol of the valley." Indeed, during the wallunk'a cholita after cholita was called up to mount the swing to try for the baskets, while a folkloric group performed their bawdy couplets, and inbetween songs, drank heavily. The region's cuisine, in addition to the couplet performances, is the other main pole of attraction for this sort of folkloric event.

The event was attended by several town VIP's, including the mayor himself, who was made the subject of a satirical carnivalesque couplet, with a cholita openly surmising about his sexual potency over the microphone. In another typical illustration of the allochronic effect of this root metaphor, during the event the mayor was called *jilakata* (a Quechua term for "indigenous" local leader, in this case an archaism with colonial implications) rather than the standard Spanish term, *alcalde*. He was then predictably implored to dance a cueca with this cholita, a request he obliged. Given that the Day of the Dead takes place mere days before biannual regional elections, the past year this particular wallunk'a was heavily attended by local políticos. The owners of the chichería recalled how the different regional candidates came, "with their people," and dressed in the "caps and t-shirts" of their respective political parties. Party members also handed out political fliers to the attendees, encouraging people to vote for their candidate. The event was equal parts folklore and politics.

The politicization of these folkloric venues has become so standard, that it is a frequent cause for complaint. One folkloric festival organizer lamented to me the necessity of having to, in his words, "prostitute culture" in order to bring off the festival at all. Consider this representative complaint, which appeared in a section of the regional newspaper dedicated exclusively to the provinces:

The rural markets [ferias] and fiestas are one of the few opportunities in which the inhabitants of communities can come together: friends, *compadres*, relatives, authorities, etc., in order to share and converse together [*compartir*], around a provocative pitcher of chicha, or around a succulent *chicharrón* [a regional dish of deep fat fried pork parts], gossiping about conceptions that reflect at once religion, the national reality [read:

politics], and other peculiarities, confined to the daily tasks [*faenas cotidianas*] in the furrows: planting, care of crops, and harvest.

But, given the nearness of the elections, very curious things take place. It is a different environment, with a strange flurry of activity.

One Sunday, I met with the members of a community in order to participate with them in a religious event, prepared for this date. There appeared suddenly a small vehicle, up until now unknown by the locals. From the vehicle descended three persons. And then, Oh, pre-electoral magic! In the blink of an eye, they inundated us with political propaganda. And we, stupefied, asked ourselves: "But how did they know to find us meeting here?" Then, one of the group responded, "These types have eyes everywhere..."

Yes, the above tale, is nothing but a paradox, given the amount of times that those sorts are seen in these parts [*rincones*]; But something important which should deserve the attention of all who aspire to arrive at the precious seat of power, is, without doubt, whether those who look for aid or support in order to rise to their political offices [*cargos políticos*] also know how to respond from above to the needs of the forgotten areas of our territory (Sabino Colque 1993; translation mine).

This is an all too familiar parable of the "ambush," as the article put it, of rural festive occasions by political parties. Note the idealized portrait of provincial fiestas as moments of collective *communitas* which forms the backdrop for political meddling. This perceived politicization of regional folklore is part of the decadence many feel threatens the region's cultural integrity. Not everyone approves of these reconstituted wallunk'as. This "traditional" practice, they feel, has been "given over to electrified musical groups and the sale of chicha." It has been reduced to little more than advertisement. Exclaimed one disenchanted local, "All they do is teach a few cholitas to attract people to the establishment." In the case of our wallunk'a, in fact, a similarly decadent political machination can be said to inform the folkloric frame. In essence, a client of the mayor used his sister's establishment to provide a "populist" public forum for his political patron. In so doing, the cholita as a vital folkloric figure, became the medium for these two male *políticos* to negotiate their ongoing relationship. And I contend that it is the politicians, themselves, who require the presence of this woman de pollera as a symbol of the *llakta* in these idealized folkloric spaces, and that despite the cries of prostitution, events like the wallunk'a have little traditional import beyond their political value to convince others of a politician's "traditional" identity.

It is not coincidental that the wallunk'a, as well as the folkloric festivals more generally, take generous advantage of the social space of the *chichería*. Drinking and drinking etiquette is a ritual inevitability in the Andes (cf. Saignes 1993). In the province of Quillacollo, as I was told countless times, drinking, and in particular drinking chicha, is thought to build a communicational frame. A drinking companion, however briefly, becomes a co-conspirator and confidant. In

Bakhtin's parlance, most interaction in this ambiance is "without footlights" (1984: 265). The chichería is one of the important public spaces, with the feria being the other, where the Quechua language asserts itself over Spanish, most often in the telling of jokes, and in the word play described earlier. In chicherías, therefore, interpersonal expression is thought to be notoriously intimate, direct, and without social masks ("*a calzón quitado*," literally, "without pants," referring to blunt talk). But, while pants might be rhetorically dispensed with in the chichería, the pollera remains a fixture.

In Cochabamba's lower valley, the chichería is treated as the ideal site for fostering a collective regional identity as vallunos, despite pervasive class distinctions. This sentiment, imbued with a notable nostalgia, is detectable in the following characterization of the chichería before the 1952 Revolution: "In this social microcosm an ample democracy was practiced which was totally unknown in all other environments of this oligarquic society. That which politics could not do, the fraternity of the chichería was able to achieve" (Rodriguez and Solares 1990: 142; translation mine). And yet, the chichería has always been a place to stir the political cooking pot. Sharing a memorable drinking bout (*farra*) and exposing one's personal side goes a long way toward establishing relations of "trust" (*confianza*). Through imbibing at chicherías, distant friendships can be converted into confidential friendships (*amigos de confianza*), the trusted lieutenants vital for building successful provincial political machines. In fact, the first established meeting place (*comando*) of the regional apparatus of the populist UCS party in the late 1980's was none other than that infamous chichería, the Chola Milagrosa, with its impassioned, miraculous chicha. And behind the scenes, facilitating local party membership, is none other than the recognized regional figure of the de pollera chichera.

Just as much pragmatic "back room" political work is hammered out amidst *tutumás* of chicha, the electoral potential of the chichería has not been lost on provincial políticos. They have made the k'araku a standard part of their stumping repertoire. During such campaign stops, chicha is liberally distributed to the assembled crowd, ostensibly in exchange for peoples' votes. Stories told to me about the formative years of the late 1970's and early 1980's, when current regional

political apparati were being actively built, dwell on the selfless work of political "couples" (a local party leader and his wife), who exhaustively trekked the length and breadth of the province making contacts. One such "wife," a veteran behind-the-scenes operator, recounted the many times she and her husband -- then a prominent ADN leader of what was later to become the UCS machine of Chola Milagrosa fame -- made recruiting visits to the houses of "peasant" (*campesino*) families. They would approach their prospective political clients using strategies similar to those found in Lagos' (1994) account of rural women traders in nearby Tiraque, armed with chicha. And while her husband explained about the party, she would give to the client's wife a gift of food and chicha, which she called a necessary "stimulus" (*estímulo*).

This gift can be understood in Andean terms as an example of *t'inka*, a modest gift designed to signal the existence of a relationship. This informal reciprocal exchange between women de pollera, then, serves as the frame for the consolidation of dyadic political ties of patronage and clientage between men. These illustrations of the wallunk'a and the k'araku bring across the mediatory value of the chola. The ambiance of the chichería, and its associated practice, provides the contexts políticos require to flourish. As root metaphor, then, the chola plays a metacultural role. In folkloric terms, the intimacy of the domestic economy is also the intimacy of the flirtation. The erotic "chola k'alíncha" is also an incarnation of the matriarchal productive chola. Taken together, these superimposed images frame the formation of male political networks. Cholas are perhaps tolerant of their own self-caricature in political propaganda, of which they are well aware, because in the political arena this same construct contributes to the social reproduction of the domestic economy via the sorts of development exchanges described here. This awareness of their predicament is reflected in the idea that for "legitimate" women, politics is like an illicit love affair. Women are the victims of adultery, a prospect encoded in the folkloric mode as the "chola k'alíncha." And in turn, this overlapping set of images of women de pollera has its roots in the "indigenist" folkloric expression of the hacienda era, where the popular classes were hierarchically subordinate. This situation, then, defines the regional possibilities for the "native" woman as active historical subject.

## 5. The Decadence of the Cholita

However, people entertain a looming pessimism about the future integrity of the regional cholita in Quillacollo. One encounters the conviction that she might soon disappear entirely from view, trading in her pollera for pants or modern skirts. This in part explains the nostalgic tone often adopted when considering the plight of the cholita. Recall the feeling of social alienation ascribed to the growing sentiment among women to switch from polleras, voiced at the start of this essay, as well as the conviction that the shrinking hem line of the pollera in the festival entradas amounts to a distortion of traditional values. This sense of things out of joint also informs rhetoric about political "corruption," such as the use of the prebenda. I even met with such talk when attending a town beauty pageant. The complaint was that the girls competing were no longer all from Quillacollo itself. As one fraternity founder stated the case, "If we talk about the current chola cochabambina, now with her short pollera, high heels, and makeup, she is no longer authentic." This woman de vestido has founded a dance fraternity that strives to "move against the principle of exhibitionism," and "not treat the woman as a commodity," by promoting the "costume of the authentic qhochala." Commenting on the omnipresent political propaganda, with which I began this exploration, another young político offered me some choice words about the decadence of "traditional" regional identities:

[The political parties] wanted to identify themselves with this symbol of the valley. But well adorned cholas, with earrings and hat...are no more! [The chola of political propaganda] is a fictitious chola. She no longer exists. There has been a change in costume, in colors, with polleras designed in Europe. It's a transformation of fashion. Now we have the modern chola. There's an evolution in the form of dress. Her undergarments of the past are no more [laughing]! There aren't any more plain hand-woven polleras. Her hat is no longer of the stovepipe variety. Now it is lighter and made in Panamá. She sports a sweater made in Brazil...I believe that there is a conflict. [The political propaganda] will distort matters. The original chola is no longer (translation mine).

A notable characteristic of these criticisms about the chola garb giving way to modern dress styles is that what counts as modern is the dispersion of the local into the global, and so, the perceived loss of regional cultural fixity. Notable as well is that all these criticisms were voiced by men and women, de vestido to be sure, in variously close and active relations to the local political arena. It is, in short, the political class that seems most concerned about the possibility that the chola might

disappear into the global flux. This is odd, in a sense, given that it is also this same political class that most doggedly adheres to a local rhetoric of development and modernization for the town. But then, we have to remind ourselves what it is that popular politicians require to be effective in the electoral context.

I have suggested that an enduring problem for regional políticos is the question of self-identity as transposed into political image. In part, this is an argument about how the "popular sector," as an electoral object, is politically constituted. These men need to consolidate a "popular" self-identity, which is then dovetailed with a candidacy in a "populist" political party. In Quillacollo since the advent of local elections in 1987, except for one two year term (1993-1995), the core of políticos currently occupying the UCS party has had a stranglehold on the provincial political arena. The UCS party, itself, has been characterized as populist (Mayorga 1991), in conspicuous tension with the national political center, as represented by the traditional MNR party. But what does this mean concretely? The populist label itself is insufficient as a productive type of political self-definition. Populist figures must constantly demonstrate access to the interior spaces of regional popular culture. Hence they seek direct contact with living indexes of this frame, to repeatedly reconfirm their own popular identities, as well as to build up political networks among themselves. As things stand, male políticos frequently exchange economic staples with women's groups, an act typical of the regional development context. These exchanges are organized, however, by a local male political representative, who in turn, eventually becomes the political client of the regional leader providing said goods and services to the zone. While, technically, mostly agricultural staples change hands, I submit that in fact these transactions are really political exchanges between men of prototypically "native" women.

Somewhat unexpectedly this returns us to a familiar anthropological problem of the reproduction of political categories and alliances by virtue of the exchange of women (Levi-Strauss 1963; Leach 1954). However, for our present case, across the various local cultural frames of reference -- in the cases of the "matriarchal" domestic economy, the cult of the Virgin, fiesta libations and entradas, folkloric festivals, indigenist regional literature, the wallunk'a,

different "traditional" forms of Andean reciprocal exchange, and so on -- we have seen that the woman de pollera's peculiar regional cultural role is the mediation of the popular as a constructed root metaphor of productivity, exchange and reproduction. In short, in the folkloric mode she both constitutes the popular frame of reference, and provides access to it, by way of the imagined field, market, fiesta, and drinking establishment.

Cholas are consummate cultural brokers who index "traditional" folklorized culture, "frame" the construction of dyadic political ties, and "produce" populist identities. In this sense, obviously the chola is invaluable cultural capital for políticos seeking to redefine their self-identities along popular lines. These men are not just exchanging women de pollera, but more importantly, the mediatory potential that they intrinsically represent. We might say that men exchange "native" women precisely because such women symbolize "Andean reciprocal exchange" in the national imaginary. In a sense, we have here a doubly idealized political exchange. Men engage in such exchanges to solidify their partly fictional political images; and said images arise through the manipulation of a significantly utopic and reconstructed folklorized universe, populated by saints, festival personae, and literary tropes derived from a nonexistent feudal past. In Quillacollo men do not exchange for women, but with women. And they do not seek to obtain the flesh and blood article as with the kinship-based alliance theories, but rather to court her image, and in so doing gain access to the populist cultural potential indexed by the "native" woman as a vital folkloric root metaphor. And this kind of relation of exchange once removed, often talked about by women themselves as a kind of adultery, is itself an excellent example of the machiavellian duplicity associated with the política criolla.

We are now in a better position, I think, to appreciate the anxiety voiced by political types over the potentially inevitable disappearance of the chola from the social landscape. Políticos feel threatened by the possible loss of valuable political capital, the chola as populist currency. If the chola indeed "modernizes," políticos will have that much less to hang their populist hats on. This anxiety is ambivalently encoded in the folkloric version of the chola, as well, detectable in the many references to her deceitfulness and capriciousness (picardía). This allochronic myth model is



used with mixed success in male political rhetoric to reconcile increasingly antagonistic and incompatible rural and urban worlds, and economic realities. Too, gradations of chola garb are increasing, and women themselves are acutely aware of the cultural potency of the pollera. Women also make strategic use of this “native” dress (Healy 1996). Needing to look the part, they often change clothes several times during the day, depending upon the requirements of the situation. As such, the folkloric chola is in increasing tension with the “real” woman de pollera, and this is reflected by the instability of the image of the chola who, as “masculine” (varoníl) matriarch, cacica, and breadwinner (cf. Weismantel 1995), threatens to change gender altogether, the one thing that politically speaking she is not permitted to do.

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