

MARKETING INDIGENEITY:
IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS OF TWO GENERATIONS OF INFORMAL VENDING
WOMEN IN NEOLIBERAL BOLIVIA

BY

ISABEL SCARBOROUGH

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Andrew Orta, Chair
Professor Nancy Abelman
Professor Alma Gottlieb
Associate Professor Nils Jacobsen

ABSTRACT

This work is an ethnographic study about a group of informal market women who have crafted an alternative merchant middle class in Bolivia's cities and who are called *cholitas*; a term denoting a person of mixed indigenous and European descent. In a society where upward social mobility was barred to the indigenous majority, *cholitas* differed from other sectors because rather than attempting to assimilate into the white upper classes through emulation they maintained and took pride in their distinctive ethnic garb. At the same time that *cholitas* embody indigeneity—through this dress, language, and cultural practices—they have also earned a reputation in the regional social imaginary as savvy businesswomen and traders. In fact, Cochabamba's *cholitas* have consciously fed this dual identity through the centuries, thus blurring the boundaries between indigeneity and entrepreneurship.

In the dissertation, I argue that *cholitas* position themselves outside the social continuum that presupposes a teleological progression from indigenous to white. Rather, based on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of social class formation, these market women provoked a "shift" in the definition of Cochabamba's urban middle class to the point where it stretched to encompass their group and their unorthodox combination of ethnic markers and commercial success. Further, I also contend that the youngest generation of these *chola* women is now creating a similar shift for the definition of indigeneity in contemporary Cochabamba where an indigenous identity is no longer only an ethnic category but stretches to encompass political and economic characteristics, claimed through market knowledge and practice. I have titled this work "marketing indigeneity" because it illustrates the ambivalence of the *cholitas*' indigenous and entrepreneurial duality and because I argue that these women's everyday experiences assign different values to these two

identities. Indigeneity and entrepreneurship then become a form of cultural capital that is spent, bartered, and exchanged to determine power relations.

The stories I tell in this dissertation relate how *chola* market women in the past two and a half decades were active participants in the local cultural, economic and political processes that are dramatically changing the Bolivian nation in the wake of neoliberalism. My method consists of examining two generations of these market women to trace their journeys of mobility across Bolivia's class and ethnic spectrum. In this examination, I contrast the youngest two generations of *cholitas* whose stories help define the current transition period in which Bolivia enters a market-based era based on a new system that values a global ethnic identity. My findings and discussion on the *chola*' experiences contribute to an emerging body of comparative work on the role of marginalized sectors in postcolonial developing societies.

To Anthony, with love

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INTRODUCTION

MARKETING INDIGENEITY, NEGOTIATING CLASS MOBILITY

Perhaps the most difficult groups to analyze are the intermediate sectors, which suffer, more than anyone else, the ambiguity of their situation... The solidity of their economic and social position gives them a greater security and enables them to act with greater freedom to posit alternatives. On the other hand, their cultural position almost inevitably entails a lack of identity.

Xavier Albó¹

We have only begun to explore how [Andean peoples] continually reconstructed cultural meanings and identities, as they moved into (or sometimes, out of) the orbit of regional and world markets.

Brooke Larson²

On a dusty November afternoon in 2007 visitors to the sprawling outdoor market in the city of Cochabamba in Bolivia would have noticed groups of confused women vendors running along corridors flanked by cramped merchandise stalls. The women strained to hear the latest rumor on the statements made by the Minister of Finance at a popular radio talk show broadcast that very morning. The Minister, I was told excitedly by several customers and merchants, blamed informal female vendors from those very stalls for the nation's increase in inflation the past year. He declared that inflation was a direct result of these vendors' practice of hoarding food and other staples to speculate with prices, and ended his statement with threats to go down to the marketplace and forcibly confiscate the market women's merchandise to teach them a lesson.

When these stories reached my ears my first reaction was to marvel at the fantastic proportions that gossip could lend to a tale where humble market women—most of whom had a

¹ From "Our Identity Starting from Pluralism in the Base" in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, John Beverley, José Oviedo and Michael Aronna, eds. 1995. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 21.

² From "Andean Communities, Political Cultures, and Markets: The Changing Contours of a Field" in *Ethnicity, Markets and Migration in the Andes: At the Crossroads of History and Anthropology*, Brooke Larson and Olivia Harris with Enrique Tandeter, eds. 1995. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 38.

grade school education and belonged to Bolivia's historically-marginalized indigenous population—were portrayed as provokers of inflation and the targeted enemy for a minister of state. Despite my initial incredulity, the events of the following weeks would show that state officials truly considered these informal vendors agents of the nation's economic distress which required that the government take appropriate action against them. In fact, the Minister of Finance initiated a protracted media war where he reiterated his initial accusations and continued his efforts to foist blame for national inflation on these women.

These informal vending women and their growing importance in Bolivia's economy and their influence on issues of national identity are at the core of this dissertation. Their stories exemplify how identity constructions now occur within sociocultural and economic matrices that extend far beyond local communities, and how marginalized populations in postcolonial nations are forging new connections with the state and the free market. The market women of this story—known as *cholitas*³—embody both indigeneity and entrepreneurship in the Bolivian national imagination and illustrate these innovative global connections and their effect on changing social structures. I have titled this work “marketing indigeneity” because it illustrates the ambivalence of the *cholitas*' indigenous and entrepreneurial duality and because I argue that these women's everyday experiences assign different values to these two identities. Indigeneity and entrepreneurship then become a form of symbolic capital that is spent, bartered, and exchanged to determine power relations.

³ Throughout this dissertation, I chose to use the feminine *chola* instead of the masculine *cholo* to refer to this sector of Bolivian society, despite the fact that in Spanish the masculine form is also used to denote both male and female members of a group. I do this purposefully in order to avoid confusing readers who are unfamiliar with Spanish or the Andes, and because the people whose lives are explored in this ethnography are all *chola* women. Additionally, I like the notion of subverting the term from a feminist perspective to give the *cholitas* their due as, particularly in Cochabamba, it is the women who define this class and ethnic identity.

The following pages scrutinize the ongoing negotiations that these female vendors' identities are subject to. Bolivia's *cholitas* are well known for their business acumen, political activism, and embodiment of indigeneity in the national imaginary that position these women at a crossroad where a number of seemingly-contradictory characteristics are brought together. The privileged position of the *cholitas* provides a window from which to examine a multiplicity of issues related to class, politics, and entrepreneurship; the method that I employ to untangle these topics is the comparison and contrast of two generations of *cholitas*. Comparing two generations is particularly useful to sense changes in socioeconomic structures. My findings show that these transformations have modified local perceptions of indigeneity and the informal economy to the point where the former is also a political category, and where belonging to the informal market can be claimed through ethnic identification. The discussion of how these economic and ethnic identities are exchanged and set on their head—woven throughout this dissertation—traces the subtle nuances of a new shift in the self-identification of Bolivia's majority of urban indigenous.

The exchanges in identity that I refer to here took place after the imposition of economic structural reforms that ushered an era of neoliberalism in Latin America and a series of grassroots social movements in reaction to these changes. Throughout this text when I mention neoliberalism I refer to the policies implemented by the Bolivian state in 1985 and that enacted, among other things, the privatization and closure of state-owned companies, the establishment of microcredit lending institutions, the creation of free trade zones, and the passing of laws promoting multiculturalism. Julia Elyachar's study of the markets points out that in the transformation that took place at this time in many parts of the developing world, members of the informal economy are no longer connected to a nation or a nation-state (Elyachar 2007: 117). For the vending women of this study, the feeling of disconnection from the state resulted from the

retreat of government services. These women's sense of grievance lead them to actively participate in a series of anti-neoliberal protests that changed the face of Bolivian politics when they culminated with the swearing-in of Evo Morales as the country's first indigenous president in 2005 (Lagos 2006; Laurie and Pozo 2006).

In this dissertation I try to position contemporary developments within a history of power relations and struggles for dominance. For instance, the anti-neoliberal protests that I mention here were centered on historical grievances perpetrated upon indigenous peoples that permitted claims of injustice against the ruling elites and the state. What is striking is that Bolivians classified these protest movements against the state as part of a series of indigenous uprisings that harken back uninterruptedly to the first resistance movements against the Spanish conquest more than five centuries in the past. Deploying the protests as part of an ongoing history of injustice not only provided the protesters with their justification but also defines the dual indigeneity and entrepreneurial aspects of *cholas* as “contemporary social relation[s] articulated in terms of the past” (Canessa 2008: 358).

For Bolivia's *cholas*, this connection between current power relations and their history as a group is compounded by their gendered identity that they also perceive in terms of a *long durée*. *Cholas*' tense relationship with the Bolivian state is grounded in the country's colonial past and originated in these vendors' work in the marketplace that disrupted notions of female propriety in a society where their sex was relegated to the domestic realm (Revollo 2001; Zabala 1995). Historian Elizabeth Dore argues that the reason why women and indigenous peoples in contemporary Latin America continue in a subordinate position to the ruling elites to this day is because the imagined communities of these nations upon independence from Europe reworked and claimed colonial ideologies of indigenous subordination and symbols of “patriarchalism”—

or systems of patriarchal government—into their dogma (Dore 2000: 17). These old ideologies continue to color the conflicting relations between groups of the ruling elite and *cholitas* just as Bolivia's gender regimes will color all of the *cholitas*' experiences that I describe in this dissertation. Indeed, the importance of historical and cultural context to indigenous and gendered identities evidences that these terms are best understood as “relational” concepts (Trigger and Dalley 2010: 48). Said differently, indigeneity and gender relations change due to the influence of culture, time, and place. The relational nature of the *chola* identities that are embedded in Bolivia's cultural history requires the nuances provided by local context—including the narrative of how their unique identity was created—which I provide below.

The region of Cochabamba, the site of my research and the place that this dissertation is about, is well-known as the *chola* center of Bolivia. This trade hub also has a reputation for sheltering *mestizos*, a term synonymous with *chola* in that it also describes the descendants of a mixed European and indigenous heritage in Bolivia. *Mestizos* are considered the legitimate intermediate stepping stone between indigenous and white, perceived as “evolving from ‘primitive’ Indianness into a more ‘civilized’ stage and eventually incompatible with indigenous ways” given that they, at some point, renounce their ethnic identity and attempt to pass as or become “white” (de la Cadena 2000: 5). Bolivia's *chola* sector was born at the moment when its members defined themselves apart from *mestizos* by stepping outside the Indian to white continuum to create their own class stratum based on their commercial success. In the mid-twentieth century, *chola* merchants residing in Bolivia's highland cities shifted and stretched the boundaries of this society's middle class to include their group, despite the ethnic markers that

designated their place at the bottom of the nation's hierarchy (Gill 1994; Medinacelli 1989).⁴ In other words, class mobility is the reason why the *cholitas* emerged as a separate group that by its very existence has challenged the established social structure imposed by the governing elites. The *cholitas*' intimate links to processes of ethnic and class mobility are the second important thread—after the exploration of their indigenous entrepreneurial duality—that runs the length of this text.

When *cholitas* stepped outside the ethnic continuum and challenged this dominant teleological progression, their group became “less civilized” than that of *mestizos* and elicited a negative reaction from both the white middle class that they aspired to, and from some indigenous groups who saw their successful forays into urban capitalism as severing them from an indigenous worldview defined by an agricultural lifestyle (Buechler and Buechler 1998; Medinacelli and Mendieta 1997; Rossells 2001). Today, these ambivalent feelings about the *cholitas*' duality continue to contribute to the contested relation between these women and other sectors of society. Although *cholitas* are vocal supporters of the current administration's anti-neoliberal agenda of indigenous nationalism, they are viewed with suspicion by the government on the one hand because of their history of challenge to state authority and, on the other, because these female entrepreneurs dramatically benefitted from free market policies. This general resentment against *cholitas* is observed in that despite the emergence of Bolivian national expressions of *mestizo* art, music, architecture, and food, there are few or no references made to a similar *chola* music or art movement. Indeed, other scholars have noted that at best, Bolivians do not consider *cholitas* as a proper social class, and at worst they view it as a “bastard” group that

⁴ See Bourdieu for more on the mutability of the social class (1985: 728). In Bolivia's case this is the more remarkable given that the social hierarchy that the *chola* women were challenging and shifting is highly rigid (Zabala 1995; Sanjinés 2004).

combines the meaner characteristics of the Spanish and native worlds (Larson 2004; Soruco Sologuren 2006a; Stevenson 1999).

Cholas could do little to counteract these stereotypes until new neoliberal policies of multiculturalism sought to replace the *mestizo* worldview espousing a progression toward whiteness that had held sway in Bolivia for decades. The premise of this new ideology is that of several different cultures and/or indigenous communities coexisting in harmony under one nation-state, where all ethnic differences are celebrated and are inclusive. In a country like Bolivia where the majority of the population has indigenous roots, it is not surprising that multiculturalism was taken up as the basis for a new commonality with those who form a global collective of indigenous peoples and share a similar history of colonialism and marginalization (Zenker 2011: 64). The global aspect of indigeneity has made it an identity desired by most Bolivians who are deploying it to claim a place in the new nation. *Cholas*, who continue to occupy a space outside older societal structures, work hard to assert their national belonging in this new milieu by negotiating their embodiment of indigeneity to secure specific special entitlements from the state. In other words, claiming an indigenous identity has become an “alternative mode to nationalism” and *chola* women provide some excellent examples of how politics and market practices can be deployed to become indigenous (Merlan 2009: 303). I elaborate on these examples in the following paragraphs on the class and ethnic mobility of the *chola* sector after neoliberalism.

Through the centuries, *cholas* found that upward social climbing was barred to their sector due to their refusal to shed their indigenous identity markers on account of the dominant notion that the only path to national belonging was through assimilation. Within this framework, *cholas* appear to be forever stuck in a suspended state from which they neither return to their

indigenous roots nor move forward to embrace a white identity, reminiscent of Albó's comment on Bolivia's intermediate sectors in the epigraph that opens this introduction. Although these women are defined by their class mobility given their permanent efforts to better their status through trade, the constraints created by their gender and ethnic identities prevented all but a few of their group to attain a middle class status associated with this society's white or whitened elites. This status quo was maintained with little change until the recent reforms imposing the free market and multicultural discourses that provided some of the more successful *cholitas* with the economic wherewithal and cultural capital to finish this journey of mobility in much greater numbers than in the entire previous history of this group. Indeed, I use the *cholitas*' experiences with mobility to illustrate identity negotiations because, despite their economic success and protracted efforts, *cholitas* in Cochabamba failed to become a part of the city's middle class until their current youngest generation.

Before the advent of neoliberalism *cholitas* were divided from *mestizos* by their occupation. *Cholitas* had no access to higher education and therefore their group worked in trade and crafts while *mestizos* occupied the lower echelons of professional positions. In the dawn of the twenty-first century the majority of the youngest generation of the *chola* sector acquired degrees in higher education. It is these credentials and their business success that allowed this generation to finally join the ranks of Bolivia's urban professionals. In this study I follow the journey of upward mobility of this younger generation and the surprising *return* to the markets of some of these young women after shedding their mothers' visible markers of ethnicity—including dress and language. These young market vendors argue for new claims to their indigenous roots through an inherited market savvy that is passed down from *chola* mothers to daughters. At the same time, the younger women deploy the authority and skills acquired

through a college education to connect to the free market economy. In this way, market vendors are redefining the requirements for the *chola* identity slot and cultural citizenship in the Cochabamba of the twenty-first century. More to the point, the *chol*as of the new generation blend two different systems of business knowhow to challenge previous definitions of indigeneity and of market practices. In this dissertation I compare and contrast two generations of *chol*as because their stories aid our understanding of the current transition period in which Bolivia enters a market-based era based on a new system that values a global ethnic identity. I particularly focus on how current *chol*as reconstruct these cultural meanings as they move in and out of the orbits of the global market (Larson 1995: 38).

Because of the many parts that compose the *chola* identity, the definitions and descriptions of *chol*as are as varied as these women are numerous. Nevertheless, the general consensus is that *chol*as are defined by their trading activities that straddle the worlds of modern commerce and what is perceived as an archaic ethnicity, blurring the boundaries between the two (Albro 2000; Paulson 1996; Seligmann 1989; Velasco 2001)⁵. Bolivian commerce legislation has been heavily influenced by the development literature that has been popular with Latin American policy-makers since the 1970s (Wanderley 2003). This body of work posits that those who practice informal commerce do so to increase their distance from the precarious nature of informality in the hope of achieving their eventual incorporation into the formal economy (Rivera Cusicanqui 1996; Roitman 2004). In Bolivia today, as I mentioned previously, *chola*

⁵ *Chola* market women are an Andean phenomenon and, as such, have been the inspiration for a number of groundbreaking ethnographies including studies about *chol*as in Cusco and Lima in Peru (Babb 1998; De la Cadena 2000; Femenías 2007; Seligmann 2004) as well as studies of *chol*as in Ecuador (Cervonne 2002; Weismantel 2003). Other noteworthy studies of this group in Bolivia deal with *chol*as in La Paz who boast Aymara indigenous roots (Gill 1993; Guss 2000; Rivera Cusicanqui 1996), and explore the lives of Sucre's Quechua *chol*as and their role in defining Bolivia's *mestizo* identity (Estenssoro 2003; Zulawski 2000). As this dissertation deals exclusively with *chol*as in Cochabamba, I build my discussion on work specific to these women, unless otherwise noted.

merchants have excelled in their commercial ventures after free market policies were implemented to the point where they have taken up most of the attributes of the formal sector. At the same time the formal market is shrinking and some *chololas* have become so successful they manage veritable trade empires. Although the imagined and normative borders between these two sectors of the economy are still in place, the *chololas*' activities have steadily chipped away at the barriers between the informal and formal markets to the point where the line that separates the two is nearly invisible. In fact, this situation exemplifies the growing importance of the informal economy in the developing world that is redefining the global market and forcing scholars to reconsider its former classification in the development literature as a shadow or weak copy of the formal sector (Ferguson 2010; Hernández and Kellett 2010). Further, this discussion on whether the *chololas*' market practices are formal or informal will speak to how these women define their entrepreneurial and indigenous identities in the twenty-first century.

Chololas have never ceased in their struggle to gain acceptance in Bolivia's society—despite their contradictory identities—and achieve upward mobility. Although they faced great difficulties breaking down class barriers because of their gender and ethnicity, they have also accrued an enormous amount of economic and political power over the years and are now a major force that defines their city and community. In order to better understand this central role of *chololas* in Cochabamba, I employ the theoretical contributions of feminist anthropologists who have described ethnic mobility in terms of power differentials to tease out the hidden connections between *chololas* and local governing institutions (Beattie 2003; Ortner 1996; Sommers 1997). Other work with which this research engages includes scholarship on social mobility and class formation, given the dramatic journeys of these market women and their offspring (Behrman et al. 2001; Nutini 2005; Truitt 2008).

I also draw upon recent work by economic anthropologists who have begun a conversation on the role of the markets as a cultural construct and its links to sociopolitical change, to further explain the continuing significance of the role that *cholitas* play in Bolivian society as the country continues to negotiate the legacies of neoliberalism (Appelbaum 2005; Fischer 2009; Tranberg-Hansen 2004). Lastly, I also engage my work with literature on the informal and formal markets including work from economic sociology and cultural geography (Andolina and Laurie 2009; Fligstein and Dauter 2007).

In these conversations with different bodies of literature, this dissertation contributes to broader conversations on the construction of ethnic identity in urban and transnational ethnography, on the intersection of gender and class, and on the anthropology of the markets. Most notably, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the effects of global economic policies in postcolonial developing societies. My intention with this work is to introduce a nuanced discussion of the lives of *chola* market women in all their complexity and—through ethnographic data—provide the tools to enable an in-depth analysis of their role in building the Bolivian nation in the years to come. The section that follows provides an outline of the dissertation’s chapters and an explanation of how these fit into the main arguments that I have described to this point.

Organization of the Dissertation

In order to best organize the multiplicity of sites and players that form part of this investigation, I have divided the text of this dissertation into six separate chapters. The first chapter introduces *chola* market women and describes the research setting for the market *cholitas*: the city of Cochabamba. Here I also provide a description of the place that *cholitas* occupy in Cochabamba’s

social imaginary and why their lives are perceived as emblematic of the region. I then continue with a snapshot of the political, economic, social and cultural factors that affected Bolivians for the eighteen months I spent carrying out fieldwork among market *chol*as. The next section describes the evolution of the proposed dissertation project, including the research methods that were used to collect the data in this study. I conclude this chapter with a brief reflection on the writing of this ethnography, including how my own identities affected my interactions with both generations of *chol*as.

Chapter Two “The Market and the Plaza: How *Chola* Vendors Manipulate Cochabamba’s Urban Landscape”, will present the city and region of Cochabamba and disclose the multiple sites at which *chol*as play an important role. This journey shows how *chol*as work as veritable architects that change and modify the city’s landscape to gain economic power. Most obviously, *chol*as purchase and claim vending stalls within the informal outdoor marketplace, as well as own prime real estate throughout Cochabamba. Because of the explosion of the informal market in recent decades, the section of the city dedicated to trade is crowded to the bursting point. Out on the sidewalks, temporary vending stalls are set up and taken down according to an internal rhythm that changes the course of traffic, physically modifies sidewalks and street signage, and creates a constant conflict. *Chola* vendors fight for this space with other sellers and building owners, but above all struggle with the municipal government that rents out or sells the right to these public areas. The chapter revolves around the disclosure of an intimate network of reciprocal relations with the local government apparatus and a discussion of the *chol*as’ use of unions and their political clout. This chapter also comments on the “taking” of public spaces through protest marches. These outlets of communal expression represent the manner in which politics are currently waged in Bolivia, and challenge postcolonial and modernist ideas that

influenced the city's urban planning and created a spatialized notion of the state as being above the *chololas* and other groups in civil society.

Chapter Three: "Uneven Mobility: The Effects of Education and Migration on the *Chola* Class" describes the relation between education and urban migration and their combined effects on social mobility in Cochabamba. I argue here that the journeys of mobility for Cochabamba's *chololas* have increased exponentially since the implementation of neoliberal reforms, to the point where the vast majority of the youngest generation have attained degrees in higher education, finally breaking through class barriers that were almost insurmountable. In this chapter I work with a metaphor of *chola* mobility as blocked and unevenly scattered. The many journeys of mobility of these women are blocked because they can be stopped or interrupted at different points in the journey which has caused *chololas* to diversify their options and send their children and other members of their kin on different paths to attain upward mobility; scattering *chololas* and their kin throughout Cochabamba's social structure. This process is messy, complex and fraught with obstacles, which belies the neoliberal fantasy of mobility as fluid and unimpeded. Lastly, an important thread that runs through this chapter is that of language as a class and ethnic marker. The Bolivian state used Spanish first to elide indigeneity and then the same language instruction was appropriated by indigenous peoples to overcome and resist exploitation, reflecting an underlying ambivalence in the use and valuing of language that is also used by the *chola* class to advance their own mobility while blocking that of recent rural immigrants to their city.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation deals with the entrepreneurial activities of *chola* market women. Chapter Four "Pleated Politics: Conflicting Discourses On Class and Ethnicity in the Marketplace" describes the threat to the older established *chololas* in the market by a group of

recent rural indigenous immigrants who wish to appropriate the *chola* label. I focus this chapter on the battle between *chola* vendors who have set up small businesses and sweatshops manufacturing and selling clothes, and these new arrivals who specialize in selling used clothes that are smuggled into the country and are part of a global clothing trade network. This conflict achieved national notoriety when the government proposed a law to ban the sale of used clothes as illegal. Both groups of vendors in the Cochabamba market reacted with a series of protest marches, strikes and road blocks to appeal to the state and ask for either the enforcement or repeal of this decree. Most interesting is that both groups resorted to a campaign through the local press in which they attacked and accused each other of lacking specific middle-class defining characteristics such as hygiene, education and urban or street smarts.

Chapter Five continues to and expands on the use of the media to establish power relations. Titled “Media Wars: Inflation, Speculation and *Chola* Impersonations,” this chapter is centered on the relations between *chololas* and the state focused on an analysis of a series of mass media appearances by both *chololas* and government officials in which the latter were accusing these market women of price speculation and aggravating the country’s inflationary process. Here I expand on the vignette with which I began this introduction and discusses how the market women responded to the state’s accusations. Although the question of whether the market women were responsible for a rise in inflation was never answered to anyone’s satisfaction and the media interest eventually died, the importance of market *chololas* in Bolivian society is showcased as undisputedly important to the country’s economic welfare.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, describes the return journey to the markets of the younger generation of *chololas* who have shed the distinctive ethnic garb of their mothers. I titled this chapter “Bidirectional Knowledges and Practices: Redefining the (In)Formal Economy.” Here I

explain how the young *cholas* consider the market knowledge of their mothers as something they inherit by birth and how these young women use this legacy to justify their place in their mother's marketplace grounded on their indigenous heritage. Based on my time following these young women as they carried out their business transactions, I trace a handful of their most common trade practices. I then analyze their explanations on how these practices related to either the cultural market practices or to what they had learned about business practices in school, including the *cholas*' descriptions of the differences between the informal and private sectors. I provide the evidence for the core argument of this work; that these young market women are thus deploying their market knowledge to claim indigeneity through their commercial practices. In this closing section I discuss the centrality of *cholas* in the construction of class, ethnic, and gendered identities in Cochabamba, and in the new Bolivia that the current government is hoping to establish. I end by bringing together the narratives and arguments from the previous chapters and exhorting further research on this representative group of women.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS OF *CHOLA* MARKET WOMEN IN BOLIVIA

The Setting: A City of Heroines

The setting for this ethnographic study is the city of Cochabamba, a metropolis located within a flat valley surrounded by tall mountains at an altitude of 7,400 feet above sea level with a population, according to the 2008 census, of 608,276 inhabitants. The city is nestled in a region that slopes down into the Amazon basin to the East, and climbs to the Andes highlands in the West (Figure 1). Given this privileged geographic location, moderate climate, and fertile soil, the region and city are a commerce hub between the Bolivian highlands and the tropics.



Figure 1: View of Cochabamba from the Southeast

Moreover, Cochabamba has a reputation for being a central space that articulates and mediates between the white and the indigenous, because it's the home to *chola* women who have traditionally played an intermediate role between ethnic and social identities, and because these women have ruled over these trading markets for over five centuries (Sanchez and Ramirez 2005; Instituto Nacional de Estadística [*Bolivian National Statistics Institute*] 2010).

The city follows a classic Spanish colonial grid pattern, at least at its center, while marginal neighborhoods that stretch out and spill onto the surrounding hillsides conform to the local topography. Cochabamba is neatly divided into North and South zones and local residents point out that the northern part of town houses the dwellings of the city's white upper class while the southern end of the city is where the lower and working classes—read indigenous and *chola* sectors—make their home. The southern zone is also where the immense outdoor market ruled by the women of this study is set and is the site to which rural immigrants flock. Indeed, this monstrous sprawl is in constant motion and change as it absorbs the surrounding blocks and expands into new neighborhoods every year, in silent witness to the commercial power of the *cholitas* who claim it as their domain. Further, the *chola* identity is considered an extension of Cochabamba on account of the region's self-portrayal in popular media images as *mestizo* or *chola*, because of its portrayal as a space where the indigenous and non-indigenous meet and blend at this trade and cultural crossroad.

Visitors who walk the few blocks from the colonial narrow streets of the city's business downtown district to the informal outdoor market, will find their steps leading them past San Sebastián hill. At its top, gazing over the marketplace where *cholitas* ply their wares, is the monument to the “Heroines of the Summit” (*Heroínas de la Coronilla*) a statue commissioned in the early 1920s to commemorate a battle that took place at this site in 1812. During the region's

Independence War from Spain in the early nineteenth century, there came a point when all the men had been recruited by the independent movement and left the city to fight, leaving only women, children and the elderly within the town. The Spanish royalist army prepared to march its troops into the city. However, the gun-bearing soldiers were momentarily stopped by a group of brave women—most of whom were *cholas*—armed with little more than slingshots and kitchen knives. The ensuing skirmish in which the *cholas* were massacred put Cochabamba on the map as a region desirous of independence, and gave its women a reputation for fearlessness and valor that defines them to this day (Gotkowitz 2000: 217).

The commission for the statue to commemorate the heroines began as the brainchild of the wife of one of Bolivia's former presidents. When *cholas* learned of this project, they were quick to offer their help and become involved to the point where they were crucial in raising the funds to ship the statue on its long journey from Italy. However, not all the dealings between these two groups were harmonious, and the story of this monument shows an interesting split between the market *cholas* and the upper class ladies who joined forces for its execution. The elites wished to emphasize the nurturing and mothering characteristics of the women represented by the statue and make it representative of all Cochabamba women, thereby effectively erasing the ethnic and class factors from the story. Market *cholas*, on the other hand, focused on the bravery and resourcefulness of the *chola* heroines whom they publicly claimed as their "direct ancestors" at the inauguration ceremony. In this way, the *cholas* attempted to claim the statue and its story as they celebrated one of the few instances in which their group was included in Bolivia's official history given that the *chola* sector was consistently elided from history texts (Molyneaux 2000: 73; Salamanca Ugarte 1975: 34).

The point of conflict between the *chololas* and the elite ladies was solved by the upper class women who arranged for the enactment of a law in which May 27, the date of the battle on the San Sebastián hill, was officially instituted as Bolivian Mother's Day, thus highlighting the universal rather than the *chola* characteristics of the heroines. Today, Bolivians still celebrate Mother's Day on the date of this battle. However, *cochabambinas*, as the city's female residents are known, also continue to be referred to by Bolivians as *valerosas* or courageous because of the actions of the *chololas* on San Sebastian. The fact that different sectors of society wished to stress different facets of the heroines on the hill shows a common tension embodied by *chololas* who are both nurturing mothers and independent fighters, and is an ongoing fracture or disconnect.

Chololas, as I have discussed in the introduction to this text, were never accepted by the upper classes in Cochabamba, despite their efforts to attain upward mobility. A large part of this failure has to do with their ambivalent place in the social imaginary that shows them in both positive and negative roles. Spanish colonial social mores that have survived to this day imposed the belief that women in what is now Latin America upheld the honor and status of their households and that the purity of women was guarded within the domestic realm. *Chololas* challenged this belief as they sought to dominate public—and therefore male—spaces as they opened trade routes, built market stalls, and established commercial enterprises based on pre-colonial models (Rossells 2001: 37). These actions placed the vendors outside the purview of “decency” and resulted in a negative view of *chololas* as women of loose morals.

Chololas as highly sexualized beings are portrayed in Bolivian literature and history as the lovers or mistresses of upper class men, and the owners of *chicherías*, or houses where the local maize beer or *chicha* was served and men of the elite consorted with the *chololas* who usually ran

these businesses (Lagos 1994; Zulawski 2000). There is also a dominant idea in Bolivia that a lack of proficiency in Spanish and a lack of education labels that person as more indigenous and therefore places them lower on the social scale (Luykx 2003). Despite their long-term residence in the city, *cholitas* continue to be viewed as “ignorant Indians” by the upper classes and are conflated with more recent rural immigrants who lack the *cholitas*’ urban capital and commercial power. This thread of language as an indexer of class and race will recur throughout the dissertation, including the deployment of these racializing categories by the *cholitas* to block the path to mobility for recent urban immigrants in some cases, and to overcome some obstacles placed in their path by the upper classes in others.

The other image held of *cholitas* in Cochabamba that is nearly opposite to that of uneducated indigenous is that of nurturing motherhood. Regarding this issue, *scholars* have described how the region’s upper classes both figuratively and literally fed at the *chola*’s breast due to this group’s prevalent practice to use *chola* or indigenous wet nurses and nannies, resulting in an image of *cholitas* as nurturing, fertile, and with a special connection to the land (Velasco 2001: 419). Confirming *cholitas* as mother figures are accounts that show how these women assert power and authority through language, more particularly, through terms of endearment and insults like mothers encouraging and chastising their children. I can attest to this description myself as I heard *cholitas* stop and address potential clients in the markets with sweet Quechua endearments. However, I was warned that these terms are also uttered as a prelude to famous “dressing-downs” by the *cholitas* to customers who fail to show up in the markets for some time or are known to carry out their regular purchases from another vendor. Indeed, *cholitas* are known for their wit and quick tongues and will also wield language as a weapon. *Cholitas* have been studied trading insults in the marketplace with other vendors to clear the air and assert

their place in the inner market hierarchy (Seligmann 1989). Or, as I witnessed, *cholitas* also employ insults to hold their own and cower municipal market inspectors or anyone doubting or threatening their authority.

Cochabamba's residents refer to their region as a "matriarchy," saying that *cholitas*, who are representative of this part of Bolivia, are the veritable breadwinners for their households and hold their family's purse strings. This is definitely the case for the *cholitas* of this study, however, it is important to also consider that the *cholitas* hold economic power within a society where women and men live under a broader patriarchal rule. The main industries and businesses in the city do not belong to *cholitas* or even to women from the upper classes, but to elite males as part of the Spanish colonial legacy. Within unions and other political institutions, leadership roles fall to men. Bolivia's legal system counts men as heads of household, and religious hierarchies place men in leading roles (Paulson 1996: 104). Though Cochabamba's *cholitas* have boasted more freedom than middle class women because of their activities in the market, their relative independence has come with a price on their reputation. More to the point, despite their fame for entrepreneurship and courage, *cholitas* do not represent a threat to the masculinity of Cochabamba's males as their valor inspired by the San Sebastián heroines is tempered by their mothering nature and by the fact that they also carry out all the traditional housekeeping activities that their middle class sisters do, in addition to their work in trade. In fact, this dissertation shows how *cholitas* struggle to provide for their families utilizing their market knowhow and reproduce the gendered division of labor of their class as they expect their work in the markets to be carried on through the female line and only train their daughters to follow in their footsteps⁶.

⁶ This research study is centered on *chola* market women and their daughters. Though I did interview some of the women's husbands and sons and observed their interactions with the *cholitas*, I consciously

At the beginning of my fieldwork term, I set out to map the marketplace where *cholas* earned both their trading and mothering reputations to define their sphere of influence and visualize their setting. However, I quickly found that following the threads of the experiences of the different *cholas* I interviewed took me to every part of the city and showed me that these valorous *cholas* are ubiquitous and integral to the life of Cochabamba. In the end, I had covered so much of the different city neighborhoods that my ethnography of a group of people has become an ethnographic study of the city that shelters them. Indeed, one of my arguments in this dissertation is that *cholas* are not the marginal group that popular discourse leads us to believe, in the sense of their insignificance or lack of relevance. Rather, they are central to the destinies of the six hundred thousand souls who call Cochabamba their home. In the following paragraphs, I map out my travels to the different areas of town in which I interacted with *cholas* and their university-educated daughters, as different locations also mark different points in the journeys of mobility that I tease out in this study.

At the beginning of every day of my fieldwork experience, I walked for fifteen minutes to the bus stop that would carry me through the city on my journey to the marketplace and the different spaces where the *chola* market women I knew carried out their lives. Some days, I would step off the bus after a mere five-to ten-minute ride, as I stopped in a neighborhood where a number of the *chola* market women I interviewed lived, bordering one of the city's elite gated communities. As is often the case in Bolivia's cities, expensive homes with high walls and security systems set at the gate nestled cheek by jowl with humble adobe homes or simple brick constructions. The latter were the homes of some of the *chola* market vendors whose lives I was

chose not to include their stories in this dissertation because I felt I didn't have enough data to do the men's voices justice. Perhaps this will become part of a future research study in which I will integrate both genders.

privileged to share. In some of these homes, the *cholas* and their families toiled at sewing machines set up precariously near windows or doorways, putting together garments as part of a larger sweatshop garment industry or just producing the wares they would sell at market. At other homes, parents and grandparents would sit on doorsteps, having vacated their one bedroom home so a son or daughter could study quietly. Within enclosed patios or inside their living rooms, older *cholas* sold dried goods, milk, bread, and eggs to their neighbors who wished to save themselves the long trip to the markets.

On other days, I would get off the bus at an upper class residential neighborhood, near the city's supermarket and private university campus, and visit with some market women who were supplementing their income as domestic servants in this neighborhood, or I would chat with their daughters who were taking courses at the university, or follow yet other market women as they collected rent from homes they owned in this part of the city. Yet other days were spent downtown, sitting in the waiting room of the offices of market women's daughters who had opted to step into the world of young professionals and away from the markets. It was also downtown that I followed these women and their attorneys to the city's courthouse where law suits were filed by and against the *cholas* having to do with contested space in the markets, or where I patiently sat for hours as the *cholas* and I listened to speeches given by representatives from the different market vendor sectors during meetings held by the market unions. The role of unions for the market vendors is crucial as it is the mechanism through which *cholas* organize and negotiate vending spaces and rights with other vendors at the marketplace, as well as present their petitions to local and national government institutions. I describe a prime example of the role of unions in a conflict with both the government and other *cholas* in Chapter Four of this

text, where I narrate the battle between petty clothes manufacturers and used-clothes vendors in Cochabamba.

The bus I always rode through the city had one last stop before turning around and retracing its steps. This was in the heart of the immense outdoor marketplace where the *chola* vendors of this story ruled. There, I spent my afternoons sitting amidst sacks of flour in cool storerooms, or strolled down cramped corridors where the street pavement was almost completely covered with merchandise, or I squinted in the sun as I followed an itinerant vendor do her rounds. As I carried out all of these activities, I could feel the throbbing pulse of the city's economy and the power of the *chola* class in Cochabamba. Like the visitors at the beginning of this story, I would stop at the foot of San Sebastian hill to gaze up to the monument to the *Heroínas*. I then pondered the multiple facets of the *chola* identity as nurturing mother, savvy trader, symbol of female sexuality and fertility, embodiment of indigeneity, courageous warrior, and political activist. It is these very peculiar characteristics that also make *chol*as an excellent group to study in order to best unpack the challenges and transformations affecting Bolivians today in regards to class, culture and gender negotiations.

The Moment: Bolivia's Neoliberal Era in the Twenty-First Century

The twenty-first century has proven momentous for Bolivians and Cochabamba's residents. The country underwent far-reaching socioeconomic changes and an era riddled with social protests. The latter began with a series of marches organized by indigenous rights groups around the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America in 1992. Soon after, these demonstrations changed from targeting the region's colonialism to calling attention to the effects of the economic structural reforms implemented throughout the 1990s that widened the gap

between the rich and the poor and signaled the retreat of the state. Protestors in these marches were still members of Bolivia's indigenous majority but this time, instead of uniting under their indigenous identity, they called for the improvement of economic conditions for "the Bolivian people" (Postero 2007: 4). The first decade of the twenty-first century is best described as chaotic, even for a country known for its social turmoil, and Cochabamba was the stage for some of the most dramatic of these social movements. In April 2000, the women and men of the city took to the streets en masse clamoring for a multinational business consortium to leave the country. This consortium had won the public bid to privatize the city's water services and had hiked water prices over two hundred percent as one of its first measures. In an extraordinary and unforeseen victory, these protests—which paralyzed the city for eleven days and affected the distribution of goods and commerce across the nation—reverted this privatization (Assies 2003). These demonstrations, in retrospect, have been catalogued as part of a series of marches and road blockades throughout the decade in which Bolivians took to the streets looking for alternatives to neoliberalism (Laurie and Pozo 2006: 13) .

The current government administration of President Evo Morales assumed power in December 2005. President Morales has been the leader of the federation of coca leaf growers in the Department of Cochabamba since the late 1990s and is one of the better known and recognized heads of the social movements that campaigned for indigenous rights and for the demands of the coca farmers who have colonized Cochabamba's tropical region. Morales now heads a political party called Movement for Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS) which began as the institutional umbrella organization for the coca growers union federation. Morales, who is of Aymara descent, has self-proclaimed himself as the first indigenous president of Bolivia and built his electoral campaign on a strict anti-neoliberal platform that encouraged the

restoration of power to Bolivia's oppressed indigenous majority. Morales' victory came at a time when Bolivians in general were disenchanted with political parties, including populist political leaders, and had written these leaders off as corrupt and self-serving. In this scenario, Morales and other indigenous and union leaders who had emerged from the grassroots promised governing from and for the people (Van de Cott 2008).

The policies espoused by Morales and the MAS include increasing the government influence—and percentage of shareholding—in foreign energy and mining companies and an all-encompassing constitutional reform, and have been vigorously opposed by the small, though powerful, white elites from the Eastern lowland region of the country and by a number of indigenous groups that feel Morales doesn't represent indigeneity (Fabricant 2009; Gustafson 2009). Indeed, what I found fascinating while in the field is that I heard Morales labeled as “*cholo*” by both groups who oppose him. His detractors accused him of not speaking proper Aymara or Quechua—Bolivia's main indigenous languages—and of being raised by parents who knew little or nothing of native religious beliefs, thus challenging his right to call himself indigenous. Morales does fall somewhat short of this category if viewed under the somewhat romanticized version of indigeneity that MAS politicians seem to favor. But he is not the only Bolivian claiming indigeneity under new parameters; and how the *cholas* in Cochabamba of this research study achieve this goal is one of the main points discussed in this dissertation. I analyze this issue in further detail in the final chapter of this text.

Cholas' tradition for political activism in this region was closely linked to the women's suffrage movement and the work of the national anarchist labor party in Bolivia in the 1930s (Revollo 2001). *Cholas* have actively participated in the most important movements that influenced Bolivian politics through the twentieth century including unions, the international

labor movement, identity politics social movements, and indigenous and populist politics. In this regard, it is important to revisit the *chololas*' historical role in politics to better understand how their relationship with both local and national governments has changed for both generations of *chololas* in this study. For instance, in the years leading to the presidential elections when Morales won, *chola* market women played a very important role in the social movements that aided the MAS' rise to power within the series of anti-neoliberal protests that I mention in this section.

Chololas in the markets have historically found themselves in a privileged position to witness the effects of top-down policies that historically translated into forms of hardship for the lives of the indigenous majority (Medinacelli 1989). The recent advent of neoliberalism in Bolivia caused the closing of the state mining corporation and subsequent relocation of thousands of mining indigenous families, many of which made their way to Cochabamba. The retrenchment of state health, transportation, and public housing services dealt a near-fatal blow to the economy of thousands of urban poor families in the city, many of which had direct dealings with the *chololas* as customers, extended kin or neighbors. It was these detrimental effects of neoliberalism that sent entire city neighborhood residents into the streets to join protest marches that decried these policies and forced the national government to restore some of these services. These powerful rallies forced the government to give into the people's demands, and sowed the seeds for the rise of social justice movements and anti-neoliberal political parties such as those of President Morales (Assies 2003). *Chololas* expressly supported these openly anti-neoliberal political campaigns as they historically count themselves as part of the oppressed indigenous multitude and have a trajectory for political activism (Gotkowitz 2000). Indeed, *chololas* were staunch in their support of Morales and the MAS, funding parts of his campaign and

attending and staffing protest marches and blockades that decried the ruthlessness of foreign-imposed economic policies.

The two generations of *chola* women that I describe in this dissertation have been touched by the dramatic changes brought about by neoliberal reforms in Bolivia, including changes in political participation for these women and new ideologies on national belonging, tied to ethnic identity. I arrived in Cochabamba to begin fieldwork on September 2007, at a time when the events of the series of anti-neoliberal protests that ousted the previous government and placed Morales in power were still fresh in people's minds and had clearly affected the way in which *cochabambinos* thought of race and ethnic relations and the rise of indigenous identity politics. Indeed, during my stay in the city, people's accounts of these stories of popular protest and political unrest also served to show that Cochabamba was a region and a population polarized and divided, whether in opposition to or in full support of Morales and his policies. Conversations on these events became a useful platform from which to launch discussion on issues of ethnic relations in Bolivia with *chola* market women. This is important as, given the delicate nature of the topic, I believe that had it not been for being able to reference to these conflicts, I would not have had the opportunity to ask and receive their opinions on issues of racialization in relation with new discourses on indigeneity. Our conversations afforded me a glimpse on the *cholas'* opinion on the future of relations between the classes in the new Bolivia that Morales and his followers are attempting to create. In the following sections, I describe how my dissertation project evolved and fit into the events that I outlined here, and end with a brief reflection on the relevance and ethics of these types of issues in fieldwork.

The Project: A Look Across Generations

I began to study *chola* women in Cochabamba's marketplace in 2000. At this time, neoliberal reforms created new access to capital through microfunding and opened the economy to the free market in a way that greatly benefitted *cholitas* to the point that many of this group saw unprecedented growth in their fortunes and were soon controlling large regional enterprises fueled by the needs of the population explosion in the city due to immigration. *Cholitas* used these earnings to increase their influence with the local state apparatus and political parties. In addition, these women took the opportunity afforded by the expansion of the private education sector and their newfound prosperity to send their children to acquire a college education and finally gain the upward mobility that had eluded them for so long. As I was able to witness in follow-up visits, there is now an entire generation of college graduates in Cochabamba whose *chola* mothers trade in the informal markets for a living. More importantly, the young *chola* women taking classes in Cochabamba's universities have shed their ethnic dress to navigate the world of higher education.

When I noted this dramatic change between the generations, several *cholitas* expressed their delight on how their daughters had left the markets and the *chola* identity behind and could now be considered part of the city's professional middle class. Nevertheless, the satisfaction felt by the proud *chola* parents was tinged with some regret as, even though *cholitas* continue to be a powerful presence in Cochabamba, it was understood that these circumstances might spell the eventual demise of their unique social sector. Based on these preliminary findings, my dissertation project proposed exploring how the country's sweeping neoliberal policies had affected market *cholitas* on the ground regarding their class positioning. Specifically, I set out to compare changes between both generations of market women and verify or deny the younger

women's move away from the *chola* identity. To this end, I proposed to conduct ethnographic research to gain a better understanding of how socioeconomic transformations affected market *cholitas* in their journey of upward mobility. This investigation comprised carrying out in-depth interviews and participant observation with a group of several market *chola* mother-daughter pairs who I had contacted during preliminary fieldwork and who had given their consent for the longer study. I described how I followed these women around the city in the section on the research setting in this chapter.

One of the first facts I ascertained after beginning dissertation fieldwork was that acquiring a degree in higher education is such a widespread phenomenon in the younger generation of *cholitas* that it has become their distinguishing characteristic. Furthermore, and to my surprise, I learned that a significant number of the *cholitas'* daughters are earning degrees in business and economics and *returning* to the markets of their mothers to appropriate the *chola* label in their own terms. As I followed these journeys where the young women made their way back to the markets, it became clear that the young *cholitas*, for so they call themselves, planned to continue their mothers' entrepreneurial legacy, moving it forward in a new direction while they simultaneously reproduced the *chola's* claims on embodying indigeneity. These young women argue that indigeneity can be represented not only through visible markers such as dress or language, but also through ways of experiencing, practicing and imagining the market. To support their case, the younger generation of vendors emphasizes the cultural knowhow of trade that they inherited from their mothers, based on Andean practices of reciprocity and networking, instead of the business formal training they acquired through education. This knowledge that is passed down the female line from *chola* mother to daughter is a strong component of their

indigenous identity, and the young women use it as the credentials that enable them to continue claiming the *chola* label and working within Cochabamba's marketplaces.

The young *chololas*' claim to this Andean market knowledge does not deny their university training. Rather, young market women utilize their newly-acquired skills and credentials to strengthen or forge links to the local and international formal markets. As a matter of fact, *chololas* have been strongly drawn to the transnational flow of goods in the global market that accompanied Bolivia's economic reforms. The appeal to these vendors was so strong that they became one of the first sectors to attempt to insert their business activities onto global trade circuits. *Chololas* complained that though for all practical purposes they succeeded in establishing many of these trade connections, their ethnicity and gender stood against them and they were beat in this game by upper class businessmen from the private sector. In a well known pattern the *chololas* had seen many times before, the elite entrepreneurs asserted their power over sectors lower in the social scale than their own and claimed priority over the global market, in this manner effectively excluding the *chola* informal vendors.

In conversations and interviews I had with the younger educated *chololas*, I found that many viewed their purpose in gaining a college degree as the acquisition of tools, skills and credentials that would enable them to fight the formal businesses and their hold on the new frontier of transnational trade. Indeed, the older generation of *chololas* confirmed that one of the motives for providing their daughters with an education was that it enabled them to understand the formal market universe. However, in the process of returning to the markets the younger *chololas* have stretched and pushed the definition of the *chola* identity and, rather than mediate between two disparate systems for their mother's benefit, they are blending the unique brand of Andean entrepreneurship that they inherited with global free market practices. This new social

niche that young *cholitas* are creating in the Cochabamba markets responds directly to the changes wrought by neoliberalism. More to the point, their actions in aligning themselves with these economic changes while appropriating their indigenous roots also challenge a nationalist model that the current government administration is attempting to impose. The new version of nationalism calls for the reversal of the postcolonial social order, a return to indigeneity, and the reversal of neoliberal economics. Although the young *cholitas* are proud of their indigenous roots and quick to find an alternative way to claim them, they are also keen on protecting their identity as entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, this last places them at odds with official state discourses on the evils of capitalism.

The conflict between state officials and the *chola* market women is surprising because, as I noted before, despite the benefits *cholitas* garnered from trading in the free market economy, their sector played a pivotal role in the social movements that gave birth to the new indigenous identity politics in Cochabamba. Indeed, *cholitas* supported the anti-neoliberal platform that eventually brought Evo Morales to power and many joined Morales' socialist political party. The source of conflict between these erstwhile collaborators is that the Morales administration is now campaigning against the free market economy including the entrepreneurship and growing role in the global economy that the new generation of *cholitas* in Cochabamba is openly embracing. In a determined effort to reverse the established social order, Morales and his followers promote a return to the indigenous identity formerly at the bottom of this structure. Consequently, the new *cholitas* find themselves once again defying the established order by refusing to give up their rights to their entrepreneurial identity. What came as a great surprise to both generations of these women is that in the two years after Morales assumed power, adherents of the current government ignored their role aiding the current administration's political campaign and began a

series of attacks in the media against capitalist market practices that included the *chola* market vendors as well as the more traditional formal business sector. In this way, *chola* entrepreneurs in the informal marketplace were for the first time lumped with the formal business sector as holdouts from the previous administration's neoliberal reforms and both types of entrepreneurs were used as scapegoats that were blamed for economic processes such as inflation. In fact, just as market *chol*as in the past were discriminated against because of their indigenous traits, they were now condemned by the current government's media campaigns decrying all entrepreneurial activities.

My dissertation, as I have traced thus far, went from an exploration on social mobility to an analysis of this mobility as a symptom of a broader processes of identity transformation. Within this new framework, the entrepreneurial component of the *chola* identity is crafting yet another social niche for the younger generation, despite their college training and lack of ethnic dress. With new parameters on what it means to be "*chola*" set by the understanding and deployment of different market knowledges, these women effectively set current definitions of indigeneity and entrepreneurship on their head, while concurrently redefining how ethnic and class mobility can be achieved in neoliberal Bolivia. In fact, the new generation of market *chol*as is defining Bolivian citizenship and national belonging as a part of a complex identity where globalized discourses on indigeneity and the transnational market can coexist and flourish.

The Writing: A Word on Gathering Data and Reflexivity

A small part of what she had learned in that year and a half was gathered up, amber fossils, in her dissertation.

*Kirin Narayan*⁷

⁷ From "Participant Observation" in *Women Writing Culture*, Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds. 1995. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 41.

Like many fellow anthropologists, the most important fieldwork method I utilized for this research project was participant observation in which I was privileged to witness and record the *cholas*' daily interactions and transactions in the marketplaces and in the social networks that they ruled. To this point, I have explained how I integrated the different sites within the city of Cochabamba through this methodology. I spent much of the eighteen months in which I conducted fieldwork sitting on the buses that lead from the North to the South ends of the city, strolling around the marketplace, and walking to and from the markets with the *cholas* and their families. I sat down and formally interviewed the *cholas* in some cases, and obtained permission at other times to record informal discussions or conversations that I would strike up with people. I also kept detailed fieldnotes of all my observations. Additionally, I conducted a short study with the help of a couple of the young *cholas* in which we slowly walked from one end of the city to the other and plotted the two most visible markers of the *chola* class in the public space, that is, we carefully noted where we could hear Quechua spoken or see women wearing the *cholas* distinctive ethnic dress. Lastly, I made a point of asking each *chola* I met or interviewed a few key facts about their family, in order to better compare class mobility across generations; and I had *cholas* briefly answer questions about their business occupation, education, marital status, family life, and language use.

Obtaining these data was not easy in terms of earning the *cholas*' trust to the point where they felt free to talk about sensitive issues such as class, ethnicity and gender. Building respectful work relations with these women was a long process that took me through pre-dissertation visits every summer from 2003 to 2006. Throughout these, the *cholas* and I went through what Waterson and Rylko-Bauer call the "ethnographic dance," in which the negotiation for control between the ethnographer and the informant are "mediated by social distance, rules of politeness

and the anthropologist's ethical concerns about exploitation and rudeness" (2006: 405).

Throughout my sojourn in the field, I was partnered continuously in this dance with one or several of the *cholas*, and at the same time that I was generously received and forged friendships or relations of grudging respect, further questioning of trust and motivation continued to emerge as our conversations dealt with thorny or sensitive issues.

A mechanism that I found useful to approach sensitive topics was to open the discussion with questions or comments on recent local events related to these issues. For instance, I found that talking about confrontations between coca leaf growers and the white middle classes helped me approach the *cholas* with questions on their opinion on racialization in Bolivia. It is important at this point also to note that a fact that opened many doors for me with the *cholas* was that I was born and raised in Cochabamba. Because of this, the market women and I shared the common history and experiences that joined all of Cochabamba's residents who lived through the turbulent past three decades. In retrospect, I see that I spent many afternoons sitting on a short stool hidden behind bales of cloth or leaning against a cool wall of rice sacks within a stall, swapping stories about what I or the market women had been doing at the end of the military dictatorships, how we had witnessed long lines to buy bread during the country's bout with hyperinflation, or how we had found shelter in someone's store on the way home from school while police and university students fought in streets foggy with tear gas, in protest against the imposition of economic measures. In fact, as I describe elsewhere in this text, these protests are an everyday occurrence summoned to request local government authorities for better-lit streets, access to public transportation, or a new daycare, to name a few of the myriad claims presented in the protest marches that parade down Cochabamba's downtown streets.

My claims to also being a *cochabambina*, my gender, and a Spanish spoken in the city's distinctive accent—including sayings peppered with Quechua words—helped my cause to befriend the *cholas*. However, my education, my lack of experience with the markets except as an occasional customer, and my appearance including my phenotype and dress, all firmly placed me in a different social class than the *cholas* and made them wary of my questions.

Anthropologists who are bi- or multicultural and do not fit the label of complete stranger to their culture of study, a category which Lila Abu-Lughod names “halfies,” have been prominent in questioning and disclosing the intimacy arising between researcher and researched, including reflecting on the power imbalance existing between researchers and informants (1991: 137). Conducting ethnography and representing these experiences through writing is about issues of position and how the ethnographer manages these power imbalances as part of the conversation of who should reveal what about whom. In this regard, I feel that the *cholas* and I built a tenuous bridge across this imbalance based on revelations about our personal histories in which my halfie identity was as often a help as it was a hindrance to my research.

As many other ethnographers have noted before, universal points of contact can also overcome mistrust. In my case, being a mother and sole caretaker of my school-age son who accompanied me to the field was a wonderful conversation starter. Although at first I held this part of my life back from the *cholas* due to the idea that we have in the academy on the need to separate our professional from our personal lives, the market women I spent time with found it strange that I wouldn't have my son with me whenever he was out of school. They explained that they found this remarkable given the large number of market *cholas* who are single or divorced mothers or whose husbands spend long stretches of time away doing seasonal labor or transporting produce to markets. I soon found that many wanted to meet the son I frequently

mentioned and was surprised to see that the market women, their families, and associates happily suggested making our appointments at times when my son would be in school. In fact, a good number of informants insisted on carrying out our interviews or informal conversations in an ice cream shop or at a park where my son could spend some time playing or having a treat while we chatted. This attitude to the ways in which motherhood and work are combined truly opened my eyes to the manner in which these market women blur the boundaries between the public and domestic worlds and was a constant reminder of the similarities I shared with these women, as well as of the chasm that separated us given my education and the power imbalance existing between us.⁸

My research with Cochabamba's market women necessarily had to take into account these women's historical struggle to attain cultural citizenship as they fought their subordinate position within the Bolivian nation, without collapsing this fight as mere issues of representation of an exploited indigenous identity. As anthropologist Lisa Rofel has pointed out, part of the power balance in fieldwork requires being careful not to typify the ethnographic encounter as "one between the western self and the non-western other" (1999: 37). The temptation to portray these women purely in terms of their ethnicity was strong especially given the fact that I was contrasting their experiences with those of their daughters, who carried no visible markers of this indigeneity. Indeed, hanging out with the market vendor daughters was markedly more comfortable for me as they did not require the same assurances of trust as their mothers and, given their education, these women could understand my academic obligations and often mediated with the older generation for me. Because of our discipline's bias in emphasizing the

⁸ For more on my own positionality in the field as a single parent and on the graduate school journey please see Lauren Anaya, Angela Glaros, Isabel Scarborough and Nicole Tami "Single Parenthood and the PhD Journey," *Anthropology News* 50(6): 3–5, September 2009.

differences with the Other, participant observation with the younger generation always felt as less the genuine article than spending the same time with their ethnically-marked mothers. I was reminded of Ulf Hannerz's anxieties on modern fieldwork when he queries "What do you do when 'your people' spend hours alone at a desk, perhaps concentrating on a computer screen?" (2003: 211). Despite the wealth of data the market women's daughters freely gave to me, I always felt that observing the mothers dozing at the market stalls was "true" research, while watching the younger women talk about customer debts behind a desk was not. These biases of representation have everything to do with what Clifford Geertz points to as part of what ethnographers do to prove that we have "been there," a moral value that justifies our role as experts on our research topic (1988: 12).

Another factor I wish to note here is the difficulty of translating and transposing the rich experiences that the *chola* women shared with me onto these pages. The lives of the *chol*as are messy, as are their struggles for a better life and to achieve some social recognition after being marginalized for centuries. The black and white and somewhat cold format of a dissertation falls short of portraying all the complexities of the *chola*'s lived experiences. Indeed, there were many times when I felt the gap between myself who had been there and the readers of this ethnography was insurmountable. I feared I would lose the *chol*as' words and stories when I interpreted their stories for the broader audience who would read my writing. However, these limitations plague writers in any genre. To bridge the gap somewhat, I have borrowed some of the structures that have supported other ethnographers. To begin, I intersperse ethnographic vignettes throughout the chapters in this text in which I use the first person to convey my narrative. I do this to show how I arrived at a specific piece of data, or how my identity or relation to the *chol*as affected a specific event or outcome. I also use the "ethnographic present" throughout the text, even though

I allude to events that took place during a specific eighteen-month period because, as ethnographers, our analysis of our fieldwork data and our engagement with the material we lay out in our writing is done very much in the present moment. I also embed the historical context and theory that I use to explain and analyze the *cholas*' stories, within every chapter. I hope that, like every good storytelling, the roads and threads that lead to my conclusions at the end of this work are clear.

Given what I have sketched in these paragraphs, I see that the amber fossils of my dissertation research alluded by Narayan at the beginning of this section will indeed carry several pieces of what I learned from the *cholas* in Cochabamba's markets. Indeed, while in the process of drafting the stories of these women, I agonized over which pieces exactly to preserve and which to set aside for another time. I'm not sure whether I chose wisely, but I hope I did choose what the *cholas* would have liked brought to the attention of a broader audience than that of our conversations in the marketplace. There is an inevitability to both the intimacy built between our informants and ourselves, and the power imbalance in our relationships that continues to be played out as the ethnographer decides which pieces to discard and which to preserve on paper. However, at the end of the day, surrounded by our fieldnotes and faced by our writing tasks, the best thing we can do is tell the stories entrusted to us.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MARKET AND THE PLAZA:

HOW *CHOLA* VENDORS MANIPULATE COCHABAMBA'S URBAN LANDSCAPE

One way to understand the anthropological emphasis on participant observation is to see in this method an effort to turn the spaces we go out to inhabit into places with whose feeling tones we are familiar. Participation enables us to feel something of what our informants feel in the spaces they occupy and in which they act. It is essentially a method aimed at the experience of place.

*James Fernandez*⁹

This chapter revolves around the tension between *chola* market women and the state apparatus in the city of Cochabamba, a tension which is defined by power negotiations across different spaces. To unpack these relations, I build on Ferguson and Gupta's notion that the state can be understood as composed by specific principles of spatialization, particularly the perception of the state as occupying a vertical space in the sense that it exists somewhere above civil society produced through bureaucratic practices on the ground (2002: 981). I also engage with existing scholarship discussing urban spaces in Latin America and Bolivia in terms of the contrasts between marginal and central populations. This work shows how ethnic-based hierarchies stipulate who occupies different public spaces—including informal marketplaces—and the consequences of transgressing or crossing into a space that does not correspond to one's social group (Mehrotra 2010: 5).

Tracing the daily urban journeys of *chola* market women and their "experiences of place," as described by Fernandez at the opening of this text, evidences how *chola* market

⁹ From "Emergence and Convergence in some African Sacred Places," in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, Low, Setha and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, editors. Blackwell Publishing. 2003, pp. 187.

women interact with government officials and other elites in Cochabamba as co-participants in an entangled web of power-laden relations. In this chapter I will draw from different ethnographic examples to show how Cochabamba's state institutions—operating under Ferguson and Gupta's notion of the state's verticality—are at odds with the market *cholas*. These examples also demonstrate how these women mobilize multiple spatial strategies in the urban landscape to challenge and subvert the power hierarchies in Cochabamba's society and governance. There are multiple public spaces of privilege in this city that are still perceived as excluding specific groups, such as that of the *cholas*, due to their ethnic identity. I juxtapose different cases illustrating the *cholas'* use of privileged spaces such as the city's main square and upper class residential neighborhoods, with stories that define the market landscape ruled and manipulated by the *chola* vendors and their own internal hierarchies. I conclude this chapter with stories of the *cholas'* role in popular mobilization movements of the past decade that have also played an important role in defining the urban loci of power. I argue that whether working with or against the government apparatus in the marketplace or in the taking of the streets in popular protests these market women are often in a position of power parallel to or opposite to the state, and not necessarily below it, and thus challenge the notion that the state is vertically above civil society (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 987). All of these stories combine to provide a portrait of market *cholas* and their political subjectivity within the particular context of contemporary urban Bolivia.

Urban Planning, Civilized Urbanity and the Threat of Migration

To examine being-in-the-world of Spanish America we have to look at concrete places where Spanish Americans are in process of being. Two such places ideally suited for this purpose are the market and the plaza.

Miles Richardson¹⁰

One of the most representative of Cochabamba's public spaces that is linked to the privileged classes and the governing power of the city is the central plaza or town square. The city's *Plaza Principal* is a space where downtown businesses nestle and where government bureaucracy snuggles between private finance institutions and the church. The beautiful arcades that flank the narrow streets around the plaza mutely remind us of the city's colonial European roots. The local prefecture, city hall and the cathedral look down in apparent censure on the constant loud traffic and pedestrians. On my first visit to this site on a sleepy weekday afternoon, I remember standing next to a flower border and observing children, the elderly, and a few youngsters lounging around the square's wrought-iron benches or strolling through on their way to work or school. For a moment, a flock of pigeons flew off at my feet and I seemed to be alone before the ornate fountain, back in a time constantly evoked in my hearing by upper crust *cochabambinos*, or the name given to Cochabamba's residents. In conversations referring to the city with these residents, a bygone era would be conjured by the white middle and upper classes when genteel ladies used to step off and promenade the perimeter of the plaza to breathe the fresh night air, twirling parasols and fluttering fans.

That afternoon I turned my head and, for a heartbeat only, stared at an apparition in disbelief. A woman dressed in a Victorian lace dress and twirling a parasol similar to that of my imaginings crossed the plaza on the arm of a man wearing a swallow-tailed coat and what looked

¹⁰ From "Being-in-the-plaza: Material culture and the construction of social reality in Spanish America," in *American Ethnologist* 9(2). 1982, pp. 421.

to be a stovepipe hat. The illusion was broken when I noticed a policeman cordoning off an area followed by a group of photographers and about a dozen men and women dressed in a similar style. An elderly woman chatting with an ice cream vendor pointed these people out to me exclaiming she knew one of the women in costume. It turns out that they were part of an activity put together each year by the municipality on the city's anniversary remembering 'Cochabamba of Yesteryear'¹¹. The costumed players were there to get their picture taken before the cathedral. The posing and photography were done in short order and the onlookers quickly scattered. As they left the plaza in small groups of twos and threes, a large number of *chola* women wearing their distinctive pleated skirts and straw hats slowly converged from the other end of the plaza where they had patiently waited the past half hour and quickly took over the open space that the photographers vacated. These were a group of protestors, convened to pick up on their daily demonstration against city hall after their lunch break. They circled back in the direction of the cathedral and one of them turned on a megaphone to begin an impassioned speech warning the mayor they would not leave his doorstep until he provided for the new preschool he had promised their neighborhood during his election campaign two years back.

This story shows a juxtaposition of two very different worlds where a representation of Cochabamba's historical elite and members of a middle class that identifies as indigenous occupied the same space in little under an hour and presented startlingly different images of Cochabamba as placid urbanity and chaotic dissatisfaction (Figure 2). Although different groups

¹¹ *Cochabamba de Antaño* in Spanish. City officials in Cochabamba recreate the region's colonial past glories at the city's anniversary celebrations every year, an activity that has been taking place intermittently for the past thirty years or so. This nostalgic representation makes a powerful statement on the continued relevance of these images for the city's residents and for how the municipal government reinforces this ideology. These performances support long-term city residents and their claims to the city against the massive influx of undesirable indigenous immigrants from the rural area in the recent past. For more information and images on this celebration please see the official website for Cochabamba's City Hall: <http://cochabamba.gov.bo/Index/> (accessed on August 1, 2010).

coexist and cohabit in the same urban space in this city, they also vie for these spaces and state services in an ongoing conflict where the elites portray their group as upholding established ideals of the urban community while *cholas* and other marginal groups are excluded from this vision. Though in the story above the *chola* protestors and the municipality's performers shared the same spaces in the plaza, the issue of who controls the main square gains importance as the plaza becomes a representative public space "critical to the reproduction of a dominant memory" (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 22).



Figure 2: *Chola* protestors in Cochabamba's main plaza.

Cochabamba was born a Spanish colonial town in the late sixteenth century, with a grid pattern around a main square housing the city's secular and religious governing headquarters. This layout served as a means for the European colonizers to impose their own sociopolitical and

economic structures and establish themselves in positions of authority. To further their power, the city was also divided into “Indian” and white neighborhoods in a very marked way. In these divisions and power dichotomy, the marketplaces where *cholas* have ruled for centuries were traditionally considered the core of the indigenous part of town, just as the central plaza is representative of the city’s ruling elite (Barragán 1992: 18). Today, Bolivia’s urban centers continue to evidence the prevalence of a colonial ideology and dominant memory that, over the course of the twentieth century, attempted to impose an orderly city through urban planning projects where each sector of society was assigned a space and supported a system that justified ethnic inequity (Ledo 2002).

Ethnographer Daniel Goldstein artfully demonstrates how Cochabamba’s history for the past two centuries fits into this pattern of exclusion of the indigenous through idealized visions of urban planning as the city was marked by efforts to rationalize and order the natural landscape. In these efforts, a group of architects directly influenced by European high modernists, presented and partially implemented grandiose plans for scientifically “legible” neighborhoods in the city. These municipal blueprints contributed to a “distinctly Andean form of modernity” in which “the countryside, defined in terms of an ‘Indianness’ that is threatening and dangerous to whites, stands for the national past, contrasted with the urban centers that represent the nation’s future” (Goldstein 2004: 13). This definition of a civilized modernity continued unbroken until the late 1980s when it was disrupted by changes brought about by a massive influx of indigenous peoples to the city from the rural areas and the highland mining districts.

As many other Latin American cities, Cochabamba saw its structure and clear divisions threatened by a large population explosion due to immigration (Hernández and Kellett 2010: 5).

There have been a number of immigrant waves to this city over the years. Many of the market *chola* vendors that I refer to in this dissertation arrived in the city at the turn of the twentieth century compelled by industrialization and changes in rural agricultural practices. However, the most dramatic increase in population in the history of Cochabamba took place as a product of neoliberal structural reforms in the past two decades. In 1986 a law was passed that privatized and downsized the dying tin mining industry¹² resulting in the forcible relocation of hundreds of families from the highland mining centers to the sparsely populated lowland tropics. Many of these former miners, from indigenous rural communities, chose to settle in Cochabamba instead (Lagos 2006: 17). Their arrival, together with a new wave of indigenous peasants driven to the cities by the growth of commercial agriculture, caused an expansion of the urban grid straining to cope with new forms of transportation, production and commercialization. Indeed, the city's population mushroomed from 80,000 to 600,000 inhabitants in little more than two decades (Blanes 2007: 26–28).

The deluge of immigrants resulted in the almost overnight emergence of new marginal neighborhoods that sheltered the incoming population. These urban sprawls are characterized by their precarious dwellings and the fact that they lack any supervision or services from the city's government. The incoming migrant groups who settle in the city's outskirts are met with an absence of services which—compounded by neoliberal economic policies that cut social services dramatically—places them on the path to impoverishment. These immigrants dwell in rows of adobe mud huts with corrugated tin roofs where running water, sewage pipes, clinics, schools,

¹² For more on the economic and political importance of tin mining in the first half of the twentieth century please see Antonio Mitre's *Bajo un cielo de estaño: fulgor y ocaso del metal en Bolivia* [Under a pewter sky: brilliance and twilight of the metal in Bolivia], and *El desentrañamiento del estaño: los republicanos en la historia de Bolivia* [Deciphering tin: Republicans in Bolivia's history] by Juan Albarracín Millán. Regarding the impact of relocation in former miner's lives please see June Nash's *I Spent my Life in the Mines: The Story of Juan Rojas, Bolivian Tin Miner*.

and electricity are as absent from these spur-of-the-moment settlements as infant mortality, illegal sweatshops, petty crime, and garbage are ubiquitous (Cielo and Céspedes Quiroz 2008). The poverty and lack of city skills and education of these new residents reproduces the historical ideology of the indigenous as ignorant, dirty and backward that is seized on by groups of long-established residents including upper classes and the *cholas* who use this to reaffirm their dominance in the social order over these new arrivals (De la Cadena 1998; Larson 2004).

As soon as any immigrants set foot in Cochabamba, they gravitate to the city's marketplace because it offers many opportunities for temporary employment. Indeed, the informal market is often the only space where former peasants and miners can find work given their skills and education. This domain is run by the *chola* market women of this research. Cochabamba's market *cholas* trade everything under the sun in an ever-transforming marketscape. From vegetables and dry goods, to clothing and handicrafts, to flat screen televisions and electronics, *cholas* keep their city neighbors clothed, fed and provided with every imaginable luxury and necessity. There is great heterogeneity within the markets where *cholas* who are veritable trade moguls, and influence city and state-wide economic policies through their ties with local politicians, work next to humble street peddlers whose sales barely enable them to survive the day. This heterogeneity has in turn created a visible hierarchy in the informal markets, where the top *cholas* belong to the older group who established themselves in these markets five generations ago and carved out trade and commerce empires in the city.

These established *cholas* have ambivalent feelings when it comes to the recent rural indigenous immigrants. On the one hand, these new arrivals are beneficial to the market women as they provide inexpensive labor that contributes to the expansion of these women's businesses such as unloading and stocking merchandise, helping with stall repairs, guarding the *cholas*'

warehouses, and other menial and temporary tasks. The new arrivals also often end up renting the warehouses and market stalls that many of the more successful *chololas* own and run. On the other hand, the vendor women eye the increased visibility of indigenous persons in their markets and city with concern. The *chololas*' unease is because the immigrants' poverty reinforces regional stereotypes that portray the indigenous as sites of "disorder, dirt and disease" that conflict with the *chololas*' claim to an entrepreneurship that appeals to burgeoning desires for modernity and progress (Rivera Cusicanqui 1996: 198). The hierarchies between new and older immigrants are defined by the more established *chololas* who impose their control over the market spaces through their businesses and economic power, as well as by claiming a greater urbanity. The latter is based on the identification of rural with "backward" and "uncivilized" that has long plagued this part of the Andes. In the following two chapters I will further explore and discuss individual stories of both recent immigrants and established *chololas* and their interactions and conflict as they relate to the racial hierarchy prevalent in Bolivian society¹³.

In addition to changes within the marketplaces, Cochabamba in the past two decades has also transitioned from a clear delineation marking the spaces between the upper and lower classes in the city to a blurring of the two. Symptomatic of these changes is the fact that the presence and claim of the elites in the streets has diminished considerably to be replaced by a taking of these same streets and a variety of other formerly upper class public spaces by indigenous and "popular" urban sectors through protest marches, religious festivals and everyday activities (Arbona 2010; Martinez 2001; Robins 2006). However, before we discuss these

¹³ Specifically, Chapter Four of this dissertation is centered on a conflict between a group of established or long-time resident *chololas* and a group of recently arrived migrant *chololas*, both of whom are vying for the same niche in the market. This story also demonstrates how the interactions between both groups affect the construction of the *chola* class and who can claim it based on their indigenous and entrepreneurial identities.

emerging divisions in the city's social space, I present the city's informal marketscape and how the daily practices—particularly the manipulation of space—of different *cholitas* in the market stalls and throughout the city affect their political and economic power and their relations to the local state apparatus.

Taking Over the Urban Landscape: Market Architects and Real Estate Brokers

On the afternoon of the story when both *chola* protestors and performers of an upper class remembrance of the city's history shared the city's town square, I myself set out to walk the dozen blocks that would carry me from the plaza to where vending stalls began their encroachment on the city's sidewalks. *La Cancha*, or “enclosed field,” is how Cochabamba's residents refer to the immense outdoor market where the *cholitas* work and rule. The term alludes to the space where, in small towns scattered throughout rural Bolivia, local trade fairs continue to be held weekly when peasants come from the outlying areas bringing in their produce to sell at market. Although the feel of a small town is still remembered by many residents, the city and its market are far from this description today. An open air marketplace may conjure images of billowing awnings amidst soaring arcades, yet the *Cancha* in Cochabamba is a constantly shifting territory that occupies sidewalks, roadways, gutters and squares through more than 100 blocks of urban sprawl (Antequera 2007: 196). This market's landscape challenges the notion that business requires a stable—read “fixed” or “inert”—base of operations (Cook 2008: 7). The best way to explain how the physical face of the market and vending stalls is ever changing and fragmenting is to show these transformations in a series of still snapshots similar to those obtained when viewing a space through the revolving lens of a kaleidoscope. In the *Cancha*, large sections of the outdoor market can bloom or wilt overnight, as stalls and shoppers seem to

be magically conjured out of thin air on trade fair days, or specific stalls can become a fixture of the urban landscape when the municipality builds an ornate booth within a park or at a busy street corner and then sells or leases the same to the market woman who occupied that spot.

On my first visits to this marketplace, my purpose was to carry out an exercise tracing the geography of the market so I could compare my notes to formal maps and accounts of this space by city hall officials and local urban planners and architects. However, I found myself having to start over again several times as I searched in vain for familiar sights that had disappeared from where I had marked them only a few days past. To give just one example from my fieldnotes at the time, there were a few blocks of a busy avenue that I had visited five weeks before that had me constantly checking the street name on the few signs available as I made my dazed way down the thoroughfare. Traffic was now flowing in the opposite direction to what I remembered, thanks to a municipal ordinance that attempted to control rush hour bottle necks. The goods and types of vendors lining the street had changed, and even some of the houses that lined the street had been boarded up and hidden behind a wall of corrugated tin planks that signaled ongoing construction. Very quickly, I learned that one of the few certainties of the outdoor market is that its infrastructure, ranging from small wheelbarrows in which to carry goods, to towers of crates and boxes displaying wares, to five-story buildings housing shops, can and will change to fit the shifting economic and social needs of the city's market players.

After some false starts, I decided to put my mapping exercise on hold until I was able to first define this materialization of the market by indicating which spaces remain unmoved in the face of this constant change, if any, and second, to enquire as to the reasons why market women and other indigenous and migrant groups trying to make their way in the markets regularly shifted their physical infrastructure. As I began this new research task, my first question was

quickly answered as people from all walks of life pointed to the traditional portions of the market that had been selling produce, meat or potatoes for several generations as the site in the market that never changed or moved. With names signaling both the city's indigenous Quechua and Spanish colonial roots, such as "La Pampa," "Calatayud," and "San Antonio," these immense warehouses sheltered a number of *cholas* whose stalls had been in the family for two or three generations. These stalls not only remain fixed spatially, but the carved wooden shutters on some and the rusted thick metal posts on others were carefully kept to maintain their aged look as these markers of permanence gave these *cholas* seniority in the market hierarchy. When I visited, these particular market women reminded me of islands sitting unmoved by the tides of urban change lapping at their shore. Although they showed some heterogeneity within their numbers, they almost all proved to be powerful and prestigious business competitors.

My interviews with these queen bees of the market on the changing nature of the physical spaces of outdoor trade disclosed different strategies used in the world of informal commerce to change the face of the marketplace and the city's marginal neighborhoods. Construction and renovation on every scale was topmost amongst these strategies, and a number of different stories began to unfold on the design and building of everything from small storage nooks to shopping malls. A fact I quickly learned from these women was that apprenticeship to a master constructor is one of the most common positions for young rural immigrant boys, or for young urbanites. A host of teenage boys is taken every year to act as gofers, mixing cement, handing tools, and fetching food for the workers, all of which provide valuable on-the-job experience. In fact, *cochabambinos* are well known for their construction skills and many have ventured afar to make their fortune in building companies in both the US and Europe (Ferrufino Quiroga et al. 2007). Given this picture, any teenage boy found in the street is a potential *albañil* or apprentice

mason, hired by people to effect repairs on their dwellings or, in the market women's case, their stalls.

My enquiries revealed that the daily wages paid to these young men are low, and often comprise a nominal cash amount plus meals; some teens even accept payment "in kind" in the form of merchandise such as clothing, school supplies, or dried goods and food staples for their families. Because of this, even the poorest vendors can afford to hire someone to modify their stall, change the low brick walls that partition or mark boundaries between stalls, or open a storefront from their home. The many changes in the market streets are the product of a host of such small improvements. The reasoning behind these changes is mainly economic, although political motivations also play a part. These motives are illustrated by a story a *chola* woman I interviewed told me on how one of these street modifications came about:

"All right, then... I will explain. The other day I called my man [journeyman] to ask him to widen the sidewalk on my stall. City Hall had told us we could not put out wider stalls. 'Only the width of the sidewalk,' they said to us, 'you can't go down onto the asphalt, because of traffic flow' they said... But I, and the others, the other women in our group in the union, right? We got together and we said, 'How can it be, we already need newer stalls, who do they think they are, we can't place all our vegetables in only one meter, they fall and get dirty and no one buys them.' Then one of the women said 'All right, girls, let's widen the sidewalks all the way from the corner, not the stalls.' The next day all of us went to call journeymen, construction workers, everyone. In one night each one of us had her sidewalk widened about thirty centimeters. All exactly the same. The inspector didn't even notice and now we can sell more vegetables."¹⁴

¹⁴ "Ya pues entonces, te voy a explicar. El otro día he llamado a mi hombrecito para pedirle que ensanchemos pues la vereda de mi puesto. El municipio nos había prohibido que pongamos puestos más anchos. El ancho de la vereda nomás vas a poner, nos ha dicho, no se van a bajar al asfalto, circulación vehicular han dicho.... Pero yo y las otras, las otras de nuestro grupo del sindicato, ¿no ve? Nos hemos juntado y hemos dicho, 'como pues, ya necesitamos puestos más grandes, que se cree, en un metrilo nomás no podemos poner toda la verdura, se cae y se ensucia y ya nadie compra.' Entonces una de las señoras ha dicho 'ya pues chicas, vamos a ensanchar las veredas desde la esquina, no los puestos.' Al otro día hemos ido toditas a llamar albañiles, maestros, de todo. En una noche cada una ha hecho ensanchar su vereda como treinta centímetros. Todas igualitas. El inspector ni cuenta que se ha dado y ahora podemos vender más verduras."

This interview excerpt vividly illustrates how the main motivation for physically changing the streets of the marketplace is economic, yet it also reveals how politics and the desire *cholas* have to challenge authority and impose their own rules also play a part. By resorting to routine mechanisms that modify the marketscape, the *cholas* who widened their sidewalk challenged strictures by petty bureaucrats to “police and control trade activities,” thereby questioning the verticality built by the government on these surveillance activities, and challenging state power (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 987)¹⁵. *Cholas* generally thought these petty bureaucrats were corrupt and only interested in getting bribes or fines from the *cholas*. Thus they were always looking for ways in which to turn the tables on those who took advantage of their power over the *chola* sector.

Cholas' strategies to negotiate power are not only limited to these small construction projects. Indeed, the visitor to the *Cancha* and its environs will find the sights and sounds of ongoing construction everywhere they look, as five-to fifteen-story buildings sprout up in the streets where vending stalls squat. Many of these buildings are apparently unfinished, showing unpainted brick or cement facades, and makeshift electrical wiring, but a closer look will show they house a number of busy shops or provide housing for the vendor community. A common practice is that the building owners will often wait for an unexpected windfall to give their edifice a finished appearance; an occurrence that can be years in the making.

These manipulations of their surroundings and infrastructure are another way in which *cholas* challenge the verticality of the state. When the *cholas* influence and physically modify the urban landscape in the markets, they control and regulate these spaces, thereby subverting the

¹⁵ Challenges to government officials by street vendors and other members of the informal market are a common occurrence across the globe. See Clark (1995) for Africa, Kapchan (1996) for the Middle East, Mandel and Humphrey (2002) for Eastern Europe, and Stoller (2002) for New York city, among others.

state's role as urban planner. Another arena where the *cholas* are making inroads and shaping the city's landscape to their purposes is in real estate. *Cholas* always sold, bought, rented and leased market stalls and the street space where they laid out their colorful wares. Today, as the more successful established *cholas* make greater profits thanks to economic reforms, they are extending their experiences in market real estate and investing these earnings in homes and plots of land and making inroads in other neighborhoods of the growing city. The more successful market women own many of the buildings sprouting in the avenues of the *Cancha* and, in recent years, also purchased homes and buildings in the new immigrant neighborhoods that I described in previous paragraphs.

As I was taken on a tour of one of these marginal neighborhoods by a wealthy *chola* vendor, she proudly pointed to the fact that the only cement and brick houses we spotted along the unpaved streets were owned and rented to the community by her merchant class peers, as immigrants could only afford mud brick homes. The real estate in the immigrant neighborhoods is viewed by the *cholas* as an investment and as one more tool used to assert power over the new arrivals or lure them into the more successful *cholas'* ever expanding business networks. *Cholas* establish fictive kin bonds with these immigrants through sponsorship of a religious festivity or event thus indebting these people to work for the *cholas* with little or no payment in return. However, to be fair, as the *cholas'* godchildren, the immigrants can also demand that the market women continue to help them financially and in kind with favors on their wide business networks. In sum, the homes in the marginal neighborhoods owned by *cholas* are used to help out friends or relatives in need by charging low rents or asking for payment in kind as unpaid labor in the *cholas'* business. To close the circle and mark their presence in every representative neighborhood in the city, from the marketplace near the center of town to the shantytowns in the

southern edges of the city where recent rural immigrants reside, these market women also own a number of properties in elite residential neighborhoods in the upper and middle class parts of town that, until recently, they would have seldom visited.

In the past two decades, introducing free market practices caused a proliferation of private education institutions in Cochabamba that together with an increase in the fortunes of the market *chololas* combined to create circumstances favorable for most of the members of the youngest generation of these market women to access higher education. This created a situation in which many young women and men whose mothers bartered in the markets attended the private universities located in or near the upper class neighborhoods in the city. Because of this, a number of market *chololas* I knew purchased homes in the city's northern end, away from the markets and within walking distance of the college campus where their children attended classes. The *chololas* did not live in these residences and for the most part rented them to white middle and upper class families, except when the homes were used by the *chololas'* children while university was in session. I was able to visit a half dozen of these houses that were actually used by the *chololas'* children and was struck by the fact that, though equipped with every comfort, they were seen by the *chololas'* and their families as a temporary living arrangement and the house would obviously be rented or sold the minute their children's need ended with their graduation from college.

These real estate transactions tell us that the *chololas* are wealthy enough to make an expensive investment just to ease their children's transition to college, though we should not forget that these real estate goods are considered valuable property that can be sold or rented in future. However, what is most striking about these real estate investments is that the *chololas*, who physically modify the landscape of the market to meet their needs, are beginning to take over

what used to be considered “white” neighborhoods and control and subvert this space to advance their own families. Although clearly there are still social and ethnic barriers that are hard to cross for the *cholitas*, as witnessed by their reluctance to occupy the homes they purchased in these neighborhoods, the very fact that these market women now own these homes speaks of a new frontier in their social mobility, a topic which I will explore in greater detail in the chapter following this one.

Cochabamba’s market women play a critical part in shaping this city’s facade in the twenty-first century given that they finance the majority of construction work taking place within its bounds, and invest heavily in real estate in neighborhoods across the social spectrum. The short answer to the question that opened this section on why *cholitas* modify the physical landscape of the market and its streets and own real estate at different levels is because these strategies are good for business. If the *cholitas* can augment their vending space or the display appeal of their wares, or access different customers by moving through different locations in the market as they work at different stalls, they will do it. Yet another reason for *cholitas* to go to all the trouble of modifying the marketplace as they implement their own urban planning is because it gives them access to power as they gain economic benefit. Indeed, these women physically mold the part of the city that they rule directly into their own image and for their own purposes demonstrating an agency that gives the lie to the city and state government’s statements on their control of urban spaces. In the following section, I explore how the *cholitas* are forging new intimate relations with local government through political activism and the use of legal proceedings that places them in a position parallel to rather than below the state. This discussion contributes to our understanding on how *cholitas* wield the power they have accrued as architects and designers of alternative blueprints to Cochabamba’s urban landscape.

Surveillance of the Streets: Conflict and Cooperation between *Chola* Women and the State

In the story that opens this chapter, I mentioned witnessing how city officials in Cochabamba recreate a past era at the city's anniversary celebrations every year, depicting a time when the city's layout was orderly, in accordance with ideologies of modernity in urban planning that mapped out the ethnic-based social hierarchy (Scott 1998). This remembrance is meant to help impose public order as it facilitates local state surveillance, making the city safe for all its residents. The symbolic action of reproducing this past makes a powerful statement on the continued relevance of the desire for order and safety for the city's residents, especially given the recent influx of a large population of indigenous people who have traditionally been considered unpredictable and dangerous due to their lack of formal education and perceived civility in the popular imagination.

This ideal of an ordered and civilized metropolis is showcased in different postcolonial societies across the globe. The anthropological record teems with examples from informal market women and their conflicting relationship with state officials and structures revolving around the use of urban space (Babb 2001; Bromley and Mackie 2009). This conflict is most often defined by a constant struggle to control and police the streets through which the informal economy operates. Just to name a few instances that illustrate this penchant for public order, the work of Deborah Kapchan in Morocco in the early 1990s shows how city officials frowned on women vendors and their forays into the public domain and were almost eager to report their doings to the local Muslim church (1996: 7). In Zambia, a constant crackdown on street vendors carried out in the name of law and order had police forcibly clearing Lukasa's streets from informal vendors and threatening them with incarceration (Tranberg-Hansen 2002: 62). In Latin

America, Blenda Femenías provides a fascinating example of the Mayor of Arequipa, Peru, declaring war on informal vendors and enlisting the aid of a water cannon to literally “cleanse” the city streets. She narrates how “shooting plain water... did no good. Accelerating the aggression, the mayor had the water dyed red so it would stain as well as soak the [vendors’] merchandise. Now he has escalated again by mixing the water with kerosene... and pesticide... the vendor’s health be damned” (2007: 8).

In Bolivia, market women’s extended history of trade has made them the periodic target of state and municipal laws enacted to police and regulate their activities on the streets, and oftentimes also to cleanse their presence from this space in the name of progress and hygiene, in a situation similar to that described by Femenías in Peru (Medinacelli 1989). This criminalization of market women by the government and local authorities reflects the urban ideal of order that goes hand in hand with the danger represented by chaos, coupled with ideas that women become polluted or are bearers of pollution or dirt because they leave their assigned space in society. The stereotype is reinforced by the notion that markets are difficult places to control given that they are ruled by desire to trade and the laws of competition. Because food is usually involved in these exchanges, hygiene—or health issues arising from a lack of hygiene—plays a defining role in the perceived disorderly nature of markets. These concerns translate into tighter control by municipal authorities in charge of administering these trading spaces (Black 2005). The link of hygiene as a civilizing influence and justifications for segregation through juxtaposed images of cleanliness and disease have been observed and analyzed in a number of postcolonial settings (Burke 2003; Douglas 1966)¹⁶. For the case of Cochabamba’s market women, the lack of

¹⁶ For a discussion of how discourses of hygiene and pollution has been deployed in the Andes, based on Mary Douglas’ notion that pollution came to be developed as a means of social control, please see Fiona Wilson’s work on the use of discourses on hygiene and pollution nineteenth-century Peru (2004), Mary Weismantel’s examination of stereotypes of women and pollution across the Andes (1998) and Anna

hygiene associated with these vendors reinforces historical stereotypes of indigenous peoples—who are embodied by the *cholas*—as disorderly and uncivilized. While I resided in Cochabamba, I witnessed one event where city authorities cracked down on street vendors at a temporary vending fair and where these ideals of cleanliness were invoked. I watched this drama unfold as a heated debate developed over the course of several weeks in the local media about an ever-increasing number of vendors who vied for a space at the Christmas Fair that takes over several blocks of the center of town every December.

The city's informal Christmas Fair was an organic event that began as a handful of artisans setting up their wares in improvised stalls near the main plaza, to barter their wares for the holiday season. In a few years, the fair grew exponentially to the point where it resulted in havoc in the already clogged arteries through which the city's traffic flowed downtown. This caused a group of citizens who lived in this neighborhood to organize a campaign to get City Hall to evict the vendors and their stalls from the streets. For over a month, Cochabamba's residents could turn on the noon daily news and witness dramatic images of wailing vendors holding their children for TV journalists and their cameras, facing municipal police and the frantic owners of the buildings at the doorsteps of which the vendors had set their wares. News anchormen set this melodrama to music and showed the poor and downtrodden in slow motion, while a voice-over narrated the plight of many of these would-be vendors who were trying to make ends meet to feed their families at a time of economic crisis. These images were juxtaposed against interviews with city officials who complained that the situation was escalating out of control as vendors had no respect for authority and set up shop in public parks and thoroughfares. Enduring discourses on hygiene and the danger of chaos were invoked as the city

Zulawski's arguments that link ethnic discrimination with hygiene and medicine practices in early twentieth-century Bolivia (2000).

officials argued that the fair resulted in overcrowding that could endanger people on the streets given that dirt and disease are inseparable from this type of market vending (De la Cadena 2000). The images and the interviews left the viewer with a sense of permanent conflict between vendors in the markets and local authorities.

I was especially struck by this passionate and public dramatization of the relationship between market vendors and local government, as my experiences in the market showed a very different side to this association. Indeed, on another occasion at Cochabamba's central plaza I remember standing at the doors of the Prefecture, or Governor's office, while waiting for a *chola* vendor friend to finish a meeting with some of the state officials within. When her meeting concluded and we headed back to the market, she recounted how she had spent the morning pleading for the case of a man who had asked for her support in a promotion to Head Inspector for the market section where her stall is located. She had taken an official letter from her union of vendors, signed by the President and Members of the Board, stating their backing for this official.

From this and numerous other conversations with *chola* vendors, I gleaned that both city hall and the state governor's office in Cochabamba run profitable divisions that cater to the issue of sales permits and the adjudication of vending space for *cholitas* and other informal market merchants. These systems and the transactions they control are all legal and also represent a significant source of income for petty officers in the form of bribes. In fact, the running joke in one of the market sections whenever I visited was that of a municipal inspector who was said to be on a monthly "payroll" with a union of market vendors. He was always greeted on his rounds by loud catcalls and vendors screaming "*I'll go get your boss*" or "*I can see you are looking*

*forward to this year's Christmas bonus, right?*¹⁷” Not everyone in the markets had such a close and open working relationship with state officials, but this familiarity points to the fact that these transactions carried out on vending spaces with the local government took place routinely.

The vending spaces I refer to here range from permanent stalls, built by the municipality and integrated onto urban planning projects, to the yearly lease from the city of a couple of square meters of sidewalk where a vendor can squat for approximately five or six hours, twice every week during “market days,” when this street may be closed to traffic to facilitate access by shoppers. In fact, the heterogeneity of the market can be traced by following who owns which, and how many, vending spaces. Successful merchants who hold a monopoly on specific goods and have been part of Cochabamba’s market landscape for generations own anywhere from a handful to two dozen permanent stalls on prime trading locations. They usually run at least one of the stalls in person, have family members and fictive kin running the others, and/or rent the spaces to other market vendors. A majority of women own only one stall but are always on the lookout to acquire a second, often opting for purchasing the rights to squat on less desirable spaces, knowing that in time the market will expand, and these vending stalls might go up in value as permanent booths are built in these new locations.

Women recently arrived from the rural areas or other cities are at the other end of the market spectrum; with no kin connections to help them in their new city lives and little or no starting capital. These immigrants will provisionally sit on sidewalks that the municipality has designated as “off-bounds” to selling, or will become one more of the horde of itinerant vendors who roam the open markets or offer their goods at street corners and to motorists waiting at a stoplight. The latter group of itinerant peddlers is constantly hunted by the municipal police, and

¹⁷ “*Voy a traerla a tu jefe*” and “*Habías estado esperando el aguinaldo de Navidad de este año, ¿no?*”

its members live in constant danger of having their goods seized and being imprisoned. This precarious arrangement can continue indefinitely as a great deal of cash and social contacts is required for these vendors to formalize their association with city authorities and purchase “vending sitting permits” (called *sentaje* in Spanish) from city officials that allow them to market their wares in established street spaces. However, it is also well known that the arm of the law can be persuaded to look away from the lack of these permits for a small fee, and both itinerant and older vendors agreed that the real danger in these situations was the market women in the permanent stalls who would oftentimes coordinate the raids to catch these illegal vendors with local police as a strategy to have this competition removed from the scene. In this way, the more established market women have turned to the local and municipal state for an alliance against recent rural migrants, whom the *chola* women see as a threat to their place in the markets. I describe and tease out the relation of the *chololas* with recent immigrant indigenous groups in greater detail in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

In Bolivia, union organizing is a mechanism employed by both the more established market *chololas* and their competitor vendors from recent immigrant groups to engage with the local government apparatus. In fact, market merchant women have a history of organizing that traces its roots to the first all-female merchant unions that formed part of the anarchist international worker’s movement that had organized groups in many Latin American cities in the 1930s (Waddsworth and Dibbits 1989). During my time in the markets, I observed that this tradition was still very much alive as the vast majority of the informal marketplace was organized by unions that numbered anywhere between thirty and two hundred of these vendors divided by the items they sold and the location of their vending stalls. Indeed, I attended a number of union meetings that ranged from small meetings where a handful of *chololas* met at a

street corner while sipping freshly-squeezed orange juice from a peddler's cart, to a mammoth “*ampliado*” or city-wide meeting of union members held at Cochabamba's soccer stadium where representatives from each union took all day to make speeches and vote on a number of issues that affected the use of the informal market streets. These meetings are yet another example of how *cholitas* can take it upon themselves to modify the city landscape to best fit their purposes and needs.

I mentioned an example of a *chola* vendor of my acquaintance who presented a written petition to city hall by her union, backing a municipal inspector's candidacy for promotion. Other studies on unions in Bolivia as well as my own observations show that there is a ritual dimension to carefully penning these lengthy requests, and then with a great flourish of signatures, presenting these documents to different local and state authorities in the form of petitions, communications, memos, or notarized letters (Alexander 2005; Spronk 2007). Market women proudly follow these traditions and routinely present these documents to local officials. This in itself is not anything new, yet what surprised me was that when I spoke with the local government officials who received these petitions, not only are these documents not dismissed out of hand given the *cholitas* low status in the social hierarchy, but they are actually carefully considered by city hall and prefecture officers. In fact, the reciprocal networks that market women established with local government structures are so strong that—at least on issues pertaining directly to the marketplace—the opinions of *chola* vendors and their union representatives are always consulted. In the case I described above, the letter of support that my *chola* friend presented at the Prefecture could effectively make or break the career of the petty market inspector she mentioned.

Bolivians in general place a high value on bureaucratic interactions, as these help create a growing sense of intimacy between living social actors and state structures—and form part of a process of state formation—through ongoing contact and reiteration (Aretxaga 2003: 394). Another form taken by this relationship between the *cholas* and the state is that created by legal actions. In conversations with market women and inspectors, both pointed out that some of the longer lasting associations and friendships between the two groups had begun at Cochabamba's courts of law, because of the common incidence of lawsuits against the municipality filed by market women to stall eviction from a public spot. In these cases, inspectors would be asked to act as go-betweens with the vendors and municipal bureaucrats. Lawsuits were also rampant between the owners of buildings and homes along the streets of the market, where landlords would open legal proceedings against the vendors in the hope that these women would be forced to free their doorstep.

These legal processes can go on for many years as both parties continue to present writs, and the judges and court clerks are persuaded to lengthen the case. For this reason, and due to the overwhelming number of lawsuits in some of which *cholas* are involved, many of these women convinced their daughters to study law when they sent them to attend the local university. As an elderly market woman explained, lawyers' fees can become a drain on trade business, so the best investment that can be made is to put a family member through law school so they can then provide these services for free. I was able to confirm this statement when a young woman whom I hired temporarily as a research assistant, who was obtaining her law degree, was soon the object of interested banter by a great number of vendors who approached her with questions on existing lawsuits or on how to file a suit against city hall, building owners, or other vendors.

The myriad situations that put *chola* vendors in close contact with inspectors who work for city hall issuing permits for selling space and controlling health and hygiene practices within the market serve to highlight that these associations can be very close, and show a very different picture from the idea held by the public and ratified by the media that market women live in constant strife against local government and its officials. Indeed, a stranger visiting the market might notice that there was a great number of these inspectors roaming the corridors between vending stalls at all times of the day, not due to a real need for surveillance, but fueled by a call to renew and keep social contacts. In fact, the underpaid inspectors often depended on the market women for additional income via bribes or, more to the point, might depend on contacts with market women for their very jobs as many of these positions are political and the vendors are well connected with local authorities. In short, from strife over vending space with petty bureaucrats to cooperating with these same officials in leasing market stalls, *cholas* have ambivalent yet intimate relations with the local government apparatus. In the following section, I explore another instance in which market women and state officials are once again in conflict with each other through market union activities. I examine Cochabamba's *cholas* and their participation in Bolivian politics in the streets and how the the power they hold over the region's economy and their intimate relations with local governance help them broker with the state, party structures, and politicians.

Taking over the Streets: Blockades, Marches and Political Subjectivity

Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta observed that this country's history is punctuated by violent uprisings and rebellions due to extremes in social inequity and the fact that its indigenous majority was never given full citizenship (1988: 81). In this context, it is no surprise that the past

two decades witnessed massive mobilizations with the advent of economic structural reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund. These protests were largely based on Bolivians' disenchantment with the traditional elite political parties that had implemented these policies causing a retreat of state services and a widening gap between rich and poor (Assies 2003; Gill 2000). Something almost all of these anti-neoliberal protests had in common was that they repeatedly took place at and took over the Bolivian cities' main squares, a space I have already identified as "a source and symbol of civic power" (Low 2000: 35). In line with this belief, Cochabamba's plaza continues to be the stage for daily protests and marches against local and national state institutions today (Calderón and Szmukler 2000). Indeed, during my stay in the field, one look at the local news channels would show different groups scheduling their marches so they didn't conflict with one another or timed in such a way that they joined forces in presenting their petitions and arrived at the town's square simultaneously.

The Spaniards who drew Cochabamba's straight grid pattern five centuries ago, the city planners who imposed their utopian vision of modernity in the twentieth century, and current politicians who believe in an ordered progress, would all be, and indeed are, appalled at the repeated chaotic takeover of the plaza that I describe here. That these protests take place in spite of the long-dominant desired ideas of modernity shows the strong symbolism and remembered memory of the plaza as a space linked to state power, as well as a belief that street demonstrations are viewed by Bolivians as a means of communicating and engaging with the state. In conversations I had with some protest leaders and in press statements they made, the protestors justified their activities and the disruption of urban order by repeatedly stating that had the mayor, prefect or government authorities lent their ear to the people in a timely manner, the supplicants would not be driven to take this extreme measure. In general, there seemed to be a

consensus that the only way to catch the attention of those in power was through this type of venue, where people came into close contact with state representatives by taking their problems to the state's figurative and literal doorstep.

Cochabambinos—or Cochabamba's residents—have become expert in taking to the streets in what they see as the only effective strategy to negotiate the implementation of basic services such as health care, education and city services such as sewage, water and electric power, from an overworked and corrupt local government, which has been further limited in its duties by the enactment of neoliberal policies. This new way to relate to authority has permeated Bolivian politics so thoroughly that the process has caused more than one scholar to baptize the last decade and-a-half as a burgeoning “culture of street protests” (Robins 2006: 8). *Cholas* have a tradition for being politically active, and I have noted before how they participated in the social movements and street protests against neoliberalism that helped place the current government in power. These protests and mobilizations are based on a long tradition that has taken these demonstrations to new levels of organizing and coming together to pitch carefully-coreographed battles in the streets that require a great deal of coordination and effort. The most notable of these street protests took place in April of 2000 in a social phenomenon that would later be baptized Cochabamba's “Water War” (Assies 2003).

This protest began as a series of mobilizations against a hike in water tariffs between 200 and 300 percent throughout the city by the newly-privatized water services company. What marked this set of mobilizations to the point that people speak of organizing as before or after this milestone was the sheer magnitude and extent of the protests, the fact that it was unplanned and truly emerged from the grassroots, and its victorious outcome. This event paralyzed a city of more than one half a million people for ten days, including paralyzing trade between the

highland and lowland regions of the country for this time period. Within Cochabamba, every street, every alley, every avenue, and every bridge was blocked. Residents kept guard day and night over these homemade barricades to prevent the circulation of traffic and even that of pedestrians (Arnold and Speding 2005). The takeover of the city at this momentous time is remembered fondly by *cochabambinos* as a moment in which class and ethnic barriers were forgotten and recent immigrants, municipal officials and *cholitas* all worked side by side to oust a common enemy represented by the company that had privatized the water services in the city. The end result was that Bechtel, the US transnational that had bid for and won this privatization, rescinded its contract and left the country leaving the former state company to take up the administration of water services once again. Whenever *cholitas* remembered that fateful week and what they dubbed as “the victory of the people” over foreign corporations, they would chuckle and congratulate each other as having shown those outsiders how *cochabambinos* got things done. *Cholitas* and customers in the market when reminiscing on this history of past protests would also often comment on a recent street protest and say “it went like the Water War” to show that it had been successful.

These comments show the powerful symbolism and remembrance of the Water War that, aside from any partial or temporary economic respite it bought Cochabamba’s residents, left a legacy of pride and achievement that empowered Bolivians who felt direct action could change their lives and the governing structure. This sense of empowerment was keenly felt by the *cholitas* who played a prominent role in these events and similar conflicts, which in turn became part of these market women’s arsenal of weapons to fight their subordinate station. The following quote from an interview with a market *chola* where she describes how social mobilizations could and

should be deployed to negotiate power with the state or other oppressive groups better explains how *chololas* felt empowered by their participation in insurgency:

“When we need to organize a protest march, a blockade with my [*chola*] comrades, we already have a system in place ready so we can leave that minute if necessary.... For example, you will need... you can see the need to organize and protest for the municipality to grant us a permit to sell in a park here in the Cancha. Then we decide, all of us who wish to sell there, decide that we will block the bridge near that park and the streets that lead to it. We decide on three points for these blockades... Well, I have my children, my home, my vending stall. I can't leave everything. The blockade could last for days, right? What do we do? With a list, the union leader divides vendors into shifts and goes to call other unions [of market vendors]. Soon, the blockade is there all day, and no one misses time at their stalls or at home. We can also take advantage of the fact we're there anyway and sell our merchandise in the park, or sell food and drinks to the people manning the blockades, right? That's how we do it.... But without the union, we couldn't do it even if we wanted to .¹⁸”

This excerpt shows that there is indeed a system to the implementation of any street protest and that these temporary occupations and siege of public spaces are embedded within union organizing. The process points to the power of unions in Bolivian cities such as Cochabamba; more importantly, it also vividly defines how the *chololas* have a system in place through which to disrupt the state's ordering of urban public space.

Although I witnessed a great number of street protests in which *chololas* took an active part and organized, one event stood out in my mind as a neat illustration of how a public space can be taken over with the same tactics the *chola* vendor described in the narrative quoted above. This

¹⁸ “Cuando necesitamos armar una marcha, un bloqueo con las compañeras, ya tenemos todo un sistema listo para salir ese ratito si fuese necesario... Por ejemplo, vas a tener que... se ve que sería bueno organizarse y protestar para que la municipalidad nos de permiso para vender en un parque acá en la Cancha. Entonces se decide entre todas las que quieren vender que vamos a bloquear el puente cerca a ese parque y las calles que entran. Tres puntos de bloqueo se deciden... Bueno, yo tengo mis huahuas, mi casa, mi venta. No puedo dejar todo botado. El bloqueo puede durar días, ¿no? ¿Qué hacemos? Con lista, la dirigente forma turnos y va y llama a otros sindicatos. Al rato, todo el día está el bloqueo y nadie pierde su venta ni su tiempo en la casa. Además se puede aprovechar y vender ya en el parque tu mercadería, o comidita y refrescos a los bloqueadores, ¿no? Así sabemos hacer. Sin sindicato ni queriendo se podría.”

story has to do with a restaurant in the heart of the *Cancha*, part of the local fast-food chicken chain, *Pollos Panchita*¹⁹. This local food chain is an interesting copy of MacDonald's and other US-based fast food companies that caters specifically to local tastes. The visitor will find the garish yellow chicken logo, plastic booths and general setup of the restaurant including the names of the combos, a faithful copy of the American food places. However, the place specializes in serving a type of spiced broiled chicken that is commonly found in the open air markets. Instead of ketchup or mustard packets, the servers provide packet-sized plastic bags, closed by a knot at the end, that contain locally made tomato sauce and the region's typical hot sauce. The manager at the restaurant explained that the idea was to have customers buy the same type of flavorful food they would get at the food vending stalls, within their modern fast-food premises.

The conflict this restaurant had with a local union of *chola* vendors had to do with the fact that the owner of the food chain paid a bribe to the municipality to keep the restaurant's sidewalk free of any vending stalls. This was a feat that involved a number of police raids to evict the stall owners, a lawsuit, and hiring of private security guards that patrolled the sidewalk while the place was opened for business. The market women who contested the right to place their stalls on this sidewalk claimed that they had received vending rights to set their food stalls from city hall on that stretch before the restaurant opened. Further, they resented the implication that the food served by this place was better than what was served in their stalls. Though the owner of *Panchita* clearly held the upper hand when it came to bribing the local authorities, the

¹⁹ "Panchita" is just a local woman's name. The equivalent in English would be akin to "Betsy's Chicken."

cholas staged a series of blockades that prevented both motor vehicles *and* pedestrians from approaching the restaurant. They began by sitting or standing together on the sidewalks, and gradually brought some food to sell while at their sit-in. Meat pies and sandwiches wrapped in brown paper appeared magically from baskets and were offered to passersby. While some *cholas* sat and blocked the way, others walked around peddling their wares. This scheme was followed daily by the *cholas* for about three weeks until, shortly after I saw one of the restaurant's security guards buying a sandwich from one of the protestors, *Pollos Panchita* capitulated and an agreement was struck whereby *cholas* could set up their stalls on the sidewalk as long as they didn't block the door of the place and they sold food that did not copy that offered by the restaurant.

This story shows that *cholas* are quick to adapt to different situations and, more importantly, can outmaneuver the local governing authorities against other powerful players who also have a hand at the game of reciprocal networks. It also shows that takeover strategies such as road blocking that emerged during the era of social movements in the 1990s, and culminated with social victories such as that of the Water War, continue to be deployed to manipulate the urban landscape in a way that complements other strategies by this group such as construction and real estate speculation, proving that whether at the main plaza, in residential neighborhoods, or at their own marketplace, *cholas* play a major role in the politics that affect the changing face of the city of Cochabamba.

In Cochabamba's daily performances of protest, a common element seems to be that the chaos and disorder associated with more "indigenous" spaces such as the marketplace and marginal neighborhoods is transported and let loose at the site of the orderly plaza in a conscious blurring of physical as well as social boundaries. The historical fear held by elite sectors of the

invasion of the indigenous presence in its more civilized spaces is why ruling sectors of society consistently take steps to “restore balance and put the indigenous back in their proper place” (Arnold and Spedding 2005: 69). Popular mobilizations, union work, and social networking all help *cholitas* construct themselves as political actors with agency who work with or against the state depending on circumstances. In all of these activities, the *cholitas* are once again challenging state power so that they are no longer underneath the state spatially, but very much working alongside or in parallel lines to it. All of this has much to say about how a combination of rising economic power and new street protest political tactics complicate former views of these women as politically subject to the state and other governing entities.

Marketplace Strategies

In this chapter I have argued that exploring the role of Cochabamba’s market women as both activists and urban planners discloses heretofore hidden mechanisms on how Bolivian society and the state operate. These findings can contribute to the broader question addressed by this research of how the Andean market women of this study practice and imagine the market on the ground. *Cholitas* challenge static stereotypes of urban indigenous marginal groups and of gendered spaces in Bolivia and demonstrate that they are central to the lives of Cochabamba’s residents. Indeed, these experiences provide the nuanced and many-layered descriptions that can untangle these webs of relations and evidence how “marginal” populations such as the market *cholitas* of this study can interact with the local government apparatus and affect state formation and state operations quite effectively.

A slew of studies has recently filled bookshop shelves in Bolivia on Cochabamba’s urban issues and woes, and how best to solve them. Many of these are authored by development

planners, architects, engineers, and other urban specialists. A vast majority are written from the stance of the municipality's in-house and external consultant planners (Gordillo and Garrido 2005). Yet others, coming from anthropologists and other social scientists, deal with attesting that the marginalized urban indigenous of Latin American cities are anything but powerless. The ethnographic accounts presented in this chapter speak to both these positions by establishing the ongoing role that urban planning ideologies play in Cochabamba's social imaginary today, as well as by challenging the subordinate status of *chola* market women in this city through the *cholas'* long tradition of organizing against state exploitation. The examples in this chapter show the *cholas* working parallel to or in direct opposition to the state in situations that shift the *cholas* in their position vis-à-vis the state so that it is no longer above them. This is further ratified by the fact that *cholas* are the agents of their own destiny and have created socioeconomic mechanisms through which they control the physical boundaries of the marketplace, including construction and the forging and strengthening of political networks that permit them to influence decisions made on the fate of the marketplaces and urban planning at city hall and the local prefecture. Further, *cholas* have also established themselves as key players in the city's future, given their practice of acquiring real estate property that cuts across class lines. Also critical is the role of *cholas* in local politics and influencing government officials through a complex web of reciprocal relations, as it shows that *chola* market women are a sector that will not only influence the future of Cochabamba's planning but will affect how the region and the country emerge in the wake of neoliberal reforms.

Cochabamba's informal dwellers such as market vendors, recent immigrants and slum dwellers provide the force that moves the urban economy despite their portrayal by state officials as a "problem" population (Antequera 2007: 16). The stories of these market *cholas* and their

influence throughout their city ratify my argument that these women are ubiquitous in Cochabamba and central to the fate of its inhabitants. More to the point, they also break down static stereotypes of urban indigenous marginal groups as backward and powerless. In an age fraught with a modernist and progressive anxiety, *cholas* beckon to a modernist future, while presenting themselves as the embodiment of indigenous authenticity as they sit and ply their wares at their multicolored stalls. As architects, protestors and politicians, these women are the kinetic force that is challenging static, stale models. They are transforming Cochabamba as they strategize the marketscape and influence the integration or exclusion of immigrant populations as well as the function and aesthetics of the city. In the following chapter I further trace how migration and education have influenced Cochabamba and the market *cholas'* transformations and journeys of mobility in the past two decades.

CHAPTER THREE

UNEVEN MOBILITY:

THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION AND MIGRATION ON THE *CHOLA* CLASS

The expansion of education, both in urban and rural environments, has been determined by providing the underclasses with a modicum of knowledge concerning the form and context of the industrial-mercantile world as the main source of making a living... Without this education background, the transition from rural to urban life would have been more difficult. Thus education provided the necessary conditions for upward mobility.

*Hugo G. Nutini*²⁰

The relation between education and urban migration and their combined effects on social mobility throughout Latin America in the past century have been well documented (Avelino et al. 2005; Behrman et al. 2001; Luykx 1999). Bolivia's case followed the pattern that Nutini describes about Mexico in the quote that opens this chapter. For the near two centuries since the country became an independent republic, education and literacy campaigns were seen as the quickest route to assimilate and make citizens of the almost eighty percent of indigenous peoples inhabiting Bolivia's rugged landscape; from the chilly and oxygen-deprived Andes to the sweltering jungles of the Amazon lowlands (Gotkowitz 2003; Maldonado-Morató 2006). Providing a "modicum of knowledge" to populations suffering from centuries of isolation and exploitation did indeed equip Bolivia's indigenous majority with the tools to better face the transition required in rural to urban migration. This transition entailed not only a physical move but also an imagined transition from the agricultural "backward" lifestyle of indigenous towns to urban cosmopolitanism, a notion based on utopian visions of national development and modernity (Larson 2004). Tied to this story of repression and coercion to conform to a national model are stories of empowerment and resistance of indigenous peoples by means of the same

²⁰ From *Social Stratification and Mobility in Central Veracruz*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005: 14.

education imposed by the government. This problematic and complex duality persists to this day and is reflected in the *cholas*' stories of mobility and their relation to education that I trace in this chapter.

In the following pages I discuss the effects of both education and migratory movements on the construction of the *chola* class in Cochabamba. I frame this discussion within the concept of *mobility*, both in terms of the social mobility that *cholas* continue to aspire to, as well as in the sense of these market women's daily journeys that cut across and between boundaries in Cochabamba's different public spaces. Mobility is a concept that anthropologists have employed in the study of class formation. Of late, *scholars* have also used it to examine global flows of capital, labor migration, diasporas, and urbanization processes (Truitt 2008: 4). Indeed, mobility is closely linked to a fluidity of motion across and within boundaries of class, ethnicity, and national belonging that have to do with the re-scaling of governance that comes with neoliberalism (Hannerz 1983; Urry 2004).

A fluid and unrestrained mobility is part of the neoliberal fantasy "where there are no material or discursive frictions to hinder the space of flows... a world without historical and spatial closure, without fissures and alienation" (Mitchell 2004: 2). In this chapter I argue that mobility in Cochabamba for the *chola* class—in spite of and in part because of the advent of neoliberalism—is not fluid or free-flowing but uneven or blocked at scattered points by this society's power structure in which the indigenous is racialized. The *cholas*' mobility is channeled and redirected in multiple ways as part of their ongoing negotiations for a middle class status that also implies a renegotiation of their ethnic/racial station. Qualifying the *chola* mobility as "blocked at scattered points" is particularly apt as *cholas* inhabit a multiplicity of spaces throughout Cochabamba thus permeating their society thoroughly, albeit unevenly. Additionally,

also due to neoliberalism and the socioeconomic changes it has wrought, their journeys of mobility have become much more fragmented in the sense that there is a great deal of variation between individuals, which also contributes to the uneven or dispersed nature of this mobility across ethnic and class barriers.

This chapter begins with a brief review of education in Bolivia and Cochabamba and its effects on the *chola* class in this city. It continues with a look at the interactions between older and more recent migratory arrivals to the city and its informal market in terms of this process of class formation, and concludes with a discussion on the real and perceived mobility of market *cholitas*. This conversation provides the grounding for the chapters following this one which analyze current tensions and conflicts between these groups of more established and more recent immigrants to the city, and also continues the exchange I began in the preceding chapter on how *cholitas* position themselves within Cochabamba's urban space.

Education, Nationalism, and the Landscape of Language and Knowledge

Public education in Bolivia has had a tumultuous history. From the birth of the Bolivian republic in the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, in line with policies inherited from the colonial period, instruction was denied to the country's indigenous majority. This was a means of keeping this population in a subordinate position. Highland Quechua and Aymara—as the most numerous cohesive native communities—fought long and hard to acquire some schooling despite the many obstacles and barriers placed across their path by landowners and mining moguls where their communities labored as peons and indentured miners. These indigenous laborers provided the force that kept agriculture and mining overhead costs to a

minimum and on whose shoulders rested the country's economy throughout the twentieth century (Alexander 2005).

The struggle for education was based on the awareness that the yoke of the oppressor could not be shaken off as long as the peasant and mining communities failed to speak, read or write the language of those in power. Consequently, rural community schools sprouted across this region of the Andes characterized by their quasi-clandestine nature in which communities appealed to the central government, Catholic Church authorities, and kin networks to somehow bypass the landowners' rule and sporadically offer Spanish literacy instruction to their children. These community-based learning centers persisted despite the many obstacles in their path, which is why historians have characterized them as nuclei of indigenous resistance. However, history also remembers these schools as state tools for cultural transformation and assimilation given that eventually all ended subsumed to the Bolivian state; a reflection of the repression/empowerment complexity that characterizes this country's education. Indeed, with the advent of the nationalist revolution in 1952, these learning centers were incorporated into a broader political project that advocated for the destruction of indigenous languages and structures in order to replace them with a European civilizatory model (Brienen 2005: 145).

Education is a key component to contemporary state formation and Bolivia's schools for the second half of the twentieth century were regarded as "the crucible of a supposedly shared national culture," or part of a larger political project for the construction of a collective national subject (Luykx 1999: 42). Schools were the site that could move the indigenous along a path from the backward savagery of their ancestral practices to an enlightened whiteness. This process would oftentimes take place by passing through a *mestizo* identity, or the cultural and racial mixing of indigenous and European, manifest in Bolivia's growing urban centers (Sanjinés

2004). The nationalist model basically demanded the erasure of all indigenous markers including language, customs and dress, yet could not completely deliver its promise of providing an end to the journey of mobility with the attainment of whiteness and full citizenship. This was because indigeneity was also marked by physical appearance and, coupled with the fact that higher education in private institutions was limited almost exclusively to the upper classes, kept this final goal out of reach of the many hopeful who undertook this journey.

This state-imposed model of citizenship held sway up to the onset of neoliberal reforms that set out, among other goals, to radically transform Bolivia's education system. The proposed all-encompassing Educational Reform was powered by millions in external funding—most notably from the World Bank—which allowed for its swift national implementation in 1994. These changes were meant to reverse the old structure and produce enlightened individuals joined by pride in a common indigenous heritage that the previous model had been bent on erasing, in this way rescuing Bolivia's indigenous from their protracted oppression and finally opening the way for full upward mobility. The reform was characterized by its approach to bilingual education in which children would be taught in both their native mother tongue and Spanish, to which purpose the government massively produced school textbooks in the three most-spoken indigenous languages: Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní. These were then dispatched to cover everywhere from major population centers to the most remote corners of Bolivia (Gustafson 2009). At the core of this reform was the notion that children would learn how to read and write in their native tongue and then gradually become introduced to Spanish and incorporate it into their learning²¹.

²¹ For more on the Bolivian Education Reform and its pedagogical techniques see Ascarrunz (2003) and ETARE (1993). Aurolyn Luykx (2003) also provides a finely nuanced reading of some of the effects of the reform on the value ascribed to Bolivia's indigenous languages.

Cochabamba, as the largest population center within the Quechua-speaking region in the country, was the site of many heated debates on how to use the elementary textbooks that the Educational Reform distributed to the city's schools. A review of several studies carried out to evaluate the education system ten years after the implementation of these reforms in the region shows that, in the early 2000s, these texts were being used in the area's rural towns with mixed results. However, and more importantly, the almost quarter of a million school age children and youth in the city of Cochabamba were taught almost exclusively in Spanish and the reform's bilingual texts didn't figure in any part of the urban school curricula (Cruz et al. 2005: 286).

The results from this study showing that Quechua instruction was disregarded in the city coincide with the answers that I was given by the *chola* women I interviewed in Cochabamba's markets whom I queried about their children's education. These women and their families all spoke of Quechua as a language learned at home that was useful only to navigate the markets given that trade involved dealing with rural farmers who still spoke this native language. In contrast, school learning all took place in Spanish which, all agreed, was the language necessary for city life, to listen to television, and to learn about people in other countries. Indeed, on several occasions whenever the topic of education in Quechua would come up, I would be solemnly informed that if the *cholitas* or their children had wished to learn to read and write Quechua or to be educated in that language, then their families would have remained in the rural area.

When I argued with the *cholitas* and quoted the ideas of the Education Reform on indigenous pride as a reason to teach Quechua to the younger generations they would shake their heads and pronounce that this language was "no good" (*no sirve*) as it didn't have any possible use in the cities. To prove Quechua's rural identity, many *cholitas* pointed to the fact that this was

an eminently “agricultural” language (*un idioma agrícola*). As our arguments on the use of Quechua were recurrent, these soon triggered a game in which market *cholas*, to make this point, would take turns seeing how many words they could come up with for hoeing potatoes in Quechua, or how many Quechua words they could remember for different types of irrigation. They would keep at this exercise giving me sideways glances until I admitted defeat and looked suitably convinced of the incongruity of Quechua in city life, at which point one of the women would triumphantly state that “they would still teach me a thing or two about the *chola* class” or that I would be taught to think with a *chola* state of mind. I saw these performances, including my repeated giving in, as assurance that despite the new valuing of indigenous languages since the implementation of the Educational Reform that had been picked by the current Morales administration and its dominant ideology of indigenous nationalism, Spanish continues to be both an important marker of class and means to upward mobility in this city.

Speaking Spanish properly is indeed one of the most important class markers in Cochabamba, used to uphold traditional power structures in which the indigenous is racialized through the regimes of the progression from *mestizo* to white that I have already mentioned. An example that vividly illustrates this statement is how language instruction affects student self-esteem, where competence in Quechua is derided and basically erased as a valid knowledge when compared to Spanish skills. Educational psychologist Teresa Maldonado carried out a study among grade school children in a rural town a few hours from Cochabamba. In her investigation she observed a number of play activities and situations and evaluated numerous assignments given to these eight- and nine-year old indigenous peasant children, as well as noted classroom pedagogical techniques and student reactions to these approaches. Her results showed

that those Quechua monolingual children who struggled to understand the Spanish taught at school compared to their peers were dubbed “insecure” or “unable to learn” by their teachers.

These children described their chores and activities at home and in the fields in Quechua, showing great pride in these accomplishments. These same children’s self-image, Maldonado argues, changed dramatically when they described their schoolwork and interactions in school that took place almost exclusively in Spanish. Pride and confidence gave way to confusion and low self esteem as they echoed their teachers’ words when they stated “I can’t [do] schoolwork. I don’t know arithmetic” (*No puedo tareas, no sé aritmética*) (Maldonado-Morató 2006: 143–148)²². Maldonado concludes that these children’ differences in self-esteem depending on whether the knowledge they possessed was in Spanish or Quechua is due to broader socializing processes in which indigenous languages in Bolivia have a history of derision. She states that the skills and abilities that these children boasted linked to their indigenous and agricultural lifestyle were simply part of a form of knowledge that was not as valued as school instruction in Spanish and that the educational reform and its glossy textbooks had done little to change this historical hierarchy of value (ibid: 183).

Up to this point I have established that, be it in the city or the country around Cochabamba, Quechua knowledge and skills are undervalued when compared to “book learning” or academics that are the exclusive purview of Spanish. Here I wish to draw attention to how the *chola* market women of the *Cancha*, whose stories are the core topic of this text, have appropriated and are using these categories of knowledge value particularly when it comes to negotiating power from their marginalized position as women with an indigenous heritage. Sherry Ortner speaks of class and ethnic mobility in terms of power differentials, which she calls

²² All translations from the Spanish and Quechua, unless otherwise noted, are mine. Any errors or misinterpretations in these translations are also my responsibility.

a game of status (1996: 15). The *chola* market women in Cochabamba also view maintaining their status as a *chola* class as a game of continuous power negotiations in which they manipulate what tools they have at hand to defend their own position from the attacks of the dominant classes and from others who wish to wrestle power from them. One of many techniques I saw them employ to deflect attacks by other sectors who every so often would accuse them of price speculation, miserly hoarding of their trade goods, and cold-hearted commercialism, was to appropriate the ideas of indigenous ways of knowledge as ignorant and insignificant to show themselves off as harmless even though they continued to accumulate economic gains. The best way to illustrate this defense is through an example.

I had been following a *chola* vendor friend as she made her way through painters, masons and carpenters who were carrying out a major overhaul of the lower two floors of the building she owned at the heart of the informal marketplace. She had just signed a contract with a local bank that would be renting the space from her and had been busy moving her merchandise to the upper floors that used to be the family's living quarters. We ended our tour at what had been her kitchen, where she insisted on serving us both cups of instant coffee which we took out to the roof to drink. As she set out two plastic chairs on a narrow strip of cement away from the corrugated tin that covered the rest of this space, we settled down to chat while idly looking over the city. Only a few minutes into our reverie, one of the construction workers came up to tell my hostess that there was a municipal inspector waiting to speak to her. The woman quickly rose and ordered the inspector to be brought up to the roof. She ordered me to stay where I was and when the man arrived—out of breath from the steep flight of stairs—she immediately proceeded to seat him next to me and offered him refreshments. She introduced me as “a university friend of her daughters” and bustled about cleaning and pouring coffee while it was plain that she

expected me to entertain the visitor with polite chit chat. In this way, she set the stage for the drama she was about to perform in which the actors' roles were clearly outlined; she was the humble indigenous woman serving the educated middle classes represented by the inspector and myself.

For the next half hour the inspector vainly attempted to engage the *chola* in conversation. He pulled out some forms out of his pocket and insisted that she look at them as he thought that with her added income from the lease contract for the bank that would rent part of her home, she could no longer be considered as part of the *régimen simplificado* or “simplified tax system” applied to the informal market sector that paid little or no duties to the city and state. The woman parried all his efforts by politely murmuring pleasantries, shaking her head when offered the papers and stating she couldn't read. She told us, eyes lowered, that she had only finished the third grade in elementary school. Her family was from the country, she continued, and we must both forgive her ignorance—a lie, as I knew her family had been selling in the city market for generations. “I know very little. I know almost nothing” she kept repeating (*Sé muy poquito. No sé casi nada*). She lamented the fact that her husband was away and implied and flat-out stated that she was only an ignorant woman. The inspector left frustrated, with the vague assurance that maybe one of the *cholas'* children would pay him a visit sometime, but that this couldn't help much as they in turn knew next to nothing of her poor business dealings, which were truly insignificant.

When I left Cochabamba almost a year later, this *chola* was still listed under the city's informal tax system, so the ploy I described here at the very least gave her some breathing room to prepare a better defense against the city's tax collectors. What I find fascinating about the exchange I have portrayed here is that the *chola*, despite her superior business acumen, feigned

ignorance and claimed the lack of formal schooling that is associated with women of indigenous heritage. In a manner reminiscent of what the school teachers told rural children whose native tongue was Quechua, this *chola* used the same language of ignorance and inability to learn and acquire an education to parry attacks from the municipal inspector and protect her family's interests, thus subverting the discourse that kept her and other *chololas* in a subordinate position. In fact, I witnessed many other instances in which other *chola* women at the markets also used this same tactic to appeal to government representatives and their obligation to protect and look after the less privileged, all of which took place in situations of conflict or crisis where the *chololas* were attempting to keep or acquire economic power.

As tempting as it is to dwell on these stories of agency and empowerment, especially after exploring the damage that can be done to school age children's self-esteem with these same discourses, it is important not to forget that the *chola* women are also very much aware of the upper-hand held by Spanish and formal education in their societal scale of values. *Chola* market women can turn derogatory and even insulting labels such as ignorance in their favor when it comes to their own power negotiations, but they insist on sending their children to acquire a higher education degree as they know that this is one of the few paths available for upper mobility in Bolivian society. In fact, with neoliberalism and new educational opportunities a majority of the members of the youngest generation in these *chola* families have received or are in the process of acquiring a degree in higher education, to the point where it could be deemed a defining characteristic of this population. Indeed, this confirms that the value given by society to the knowledge acquired in formal schooling continues to be greater than that of the *chola's* knowledge of the markets, just as the value given to Spanish continues to be greater than that

attributed to Quechua, based on long-standing racializing hierarchies of language and as seen on the following narratives on higher education.

Higher Education, Mobility and Public Space

The neoliberal structural reforms of the past two decades dramatically affected Bolivians as they drastically changed the face of the country's urban centers, the manner in which people made a living, the political apparatus, and the country's educational system. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Cochabamba's higher education system rushed to cash in on the demand for university and college training services for the youth that had flooded Bolivia's cities, to the point that the studies carried out ten years after the implementation of the Education Reform named Cochabamba a "university city." The rate of growth of these private universities was such that from 1994, when this reform was implemented, to 2005 the number of the private educational institutions in Cochabamba that awarded bachelor degrees had grown from two to eleven (Rodriguez Ostria 2009).

Around this time I worked as an adjunct instructor at one of these new private universities in Cochabamba. This was an exciting time to be in higher education as many of these blatantly for-profit institutions grew overnight, trying to outdo each other in infrastructure and the types of services they could offer their students. Part of my duties as an instructor required I join other adjuncts in delivering a series of recruiting lectures. I was asked to give a number of short teaching demonstrations to students in different high schools across the city that would be followed by the distribution of informational brochures on the university. I particularly remember my first such demonstration at a school a scarce five blocks north of the *Cancha* or

informal outdoor market, located in an unadorned square brick construction that loomed over the residences lining the rest of the street.

At this school, I expected to teach to young women and men whose mothers probably lived in the area or sold in the informal markets for a living. Instead, I was surprised to learn that the students were commuting to this part of town from some of the squatter settlements or marginal neighborhoods where recent rural immigrants with few or no financial resources lived. When I asked these students why they were waking up at five in the morning in order to attempt the two hour walk it took them to get from the other end of the city to school, they replied that their neighborhood didn't have any high schools yet. Or that their parents thought or knew that the schools in their neighborhood were no good. One student stated that the one high school in his neighborhood was funded by educational reform funds from the Ministry of Education, and was thus teaching a class in Quechua. Echoing the conversations I had held with the *chola* market women, this student's parents did not approve these teaching methods as they wanted him to learn in a way that would be useful to him in their new city life. All the students I questioned agreed that they enrolled in the particular school where I gave the teaching demonstration because it provided a better education than those near their homes.

As my visits to different high schools throughout the city progressed, I noted that a common denominator was that the students enrolled in each school almost never came from the neighborhood in which it was located. That is, despite the laws that stated that this should be the case, these young women and men very rarely attended the school near their home. In fact, the teachers at the high schools told stories of parents who went to great lengths to pay bribes and transfer fees while filling out and presenting endless paperwork at the Ministry of Education's district offices. Informal conversations with parents and students revealed that the efforts to place

children in a school, any school that was considered even marginally better than the one assigned to them and that could thus afford them some social mobility—no matter how scant—was the main criterion for choosing where children would be educated and where the parents would pay tuition. Indeed, the movement between school and home was such that op ed pieces in the local newspaper ran articles at the beginning of each school year cautioning motorists and parents alike on the increase of both pedestrian and automobile traffic as thousands of children underwent grueling commutes across town (Los Tiempos 2008a). Students walked, took two or three different buses or were driven by their parents in the hope of achieving any marginal improvement to their lot and ascending or even moving laterally within the social hierarchy.

Education within a neoliberal context is meant to be a great equalizer where the supply and demand of instruction goes hand in hand with class formation and mobility. Within this system, the more selective and expensive the educational services, the greater the acquisition of social capital and the higher the place in the class hierarchy that the individual can aspire to (Rutz & Balkan 2009: 14). Bolivians certainly subscribe to this notion of upward mobility through education and the *chola* market women in Cochabamba have sunk their earnings in the schooling of their children for generations in efforts to attain this change in status. However, contrary to what one might think should be the case, the increase in their fortunes brought about by economic restructuring did not necessarily see these women all flocking to place their children in the most expensive private schools. Through interviews and conversations, I found that these market women are diversifying or branching out when it comes to where their children attend school. In other words, within the same family where the mother worked in the market stalls, one could find a child enrolled in a private elite school, including the extravagantly-priced international school that only taught classes in English and that in the past had catered only to the

upper classes²³. This same *cholas*' second child could be attending a good public school close to the market so that he or she could help at the vending stalls or with household chores. A third and popular option was the enrolment of a child in night school so that she—and in all cases where I saw this option taken the child was a girl—could dedicate all of her energies to learning her mother's trade.

The two most decisive criteria that determined where a child would attend school that would eventually also define where he or she would go to college and whether he or she would go into trade, were based first on the abilities of each individual daughter or son vis. a vis. informal vending and academic learning, and second based on their gender, given that only girls were expected to become full-time *chola* vendors and inherit their mother's business. The *cholas*' strategy in overcoming society's barriers to their upward mobility was to send different children or members of the family on different paths to achieve this goal, further contributing to my image of *cholas* and their descendants as unevenly scattered throughout the different levels of the social ladder. The following excerpt from an interview with a market *chola* who had three children whom she had sent to different universities based on the two criteria I have defined illustrates this strategy. This *cholas*' case was fairly typical compared to the responses I collected from her peers on the same topic. In this segment, she describes where her three children are acquiring or will acquire their higher education as well as her views on the different skills that they possess:

²³ Tuition at this international school was paid in US dollars and cost, on average, \$400.00 per student monthly, in a country where a majority of the population was making less than half of that amount to feed a family of four.

“Interviewer (I): Where do your daughters study?

Chola (C): One goes to the State University, she is studying Economics.... The other, she finished already, she’s an attorney, has her own law firm, you know? She went to the expensive, to the Catholic University. I paid a lot of money for that one.

I: Where does your daughter want to work when she finishes studying (Economics)?

C: She’ll come... She already works with me. She makes good money. She has her own stalls in the market and everything.

I: So she won’t work in an office like...

C: Like the other one? No!! She’s canchera (of the Cancha)!! This one, she can sell stones. Since she was little, she was like that, she knew the market well.

I: And your son?

C: The boy..., boys have to study. He will go to university, to [a] private one. God only knows what he will want. No one knows. The boys need more expensive universities than the girls.

I: Why?

C: Because he can’t work in the market. He needs to find a wife, go to a good school...

I: But he already helps you in the market. Couldn’t he keep helping you?

C: Boys don’t know the market like girls know the market. We are *cholas*, *chola* women. The market is only for women.... The other one, my daughter the attorney. She doesn’t know the market which is too bad. But good too. Then I can give all my market business to the one who knows. It’s very clear. It’s easy.”²⁴

Though this woman describes the division of her children into different tracks as clear and simple, her answers reflect a system that is complex, messy and where the *cholas* are faced with a class barrier that, until recently, was nigh insurmountable. Because of this, *cholas* have

²⁴ “Entrevistadora (E): *¿Dónde estudian tus hijas?*

Chola (C): Una va a la Estatal, está estudiando Economía... La otrita, ha acabado ya, es abogada, tiene su propio bufete, ¿no ve? Fue a la cara, este, a la Católica. He pagado harta platita para esa.

I: *¿Dónde quiere trabajar tu hija cuando acabe de estudiar (Economía)?*

C: *Va a venir pues... Ya trabaja conmigo. Se gana biencito. Tiene sus propios puestos y todo.*

I: *Así que no va a trabajar en oficina ...*

C: *¿Como la otrita? No!! Es pues canchera!! Estita, puede vender piedras. Desde chiquita era así, sabía bien el mercado.*

I: *¿Y tu hijo?*

C: *El chico..., los chicos tienen que estudiar pues. Va a ir a la universidad. A la privada. Mamita, solo Dios sabe lo que va a querer. Nadie sabe. Los hombrecitos necesitan universidades bien caras, más caro que las chicas.*

I: *¿Por qué?*

C: *Porque no puede trabajar en el mercado. Necesita mujer, necesita buena universidad...*

I: *Pero ya te ayuda en el mercado. ¿No te puede seguir ayudando?*

C: *Los chicos no saben el mercado, las chicas saben. Somos pues cholas, mujeres. El mercado es solo para mujeres... La otra, mi hija abogada. Ella no conoce el mercado, una pena pues. Pero bien también. Entonces a la otra que sabe le doy todo mi negocio. Es bien clarito. Es fácil.”*

maximized their options given that they set up their children onto as many paths as possible to ensure the success of at least one child in attaining mobility into the “white” middle class. This neat partitioning of children onto different tracks is reminiscent of the manner in which the Bolivian elites would also groom their children for positions in the clergy or in politics in the nineteenth century given that the firstborn child would inherit and run the landed estates of the family (Medinaceli and Mendieta 1997; Rossells 2001). This would not be the first time that *cholas* and the *chola* class had emulated the ruling elite’s customs, and that the *cholas* could appropriate and mold this practice to serve as a strategy to maximize their chances at mobility is not too far-fetched an assumption.

In the case of the *chola* whose words I cite, the child with the greatest likelihood to follow an educational trajectory that will set him up as part of the city’s professional middle class is her son and is why she plans to have him attend an expensive private university. At the same time she has noted her younger daughter’s market savvy and expects her to join the ranks of the *chola* class when she takes over her mother’s business, so this girl has only gone to the public state school. Aside from the notion of multiple tracks to guarantee different levels of success, there is also a strong gender structure behind this setup, which is made clear by the *cholas*’ statement that “the informal market is only for women” which implies that her son cannot go into trade, and by her regret that her older daughter has no sense for commerce and therefore had to follow a career path away from the market that cost her the expense of sending her to a good school so she could become a lawyer.

In the following weeks, I was able to contact this *chola*’s children and interview them about their schooling. The attorney daughter, whom I contacted first, set our first appointment at a fashionable café in the upscale business district of the city, in the same building as a posh five-

star hotel. When we met, I was struck by her poise, expensive business suit, and talk about her trips to Brazil to visit college friends and plans to purchase an apartment in the upscale area where our meeting took place. She insisted on paying and on contacting her younger sister on her cell phone and making an appointment for us the following week, in the same café. When I met the younger sister, I was struck by the differences with her sibling as she impatiently smoked while answering my questions and was visibly relieved when we left and even brightened when I asked to make our next interview appointment at her stalls in the marketplace. Later she would confess that her sister was “distanced” from the markets and from the family, and that she kept asking her to join her for outings in places similar to the fashionable café where we met first. She explained that she had started to refuse these invitations as her sister’s friends made her feel uncomfortable, given her line of work, despite the fact that she made much more money than any of them.

These tensions and awkward relations due to different paths in mobility were not unique to this family. Neither was the fact that the younger sister in this story felt distinctly uncomfortable in what Donna Goldstein has named “naturalized public spaces” belonging to the middle and the upper classes where the poor working class feel unwanted and do not know how to act and behave (2003: 92). In fact, I came to know many other similar cases in which the market *cholas* were excluded from entire portions of their children’s lives as these took place in upper class spaces where they felt uncomfortable and unwanted. Goldstein says that elites describe these situations as different social actors “knowing their place” in the social spectrum (ibid). The *cholas* certainly seemed to know their “place” as it was very rare to see them in any of these upper class public venues that some of their children would have access to. Moreover, I was surprised to see that the *cholas* themselves on many occasions kept their professional

daughters and their families from visiting them at the informal market. On one specific case, a *chola* woman proudly told me how her son's daughters had never set foot in the *Cancha* and that she only saw them when she went to visit them at their home. She explained that she had told her son to never bring them as the dust and dirt of the market were especially bad for young children, and they could get sick. That this *chola* was using racializing discourses of dirt and pollution to justify why her upwardly mobile son and his family should not visit the informal marketplace points to the permanence of these discourses and these social frames.

Cholas throughout the market had children, goddaughters, cousins, nieces and nephews and countless relatives and kin that had varying degrees of schooling and would end up at different points of the social scale and attain differing levels of mobility. The differences were mainly between those who had left the informal markets and moved onto other spaces and those who remained, and I observed that this division began very early on as *cholas* were constantly noting whether very small girls had inherited the *chola* business sense or not in order to groom those girls to one day inherit the family business. I would repeatedly hear stories of successful *cholas* who had been particularly bright and inquisitive since they were infants (*despierta*), had enjoyed following their mothers and the other market women, and ran errands within the market as soon as they were able to walk. This inheritance passed down the female line only, effectively provided for a way for young *chola* women to make a living, while pushing young men out into the city's working and professional classes. Once the *cholas'* children achieved upward mobility, it was expected that they would distance themselves from the markets to the point where family relations and closeness would suffer. It seemed that once you crossed the barriers of class and achieved a much yearned for distance, the journey back could only lead down the slippery slope of downward mobility and was to be avoided at all costs.

The mobility of the *chola* class can also be interrupted or blocked despite the appearance of a constant flow of people across class barriers. Bolivia's literature and history abound with examples of failed attempts at mobility, used as cautionary tales to keep people "in their assigned place" in the society. In the following paragraphs I first look at some of these examples of frustrated mobility from the immigrant population that is radically transforming the face of Cochabamba. I follow these stories with that of a young *chola* who completed her journey of upward mobility and who describes how she is faced with adapting to this new sphere and the limitations her new position brings compared to the freedoms of the *chola* class.

***Cholas* and New Immigrants: the Intricacies of Class Racism in Cochabamba**

A consequence of neoliberal economic reforms that has affected *cholas'* lives and that I discussed in the previous chapter in terms of its effects on the physical marketscape is the demographic explosion in Bolivia's urban centers caused by recent waves of rural migration. For market *cholas* in particular, these new populations of city settlers have become a danger to their unique middle class slot given that these immigrants threaten the dual indigenous and entrepreneurial identity of Cochabamba's *cholas* because they look, speak and act more indigenous than the *cholas*, while also making important inroads in local and regional trade. In other words, they are also striving to claim the *chola* class status that is held by these vendors who have sold in the informal market for generations. For these recent immigrants, the path to social mobility can be very swift once they arrive in the cities given the myriad changes brought about by new economic policies, including easy access to education and continuing opportunities in trade (Antequera 2007). At the same time, it is this speed in status change that has made

cholas in Cochabamba place roadblocks in the path of these new arrivals, in order to continue exercising their hold on regional commerce.

There is great heterogeneity amongst *cholas* in the markets from trade moguls who can easily control the regional reins of distribution of different goods and products to market women who peddle just enough merchandise to guarantee food on the table for that day. This hand-to-mouth existence seems to be the norm for many of the recent immigrants who enter Cochabamba's informal market as there are few other options left for these former peasants and miners to make a living given their lack of employable skills in the urban formal sector (Blanes 2007). Nevertheless, a sizeable minority of these recent immigrants arrive with substantial capital that they invest in establishing businesses that rival those of the local *cholas*. I detail a conflict between some of these newly-arrived wealthy *cholas* and their established counterparts in the chapter following this one. Here, I wish to look at the majority of women and men who arrive in the markets with little or no money, or with money and little in the way of contacts or business networks, and who depend on the *cholas* of the marketplace to find some means to make a living. These stories illustrate the conflicts in power and the intricacies of the racial-based hierarchies between established *cholas* and recent immigrants who wish to claim a place in the informal market.

In my fieldwork, most if not all of my initial contacts in the markets were established *cholas* on the wealthy end of the spectrum whose daughters had attained a dramatic social mobility. Because of this, I accessed the stories of recent immigrant vendors indirectly through the more established successful *cholas* and the relations and contacts they had with this immigrant population. I came across stories from immigrants who expressed their gratitude and indebtedness to the successful *cholas* who were making it possible for these immigrants to find

their way and make an income in their new lives. On the other hand, I heard equally numerous stories complaining of the obstacles and restrictions imposed by *chololas* on recent immigrants in order to maintain their hold on the informal markets.

In these conversations I came to know two sisters who had migrated to Cochabamba from the nearby province of Punata, one of whom had become the goddaughter of one of the *chololas* I followed for several weeks. These two young women represent both sides of these contrasting accounts. The youngest, who I call Margarita²⁵, was enthusiastic in her praise of her *chola* godmother. When I met her, Margarita had just entered into this relationship when a wealthy *chola* trader had agreed to sponsor Margarita's cake and party decorations for her *quinceañera* or fifteenth birthday party the year before. Thanks to her godmother's intervention, Margarita had started working pushing a small cart through parts of the market, selling locally-made vanilla and cinnamon ice cream for a *chola* who owned this business. Her godmother allowed her to leave the cart at the end of every day in one of her storage warehouses, free of charge. Margarita was excited as this would be the first time in over eleven years since her family had arrived in the city, where she had the possibility to save some money. Margarita had plans to invest this money in a small stall in the market selling candy and other sweets so all the profits she made could be her own. She had great expectations from the relationship with her godmother including being able to borrow starting capital, or asking her to pay for her studies, or having her pull strings to help Margarita purchase a stall in a good location. She was excited and generally felt that the sky was the limit now that she was under the protection of a *chola* trader.

When I met Margarita, she had to live with her sister, her brother-in-law and their two children in a tiny two-room home. Her sister, who I call Maria, had migrated to Cochabamba in

²⁵ In keeping with established ethical practices in anthropology, unless otherwise noted, all names used in this text to refer to the *chola* vendors or any other persons in the ethnographic vignettes are pseudonyms.

1988 as part of the government's relocation program of former mining employees after her husband lost his job when the state mining corporation was closed down. Like thousands in a similar situation, Maria's family received a compensation of around US\$3,000.00, a nice tidy sum with which, like many others, the family bought a car when they arrived in the city so her husband could work as a taxi driver. Maria explained how their initial excitement of moving to the city was tempered by finding that their strategy of purchasing a car was one also followed by hundreds of other immigrants to the point where the city streets were saturated with budding cab drivers jostling for fares. The car eventually broke down and they sold it for a fraction of what they spent to purchase it and her husband went through long periods of unemployment. In this situation, Maria expected to be able to step in with her expertise in the markets. She had owned and run a small store from their home in the rural town of Punata and considered herself as coming from a family well-versed in commerce. However, this possible source of income was stymied at every turn as Maria tried to unsuccessfully establish a vending space in the informal market.

Over a number of conversations, Maria explained how when she first set foot in the *Cancha* she knew next to nothing on the intricate arrangements required to acquire a market stall that included bribing municipal officers and establishing kin networks with some of the wealthier *cholas*, if even only to find where and when new stalls could become available for purchase or rent. She was appalled at the expense involved in leasing a space, including the fees required by the municipality for the right to squat on a piece of sidewalk for a few hours. After some consideration, she joined a group of about fifteen women who were in her same situation and who opted to collectively show off their wares and sit illegally on a stretch of street not far from the market. Maria bitterly told how the market *cholas* put an end to this initiative as they tipped

off the municipal inspectors and city police to close them down almost every day. These raids began with the police showing up and asking them to leave, but deteriorated into struggles where policemen would run to the stalls and begin throwing their merchandise on the ground for passersby and thieves to pick. When one of her fellow vendors was thrown in jail for an afternoon, Maria decided to stop trying to sell in the market. In any case she had barely made any sales in over three months as most of her efforts were spent eluding the police or attempting to lure customers over the insults hurled at her and her fellow squatters by the *cholas* who would send family members to walk by bad-mouthing these vendors and making disparaging remarks on their merchandise. These insults were based on the ethnic identity of Maria and her friends, who were called “dirty indian women” and told to go back to the rural towns where they belonged.

Maria was visibly upset at these events and told me that now that she was older all she wished was to make enough money to go back to her hometown in the country and retire. She was particularly upset and disappointed at the fact that she had not been able to continue her vending activities in the city. Over the years she even attempted to open up a store that sold a basic assortment of groceries from her home, but there were already two other women with similar businesses who met the needs of her neighborhood and, unfortunately, Maria’s house was at the end of a block that was set steeply uphill, which made it inconvenient for customers to seek her and her wares. When I visited, she waved at a faded sign advertising Sprite soft drinks painted over her outer wall, the only reminder she had of her failed attempts at vending. Several times over the course of my visits she noted that this was her only skill. She would regale me with tales of how she had treated her customers in Punata so well that they still remembered her and missed her store. She summarized her feelings stating that she had always been good at

selling things and her urge to trade would follow her until the day she died. These feelings echo ideas on vending held by established *chola* vendors I interviewed who also spoke of this as a physical *need* and who looked for these symptoms to decide which of their children would inherit their family business. In this, Maria and the *chol*as were of one mind, confirming the notion that for *chol*as and working class women in Bolivia more generally vending skills are intuitive and an inherited legacy rather than something that is learned.

Because of Maria's need to trade, I thought she would be pleased at her sister's good fortune in landing a vending job at the *Cancha* thanks to her relations with the *chol*as. However, she only sighed and hoped that Margarita's godmother could buffer the fierce competitiveness and the racism in the markets as, she noted, anyone arriving from the countryside was immediately discriminated against by the *chol*as who thought the markets belonged only to them. She also confided that she was troubled as her sister didn't have the vending instincts that she, Maria, had and was sure this would eventually lead to Margarita making mistakes. Maria's disparaging remarks on her sister's vending skills contrast with the opinion of Margarita's *chola* godmother. This woman told me she knew both sisters well and that she had opted to take the youngest under her wing as she was the one who had the makings of a vending *chola* in her. When I pointed out that Maria was the sister versed in vending, the *chola* retorted that this might be so but that Maria still spoke Spanish like a Quechua peasant, while Margarita had at least gone to school in the city and could better deal with customers in the market.

The reason why Margarita was chosen over Maria echoes a thread that is woven throughout this chapter. Namely that of language as a marker of class in which Spanish is valued over Quechua or other indigenous languages. Pierre Bourdieu has pointed to the importance of language in class power dynamics when he argues that by means of a "legitimate language" the

dominant classes establish a distance between themselves and the masses in order to set boundaries between the two (1991: 48). In Bolivia's case, despite or perhaps due to the efforts of the Educational Reform, Spanish has become this legitimate language, evidenced in Cochabamba by the fact that the teaching of Quechua has not been taken up in the region's urban schools. Further, whether it is spoken or not and whether the speaker speaks it in a grammatically-correct way, without an accent or without influences from indigenous languages, determines the speaker's place in society (Luykx 2003). *Cholas* have long been discriminated against by white middle class Bolivians because of their uneducated Spanish and have such a sensitized awareness to this phenomenon that they even use this characteristic to their advantage, as did the *chola* who wished to avoid an increase in her taxes earlier in the chapter. What Maria's story illustrates is that *cholas* are using the same obstacles to mobility that the upper classes routinely used against them for generations to now bar the way into the markets for more recent immigrants.

Maria's story of finding the informal market firmly closed to her based on her condition as a rural immigrant is by no means unique. The informal market has a distinct hierarchy that the *cholas* work very hard to maintain. The intimate relation they have with the local government apparatus that they have honed over the years, as well as their own vast kinship and family networks that cover almost every corner of the market stalls and their streets comprise a powerful system of surveillance through which the *cholas* control and negotiate the everyday workings of this gargantuan economic space. Within the milieu of the informal market, the fact that the *cholas* use language and education as markers of long-term residence in the city to act as a social barrier makes sense given their own experiences with social mobility and Bolivia's strict hierarchy. *Cholas* have long practice and experience with the process of social mobility and

many have achieved this objective through their children. In the following section I examine the story of a young woman from the *chola* class in Cochabamba's society whose journey of upward mobility ended successfully though at the cost of her freedom of movement within the city's class-marked public spaces.

Fine Lines: Liminality and Loss in Attempted Mobility

There are a number of young *cholitas* in Cochabamba who have successfully attained upward social mobility. However, there is also an equal number of both young and older *cholitas* who attempt this journey only to find their way blocked, or are even sent on a journey of downward mobility to lose their place in society. These stories of failed attempts have taken place for a very long time, and a good number have been immortalized in Bolivian literary works from the *costumbrista* period at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of these novels of customs and manners shared a common theme of economically successful *cholitas* who left their allotted place in society to attempt upward mobility emulating the upper classes. The stories invariably ended with these women being spurned by the upper echelons they attempted to break into, even after having "passed" as members of the white upper class for some time, and dwelt in detail on the ensuing humiliating discovery of their true nature. These novels have been the object of analysis of both literary critics and cultural studies scholars and are used to point to the unbending nature of the class and ethnic hierarchies of the time that continue to this day (Romero 1998; Soruco 2006; Stephenson 1999).

The plots of these stories vary little. A typical example of these is the novel *La Niña de sus Ojos* which loosely translates as "The Apple of her Eyes" by Antonio Diaz Villamil (1948). The novel centers on a sweet-tempered beautiful girl, daughter of a market *chola* and the apple

of her mother's eye, sent to a religious finishing school away from her family—and their influence—and thus afforded with an opportunity to mingle with the landed elites for some time. At boarding school, the young *chola* hides her origins and falls in love with the brother of one of her school friends. The young man returns her love but ends up rejecting her and taking back his marriage proposal when he finds her mother is a *chola*. Heartbroken, the heroine attempts to return to her mother's home and live as a *chola* herself. These attempts also fail as she finds she is completely out of place in a world that jars the sensibilities she acquired through her education and years of living with the upper classes. Most notably, the girl speaks a cultured Spanish and understands little or no Quechua, which also contribute to her feelings of alienation. Her circumstances lead to a series of awkward encounters in which the heroine feels herself unmoored and wandering in a liminal space where she has lost her bearings and her place in the world²⁶.

These literary records of the distance between classes in Bolivia and the liminal transition from one to the other remind me of some of the young *cholas* who attained social mobility that I had interviewed, particularly of the story of a young lawyer woman, daughter of *chola* parents. This young woman, whom I will call Jenny, finished law school at the elite Catholic University in Cochabamba, and married a young man whom she met there who belongs to the white middle class and whose parents own a liquor store. I contacted Jenny to arrange a formal interview as I saw her as a good example of someone who had achieved complete social mobility. She had been educated in a good school, held a university degree and had married up socially, and had enrolled her own daughters in an expensive private school where they rubbed elbows with the wealthy of Cochabamba. Jenny's family at the *Cancha* was very happy for her, and her *chola*

²⁶ For more details on the novels of mores of this time and how they affected the construction of *cholas* as liminal characters, see Sanjinés (2004).

mother expressed her pride in her educated daughter and her granddaughter's private school and their accomplishments in learning English.

Jenny, her husband and two daughters lived in a small apartment in his parent's backyard in the same building where the liquor store was located and that the family took turns running and staffing. Jenny's story told during the first visit I made to her home confirmed everything her mother said and frequently stressed how fortunate she felt of her many privileges. However, further visits disclosed that Jenny fretted and was frustrated with her newly-acquired "middle classness" as this implied that she was confined to being a stay-at-home mom responsible only for the care of her two little girls while her husband managed the household's economy. She explained her circumstances by describing how she had been politely but firmly banned from helping with the family store and her husband had frowned on her requests to work part-time in the city courts or seek employment of any type with her law degree.

For Jenny, becoming a stay-at-home mom was particularly hard as it went against the very grain of the *chola* identity and against the way Jenny had been raised with strong women role models who had been in charge of the household economy with their dealings in commerce. Jenny, though fully understanding her privileged position, felt that she had lost the freedom that also characterizes *cholas* and their dealings. She complained that crossing over to the white middle class had cost her mobility in the sense of being free to move within different public spaces and the freedom derived from earning her own income and not having to depend on her husband. Jenny was especially upset at the unfairness of her circumstances because her sisters-in-law were not only allowed to help out in the family store, but were establishing their own business selling cosmetics on the upper floor of the liquor shop, and busy with plans to build a side entrance to their vending venue. Jenny explained that, though no one had said this directly to

her face, her husband's family felt that Jenny's *chola* background placed her in a fragile position that was too close to the lower class status she had renounced, and that vending was an activity she should refrain from lest it call attention to her social origins.

Class status, it has been argued by Carolyn Steedman, is *felt* as emotions of resentment, frustration, or a general feeling of things lacking which explains why people make so many sacrifices to attain it and keep it (1987: 21). Jenny though frustrated and upset at the limitations that social mobility had created for her, was aware that all she could do was make personal sacrifices in order to preserve the much-desired status that she had finally achieved for herself and her family, no matter her disgruntlement. Jenny's sense of loss of freedom is different from the loss of place felt by the *chola* heroines in the novels of mores who attempted mobility and never achieved it. Nevertheless, something shared by Jenny—who gained middle class status—with these women whose middle class journeys were blocked was the sense of going through life in a liminal space, suspended between the *chola* and the middle class. She explained her unease in the following terms:

“My mother is happy and she and my [female] cousin handle our business... The last time I visited with her they didn't even ask for my opinion on their sales this year. In this way I don't feel good anymore when I visit, they speak among themselves and don't include me... On the other hand, when I want to talk to my sisters-in-law they don't understand me well because their friends... those of my husband's family, I don't know them like they do, since I was small, so I can't talk much. I go very little to my parent's house and I'm forced to go to my in-laws' and to my sister-in-law's homes. I don't feel comfortable here nor do I feel comfortable there. You've seen it. I almost don't leave the house.²⁷”

²⁷ “*Mi mami está feliz y ella y mi prima se ocupan del negocio.... La última vez que anduve de visita ya ni me consultaron como iban a hacer sus ventas este año. Entonces ya no me siento bien cuando voy a visitar, hablan entre ellas y no me incluyen.... Y más bien cuando quiero hablar con mis cuñadas, ellas tampoco me entienden bien porque sus amistades... las de la familia de mi marido, no las conozco bien desde que era chica, así que no tengo mucho que comentar. Ya voy muy poco donde mis papis, y donde mis suegros y cuñadas voy obligada. No me siento a gusto ni aquí ni allá. Ya has visto, casi no salgo de la casa.*”

Jenny feels uncomfortable and as if she doesn't belong in her mother's world of trade, nor in the middle class world of her husband's family where she has little in common with their friends who her husband knows since he was very young. In other conversations, Jenny added how her parents, her daughters and her husband all seemed to know their "place" in these relations, compared to her who felt as if she had no place at all (*no tengo lugar*). These feelings of misplacement and having no anchor are indeed similar to those of the heroine in the novel by Diaz Villamil I discussed here, yet different from the liminal characteristics of *cholas* before neoliberalism and the ensuing increase in class mobility in Cochabamba.

Jenny's mobility differs from earlier attempts portrayed in literature in that, first and most importantly, she *has* attained this upward move in society. What I find fascinating is that this success has hampered her freedom of movement and her attained privilege frustrates her as she finds that as a woman of the white middle classes she is now held down by many more constraints than her *chola* mother. The economic and political power wielded by *cholas* was lost to Jenny once the class barrier was crossed. Jenny's story and other similar stories of young *cholas* who had successfully attained upward mobility started me thinking whether it would be possible to maintain the freedoms and privileges of *cholas* when moving beyond the *chola* identity, a question that I address in the following two chapters as I tell the stories of *cholas'* inventiveness in negotiating and recreating their identity.

When anthropologist Linda Seligmann wrote about Bolivia's *cholas* before economic structural policies and their effects made social mobility much more widespread, she defined them as women who "mediate between those considered as indigenous and non-indigenous" and who of themselves were liminal characters "betwixt and between" the formal and informal markets, and between the upper and lower social classes (Seligmann 1989: 698). When

Seligmann mentioned these *chololas*, she was referring to their actions as a buffer zone between the indigenous majorities and the small upper class elite, as the markets were one of the few spaces where indigenous peasants were seen to freely mingle with upper class ladies, all of whom sought the *chololas* given that these market vendors were well-versed in Quechua and Spanish and adroitly handled both types of customers across cultural and class divides.

I argue that, currently, the mediating role of *chololas* is changing and even being left behind as recent changes in education and increases in migration have provided circumstances favorable for mobility including the journeys from rural to urban and those from an indigenous to a middle class white identity. The *chololas* in Cochabamba's market are once again acting as a buffer zone, but no longer as intermediaries between classes. Rather, the *chololas* are using their middle position to increase their economic power and advance their own mobility, oftentimes by interrupting or blocking the mobility from less privileged groups such as that of recent immigrants to the city.

Uneven Mobility and the Fantasy of Fluidity

A smoothly-flowing or fluid mobility across the social continuum is a fantasy that is part of a neoliberal doctrine and discourse (Mitchell 2004). Cochabamba's *chololas* have bought into this fantasy, as have many other subaltern populations the world over (Liechty 2003; Nutini 2002; Rutz and Balkan 2009). Nevertheless, and in a similar way to other parts of the globe, *chololas* in Cochabamba have also come to realize the elusive nature of mobility and the fact that old structures of inequity forged through centuries of racializing attitudes and behaviors cannot be overcome overnight. Throughout this chapter, I attempted to show how the implementation of neoliberal policies has created, through changes in the educational system and growth in rural to

urban migration, a complicated and fragmented context in which market *cholas* have increased their mobility to the point where many of the younger generation have achieved a new class status.

Quite often, these journeys are interrupted or blocked before they can conclude satisfactorily, or even when they reach the desired end they can leave *cholas* in a position where they find themselves on a liminal and transitory state where their “place” in society and family is awkward and uneasy and their freedom of movement is hampered. Despite the obstacles in their path and the constraints on their movements, *cholas* have a history and tradition of traversing seemingly impermeable borders in Bolivia’s class barrier. My argument that mobility for Cochabamba’s *chola* class is scattered or uneven is based on the fact that they are a heterogeneous and fluctuating group, and that this diversity within the group is what allows its members to attempt to break through class boundaries by very different paths and attain mobility in varying degrees. Indeed, market *cholas* take advantage of this heterogeneity and multiply and scatter its fragments further by sending their children on journeys to attain differing social statuses through multiple tracks based on their gender and skills, whether for the informal market or for professional work.

Education in Bolivia, which is one of the main paths to the mobility discussed in this chapter as well as one of the mainstays of the neoliberal fantasy of advancing through individual merit, is also fraught with ambivalence and contradictions that reflect a history in which it was used both as an instrument of repression and empowerment of Bolivia’s indigenous majority. In spite of the fact that the Educational Reform sought to reconcile these extremes through programs that valued indigenous languages, these programs failed to break entrenched racializing ideas. Proof of this is that the rural areas near Cochabamba continue to give a much

greater value to spoken and written Spanish. The *cholitas* of the markets of the city of this name, one of the few places where Quechua can be heard within the urban area, conceive this indigenous language as impractical and also view it as symbolic of a backward rural indigeneity. This could be observed in the case of the two immigrant sisters struggling to make their way in the city and enter the world of trade where a *chola* benefactress chose to sponsor the younger sister despite her older sibling's expertise in trade because she had attended school in the city and spoke good urban Spanish.

Social mobility for *chola* women and immigrants who wish to win a place in the informal markets is strongly shaped by class, race and other social experiences and, as such, they “need to be examined in the context of the other social relations in which people are embedded,” which are teased out in the stories of education and mobility narrated in these pages (Wharton and Thorne 1997: 657). The history of “class racism” or of a class structure based on ethnic identities that has shaped the lives of Cochabamba's *cholitas* for generations has made *chola* market women an exemplary group to explore the different paths to attain mobility in Bolivia (Balibar 2002: 214). What has changed for these women in the past two decades is that because they find themselves in a situation where their economic and political power are growing, achieving a white middle class status also leaves the privileges of being *chola* behind, as in the story of Jenny's case. This frustrated mobility, coupled with the many other scattered paths to the middle classes, improve our understanding of how *cholitas* are negotiating a place in the new Bolivia that will continue to deal with the problem of migration and the issues of education. The following chapters show new ways of being *chola* that are the result of the uneven mobility of this group in the youngest generation and evidence how they negotiate their dual indigenous and entrepreneurial identity.

CHAPTER FOUR
PLEATED POLITICS:
CONFLICTING DISCOURSES ON CLASS AND ETHNICITY IN THE
MARKETPLACE

Labels belong to interconnected histories ranging from the personal to the collective and from everyday, to artistic and academic practices that connect Europe and the Andes. Emerging from this complex discursive formation, a multiplicity of meanings can be uttered through the same word, at the same time – yet mostly only some of them get to be heard.

Marisol de la Cadena²⁸

This chapter builds on the argument presented in previous chapters that determined the links between the Bolivian state and the *chola* market women in Cochabamba through unions, shared control of market space with the local government, politics, and confrontations regarding citizenship rights—be it through the legal system or in street protests and mobilizations. The chapter further develops the last of these links by examining how discourses define the relationship between *cholitas* and the Bolivian state and construct social class. I carry out this exploration by means of ethnographic descriptions of two situations of conflict I observed in Cochabamba’s marketplace. The first contestation took place between a group of market *cholitas* who have ruled Cochabamba’s vending spaces for generations and a group of recent rural immigrant women who wish to appropriate the *chola* position and gain control of the clothing market. Both groups of these market vendors are competing for the *chola* category, as whoever owns it can also lay first claim to the indigenous component of the urban *chola* identity in Cochabamba.

²⁸ From “Are *Mestizos* Hybrids? The Conceptual Politics of Andean Identities” in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, 2005. pp. 261.

The second conflict I observed in the marketplace continues the discussion on the meanings of indigeneity and of language as an identity marker as I further analyze instances in which different *chola* vendors traded insults and words in everyday situations to negotiate their ethnic identity. I examine how ethnic labels such as “*india*,” *chola* and “*indígena*”—that in this particular order also represent a journey from more to less disadvantaged—are claimed by market women in Cochabamba through discourses on pollution and cleanliness that play off historical racializing labels of ignorance and civilization. Examining the conflicts in this chapter is important because who represents indigeneity has become critical in present day Bolivia given that this identity provides a shortcut to achieve citizenship by means of the indigenous nationalism embraced by the present administration. Whether claiming a *chola* class position or an indigenous identity, these flexible and culturally-loaded definitions can offer a multiplicity of meanings of which some are powerful, are heard, and affect the state, while others are silenced or ignored as affirmed by De la Cadena in the epigraph that opens this chapter.

There are two threads that will run throughout this chapter and these ethnographic narratives. One is that of the power held by words, language and discourses to construct both middle class and ethnic identities within Bolivia’s current political moment. The importance of the two conflicts I describe between different groups of *cholas* in Cochabamba’s marketplace lies in that they powerfully illustrate the tensions between the apparently opposed broader narratives of neoliberalism and indigenous nationalism in Bolivian politics. I argue, based on the ethnographic examples I present, that these ideologies are not necessarily at odds with each other despite their portrayal as opposites in *scholarly* literature and in official government statements.

The second thread that also helps pull the arguments of this chapter together is that of dress. I build on literature examining dress as identity performance and work on clothing as a

commodity within global markets. The first conflict where two different groups of *cholitas* are engaged in a battle to determine who will claim the *chola* class position is also fought over Cochabamba's clothing market as *chola* traders from both groups deal in this commodity. The second conflict amongst the market stalls is centered on labels that construct ethnic terms and I focus this discussion around the distinctive pleated skirt worn by *cholitas* and indigenous females called a *pollera*. This skirt is arguably the defining piece of apparel for both of these female identities, which is why this part of the chapter teases out the links between *polleras* and historical discourses of pollution and hygiene in Bolivia that have contributed to the construction of the current ethnic hierarchy.

I begin with a brief overview of the significance of the clothing industry and trade in Bolivia and its role in the current economy. I follow this with a conversation on dress as a class marker and as a type of vocabulary and how specific discourses have been used in the past to construct class and ethnic identity in the Andes and with subordinate groups. Both of these background sections also provide a brief summary of the role neoliberalism and indigenous nationalism play in the country's current politics and their role in creating and ratifying Bolivia's citizens at this moment. The next three sections provide ethnographic snapshots that describe how *cholitas* today manipulate words to construct markers of "middle classness" including hard work, hygiene and urbanity all within the conflict of the two groups of *cholitas* battling over the clothing market in Cochabamba. I conclude with a description of the state's involvement in processes where identity is construed through language and argue that a closer look can improve our understanding of how Bolivian citizenship is currently enacted and negotiated through the construction of ethnic and class identities in everyday practices (Poole 2004).

Cholas, Dress, and the Indigenous as Political

In Bolivia, clothing manufacture and sales have played a key role in the development of the economy and the informal marketplaces in highland urban centers, while at the same time preserving the ethnic identity of the women who trade in these spaces. These two aspects of clothing as both commodity and identity marker are discussed and unpacked in two distinct and burgeoning bodies of literature on the performative aspects of dress and on the capitalist consumption of garments. In the first conversation, the garb of Andean market women is read as a text through which this doubly-subordinate group—as both female and indigenous—has resisted exploitation and claimed a social space through and despite of their ethnic dress (Femenías 2007; Stephenson 1999; Weismantel 2001). Parallel to this discussion, the production and trade of clothing has been the subject of debate for economic anthropologists and sociologists who discuss its role in today's globalized world as part of the garment sweatshop industry, the tourist industry, or the illicit trade of used clothing (Maynard 2003; Tranberg-Hansen 2002; Zorn 2004).

The garb of Cochabamba's market *cholas* articulates these two conversations because it is both an important commodity and a cultural symbol for this merchant class. A passing review of the history of *chola* attire shows that it is a product of Spanish colonialism. In the eighteenth-century Andes, female attire defined class and ethnicity. As such, it became a means through which those who had mixed Spanish and indigenous blood could trick the caste-based system and ascend in social status. Indeed, after decades of miscegenation, skin color and physiognomy were no longer clear indicators of a person's ethnicity. What is now seen as characteristic *chola* dress was originally a copy of the garments of wealthy Spaniard women emulated as a means to

attain social mobility (Melendez 2008; Rossels 2001). Wealthy indigenous and *chola* women elicited a blurring of social boundaries through their dress that eventually resulted in the enactment of sumptuary laws to uphold rigid class barriers²⁹.



Figure 3: *Chola* woman in Cochabamba's market c. 1918. Courtesy of the Tambo Quirquincho Photographic Archive, La Paz, Bolivia.

After these laws were enacted, Spanish upper class women continued to improve and modify their dress while *cholitas* chose to keep the last permitted copy of European female fashion. What is particularly worthy of note in this story is the ironic fact that the dress that is

²⁹ Sumptuary laws were passed in colonial Spanish America to allegedly limit inordinate expenditures in apparel and dress accessories and help out household economies. However, in practice, they held for all but the elite Spanish stratum of this society (Ross 2008). In other words, women who were not Spaniards could not purchase and/or publicly wear expensive materials. These laws in what is now Bolivia, also specifically prohibited women who were not Spaniards from wearing distinctive elements of what was considered to be “Spanish” dress, such as certain types of head coverings, in order to define and better control the native population.

touted today as a political statement of resistance by the subaltern indigenous in Bolivia originated as an attempt to emulate the ruling elite (see Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 4: *Chola* vendor in Cochabamba's market. Note the similarity in dress with the historical picture in Figure 3.

The Bolivian republic continued to witness even stricter boundary-maintenance between social classes based on differences in dress until the advent of nationalism in the mid-twentieth century. This ideology espoused the need to eliminate ethnic difference in order for the nation to develop and progress (Sanjinés 2004). Bolivia's cities at this time were crowded with workers, miners and merchants who subscribed to the then ascendant leftist rhetoric that idealized the equality of classes. *Cholas* were powerful commercial players and active participants in this labor movement, but differed from the other sectors because they maintained their ethnic dress and took pride in their distinctive pleated skirts and dapper bowler and straw hats as trademarks of their class identity (Gill 1993). Indeed, as I have pointed out before, *cholas* at this time are

partly responsible for causing a Bourdieuan “shift” in the definition of what comprised the middle class in urban Bolivia as it expanded to also accommodate these women and their unorthodox ethnic markers in its ranks (1985: 728). Though many of Bolivia’s urban residents with indigenous roots acquired middle class status through wealth, assimilation, and the shedding of ethnic markers, *cholitas* created an alternative middle class space where their business knowhow and urban savvy blended effortlessly with their distinctive garb, language and indigenous customs (Velasco 2001).

The last two turbulent decades in Bolivia witnessed the implementation of a series of economic structural reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund and executed by governments espousing neoliberal politics. Starting in the early 1990s, *chola* businesses profited greatly from these reforms to promote the free market economy. Specifically, *chola* market women in Cochabamba were able to access small business loans when newly-formed credit unions offered microfinancing for business owners outside the formal sector. *Cholitas* had always moved and borrowed capital on a smaller scale from reciprocal kin networks. However, this new source of funding enabled many *cholitas* to expand their businesses or initiate new business projects due to the sudden availability of capital, thus creating an unprecedented growth in their fortunes (Rivero Adriázola 2007). In fact, *cholitas* quickly became the acknowledged darlings of development agencies and programs and were held up by these institutions as examples of native Andean entrepreneurs being incorporated into progress and the global economy.

Another economic structural reform that directly benefited *cholitas* at this time was the decline in government subsidies and price controls (Wanderley 2003). Able to dictate their own prices for imports in dry goods and non-perishables, *cholitas* who had worked these markets and made steady profits for decades, saw sudden jumps in their income that they quickly used to

reinvest in their business to the point where they cornered specific markets. *Cholas* in Cochabamba emerged at the dawn of the new millennium as the undisputed queens of what is known as the “family breadbasket” or a grouping of basic household goods such as wheat flour, rice, oil, and corn. These very successful businesswomen then reinvested their profits in other ventures such as real estate and market stall properties, as described in Chapter Two of this text, as well as in clothing manufacturing and sales, and cheap trade goods entering the country from neighboring Argentina or Brazil, or from China and the US via Chile’s ports.

Despite their tremendous economic success resulting from neoliberalism, the beginning of the twenty-first century found these market women also playing a crucial role in the social movements and anti-neoliberal protests that aided the electoral campaigns and eventual rise to power of current President Evo Morales at the end of 2005 (Laurie and Pozo 2006). This support of a diametrically opposite ideology is explained in part by the fact that market *cholas* continued to pursue economic and class advancement under changing circumstances. However, the main reason for the alignment of market *cholas* with a political movement that was discursively set against the policies that had benefitted them was that Morales’ party—the Movement to Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS)—promised to place power in the hands of Bolivia’s ethnic majorities who had suffered subordination and exploitation by the white elite for centuries.

Cholas in the markets have historically found themselves witnessing the effects of top-down policies that historically translated into forms of hardship for the lives of the indigenous majority (Medinacelli 1989). The recent advent of neoliberalism in Bolivia caused the closing of the state mining corporation and subsequent relocation of thousands of mining indigenous families, many of which made their way to Cochabamba. The retrenchment of state health,

transportation, and public housing services dealt a near-fatal blow to the economy of thousands of urban poor families in the city, many of which had direct dealings with the *cholitas* as customers, extended kin or neighbors. It was these detrimental effects of neoliberalism that sent droves of city neighborhood residents into the streets to joint protest marches that decried these policies and forced the national government to restore some of these services. These powerful rallies forced the government to give into the people's demands, and sowed the seeds for the rise of social justice movements and anti-neoliberal political parties such as those of Evo Morales (Assies 2003). *Cholitas* expressly supported these openly anti-neoliberal political campaigns as they historically count themselves as part of the oppressed indigenous multitude and have a trajectory for political activism (Gotkowitz 2000). Indeed, *cholitas* were staunch in their support of Morales and the MAS, funding parts of his campaign and attending and staffing protest marches and blockades that decried the ruthlessness of foreign-imposed economic policies. The *cholitas'* support was such that they were upheld as an exemplary of the indigenous identity politics movement and their image was displayed in MAS campaign posters representing the new indigenous nation that would bring a new era of social justice.

Grassroots social movements that promoted an identity politics based on an indigenous identity spread like a wildfire through the Andean nations in the early 2000s. It was at this time that Evo Morales and his Movement to Socialism became a force to be reckoned with as one of a number of "indigenous" political parties in Bolivia that rose from the ashes of traditional elite parties. The old oligarchic parties betrayed the confidence of the public and were accused of allowing the Bolivian people to suffer from the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the retreat of the state caused by neoliberalism (Postero 2007). Ironically, the new indigenous parties rose to power thanks to neoliberal regulations that created political spaces for indigenous

movements through multicultural policies, a trend that was also followed in other Andean nations. All of these different movements were, at least on the surface, very similar in their demands for full citizenship for indigenous peoples, an increase in self-representation and greater valuing of indigenous forms of knowledge and worldviews (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Postero and Zamosc 2004; Van de Cott 2008).

Cochabamba's *cholas* played an important part throughout these identity politics processes in Bolivia. Today, the *chola* market women's claim to their unique class position is being contested by a group of recent arrivals to this city and marketplace who share many of the same indigenous and entrepreneurial characteristics as these established market vendors. In the following paragraphs, I further explain the interactions between two contemporary groups of clothing vendors who coexist in Cochabamba's marketplace. One is comprised of powerful *cholas* who have traded in these markets for several generations and now deal in the production and sale of inexpensive clothing. The other is a group of no less successful *chola* who deal in used-clothes contraband. Their conflict sheds light on the importance of rhetoric in the region's political and economic power struggles.

Words as Weapons: *Chola* Adversaries in the Marketplace

Cochabamba's modern... culture, in short, was deeply marked by the idea that words had the power to harm.

*Laura Gotkowitz*³⁰

Words deployed as insults or labels have always been used to claim or award power in Cochabamba and, more generally, in Andean marketplaces. *Cholas* are a disadvantaged population, despised for their indigeneity while simultaneously envied for their economic

³⁰ From "Trading Insults: Honor, Violence and the Gendered Culture of Commerce in Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1870s-1950s" in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83(1), February 2003. pp. 85.

success. Because of this marginality, they have made an art of manipulating words to gain economic, social and political advantage. Indeed, *chololas* have used words as a tool in different public settings and in their continued struggle for recognition and upward mobility. Historian Laura Gotkowitz's work evidences how *chololas* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries filed slander suits against other *chololas* and middle class residents of the Cochabamba region in order to negotiate local conceptions of honor, race and class status (2003: 96). Ethnographic studies of *chololas* in the marketplaces of Cuzco and La Paz have shown how these women use insults linked with sexual misconduct and wealth to disrupt the dominant racial order in Peruvian and Bolivian society (Buechler 1997; De la Cadena 2000; Seligmann 2003). Yet other work on Cochabamba describes how *chololas* deployed insults in protest marches and social movements to force a reaction from local and national government officials (Laurie and Pozo 2006); or shows how name-calling and a witty tongue can be used to gain power when employed by *chola* women and men in clientelist relations within the political party structure in modern day Cochabamba (Albro 2005).

In the following paragraphs I first concentrate on the struggle for power and the battles fought with words by two groups of *chololas* in Cochabamba's marketplaces who deal in the clothing trade. The ammunition of both sides is spent through statements in the mass media and the circulation of gossip and rumors within the markets. The mission of both groups of combatants is twofold: to be able to lay exclusive claim to the *chola* class status and thus to a place within Bolivia's new indigenous nationalism, and to corner Cochabamba's clothing market. The contenders in the first group are *chola* vendors who own small businesses and sweatshops manufacturing and selling clothes.



Figure 5: "Established" *chola* sewing a pleated skirt in her home sweatshop.

The second group is comprised of recent immigrants to the city who specialize in selling used clothes that are smuggled into the country and are part of a global clothing trade network. To forestall confusion between these two similar groups of clothing merchants, I have named the first group the “established *cholas*” and their immigrant competition the “emergent *cholas*” (see Figures 5 and 6).

Inexpensive clothing has become a burgeoning business that moves millions of dollars in Bolivia’s economy in the twenty-first century. The established *cholas* are comprised of women who have traded in clothes within this marketplace for generations and whose grandmothers helped create the unique middle class *chola* category. These women play a major role in local

clothes production for sale both in national and neighboring international markets. Additionally, they have a monopoly on the city's *chola* garment industry. That is, the sweatshops they run manufacture and sell both inexpensive Western style clothes as well as the distinctive ethnic dress that marks the *chola* identity. Their merchandise is sold in a number of small stalls scattered along the breadth and length of the marketplace run by these ubiquitous women or their family members. These "established *chololas*" are carefully organized under a number of unions, where each union represents anywhere between a dozen and over a hundred clothing market stalls grouped according to their street location. All of these unions are members of the nationwide Committee in Defense of National Industry (*Comité de Defensa de la Industria Nacional*, CODEINA).

The established *chololas* under CODEINA held the undisputed monopoly over the production and distribution of inexpensive clothing for the past half century, until global trade networks that deal in used clothes reached Bolivia in the late 1980s. The "emergent *chololas*" of this story introduced used clothes into the Cochabamba market and, in a relatively short time, seriously threatened their established counterparts. The emergent *chololas* are composed of a number of indigenous families who migrated to the city of Cochabamba in the past twenty years from the neighboring mining region of Oruro. These families arrived in the city as part of the state's relocation efforts after a series of reforms shut down and privatized the national tin mining industry in which they worked. The immigrants sunk what compensation and layoff wages they were able to obtain into the then nascent market of used clothes, quickly creating a monopoly for former-miner families from their region of the country. Drawing on a vast network of family and fictive kin ties to smuggle, transport and sell used clothes from the developed

world, these fairly recent arrivals have established what has become the fastest growing sector of the local clothing business.



Figure 6: "Emergent" *chola* at her used-clothes market stall. She is posing sitting on a bale of used-clothes.

Though very powerful economically and plugged into a vast international trade network to the point where they threaten the established *cholas* and their businesses, these emergent *cholas* are still a relatively small group compared to that of the established clothing vendors. They are also organized under unions based on numbers of vending stalls.

Because garment manufacturing and sales permit fees are an important source of state revenue, the Bolivian government is very interested in Cochabamba's clothing trade. This importance is reflected in the fact that the state began a systematic program in 2007 to regulate

the informal clothing market, help the established *cholitas* in this story, and protect its fees by passing laws to tighten the punishments for dealing in used clothes and end their contraband especially given that these smuggled goods paid no taxes. These state efforts resulted in the public face-off of clothing manufacturers and used-clothes vendors or between established and emergent *cholitas*. These confrontations have taken place with street demonstrations, press statements and media appearances passionately defending either the enactment or annulment of this law and attempting to devalue the other group's claim to the *chola* middle class (Los Tiempos Newspaper 2008b; 2008c; 2008d).

Matters become complicated when we take a closer look at the identity markers through which both established and emergent *cholitas* claim this position. Indeed, both women wear the distinctive pleated skirts and flounced blouses that are considered the hallmarks of ethnic *chola* dress and both speak the Quechua indigenous language. More to the point, both sides in this conflict also represent entrepreneurship through their business activities. Thus, since both groups of *cholitas* can claim the dual indigenous/entrepreneurial identity, this situation has forced both groups to fall back on fighting over the middle class component of the *chola* identity. In this way, this conflict very quickly became defined by the *cholitas* using insults and name-calling to manipulate and appropriate middle class markers such as hygiene, hard work and education for their group or to deny them for their opponents. These markers are part of what is considered a "shared system of cultural meanings" in society and, as the following paragraphs demonstrate, both groups struggle to prove that their members are representatives of the particular meanings of what constitutes the *chola* middle class in their Bolivian city (Frykman and Löfgren 1987: 7).

Emergent *Cholas*: Hard Work Ethics and Claims to the Middle Class

On a recent sunny winter morning, *cochabambinos*, were treated to the not unusual sight of a group of protestors, bearing banners and chanting slogans, slowly winding their way around their main square to end before the governor's office, or prefecture. As the protestors bunched together, their signs read "Long Live Used Clothes that Give Employment to Bolivians!" and "President Evo Morales, Don't Take Away our Source of Income³¹." With these signs, the protestors pointed to the fact that used clothes sales, though the merchandise is smuggled into the country, provide work for hundreds of families. They also sought to disprove the circulating rumor that their sector was pushing the national petty clothing industry into bankruptcy, reasoning that there was no such business given that the majority of new clothes were imported. A sign that read "New Clothes are NOT of National Manufacture: They are Chilean, Colombian, Brazilian, Argentinean, Chinese and Peruvian. What Do You Complain About?!³²" made this point. The remaining signs for the fifty or so women protestors had slogans touting the hard work of their vending sector. Indeed, the woman leading the march held a sign proclaiming: "People of Cochabamba: Support Our Hard Work. These Clothes are for Both Rich and Poor³³." With this last statement, these vendors argued that the items they sold were a wonderful class equalizer as people from every socioeconomic background purchased their merchandise. Coupled with their claim to unacknowledged hard work—a plight familiar to most Bolivians—the protestors drew on the sympathy of most onlookers who clapped as these market women marched by.

³¹ "¡Que Viva la Ropa a Medio Uso que da Empleo a los Bolivianos!" and "Presidente Evo Morales, No Nos Quite Nuestra Fuente de Trabajo."

³² "La Ropa Nueva NO es Solo Producción Nacional, Pues la Gran Parte es Chilena, Colombiana, Brasileira, Argentina, China y Peruana. ¡De Qué Se Quejan!"

³³ "Pueblo de Cochabamba, Apoyen Nuestro Duro Trabajo. Esta Ropa es de Ricos y Pobres."

The protestors ended their demonstration by burning a bundle of used clothes in the middle of the plaza to symbolize how the government was burning away their source of income with the laws restricting the entry of this merchandise into the country. The leaders of these emergent *cholas* who had headed this demonstration held megaphones and rendered impromptu statements to the local press while looking into cameras and recorders. They expressed their wish for the government to legalize their business due to the importance of used clothes as a source of income for thousands of unemployed immigrants in Cochabamba. Another argument that they emphasized time and again was that their sector held a strong work ethic evinced by the palpable business success of their members and the fact that the stalls and stores selling used clothes in the outdoor market were spacious, modern and the favorite shopping destination for people from every socioeconomic background. Indeed, these emergent *cholas* told impassioned anecdotes of the unstinting sacrifice and hard work of used clothes vendors that were not deterred by the many obstacles government regulations and a jealous competition had put in their path. They ended their statements by comparing their group with that of market women who sold or manufactured new clothes—the established *cholas* of this story—who they claimed were lazy and, consequently, made very little money and little or no contribution to the local economy.

The following weeks saw a strong reaction by the group of established *cholas* who wrote a series of letters to the local press and appeared in a handful of television appearances. The accusations by the used clothes vendors that their group was slothful seemed to have hit a nerve as little or no effort was given in the responses to address the activities of the used clothes saleswomen, their claims to generate employment and wealth, or even their illegality. Instead, the established *chola* manufacturers drew on their pride in having a long history of trade in the region, arguing that this reflected generations of hard working women who were proud to call

themselves *cholas* given that the name symbolized their business knowhow and the education they had all been able to provide for their children. They in turn accused the emergent *cholas* of being lazy upstart traders whose businesses would fail as easy gains would be easily lost when the used clothes “fad” was over. One of the established *chola* union leaders who appeared on a popular morning news show was so incensed she called the emergent *cholas* dealing in used clothes “filthy indians” who had no claim to the *chola* class as they were ignorant of city ways and the merchant trade. This last statement on the lack of hygiene and the general state of ignorance of the sellers of used clothes caused another flurry of impassioned press statements. The emergent *chola* camp gave a number of heated replies calling their adversaries dirty and uneducated. It was at this time, when *cholas* from both groups kept a constant series of attacks over the media and across the market stalls, that I sought market women from both bands in order to ask questions on these accusations.

Established *Cholas*: The Habitus of Hygiene and Pollution

The importance of the label of hygiene and filth to the construction of a middle class status in the social sciences in postcolonial settings has been firmly established and Cochabamba is no exception (Boddy 2007; Douglas 2002; Masquelier 2005). In an interview with a prominent clothing vendor from the established *chola* group, this woman related a story to me in order to punctuate why she believed that used clothes were a filthy business in both the literal and the abstract sense of the word. She narrated how one afternoon, while strolling through the marketplace, she had chanced upon a group of used clothes vendors who had opened a pressed bale of merchandise, fresh off the truck that had smuggled several of these packs from the frontier with Chile. Bales were being sold wholesale and one had been opened to show the type

and quality of clothes that had arrived. Curious, she had stepped up to take a closer look at this merchandise, and this is how she described what happened next:

Curious then, I picked up a blouse, but when I brought it near my face... I was surprised. Sniffing... that blouse was foul and smelled as if it had diseases, bugs. I dropped that blouse that minute! I didn't want to ever again touch those used clothes, I could get sick, don't you see?³⁴

This *chola* then explained that after hastily dropping the offending item, she had hurried home to disinfect her hands and any part of her own clothes that had touched the blouse. She concluded her anecdote by pointing out that the clothes that the secondhand traders brought into the country originated in the charity donations from hospitals and churches in the developed world. She stated that it was well known that these wealthy countries had developed a number of contagious diseases that were unfamiliar to Bolivians and that the clothes donated by hospitals had been worn by people who had these diseases and that used clothes bore these germs. I later heard the notion that used clothes bore foreign diseases and germs from a number of other market traders, who were quick to make the connection between filthy germ-ridden clothes with the immorality of the illegal trade which brought this merchandise into the markets.

The other side of the story was given to me by a union leader representative from the emergent *cholitas* who herself was a used clothes vendor. When I mentioned these circulating stories on the disease borne by used clothes, she invited me to visit her family stall on a morning when the municipality would be carrying out a fumigation of the premises, following the arrival of a large cargo of bales of used clothes. On that day, this woman kept pointing to the state-of-the-art equipment brought by the fumigators, who looked quite impressive in their uniformed

³⁴ “Curiosa pues, me he levantado una blusa, pero cuando la he acercado... Sorprendido estaba. Oliendo así, esa blusita hediondo era y olía como si tuviera enfermedades, bichos. ¡Ese ratito he dejado caer esa blusa! Nunca más he querido volver a tocar esas ropas usadas, me podía enfermar ¿no ve?”

overalls and bore large tanks of pesticide with which they sprayed chemicals throughout this vendor's store. The woman explained that the union of vendors on that particular stretch paid a fee to the municipality to carry out periodical fumigations in order to ascertain the absolute cleanliness and lack of any germs or bacteria in the products they offered for sale. She gave a detailed explanation of the fumigation that her merchandise underwent at different points in the journey from the developed world. Indeed, she insisted, how could clothes coming from the sterile environs of the developed world that had been sprayed and disinfected numerous times carry any dirt? She was hurt and upset at the accusations leveled by the established *cholas* and insisted that it was their dirty sweatshops that bred filth and ignorance.

The two stories described here show that hygiene and its opposite of filth and pollution are labels that have great power to cause harm. *Cholas* and market women in particular have been marked as dirty and bearing disease given their very public presence in a world where women's honor in the colonial and republican eras in the Andes was equated with the domestic space (Lavrin 1989; Moulineaux 2000). *Cholas* squatted in the markets outside the boundaries of propriety and developed a reputation for bearing male traits of strength and economic power. The recent conflict between established and emergent *chola* clothes vendors in Cochabamba is carried out with name calling and competing claims on sterile environments, hygiene, and cleanliness because of these deeply-rooted notions on pollution and cleanliness. Middle class in Bolivia has long been associated with the concept of "hygiene" where the opposite, at least in the context of the Andes, has represented "dirty" indigenous groups considered savage or uncivilized (Larson 2004: 26). Residing in the cities and excelling at business granted *cholas* a claim to a middle class identity. As both established and emergent *cholas* could claim the indigenous and entrepreneurial aspects of being *chola*, they ended fighting this identity over who could lay a

better claim to specific urban qualities that granted this particular type of “middle classness” in Cochabamba.

Urbanity, Entrepreneurship and State Opposition

There was one label or name that brought the altercation between the emergent and established *chola* groups to an impasse, and that was *educación*. This is not literally education as seen in the previous chapter, but rather describes a quality of refinement and culture in the older sense of the word. Established *cholitas* claimed that what distinguishes Cochabamba’s original *cholitas* from the recent arrivals or emergent *cholitas* is that the former have been urban dwellers for generations. As such, they have been educated at home in the nuances of city living that give them an added edge best described as urbanity. The established *cholitas* claimed this identity and successfully won many arguments over their recent immigrant competitors, the emergent *cholitas*, because their long term residence could not be contested. What’s noteworthy here is that the notion of urbanity is based on colonial discourses in which the rural was considered backward and more “indian”, while the cities represented progress, modernity and civilization, a notion introduced in the second chapter of this dissertation (Goldstein 2004). Indeed, it could be argued that the entire strategy of claiming the middle class component of the *chola* identity be it through hard work, hygiene or urbanity, was based on these “older” discourses on class before the advent of neoliberalism or Morales’ indigeneity. Given the nature of these discourses I was curious to see how Morales and his followers would handle this conflict, as *cholitas* from both sides repeatedly and very publicly called on the government to act as arbiter in these disputes.

My query was answered when a pause was made in the verbal hostilities between established and emergent *cholitas* when union leader representatives from both groups of market

women were summoned to a meeting with government officials from the Ministry of Finance to discuss the law on clothes trade that had created this conflict. I questioned union leaders from both sides upon their return from this meeting and was told how, to everyone's surprise, the state had been hostile to both contenders. *Chola* representatives from both sides had expected these state representatives to arbitrate their conflict and declare either side victorious, however, they were instead dealt sanctions by state officials who adamantly refused to name a clear winner. In fact, shortly after this meeting, the government made a series of press statements that began an anti-neoliberal media campaign in which *chololas* from both sectors were lumped together and strongly criticized for their role as capitalist entrepreneurs. *Chololas* from both groups were appalled as they had supported the Morales' campaign and continued to have strong ties to the current administration. However, it seems that the claims made by both groups to their middle class identity through hygiene, education and hard work only convinced the government of the importance to *chololas* of their entrepreneurial role, a feature that bears a strong negative connotation under present state policies and ideologies.

My point in narrating episodes from the conflict between established and emergent *chololas* has not been to see who is in the right or wrong or who is named the winner by the state. What is important here is that *chololas* from both groups have called on the state to arbitrate and provide the final ruling on these claims, which is striking given the *chololas'* history as a subaltern group that has consistently resisted and challenged state exploitation. Ultimately, my interest in examining these confrontations has been because I believe they are useful in showing us exactly how both groups use discourses on class as well as new political discourses to advance their own position in relation to the state. Though in the meeting I mention here between government officials and representatives from both *chola* groups, the weapons *chololas* had drawn for their

battle ended up hurting them with the government and its embraced ideology of indigenous nationalism, this meeting also showed that the MAS and its officials are paying attention to the discourses employed by groups such as *cholitas* who can claim indigeneity and a place in the new nation, precisely because these everyday practices are constructing citizenship from below. Perhaps, had the *cholitas* attempted to claim their place in the markets through their indigeneity instead of through their middle class, the results would have been different and the *cholitas* would have ended being praised by the MAS instead of being publicly labeled as in opposition to the state. In the following section, I leave the established and emergent *cholitas* to discuss the construction of ethnic identities within the markets by *cholitas* to explore whether approaching the construction of citizenship through indigeneity yields better results in forging ties to the state. I do this through a discussion on the construction of ethnicity through popular discourses.

From *chola* to *indígena*?: pleated skirts and new narratives of ethnicity

Strolling through the marketplace in Cochabamba, a friend and I were stopped by a crowd forming to listen to two women who were loudly screaming at each other. The first *chola*, who looked imposing in an expensive ankle-length pleated skirt, was accusing a younger woman of never cleaning after herself as evidenced by the trail of garbage around her stall. She wrinkled her nose and loudly told everyone something to the effect of, “This woman smells bad. She says she is decent. How can she be decent if no one taught her how to bathe properly?” The younger woman, who looked to own a small stall sporting infant clothes for sale retorted that the other *chola* could not know what decency entailed as she was just a “dirty indian recently arrived from

the countryside.” “My grandmother” she continued, “was a merchant in this market when your family was herding llamas. My family is educated and could teach yours manners.”³⁵

This narrative taken from my fieldnotes brings together many of the points I have discussed thus far. Being *chola* has to do with being a merchant and it also has to do with wearing the distinctive ethnic dress that includes a pleated skirt or *pollera*. In the shouting match between these two *cholitas*, both wore *polleras*, though I remember noting that the first woman’s skirt was made of more expensive materials, thus apparently giving her a higher status than the other *chola* who was standing behind her market stall. However, as in the conflict between the clothing *chola* vendors, the *chola* who had the last word was the one who was able to claim seniority in trade by virtue of the generations her family had spent selling in the urban markets, a fact that set her apart from other would-be *cholitas* who are recent immigrants and have no notion of city “manners” and customs. In this shouting match, both *cholitas* clearly equated filth with being *indian*, in keeping with the racialized colonial discourse that continues to affect constructions of class in Bolivia, despite more recent positive discourses on indigeneity.

Given that the *pollera* marks *indias* as well as *cholitas* as well as indigenous females, I treat it here as a “heteroglossic” label that can express multiple meanings simultaneously, though some are more powerful than others (De la Cadena 2005). As such, I argue, it can help better define these three messy, interconnected identities. Indeed, proof that the *pollera* is by far the most conspicuous and representative element of the *chola* dress is that a woman of the lower socioeconomic social classes in Bolivia is referred to as either *de pollera* or *de vestido*, meaning that she wears a pleated skirt or—though dark-skinned and with indigenous features—wears a regular skirt or Western dress (Nash 1993). I have seen a woman wearing an embroidered

³⁵ In this dialogue, I attempted to transcribe what the *cholitas* were saying as best I could while this altercation took place. Though I may have not copied their words verbatim, the general meaning of the statements was clear and is reflected in my description.

blouse, straw hat, apron, and even swinging a baby wrapped in a colourful indigenous textile over her shoulders pointed out to me as an example of someone who was no longer a *chola*. Conversely, a woman wearing a pleated skirt over a sweat pants two-piece is still very much a *chola*. As the most important marker of the *chola*'s ethnic and class identities, the pleated skirt has also been traditionally connected with images of dirt and pollution. The descriptions made of *cholitas* and their skirts as dirty and unhygienic by Bolivian elites have always referred to this lack of cleanliness not so much in an absolute sense, but rather in a moral sense where the physical contamination of these women reflects the social order that belittles them (Douglas 2002; Masquelier 2005; Van Vleet 2003).

During my sojourn through the open-air markets in Cochabamba, I heard clear examples of the continuing significance of the tie between dirt and a subordinate racial identity. Epithets of filth and stench were flung at *chola* women by upper class women and men, lower class women in Western dress, and by other *cholitas*, in circumstances that echo the battle of insults and name-calling held by the established and emergent *cholitas* in the sections preceding this one. However, the harshest insults on filth and disease were couched as stories on *polleras* represented as the perfect breeding place for lice and other types of bugs who hid and fed on the dirt collecting between these skirts' pleats and folds. Indeed, I was at one point told to steer away from *cholitas* and their "malodorous skirts"³⁶ that were never washed in spite of the fact that the vendors squatted in muddy public sidewalks all day. Lastly, the stories went, these voluminous skirts spread disease when the *cholitas* walked, as their sheer bulk ensured that they would brush against passersby, walls, and other surfaces that people touched.

The images conjured by the descriptions of women covered in dirt walking through the markets in ponderous skirts and leaving illness and disorder in their wake are obviously far from

³⁶ "Polleras malolientes."

actual reality and easily disabused. However, the power of these portrayals lies in their symbolic ability to demean *cholitas* and keep them from attaining upward mobility. Clearly, there continues to be a clear link between the unclean and therefore uncivilized nature of *chola* vendors and the use of the pleated skirt that “comprises the idea of servitude and ignorance deeply rooted in Bolivian society, which is why many... advocated for the disappearance of these skirts, as they were thought to be a cause for Bolivia’s lack of progress.” (Rossells 2001: 281). However, despite these representations, there is another side that shows *polleras* as a fashion designer’s dream that signal pride and confidence by their wearers, such as the *polleras* that are worn on special occasions or for religious festivities. These skirts are displayed in thick, richly-embroidered materials, boasting lacework and shining appliqués on top of the pleats and around their hem. These expensive versions of the pleated skirt also clothe images of smiling *cholitas* gazing back from pictures in which they are shown attending political rallies, dancing with President Evo Morales, or giving speeches to an audience of other *cholitas* dressed in *polleras* and men who wear some marker of indigeneity such as a wool cap or poncho. In these images, the women who wear the *polleras* are no longer the filthy indians in the marketplace, but the indigenous citizens in the new nationalist era ushered by the Morales administration.

The role of the *pollera* apparently continues to be key in strategies of ethnic representation whether to discriminate against the women who wear them for being *indian* or to applaud the indigeneity of their bearers. However, when I asked *chola* friends on how they thought the *pollera* defined indigeneity, this query disclosed a surprising point. *Cholitas* told me how the *pollera* was indeed critical in defining who belonged to the *chola* position, but they didn’t seem to think you had to wear a *pollera* to consider yourself indigenous. To prove this, they pointed to women who moved in their circles and carried out trading who attended the

Movement to Socialism (MAS) political rallies, held MAS membership—as proven by their MAS party identification card—and did *not* wear a pleated skirt. When I then asked if these indigenous women who no longer wore *polleras* were no longer *cholas*, my question was met with a thoughtful silence. Some *cholas* said yes while others denied this possibility. In the end, a consensus was reached when one told me I should go and ask these indigenous women if they still considered themselves to be *cholas*. What this answer suggests is that indigeneity might be a matter of self-identification that, unlike the *india* and *chola* identities, doesn't depend on visible markers such as dress.

These questions on the meaning of indigeneity also reminded me of a time when I had been confused by a woman I met in the market who was hidden behind several sacks of rice and who spoke to customers by climbing a ladder and addressing them by poking her head on top of her merchandise. Because I was not able to spot her *pollera*, I had hesitated upon meeting her on whether to address her as “ma'am” (*señora*) or as *casera*, a term used to address market *chola* vendors. I don't know whether the woman crafted this ambiguity on purpose, but I suspect that faced by the unknown, customers automatically assumed the woman was not a *chola* and accorded her a higher status than that of this class which, albeit powerful, continues to carry negative connotations due to historical ethnic discrimination. Conversely, I wondered if at a meeting of MAS party members, upon spotting any woman attending this meeting, was I to assume that she was to be labelled as *indígena* despite the fact that she didn't wear a *pollera*? Or were only women at the meeting wearing *polleras* to be considered as indigenous? Indeed, would you know anyone's identification unless you asked them directly?

This situation reminded me of instances I witnessed in my stay in the field when upper class members and some middle class people would volubly complain that with the *pollera*

beginning to disappear due to *chololas*' new choices on identifying themselves through other markers, Cochabamba looked like it was overrun by *birlochas* or a derogative term meaning a loose woman or a woman of *chola* extraction or mixed descent but without the ethnic dress. The general consensus of these complaints was that *chololas* no longer knew their proper place. Though there is a clear progression in status from *india* to *chola* to *indígena*, despite the desirability of being indigenous because of the ties from this identity to full citizenship in the current political moment, all of these labels continue to carry many discriminatory undertones as old colonial discourses still hold sway, no matter what the government or new global discourses on indigeneity might state. In the same way, despite the power of these racializing discourses, there are new discourses on indigeneity that are emerging and being deployed by *chololas* to rearticulate and renegotiate the *chola* identity within these new parameters. Given that these new values are set by the governing political party, the following section examines how *chololas* are establishing ties with the state in this context.

The State as Final Validation: New Ways of Being *Chola*

It is important to bear in mind that whether an organization adequately represents indigenous people can be determined only by its members or prospective members themselves... In the Bolivian case, the data suggest that indigenous organizations, though they represent socially and economically excluded sectors of society, form part of the societal structure and present a common history.

*I.S.R. Pape*³⁷

³⁷ From "Indigenous Movements and the Andean Dynamics of Ethnicity and Class: Organization, Representation, and Political Practice in the Bolivian Highlands" in *Latin American Perspectives* 36(4), July 2009. pp. 120.

Across the continent, a new indigeneity ideology influenced government policies that were applied to indigenous peoples without consultation. The fundamental criticism of the ideological construct of indigeneity as it emerged in the 1970s was that it assumed a passive indigenous subject that needed to be represented, rescued, and constructed from the enlightenment of Western values

Juan Francisco Salazar and Amalia Córdova³⁸.

This chapter explored the interactions between established *chola* clothing merchants, immigrant used clothes vendors, and the role played by language in the construction of class identities. In these interactions, the fact emerges that both groups of *cholitas* are attempting to claim a middle class identity that symbolizes an indigeneity valued by the government. Yet, despite their political and economic power in the region, *cholitas* from both opposing groups in this conflict were attacked by government officials who targeted the *chola* entrepreneurs as opposed to the governing party, its political ideology and the nation-state. This state-of-affairs is the result of *cholitas'* claim to the urban middle class through their entrepreneurial market practices.

Cholitas in both established and emergent *chola* groups, despite the government's negativity and their ambivalent situation, try to claim a space in the new Bolivia as they continue to play an important role in processes of class formation and citizenship through the deployment of words in gossip, informal conversations and public statements. These mechanisms have been considered to play important social and political functions in community life and anthropologists in the past have written about the use of informal language and expressions as a safe way for a subordinate group to resist and criticize formal power structures as well as to claim its own place in the nation (Pietilä 2007: 7; Scott 1990:161). What has taken place in the case of the *cholitas* in Cochabamba's market with the use of language in their struggle against marginality is not a

³⁸ From "Imperfect Media and the Politics of Indigenous Video in Latin America." In Wilson, Pamela (Editor); Stewart, Michelle (Editor). *Global Indigenous Media : Cultures, Poetics, and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, page 40.

novel occurrence and it is safe to state that it is a preferred method of interaction with the state by this subordinate group as well as an effective mechanism. What is different today from similar occurrences in the past is that words and labels are being used to claim identities that were disadvantaged in the past, such as that of indigeneity, or to decry formerly positive labels such as that of commercial market practices. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised in order not to fall into simplistic dichotomies in which neoliberalism and indigeneity are placed as polar opposites along a socio-political continuum, and in which neoliberalism is vilified while indigeneity is elevated. Though the government's rhetoric of a new Bolivia seems to express these sentiments in such black and white terms, something important evidenced by the ethnographic examples in this chapter is that class formation in Bolivia continues to be tightly linked to ethnicity and is anything but a simple teleological progression.

Something else that is different from the way identity was constructed in the past and that speaks volumes about the present moment is that, unlike "indian" and *chola* identities, that of indigeneity can be claimed without resorting to visible ethnic markers such as that of dress. This was shown by the examples pointed out by the *cholas* when speaking of women who belonged to the MAS political party and could claim indigeneity through this membership, despite the fact that they didn't wear the emblematic *pollera* or distinctive ethnic pleated skirt. I.S.R. Pape has suggested that indigeneity in the Andes needs to be determined by self-identification as different members of an astonishing variety of native groups take part in an equally varied number of indigenous political movements. This constant process of self-identification as political actors and participants in the democratic process are part of what Nancy Grey Postero has baptized as an era of "postmulticultural citizenship" in which newly-acquired citizenship rights by formerly subordinate groups undergoes constant reaffirmation (2007: 11).

I find that *cholas* provide an interesting example in the process to claim an indigenous identity, given Bolivia's current political setup and the unique dual identity of *cholas* where indigeneity and entrepreneurship coexist. Unlike former ideological movements of indigeneity where the indigenous subject passively accepted representation, rescue and the imposition of Western values as in the epigraph by Salazar and Córdova at the beginning of this section, contemporary indigenous peoples in Bolivia are proud to belong to a political project that empowers them and projects the voices of its members.

Postero's notion of multiculturalism as self-identification gestures to this independence. In addition, it also builds on Charles Hale's idea that Latin America today is undergoing a process in which indigenous peoples are finally assuming full citizenship thanks to multicultural policies brought about by neoliberalism. In this regard, Hale states that: "It is often assumed that the central tenet of neoliberalism, is the triumph of an aggressively individualist ideology of 'economic man.'" Hale suggests instead that the neoliberal ideology is also in great part defined by granting collective rights and compensatory measures to formerly disadvantaged indigenous groups (2002: 261). Both Postero and Hale argue that indigeneity cannot be easily separated from a neoliberal ideology, as the MAS and the Morales administration attempt to do.

The examples in this chapter show that the *cholas* don't fit into Hale's definition of "neoliberal multiculturalism" because these women continue to operate under an individualistic liberal dogma when it comes to their business dealings with the market. In this way, *cholas* provide us with one way of understanding how indigeneity can coexist and actually feed off capitalist and neoliberal market practices, given their activities and identity as consummate entrepreneurs. Indeed, *cholas* do not consider their indigeneity as being at odds with commercial practices as they see entrepreneurship itself as being indigenous. I explore specific market

practices and how *cholitas* mark these as indigenous or non-indigenous in greater detail in the following chapter.

The stories and narratives in this text that show *cholitas* deploying insults and labels loaded with historical and cultural significance such as pollution and hygiene, hard work and indolence, and refinement and ignorance are proof of the variegated complexity in Bolivia's identity negotiations that, artfully orchestrated by the subaltern, can directly affect broader socioeconomic actions and methods. The examination of a sector of Bolivian society provided in the examples of this text shows how people on the ground in Bolivia have a hand in the construction of class through conversation and public statements despite and because of official ideologies on citizenship. It also argues that, no matter whether under a neoliberal or any other type of regime, citizens in Bolivia continue to look to the state to validate their claims of national belonging. Examining the actions and negotiations of groups such as *chola* market vendors that are in the midst of identity transformations and who have adapted to moments of change in ethnic ideologies in the past, improves our understanding on how the state and people on the ground forge ties through ethnic labels such as indigeneity. It also provides a good starting point from which to unpack class formation and identity politics as Bolivia continues down the road of socioeconomic change in the decades to come.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEDIA WARS:

INFLATION, SPECULATION AND *CHOLA* IMPERSONATIONS

The relation between the indigenous and entrepreneurial identities of Cochabamba's *cholitas* outlined up to this point evidence that *chola* market women are part of a subordinate majority that, due to their importance to local and regional economic processes, also boast a protracted relationship with the state and sundry interactions with the formal business sector and the elites that go back for generations. These interactions have been hidden from view in the same way as, more generally, the histories of women and indigenous peoples with the state were hidden for much of postcolonial times in Latin America (Dore 2000: 16). For this reason, it has been argued that scholars who study women and indigenous peoples in the region only recently moved to examine the role of the body politic in the wake of globalized discourses, in search of the groundwork for the creation of a number of social movements and organizations that demanded the inclusion of both these groups within the nation-state (Canessa 2005; Minde et al 2008).

Ethnographers of the Andes redoubled their efforts to scrutinize the government apparatus and its relation to women and indigenous groups with the advent of neoliberalism in the late twentieth century (Crain 1994; De la Cadena 2010; Paulson and Calla 2000). As I have shown with the stories of the *cholitas* in the markets in Cochabamba in the second chapter of this dissertation, it is with these regional changes that the interactions and relations of *cholitas* with the state and the formal sector are unveiled or made more visible at the informal markets and elsewhere in this city's public spaces. This chapter deals with this new visibility of the interactions of the *chola* market women with the state taken to a new level through the mass

media. Evo Morales' administration is marked for its savvy manipulation and deployment of the press. In fact, Morales' government continues to heavily rely on mass communications to promote different state policies and pays close attention to the visibility of market *cholas* and other groups with claims to an indigenous identity. I show an instance in which the state's increasing animosity with commercial business at all levels due to its stance against liberal economics, resulted in a situation of conflict that embroiled the market *cholas* and briefly made them the focus of national attention. I describe and discuss a story in which a minister of state briefly stepped into the markets and actually impersonated or took the *cholas'* place in trade to stop these market women from carrying out commercial activities government authorities deemed detrimental to the people's economy. These instances illustrate a new twist in the relations between *cholas* and the state where at the same time that the government attempted to directly dictate conditions for trade, it also laid the blame for broader economic phenomena, such as inflation, with the *cholas* and the formal business sector.

Because the government made use of the press to carry out and justify these stratagems, I open this text with a brief history of the media's role in social interactions in Bolivia including the part played by radio and television in social movements and union work. I follow with a series of news reports from my time in the field that describe how inflation was the catalyst for a number of performances by government officials in the informal and formal sectors. I conclude with a brief discussion on conflict between the formal business sector and the Bolivian state, as these issues also catalyzed some of the current administration's negative attitude to entrepreneurs. My aim in exploring these stories is to show the tensions that are disclosed when formerly marginalized and silenced groups such as the *cholas* take on increasingly larger and more central roles in the regional economy. I argue that though the *cholas* surmounted many

obstacles and smartly negotiated their mobility within Bolivia's racialized hierarchy their commercial practices also open them to attack and to manipulation by the state, within a broader process of political justification and reaffirmation, which are largely implemented through media representations.

Media Manipulation: Subversive, Populist, and Official Uses of Broadcasting in Bolivia

The history of the development of mass media in Latin America and particularly studies on the history of broadcasting in the region show a clear connection between the state, media owners, and social forces that influence how the national subject is (re)produced (Fox 1997: 3). Indeed, much of the relationship between the state and the media in Bolivia can be summarized as either the crass abetting of the state through the official media or as the open confrontations of subversive media with either totalitarian states or with state-imposed liberal economic reforms.

From the mid 1960s to the return to democracy in 1982, Bolivians were governed under the auspices of a series of right-wing military dictatorships that were instrumental in the thorough introduction of radio and television broadcasting and mass communication for the first time. The wonders of communication were nothing less than dramatic in a nation that, to this day, is hampered by a geography that is the nightmare of engineers and road construction crews who battle against both the encroachment of the jungle in the eastern lowlands and the permanent danger of landslides and road cave-ins in the Andean mountain ranges. At this time, simultaneous to the introduction to the wonders of radio broadcasting by the central government at the most isolated villages, mining unions and other leftist opposition groups also created their own radio stations as a means of networking and organizing (Alexander 2005; Lagos 2006).

The mining center radio broadcasting stations stand out for their particular role for sustaining a culture of resistance and political organization through this social medium (O'Connor 1990: 108). These amateur radio stations, manned almost entirely by volunteers and paid for by miner fees, were scattered throughout the highland mining region in geographically-remote outposts and, in their heyday, numbered close to forty radio stations located in almost every mining center along these mountain ranges, no matter their size. Though the country's miners and their families were little more than three percent of the total population, the importance of these radios lay in the critical significance of tin mining to Bolivia during the mid 1970s, as this industry represented close to sixty five percent of the nation's receipts from exports (ibid: 105). Throughout the different military regimes, miner's organized and resisted against the state and used radio broadcasts to update people on the government's movements, including arrests and other human rights violations. Two of the stations had the ability to broadcast nationally, and acted as go-betweens with the smaller stations to broadcast their news to the world and report on the abuses of the dictatorships.

The political impact of these tiny stations was immense. Every day, the radio formed ties between the miners' unions and its members, and between miners belonging to these unions and peasant union members in the rural areas and factory worker unions in the cities, and invoked the shared indigenous roots between all these groups in order to present a united front against state atrocities. In times when the state media was silenced as part of the numerous military coups that took place in a span of almost two decades, the mining stations formed a structure of resistance broadcasting on the movements of the armed forces, decisions made at public and organizational meetings by different unions, and union leaders' speeches. At different times these stations were forcibly closed by the military, but even then they played a role in public resistance as the people

organized demanding their return to the airways. Eventually these protests on the closure of mining radio stations played a major role in the overturn of these dictatorships and the return to democracy (Barrios de Chungara 1978; Lagos 2006; Nash 1993).

During the heyday of radio mining broadcasts, the programs put together by the mining unions emphasized political differences and created mediated discourses in opposition to the autocratic state, thereby constituting a culture of resistance. With the advent of neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s, as mentioned earlier in this dissertation text, one of the most dramatic measures taken by the then government was to privatize the mining sector, closing down the state mining corporation and its mines and relocating thousands of miners and their families. As these families migrated to Bolivia's cities, there emerged a second era of media communications linked to political partisanship and participation. Bolivians then lived through a transition between the previous cycle of *subversive* media and a phase of *populist* media where broadcasting programs were transformed to appeal to the demographic majority of indigenous immigrants who had settled in the cities.

Bolivia's urban centers witnessed explosive and chaotic population growth during the 1980s and 1990s together with the accompanying growth of television broadcasting. In fact, radio was replaced by this new means of public communication as the largest and most-widely tuned in form of media. It was under these changing circumstances that a charismatic figure emerged in the capital city of La Paz to pioneer a distinctive blend of populist media programming with political legitimacy and campaigning. The man who led this change in format of media broadcasting was Carlos Palenque, a former singer and TV host who used his ownership of a radio and a television station to propel himself to fame and political power. Palenque's platform was a talk show he created called the *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* or the

People's Free Tribune³⁹. In this show, his television and radio studios' doors were opened at prescribed times for live broadcasts and people from La Paz's populist sectors were encouraged to step up to the microphone and either request a favor, file a complaint, make an announcement of a neighborhood communal event, or advertise their services or offer merchandise for sale. In this free-flowing format Palenque stood next to the mike and commented on the dilemma or news of the person at the stand in a reversal of roles where the announcer ceded the spotlight to the people (Soruco Sologuren et al. 2000: 38). More importantly, he opened a space where the marginalized voiceless were given a voice. Palenque's charisma and notoriety in the media propelled the party he founded in 1988 to win first place in the city's municipal and state governor elections the following year. His popularity and that of his television show only increased in the following decade and made him a strong contender for the presidency. Palenque died of a heart attack in 1997 and his party and media empire, unable to survive his demise, quickly dissolved under accusations of political corruption.

What is worthy of note from these stories is that the majority of the people who paraded before the mike at Palenque's tribune were *chola* women, both poor recent rural immigrants and more established residents who bartered in the capital city's markets. The recent immigrants often spoke very little Spanish and told their stories in their native Aymara or Quechua. The simultaneous translator for these exchanges was Remedios Loza, a *chola* merchant who worked with Palenque as a mediator and buffer between his white middle class identity and the humble indigeneity of the citizens who approached his tribune. Loza would later run for and win a seat in

³⁹ For a more detailed description on the types of complaints and appeals that were aired in this show, see Salar (2002). People would line up and speak into the microphone, oftentimes amidst a flood of tears, asking help finding a lost child, complaining of domestic abuse, of a lost job, of police brutality or of a myriad other circumstances in which their marginalized ethnic identity had made them vulnerable prey to the city's petty criminals or to the greed of those in positions of authority.

the national Senate, an achievement that made her a living and breathing advertisement for her party's populist ideology. Loza's Senate seat also foreshadowed the roles *chola* women would play in politics in the twenty-first century with the passing of multicultural reforms that established quotas for indigenous and women in the state apparatus (Revollo Quiroga 2001).

Palenque was loved by his listeners who spoke of him as a father figure, compassionate and humble, a role that anthropologist Sian Salar questions as she finds that a review of the tapings of these broadcasts show Palenque as condescending and patronizing, dramatically acting out the clientelist relations he forged with his viewers (2002: 27). Indeed, she contests Palenque's claim that his program served as an informal substitute for state services, as the aide he provided was little more than a sympathetic ear. No matter his methods or his reasoning, Salar agrees that Palenque's true legacy and that of his political party was that he forced the old oligarchic parties that had ruled the country to that point to become aware of the fact that their constituency needed to be acknowledged as wielding the electoral power and, at the same time, he helped these constituents realize their own power in politics.

This dramatic change in the face of Bolivian politics resulted in numerous copies of the format for Palenque's talk show in most if not quite all of Bolivia's broadcasting corporations. In La Paz alone in the year 2000, more than forty shows of this type could be found both on radio and television stations (Soruco Saloguren et al. 2000: 42). These tribunal-type shows spread throughout Bolivia. The city of Cochabamba with its large population of recent immigrants eagerly welcomed this format where *cholas* and other poor and working class *cochabambinos* could air their grievances. At the same time that the media opened spaces to voice the troubles and predicaments of the poor, the arrival of globalized discourses on indigeneity to Bolivia and other Latin American countries also helped indigenous organizations find new forms of cultural

resistance and revitalization through communications. New uses of media including television and radio broadcasting became part of a process grounded in local struggles for political self-determination, cultural and linguistic autonomy, and legal recognition (Salazar and Córdova 2008: 40). In Cochabamba, indigenous organizations and representatives quickly made the connection between control of the media and political legitimization with the electoral public. The current administration's Movement to Socialism (MAS), was one of the first populist political parties to invest in the control of media networks throughout the state of Cochabamba in the years that led to Evo Morales' election in 2005; a media control that the Morales administration has continued to foster and expand through its two terms in office (Muñoz-Pogossian 2008).

Morales and his Movement to Socialism (MAS) party are an interesting combination and a product of both the populist and subversive uses of media exemplified by Carlos Palenque's *tribune* and the miner's union radios. Morales was a union leader of the coca growers in the Chapare region of the state of Cochabamba at the time when he decided to also become a politician. It has been argued that by the close of the twentieth century, the *cocalero* or coca grower unions had supplanted the mining unions as the strongest organizing force in the nation, particularly given their struggle against US-imposed policies for the eradication of coca farms⁴⁰. These circumstances contributed to Morales' anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist message, parts of which would be harnessed and incorporated into the indigenous nationalist ideology of his Movement to Socialism, disseminated through a broad network of small radio broadcasting

⁴⁰ Evo Morales was the leader of all coca grower unions, a platform which launched him into a congress seat and then to the presidency. No small part of his popularity was based on his constant attacks on imperialism and the US government that appealed to the people as they smacked of a confrontation between a David and the Goliath of the north which, up this day, conditions its development aid funds to Bolivia on a certification program based on the number of hectares of coca that are eradicated. For more on US-Bolivia relations see Gamarra (2004).

stations throughout rural Bolivia (García Linera 2005). Morales, like many other politicians, copied Palenque's methods for his campaign and he hosted and appeared on a number of talk shows with formats similar to the original free tribune.

After Morales and the MAS won the presidency, his administration doubled its efforts to publicize their message of indigenous nationalism in what some have termed to be part of the practices of the new socialism that is embraced by a number of Latin American governments today.⁴¹ All of these left-leaning administrations use mass communications to uphold populist policies and usher in what has been termed a new era of official media (Schiller 2011). In Cochabamba, when I began my ethnographic fieldwork research at the end of Morales' second year in office, the official media was represented by a number of radio stations that continuously broadcast blatant pro-government messages over the airwaves. At the same time, there were also an apparently equally large number of stations that loudly proclaimed the mistakes of the government and lauded the opposition, funded by the remnants of the elite political parties and private sector business moguls. Riding cabs or buses through the city, walking through the tree-lined streets or jostling my way through market-day crowds, radios played music and blared their political messages everywhere. I would often hear the government's side of a story on my way to the *Cancha* open air market and then hear the opposition's version of the same story on my way home later that afternoon. Sometimes I would need to double-check as the stories would be so distorted in their efforts to serve up their version of the truth of what had taken place that they would seem to describe completely different events. In the following section, I follow one such

⁴¹ The first and perhaps most prominent member of the new socialism movement in Latin America is Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, who is also famous for broadcasting a television show dubbed *Aló Presidente* (Hello Mr. President) in which he had poor Venezuelans approach him with their requests and problems, similar to Palenque's tribune. For further details see Pérez Hernáinz (2008). Other countries that have embraced the new socialism and its media propaganda to different degrees are Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.

story where the government and the opposition had conflicting versions that entangled and involved the *chola* women of Cochabamba's market in these political media maneuvers. This story was linked to a recent rise in prices of goods in Bolivia's markets.

Inflation and Speculation in the Markets

To talk about inflation in Bolivia is to raise a flurry of conflicting images and ideas with anyone who lived through the crippling inflation the country underwent in 1984–1985. More than two decades later and shortly after my arrival in the field, Bolivians faced a constant and steady rise in prices for basic dry goods and produce. At first this was deemed a temporary state of affairs. However, as the situation continued and the days stretched into weeks people began to question the wisdom of government policies, and fear and anger were felt among the majority of the urban poor who barely made enough to make ends meet. As social movements threatened to take to the streets in protest, a government spokeswoman in Cochabamba gave statements in the local press pointing to the fact that this temporary situation was caused by the international recession, at the same time that she denied accusations from the opposition that a recent lack of investment from the state in farming and production was the root of the problem. Most strikingly, an inflationary process was openly denied by government officials with Morales himself coming out on television stating “*no hay inflación en Bolivia*” (“there is no inflation in Bolivia”) (La Prensa 2007). Indeed, the first time the government admitted that such a phenomenon existed was more than two months after this statement when inflation was portrayed as the product of price speculation, coupled with descriptions on the state's successful efforts to put a stop to these practices.

The government's denial of inflation is explained by Bolivians' shared memory of the hardships resulting from this economic phenomenon. This tense situation and the obvious rise in prices in trade tinged my first weeks in the informal market streets with a constant feeling of imminent disaster. People whispered in corners and *cholas*, who were known for being the principal traders in the goods whose prices kept rising, would drop dark hints in casual conversation on how they had seen inflation quickly spiral out of control from one moment to the next back in the 1980s. As I walked down the market stalls, I would find small gatherings of market women at street intersections or around someone's stall comparing notes on the latest rumors and information on goods coming in from the tropics to the east or across the mountain passes northwest of the city. Almost all customers complained about rising prices and queried the *cholas* on how long these would last. The rumors on speculation and whether this would or could increase prices on specific products were the topics of most conversations in the streets.

Resulting from this general atmosphere of impending disaster, the *cholas* I visited at this time spent many hours reminiscing and recounting stories from when they and their families had experienced the worst of the inflationary process. *Cholas* remembered hiring men to trundle handcarts full of paper money through the markets to purchase goods from wholesalers⁴². The market women could also remember standing in line for fourteen or fifteen hours to buy a can of powdered milk and hoping the price of the milk didn't go up more than three or four times within that day of waiting. However, they also told stories of how some of their friends in the informal market had made fortunes from hiding sacks of flour or rice in their warehouses as there were times when the price of a kilogram of rice bought today could be sold for ten times that amount tomorrow. In any case, whether the *cholas* had made money or suffered hardships at the time, the

⁴² The Bolivian government's response to uncontrolled inflation at the time was printing more money to the point that the bills were worth less than the paper and ink used to produce them.

general consensus was that inflation was something that hurt families and was best avoided. Indeed, what better proof of the “wrongness” of inflation, *cholas* stated, than what had been required to cure the country of this plague, namely, neoliberal reforms.

The “cure” for the exaggerated inflationary process in Bolivia’s recent history that the *cholas* referred to began with a hasty call for elections in 1984, almost two years before the end of the term of the administration then in power. The government which replaced it sought the help of the International Monetary Fund and unleashed a series of reforms that caused the retreat of state services and the rash of privatizations that I have discussed elsewhere (Chapters Four and Five). Indeed, the country was noted as a paragon of the much-touted economic “shock therapy” which successfully nipped the inflationary process in the bud⁴³. This history helps explain why the much milder inflation that took place upon my arrival to the field was the cause of great alarm among Bolivians and the *cholas* in the markets. It also explains why Morales’ government was loath to admit that inflation was taking place. In fact, the administration’s concern was confirmed by the stories that circulated, courtesy of the government’s opposition, reminding people of the inflationary process that took place over twenty years in the past and declaring that Morales’ administration would also require outside intervention to stop the current inflation. Opposition leaders shook their heads and pointed to how economic history would repeat itself and to the irony that Morales and his followers would have to implement rational

⁴³ The term “shock therapy” is associated with a series of economic measures that are linked to a group of economists who came out of the University of Chicago. Jeffrey Sachs is the economist who advised the Bolivian government in 1985 and that cured the country of its out-of-control inflationary process. Because of this he was hailed in the international press as a miracle worker. In later years, as the far-reaching effects of these economic policies were felt by the people on the ground of the countries where these reforms were implemented, a series of critical studies were published calling shock therapy a cure that was worse than the illness it treated. For more details on shock therapy and both sides of this debate as it relates to Bolivia see Klein (2007) and Sachs (2005).

liberal economic policies they were ideologically opposed to in order to overcome this economic hurdle.

Given the anti-neoliberal character of Morales and his political party and that the only known solution for inflation was the economic reforms opposed by his administration I waited—along with most Bolivians—to see how government officials would address this conundrum. In the hours before the government made a statement, talk in the streets and opinions in the media tried to guess which economic measures the Ministry of Finance would dictate to control this process. Neither I nor the market *cholas* whom I spent time with during those days, nor a number of other people I spoke to from the upper and middle classes, could foresee the government's response that I describe in the following vignette.

I walked down the market's dusty corridors flanked by vending stalls, the bright winter sun warm on the top of my head, and followed my companion's shadow as it lengthened and shortened along the flour sacks and tin shingle partitions we passed. Her stiff embroidered shawl swished against her voluminous pleated skirts, and her long braids made a muted flapping sound. As we turned a corner, my *chola* companion and I found a group of market women clustered around a small black and white TV set that was transmitting the local noon news. We were shushed as we approached and someone let us know that we were listening to the long-awaited interview with the Minister of Finance. As the man's voice washed over our group, all the *chola* women there bristled and listened with barely suppressed outrage as the Minister, smiling at the camera and sporting a silk suit and tie, launched onto a political speech the gist of which was that the current inflation that burdened all Bolivians was caused by price speculation in commerce. The criminals who were playing with the economy of the Bolivian household and preying on the poor were informal merchants and formal businesses. These two groups of entrepreneurs, he

stated while frowning down the camera lens, were covering for each other as they fleeced the Bolivian people with their inhuman capitalist practices. The government would soon take appropriate measures, he concluded, so that those robbers who called themselves *chololas* in the markets, and those other thieves in their business offices, should learn that they could not take away food from decent people and go unpunished.

In what turned out to be their fifteen-minute claim to fame, market women were interviewed most of that afternoon and the following morning by a handful of local news shows, and reporters were seen roaming the stalls taking the *chololas'* impressions and reactions to the Minister's remarks, which they later broadcast together with statements from formal businessmen and the local chamber of commerce. From what I pieced together watching the news channels and then asking the *chololas* for their responses I could see that the market women's answers to the Minister's attack varied little. Most declared that they were victims of a ploy by the Minister to deflect attention from his corrupt practices. They deployed their role as humble, unschooled, indigenous women and juxtaposed it with the Minister's role as an educated, wealthy and powerful individual, insisting the minister and the government should be protecting the dispossessed, and not attacking them. The *chololas* were particularly stricken by the fact that the government had lumped them together with the formal sector entrepreneurs and heatedly denied any alliance with formal businesses stating that the formal and informal markets had always been separate entities and thus they would always remain. The *chololas* ended by asking Morales to remove the Minister of Finance from office.

The *chololas'* protests didn't seem to unduly trouble this Minister who responded at a press conference on the following day by repeating his first accusations on the evils of price speculation and once again conflating the market *chololas* together with formal sector business

tycoons. He then mysteriously hinted to how matters would soon be taken into the government's hands to teach price speculators a lesson and end the inflation that they were causing. A few days went by without further statements from the government and then, one rainy November morning, the *cholas* were once again the focus of all media reports when news broke out that the Minister had set in motion a plan to fight the *cholas* at their own game by setting up market stalls near their own vending spots to sell goods directly from the producers to the consumers. This strategy, it was explained, eliminated the need for the go-between that were the merchant *cholas* and established a fair price within the marketplace that would put a stop to speculation.

In order to put this plan into effect, the Minister of Finance ordered government officials to purchase food staples in bulk and then had these officials distribute these goods throughout the informal markets. A handful of temporary government market stalls were set up for a couple of afternoons manned by uniformed government employees to sell gallons of cooking oil and packages of rice at a reduced price. Other stalls were set up for the sale of meat, the price of which had risen dramatically due to floods in the cattle-grazing lowlands. All of these government stalls very quickly ran out of merchandise and were closed down again.

Although these brief performances of trade by the government did little to affect food prices in reality, the state's claims asserted that these actions *were* ending inflation, as seen by the following quote from the local press.

“The Government stated yesterday that the sale of meat that it is carrying out currently, directly from the producer to the consumer, will have a positive impact on inflation levels and will achieve a decrease in the figures registered for the month of October when the country reached 1.25 percent in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Minister of Finance, Héctor Arce, stated that the sale of meat and the lowering of meat prices in the cities evidenced that the hike in prices was being generated by speculative sectors.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “*El Gobierno dijo ayer que la venta directa de carne que cumple actualmente del productor al consumidor impactará positivamente en los niveles de inflación y logrará la reducción de las cifras*”

Those who believed in this story varied across social classes. Though the upper classes and the political opposition remained skeptical, the majority of working class and poor listeners who called into radio talk shows in the following days to express their opinion on this situation were all unanimous in thinking this activity could indeed stop or prevent inflation. What callers particularly liked was the fact that the government was taking actions directly where the people were affected, in the marketplaces, instead of at the government palace or at the ministerial offices. As for the market *cholas* whom I questioned, these women admitted that, at least temporarily, prices had gone down for the products sold by the state so they pointed to that as evidence that maybe these tactics worked. More generally, they seemed to share a belief with most people of their class that these strategies were helpful as the state was seen as working on practical solutions at a level that most people could understand or grasp. For many of Cochabamba's residents, the chance to purchase oil, rice and meat at a lower price that week did more to boost the government's popularity than the most learned speeches on the economy.

All communications media are enmeshed into their social context and should be understood as political in the broadest sense of the term in that they are a reflection of people's ideologies and strategies (Gershon 2011: 284). This reflection is what imbues the media with veracity or authority and also explains the importance of mass communications to the workings of the modern state. The story of the media performances given here shows how this belief in the veracity of these communications can be extremely powerful. In its media performances, the

registradas en octubre cuando se alcanzó un 1,25 por ciento en el Índice de Precios al Consumidor (IPC). El ministro de Hacienda, Héctor Arce, señaló que la venta de carne y la bajada de precios en las ciudades permitió comprobar que el alza estaba siendo generada por sectores especulativos.”(La Prensa 2007).

government literally acts out its concern for its constituents and symbolically carries out what are meant to be interpreted as measures that solve broader phenomena that affect people on the ground. Even though these symbolic forays into commerce barely dented the local markets, politically, they were enough to deflect popular discontent and give people in the lower and working classes a renewed faith in Morales' populist administration.

The main reason for the minister of finances' very public charade as a market vendor was the government's requirement of a scapegoat for the inflationary process sweeping the national economy and the consequent need to produce evidence that the state's accusations of speculation in the informal markets were true. This proof seemed to involve stating these accusations and carrying out symbolic performances in which state officials found a solution by mimicking and therefore pointing to sectors in society that could act as these scapegoats. These measures were meant to keep people from taking to the streets in protest given that Morales' administration found itself in an explosive political situation created by the loaded history of a disastrous inflationary process in recent memory, as well as by the consequences of the neoliberal cure to this economic phenomenon. As I mentioned before, the general feeling in the streets was one of impending political and financial calamity and people and state officials could not help but remember how dire economic straits had caused the early demise of both left-leaning and neoliberal governments in the recent past.

The Bolivian government's dramatic role in the sale of meat and other products clearly had the purpose of deflecting attention from the state onto entrepreneurs in both the formal and informal sectors as well as that of upholding the government's idealized role as a populist administration that was not afraid to implement its solutions on the ground. The following

excerpt from a press article is a representative sample of the official statements the government issued to the media as part of this campaign to end inflation and deflect the public's attention.

“As long as there is speculation in the country, the Government will continue to supply meat at a fair price. The government spokeswoman said that there was evidence that the problem was not the lack of meat in Bolivia, but that there was speculation and that this created inflation. In the same way, she said that what the government did was to reestablish the balance of the market.”⁴⁵

La Prensa Newspaper, November 19, 2007

Statements similar to the one quoted here on the government's concern and intent to reestablish a balance in the markets were often followed by long speeches on how the Morales administration genuinely cared for the Bolivian people and the household economy. These speeches confirm how Morales' administration relied on its populist appeal. Because of this, the state attempted to place as much distance as possible with the neoliberal regimes that preceded it. Morales reinforced his identification with “the people” with media performances that showed him playing friendly public soccer games with his cabinet ministers and popular soccer players. He also toured the rural areas extensively inaugurating a number of public works, no matter how small or how remote the location. He repeatedly pointed to his humble indigenous origins and was proud to state how he was familiar with manual labor. These statements evoke a time when the benevolent pre-neoliberal state controlled all aspects of everyday life and could be held directly accountable for any woes the people suffered. In this vein, it is not surprising to see that the governing party would extend its media ploys to show ministers of state publicly and personally carrying out the “economic measures” that were to stop inflation on the ground. I discuss this

⁴⁵ “*Mientras dure la especulación en el país, el Gobierno seguirá suministrando carne a un precio justo. La vocero de gobierno dijo que se evidenció que el problema no era de que no existía carne en Bolivia, sino que se estaba especulando y, con ello, dando lugar a una inflación. Asimismo, dijo que lo que se ha hecho es restablecer el equilibrio del mercado.*” (Los Tiempos 2007a).

further in the following paragraphs where I continue the story of the sale of meat and how its portrayal in the media affected *chololas* and their relation to the state and the formal market.

Flipping the Tables: Impersonating *Chola* Market Women, Contesting the Formal Sector

Even as the sale of cooking oil, rice, and other dry goods all made their way through the government market stalls, by far the most spectacular of these market sale performances was the purchase, transport and sale of meat in Cochabamba's markets by state officials. At this time, television crews filmed the Minister of Finance taking a trip to the lowland region of the country by private jet, where his visit to a cattle ranch was broadcast live over the news. There he arranged for the slaughter and sale of a couple of hundred heads of cattle. The minister then flew the meat back to the cities in the highlands and had it distributed in the open air markets at specially marked stalls and at a price lower than that sold by regular vendors. In a dramatic case of impersonation of informal market vendors, images were shown in the press where the Minister, with the ubiquitous suit and silk tie, stood by a market stall and shook hands and handed out packages to people who lined up to purchase the meat he had brought.

As for the market *chololas*, they found this arrangement and charade by the government hilarious. They spent several days after this event taking turns pointing to the newspaper pictures of the minister at his market stall exclaiming "he has dressed up as a *chola!*" (!*se había disfrazado como chola!*). This statement was followed by much giggling and several remarks on the man's dubious sexual preferences given how he liked wearing the metaphorical *pollera* or pleated skirts that defined these women. In this way the market vendors were quick to point that the minister's performance, which he undertook to undermine the commercial power of *chololas*, also made him take on their subordinate gendered and ethnic identities. By making fun of his

role playing, the *cholas* underscored the fact that their privileges in commerce come tied to a number of discriminatory practices. Indeed, the constructed subjectivities that are the *cholas* are “reaffirmed through routine performances of their identities” as women, as indigenous, and as entrepreneurs (Beattie 2003: 52). The danger that the minister failed to take into account when he positioned himself behind a stall in the informal market was that by carrying out the performance of the *chola* entrepreneurial identity, he could also fall prey to the other more powerful identities of these women that are linked to pollution and disorder and that have kept them in a subordinate position for generations (Tassi 2010).

Using the images of *cholas* in the media and in popular culture is nothing new and scholars have pointed to the fact that these women are often shown as hypersexual symbols of fertility, motherhood and indigeneity (Estenssoro 2003). Along these same lines, political candidates have a tradition for using *cholas* and their images to bridge and mediate between the white candidates and the indigenous electoral masses such as in the case that I mentioned earlier of Palenque and his broadcasting companion, the *chola* Remedios (Albro 2005). What is new in the situation I describe here is that a minister of state took on the role of these marginalized women. Since the construction of womanhood in Cochabamba is greatly influenced by its *cholas* and “discursive practices that sustain their naturalization,” when the minister enacted the daily vending practices of the *cholas*, their gender identity came to the fore and created an unforeseen threat to the minister’s masculinity (Ulysse 2007: 25). This man chose not to make any formal reply to the numerous jokes on his cross-dressing tendencies that made their rounds in the opposition media channels. However, he did disappear from the public eye for some time. Indeed, it is interesting to note that this event represented both his debut and closing performance in the markets as it was the last time he was ever seen in this space. Not surprisingly, the

government official who brought the next lot of meat for sale in Cochabamba's market was the female Minister of Rural and Agricultural Development.

A few days after the Minister of Finance made his appearance at the market stalls masquerading as an informal merchant, the second meat shipment was brought to the city of Cochabamba by the above mentioned female government official. This continued the state's strategy of ensuring that highly-placed state officials were seen personally implementing measures meant to improve the economy and people's living conditions on the ground, while it also discreetly replaced the Minister of Finance after his enactment of *chola* market vendors. The local newspaper, *Los Tiempos*, had a front-page story on Minister Rivero's arrival to Cochabamba and described it in the following words:

The meat bought by the Government finally arrived in Cochabamba yesterday. Fifteen thousand kilograms of meat arrived which will be sold starting today in Cochabamba's marketplaces. The Minister of Rural and Agricultural Development, Susana Rivero, arrived last night with her team at Cochabamba's Air Base with this lot of meat. She also stated that there is meat in Cochabamba, but that the problem is that it is very costly. She indicated that the culprits in this speculation with prices are the *large landowners and ranchers in the lowland state of Santa Cruz*. (italics, mine)⁴⁶

Los Tiempos Newspaper, November 24, 2007

Though Minister Rivero's performance didn't draw as much attention from the press as the earlier and first performance of this type by the Minister of Finance, what is noteworthy of Rivero's press statement is that she lays the blame of price speculation and the resulting inflation no longer on the merchants who sell these goods but on the producers of this food staple. Her

⁴⁶“Finalmente la carne comprada por el Gobierno llegó ayer a Cochabamba. Se trata de 15.000 kilos del producto que será comercializado desde hoy en los mercados cochabambinos. La ministra de Desarrollo Rural y Agropecuario, Susana Rivero, junto a su equipo arribó anoche a la Base Aérea de Cochabamba con el lote. También dijo que en Cochabamba hay carne, el problema es que está muy cara. Señaló que uno de los culpables para la especulación son los ganaderos cruceños.” (*Los Tiempos* 2007b).

attack on cattle ranchers and large landowners in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia reflects an ongoing conflict between these powerful businessmen and the Morales' government, given that this group has been notorious for its vociferous opposition to his election and policies. Rivero's statements began a new phase in the inflation-preventing campaign the government had launched, in which the state's attack shifted from the market *cholas* to a target visible in its opposition to Morales' administration.

In the following weeks, a media war was launched where Morales and his cabinet and other officials openly contradicted and fought against statements by representatives from the large landowners mentioned above. These skirmishes took place throughout the press and were particularly violent and drawn out given the fact that some of these wealthy businessmen also owned a large part of the opposition's radio and television stations that competed with the state to gain support from Bolivians. Press conferences were summoned by both groups, talk shows were visited, and paid advertisements similar to those on electoral campaigns paraded across people's television screens and could be seen on glossy posters in the streets.

The conflict in the media between the landholders and formal businessmen and the state was part of a broader economic and political struggle, proof of which is the fact that this battle ended up being taken out of the media and into the halls of congress. The cattle ranchers and companies who dealt in the production of meat, unlike the *cholas*, had power to fight back against the state in political circles and years of experienced negotiations at this level. These landholders soon threatened that they would stop selling meat to the government and thus put an end to the state's inflation-stopping campaign. About two weeks after the Minister of Finance flew to the lowlands for the first time to purchase cattle from the ranchers, a large group of these

landowners from the cattle growing region of San Borja made their own news, as seen from the following press report:

Congress has seen a decree circulated and signed by the authorities and residents of San Borja, stating that “they will no longer sell meat to the Government.” This resolution is supported by the President of the Federation of Ranchers of Bolivia, Christian Sattori, who stated that the Government’s actions are “threatening the productive chain of the meat sector and that this is a political manipulation that doesn’t solve the basic problem which is inflation ”.⁴⁷

Los Tiempos Newspaper, December 4, 2007

Though the petition in Congress circulated for endless weeks, it was never signed and passed given that Morales’ party held the majority of seats. Like the government’s own performances, this gesture seemed to be an enactment meant to make a political statement more than to achieve any tangible results. Indeed, word in the streets was echoed by the *chola* market women who sneered at this piece of news saying that the cattle ranchers would not willingly alienate the government, as it was their largest and best customer.

The many participants in the media wars over inflation and the sale of dry goods and meat soon saw the public tire of this conflict. By the time the Christmas holidays had come and gone in December of 2007, the news frenzy on inflation that had begun in early November soon blew over as the country turned its eyes onto the drafting and passing of a new Constitution by the Morales government that was highly contested by opposition politicians. For the *cholas*, this meant the end of their brief celebrity in the media and it also spelled the end of the state’s efforts to play an active part in the informal markets. A few weeks after the Minister of Finances posed

⁴⁷ “*En el congreso circuló una resolución firmada por autoridades y pobladores de San Borja, asegurando que "ya no permitirán la venta de carne al Gobierno". Este hecho fue apoyado por el presidente de la Confederación de Ganaderos de Bolivia, Christian Sattori, que aseguró que dicha acción del Gobierno está "atentando contra la cadena productiva del sector y es una manipulación política que no resuelve el problema de fondo que es la inflación."*(Los Tiempos 2007c).

as a market vendor, he was suddenly fired in disgrace, on corruption charges similar to those leveled by the vendors against him. When the news reached the informal marketplace, the *cholas* celebrated this victory as if they had been responsible for his dismissal. Immediately after, all the vendors in the informal markets turned to the more pressing concerns of the end of year holiday sales that also took a prominent place in the local news programming as the city gave itself over to an intense period of consumerism.

Although the government very democratically lumped the informal market *cholas*, formal sector businessmen and elite landholders in its accusations of speculation during the inflation crisis of 2007, all of these groups made every effort to distance themselves from each other and to assert their individuality when it came to relations with the state. When the *cholas* were interviewed by the press shortly after they were first attacked by the government's minister with accusations of price speculation, these women protested not only at being blamed for inflation but at the fact that these allegations were made in such a way that they conflated the *cholas* with the formal sector, a fact which both *cholas* and formal businessmen resented.

Morales' government critiqued commerce in an encompassing way that disregarded the differences between informal and formal sectors of the economy because this fit with the official ideological campaign to demonize entrepreneurial practices while at the same time it helped weaken formal business elites who were very vocal in their critiques of the government. The fact that the government kept attempting to make *cholas* and formal sector entrepreneurs the scapegoats in this situation also shows that, in the government's eyes, the formal and the informal market were beginning to show many similar characteristics and could be joined in the same group as exemplary of neoliberal practices. Despite the vehement denial by both of these groups in their media statements, data in other chapters of this dissertation (Chapters Two and

Six) shows market *cholas* forging new and stronger ties with the formal sector and often working in tandem with these businesses. In this light, the Bolivian state's accusations evidence an awareness of the blurring of the boundaries between the formal and the informal markets.

With the elite landowners and formal sector businessmen expressing themselves quite firmly against Morales' government, this left the market *cholas* in an uncertain position where they were prone to be attacked or used by either side. This was evidenced by the fact that *cholas* were easily seen as interchangeable with formal sector businessmen, though without the privileges that these elite males hold in society. As explained to this point, the Morales government was keen on placing the blame of inflation on others in order to deflect political and social unrest. As part of this process, different government representatives took turns blaming the *chola* market women and formal sector merchants as well as the large landowners and ranchers who represent the production end of the meat industry that became the focus of the state's media campaign against speculation.

The media in Bolivia has a history of creating a culture of resistance for the downtrodden majorities, as seen by the miner's radios in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, the media was dubbed as "populist" and gave voice to these majorities as those in power awakened to the fact that these sectors of society were also constituents and would be needed for political leverage. Bolivian social movements at the turn of this century combined the organizing strategies from the miner radio era with the power of the populist constituency and brought a government that was considered to be "of the people" to power (Albro 2010). However, what changed from previous roles of the media abetting state power is that even though conflicts in the press continue to reflect tensions and struggles in society, the roles have been reversed as groups against the state that are passing themselves as the disadvantaged of Morales' administration

now are no longer the lower classes or indigenous groups that took Morales and his party to the presidency, but the minority elites and businesses that are opposed to his government. In fact, these groups can be seen using the media to organize pockets of resistance and protest similar to the ones Morales and his political party used to organize and eventually win their electoral campaign (Fabricant 2009; Gustafson 2006).

The consequences of how the tables have been flipped on the elites that held Bolivia's political power in uninterrupted succession until quite recently are sure to be far-reaching. In the examples given here in which these elites are now pitted against the state, be it in the media or in deliberations in Congress, Morales' government is being pressed to continuously justify its actions to its populist constituents within political and socioeconomic structures that are the enduring legacy of a neoliberalism that his administration opposes ideologically. In a similar way, market *cholas* are also pressured to reaffirm their loyalty to the populist cause that they share with Morales and his political party as their commercial attributes can effectively render generations of subordinate struggle moot.

Growing Visibility, Growing Influence: *Cholas*, Patriarchal Politics and the Media

Media ideologies are about particular constellations of power, the creation of stereotypes about individuals or social groups, and the production of subjects in particular cultural and historical context.

*Laura Kunreuther*⁴⁸.

Despite the dramatic media exposure of market *cholas* that I have described in the previous pages, I came away from this experience with the feeling that these market women, though critically important to local and regional economies, continue to play a hidden role in Bolivian

⁴⁸ From "Transparent Media: Radio, Voice, and Ideologies of Directness in Postdemocratic Nepal." In *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20(2), 2010, pp. 335.

society away from the public eye. I say this because in hindsight there were no other similar dramatic events that were as widely disseminated in the mass media in the following year that I spent in Cochabamba. After the events I describe here, the only other time I took note of market women in the news was when I noticed that a couple of local Cochabamba news channels would run a string of streaming prices for vegetables and basic groceries at the bottom of the TV screen during the local news program at noon, akin to the streaming numbers below news networks in the US where the Dow Jones and other stock exchange prices are provided. A few enquiries in the markets and with journalist friends disclosed the fact that these prices were obtained everyday by a reporter from the news channel who would visit a group of market *chola* vendors who sold these goods, as they were the best source for this type of data. However, at no point was their expertise and contribution to the daily news program acknowledged, nor did the *cholas* or the journalists who were in charge of this information think that they should be recognized in any way, thus reproducing their historical invisibility in interactions with state and economic policies.

As the epigraph that opens this section by Laura Kunreuther aptly states, the media highlights the interactions between particular constellations of power. In these constant power negotiations, we can explain Morales' attack on the *chola* market women because those who are at the margins are the first to feel their place in society questioned. Given the *cholas*' former invisibility to the state due to their subaltern identity, examining their new notoriety and visibility in the media can disclose new directions from the state's interaction with "populist" sectors and further explain their growing influence in Bolivian politics. In the highly visible interactions of the state by the market *cholas* which now take place under the blinding glare of media reporting, we see that *cholas*' commercial practices make them a target for the state's

maneuvers against liberal economics that in turn justify the current administration's claim to political power through a populist platform. This is best seen in situations of conflict such as the fear of a recurring inflation where the state felt threatened by powerful memories of economic hardship and by the people's power through mobilizations within Bolivia's culture of protest.

Tensions disclose how formerly marginalized groups became more central and how the formerly invisible become visible. Though *cholas'* commercial practices earned them a prominent place in the regional economy, these same practices left them vulnerable to manipulation and attack by Morales' populist state and other indigenous nationalist ideologists as groups as shown by the situations of conflict that were played out in the media that I narrated in these pages. Another element of the state's strategy to combat social unrest and tensions was its hold over the country's mass communications which it resorted to bombard Bolivians with its official stance on speculation as the root of inflation and most state policies. Indeed, access to the media is key in the shaping of postcolonial societies such as Bolivia where the construction of an "informed public subject" helps define the state's relation to different sectors of society (Hultin 2007: 13).

The current power struggle and negotiations between the Morales administration and its political opposition are framed within the ideologies and the practices of the market, which are seen as female or feminized in Cochabamba because of their close association with *chola* vendors. *Cholas*, in their ongoing struggle demanding inclusion by the state, become a lightning rod for discussion on the Bolivian nation's economy and the markets where their subordinate gender and ethnic identities have been tightly woven into how the state has dealt and continues to deal with the informal markets. The stories that illustrate how Bolivia's current populist government used the *cholas* to represent the market and to lay the responsibility of broader

economic processes on their shoulders might have played out differently without the background of patriarchalism present throughout Latin American state history. When the market *cholas* discussed their impersonation by the Minister of Finance, they pointed to his clearly condescending attitude to the work of *chola* traders and what they deemed more generally as a lack of respect for women. They stated that this reflected a broader attitude by many of Morales' male government officials with *cholas*, though they were also quick to point out that previous administrations' employees had had the same attitude to women and *cholas*.

Cholas represent a formidable economic force to be reckoned with. They also represent and embody a regional image of *valorous* nurturing women who through political activism and their very public presence in the markets look out for and advance the interests of their family members against almost overwhelming odds. In the following and concluding portion of the dissertation I will continue discussing the inescapable and powerful female defining identity of the *cholas* and its role for future generations of these women who will continue to work and trade in the markets and beyond them. I take a look at the younger generation who I consider the new *cholas* of the twenty-first century and who are now taking control of Cochabamba's markets, and it is with their story that I close these ethnographic conversations.

CHAPTER SIX

BIDIRECTIONAL KNOWLEDGES AND PRACTICES:

REDEFINING THE (IN)FORMAL ECONOMY

All the efforts of economists to insist on the autonomy of an abstract market logic cannot disguise the fact that market relations have a personal and social component.

*Keith Hart*⁴⁹

Most economic activity does not match the abstract market logic, as Keith Hart puts it in the quote that opens this chapter. In fact, economic practices are embedded in social networks and cannot be analyzed without grounding them in this context (Granovetter 1985; Polanyi 2001). *Chola* market women and other informal market vendors have been used in Bolivia's reports on the national economy as a foil to showcase formal businesses as a desirable goal (Wanderley 2003). This notion is based on a continuing discourse that believes that the informal sector is a transitory stage meant to disappear with the eventual development of the countries in which these vendors ply their trade (Bhowmik 2010: 3). This development narrative espouses a vision in which marginal informal vendors advance along a continuum to ultimately leave their informality behind, become absorbed by the formal economy, and access the government benefits and protections that come with taxation. It presupposes that informality is practiced only by the poor and disadvantaged and that there is a marked boundary between informality and formality assembled from legal stipulations.

Following this development discourse, *cholas* have been historically denied access to the formal market for centuries—despite their trajectories in trade—and continue to be excluded

⁴⁹ From “Money: one anthropologist’s view,” in *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*, James G. Carrier, ed. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing House, pp. 166.

from this mobility from informal to formal, a phenomenon stemming from the ethnic-based obstacles to upward mobility I detailed previously (Chapter Three). Indeed, moving into the formal sector for these women implies attaining mobility into the white middle classes and away from the informal markets and the *chola* identity. Currently, after the benefit to *cholas*' fortunes from neoliberal economic policies, the transition from the informal to the formal has finally been achieved by the youngest generation of these market women who have acquired higher education credentials that are the key that opened the doors of the formal business world to them. This chapter concentrates on some of the *cholas* of the youngest generation who, despite having achieved this access to the formal business sector, chose to return to the informal marketplace and claim their *chola* status through the indigenous component of this identity. I juxtapose these cases with that of some older *cholas* who in turn have accessed the formal sector not through educational credentials but by appropriating and providing formal sector services in the informal markets and because the sheer economic power they wield places them in a position where there are opportunities to work in tandem with formal businesses⁵⁰.

In this chapter I argue that the *chola* market women of Cochabamba from both generations creatively work the spaces between the constructed duality of the formal and the informal through the manipulation of differing market knowledges and practices. *Cholas* question the appeal of the formal business sector given its continued exclusion of *chola* market

⁵⁰ Overall, *cholas*' economic successes have always been hard to compare with those of the formal sector, particularly because they belong to a "shadow economy" where their financial achievements were never quantified and because they were historically relegated to their own category given their disadvantaged gendered and ethnic position (Rivero Adriázola 2007; Seligmann 2004). Despite the fact that this situation is changing today with the advent of the new indigenous-based nationalism that awards *cholas* new respect as economic actors, it is still hard to tell exactly how *cholas* compare to the formal sector as there are few or no studies that provide statistics on the sales of the informal market vendors. I base my statements in this text that affirm the existence of a sector of *chola* vendors who are as successful as top formal businesses on how the *cholas* themselves and formal businessmen I interviewed described their economic role and their relation to the formal sector.

vendors, the recent comparable levels of wealth that can be acquired in the informal economy, and new discourses on the value of indigeneity and, as a result, of indigenous market practices. At the same time they are vying with the formal sector in order to participate in global trade networks of production and distribution. This ambivalent situation in which the formal sector at the same time appeals to and offends *cholas*' entrepreneurship results in a situation where *cholas* from both generations are constructing and re-imagining their own version of the market and reaffirming the dichotomy between informal and formal in novel ways.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first half discusses a set of ethnographic vignettes that illustrate how the younger educated generation of market *cholas* manipulates and indexes market practices as either indigenous or non-indigenous and how this division provides its members with the authority to claim indigeneity. In this set of narratives I describe a process through which these young women assert that indigeneity can be represented not only through visible markers such as dress or language, but also through ways of practicing and imagining the market. Indeed, these market women are claiming their indigenous identity through business knowledge that they consider a legacy passed and inherited down the female line that is portrayed as opposite to the business education that is the basis for the formal sector. The market practice they deem as "non-indigenous" also discloses how *cholas* from the youngest generation have direct business dealings with formal transnational corporations. In the second half of the chapter, these ties to the formal sector by the youngest generation of *cholas* are discussed in contrast to instances in which an older generation of market vendors seeks to form an alternative to the formal sector. In this case the older *cholas* act as a channel to provide financing from microcredit funding to producers and other informal vendors whose operations are too small to qualify for these credits.

The surprising intimacy between the formal and the informal market sectors shown by all of these stories on market practices and forms of knowledge not only builds on a long-standing body of literature on informal market vending that shows how the boundaries within this dichotomy are shifting and blurred, but illustrates that in certain cases these boundaries are fracturing and giving way under the weight of the economic success of some informal businesses that can be a match for their rivals in the formal economy (Seligmann 2002; Tranberg-Hansen and Vaa 2002; Weismantel 2001).

There and Back: Young *cholas*' journeys between the informal and the formal markets

Chola market women rule over an informal economy where their varied business practices blend commerce with their particular social context and cultural realities. Because Cochabamba is an important trade hub in Bolivia, the *cholas* who work in the region's informal market have long been active participants in regional trade networks. *Cholas* and their products travelled across mountain passes, down into the coast in what is now Chile in the West, and across the dense Amazon jungles of the East, and beyond the frontiers of what are now Brazil, Argentina and Peru (Harris 1995; Larson 1998). Some of these routes were established as far back as pre-Columbian times and are still used by *cholas* today to carry out transnational trade. Given this context and the unique combination of commercial success and ethnicity that identify *cholas*, it is not surprising to find that these market women are keen on participating in the opportunities for global trade resulting from neoliberal economic policies.

Cholas were strongly drawn to the announcement and endorsement of the transnational flow of goods in the global market by the Bolivian state and its economic reforms two decades ago. The appeal to these vendors was so strong that they became one of the first sectors to

attempt to insert their business activities onto these renewed global trade circuits. However, some of the *cholas* I interviewed complained that though for all practical purposes they succeeded in establishing a number of trade connections with transnational networks of cheap goods coming from China and Taiwan via Peruvian and Chilean ports, they had trouble establishing their rights to legally import these goods into the country. The *cholas* explained that many had kin and friends positioned in the informal markets of Arica and Iquique in Chile, as well as in Ilo in Peru, commanding good business capital and plugged into the trading networks of those ports. For years some of the goods that arrived in these ports made it into Bolivia's informal markets by means of smuggling. However, the *cholas* thought that with the establishment of free trade zones in some Bolivian cities, including Cochabamba, they would be able to tap into these networks and establish importing businesses in the formal market. Though the *cholas* had the means and the will to carry out these new ventures, any import business continued to be the exclusive domain of businesses belonging to the elite within the formal sector, a fact that was reinforced through state trade regulations. In a pattern the *cholas* had seen many times in the past, formal entrepreneurs belonging to the upper classes asserted their power over those lower in the ethnic and social scale and claimed priority over the global market, in this manner effectively excluding *chola* informal vendors whose ethnicity stood against them.

A frustration with the formal sector that could still exclude *cholas* from specific business venues contributed to these women's decision to send their children to university and finally gain the upward mobility that had eluded them for so long. *Chola* women did this through the opportunity afforded by the recent expansion of the private education system and their newfound prosperity. These women felt that going to school and becoming proficient in the language of the formal market would allow their children to act as mediators and interpret between the more

abstract free market and their own trading practices. Additionally, in conversations and interviews I had with this group of college graduates, I found that many also viewed their purpose in gaining a college degree as the acquisition of tools, skills and credentials that would enable them to compete with formal businesses on a more level playing field, and win a hold on the new frontier of transnational trade for their family business.

As I witnessed during fieldwork, there is now an entire generation of college graduates in Cochabamba whose mothers barter in the informal markets for a living, regardless of the level of these women's standing in the market hierarchy. This is such a widespread phenomenon in the younger generation of *cholas* that it has become their distinguishing characteristic. The more humble market women sent their children to college at the local state university, while the wealthy *cholas* had their children attend elite private universities, a much more costly proposition. As I mentioned before, a significant number of the *chola*'s daughters are earning degrees in business and economics to better mediate or bridge the informal and formal markets. Though some young *cholas* continue with this journey of mobility and end up working for the formal business sector, other young *cholas* return to the markets of their mothers, in spite of being considered part of the city's professional working class.

As I followed the journeys of the latter group of young women back to the markets it became clear that these *cholas*, for so they still call themselves, planned to continue claiming their mother's dual identity as indigenous entrepreneurs. These *cholas* who acquired a university degree and came back to the informal markets, despite having shed their identifying ethnic garb, argue that indigeneity can be represented not only through visible markers such as dress or language, but also through ways of experiencing and practicing the market, emphasizing the organic knowhow of trade that they inherited from their mothers, based on Andean practices of

reciprocity and networking, instead of the formal business training they acquired through education. This legacy has become the credentials that enables these young vendors to continue claiming the *chola* label and working within the informal marketplace.

As we have seen in previous chapters, a knowledge such as that of the market *cholas* that is inherited or intuitive is clearly considered inferior to that acquired through a formal education. This opinion is echoed by scholars of these market women in Bolivia (Estenssoro 2003; Soruco Sologuren 2006b). However, as is shown in the ethnographic anecdotes that follow, the younger generation of *cholas* is challenging these hierarchies by giving equal weight to both types of market knowledges; be it learned from books or passed down by their mothers.

The following ethnographic stories describe a market practice that *cholas* considered as indigenous and another that they claimed had been transplanted from the rational market method that they had learned in their university courses. Both of these examples together illustrate how these markers of language and emotions versus rationality are deployed to justify the categories of “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” within this context of different types of market knowledge. Additionally, both stories are also exemplary of instances when *cholas* who have ventured forth and acquired the credentials necessary to breach the formal business sector and be welcomed by this group chose to go back to the informal markets and there renegotiate their identities through market practices as well as forge novel interactions with formal businesses.

Desdoblaje: Indigenous Transactions in Merchandise Sales

A young *chola*, whom I will call Arminda, and I sat within an outdoor market stall in the heat of the day. Arminda dozed with her head back against a pile of men’s jeans while I squirmed in a low stool close to the floor trying not to crumple or disarrange the cotton blouses and skirts set

on display on a series of wooden planks next to me. The stall, typical for the outdoor market, barely measured six feet by four feet and I had to make an effort not to nudge the woman's outstretched legs with my foot whenever I shifted position. Much of sales involve waiting interspersed with times of frantic activity, so I could understand why the saleswoman took her rest where she could. As we sat there, a young girl came running to the stall yelling "Godmother, godmother! A customer wants these in a six and a half!" She was waving a pair of brown men's shoes in the air as she ran in our direction. The woman I was with, sat up abruptly and dashed out the back to another stall she owned across the street which had every available square inch of space filled with gleaming leather shoes. As she approached the stall where a slender girl, another one of her employees, sat knitting, she yelled "Six and a half, brown, square toe!" The girl dropped her knitting needles, bent at the waist and quickly materialized a box of shoes that she handed to the first girl, who promptly took them and ran off again. This all took place in less than five minutes.

When we had gone back to our seats, I asked the *chola* vendor what had just taken place. She grinned and cryptically replied, "*desdoblaje*." This term translates loosely from the Spanish as "non-doubling." Arminda explained that when her family had first purchased their original stall on this sector of the market about two decades ago, it had been conveniently located on a main thoroughfare with heavy traffic. As time went by and the market continued its inexorable expansion, the pavement was swallowed by a growing number of stalls, and eventually transformed a wide avenue into a pedestrian alley, causing the municipality to shift traffic to three blocks up the road. Back then, Arminda's neighbors decided to sell their stalls in what had become a little visited side street, and purchase stalls and vending spaces on the new main street front. Arminda reviewed her options and refused to emulate this move as selling and purchasing

new stalls would cost her family business a great deal of money. She opted instead to carry out *desdoblaje*, or sending out her merchandise to be sold at other points in the market with hired itinerant peddlers without buying—thereby doubling— her number of stalls. Not everyone on Arminda’s family agreed with her decision. In fact, the general sentiment at the time was that since she had just graduated from college with a degree in Economics, Arminda’s book-learned knowledge was interfering with the common sense market instincts that *cholas* exercised and that gave them a claim to this identity. The outcome of her decision became critical. If successful, it would validate her right to claim her lineage as a market *chola* and head the family business.

Arminda’s decision to implement *desdoblaje* was followed by a period of adjustment of several months in which she barely made ends meet while she struggled to set up an efficient system where employees rotated and took turns manning the family’s fixed stall and cruising the market’s main thoroughfares offering her merchandise. To her great relief and elation, time proved Arminda right in her business strategy and she was happy to report that her venture was so successful that she had recently used her profits to finish buying out her competitors’ neighboring stalls and had expanded from selling only shoes to other merchandise such as clothes and hair bands. On the day of this story of how *desdoblaje* was put into practice, Arminda proudly pointed out how the brilliance of the scheme lay in that the young girl peddling the merchandise on foot had the mobility to aggressively search for customers, backed by the extensive stock in the permanent stall. In this way, whenever a customer asked for something she didn’t literally have on hand—such as a shoe in a specific model and size—she would dash back to where Arminda’s stalls were located, get the product her customer required, and make a sale.

The term “desdoblaje” also translates as “unfolding” or “extending.” Though Arminda only gave the first definition of the word as “not doubling,” my observations with these *chola* traders show that this practice can also be clearly seen as an instance where the *cholas* are able to extend themselves and their reach well beyond their cramped market stalls. In *desdoblaje*, Arminda’s nieces and goddaughters who ventured forth offering her wares in the corridors between stalls and out in the busy streets acted as surrogates of Arminda, taking Arminda’s trade interests beyond where she sat inside the maze of market stalls.

When I asked, Arminda how she had chanced upon the idea of *desdoblaje*, she answered with a description of the moment in which she realized how to solve her business problem in terms of powerful emotions, as seen in the following transcript of her words:

“One day I was working at my stall worried about how much money I would lose now that customers had to walk all the way in from the main street to reach my merchandise. I felt cold sweats all over my body and my family said my complexion was not healthy; the worry was affecting my liver... Then I was walking home one evening and I had a *t’inkaso* [Quechua for “gut feeling”] that I could work things out if I sent the merchandise out to the customers in a handcart with my cousin... if the customers wanted something she didn’t have, she could just run back to get it from me. I was so happy [because] this was a solution my mother and my godmother—who are also merchant *cholas*—would have liked... But I was also happy because I knew it was right, it felt right. When we *cholas* feel something is right, it usually works out well.⁵¹”

Arminda concluded her story by pointing to the process of *desdoblaje* as a clear example of an indigenous trade practice. How this clearly mercantile transaction could in any way be

⁵¹ “Un día estaba trabajando en mi puesto preocupada de cuanto plata iba a perder ahora que los clientes tenían que caminar desde la calle para llegar a mi venta. Estaba transpirando en todo el cuerpo y mi familia decía que se me veía en la cara que no estaba bien pues; la preocupación me estaba afectando el hígado, ¿no ve?... Entonces estaba yendo para mi casa una noche y me ha dado un t’inkaso que podía todito solucionarse si mandaba pues mis cositas a los clientes en una carretilla, con mi prima... si querían algo que ella no tenía, podía venir corriendo a pedirme. Estaba tan feliz esta era una solución que a mi mami y mi madrina—que también son pues de pollera—les hubiese gustado... Pero estaba feliz porque sabía que estaba bien, biencito se sentía. Cuando nosotras *cholas* sentimos que algo está bien, siempre nos sale bien, pues.”

considered “indigenous” is confusing. However, a brief survey of Arminda’s statements shows that there are several points from this young *chola*’s narrative that point to this quality, based on a number of similar stories I compiled from other *chola* vendors. First is the mention that this trading problem touched the *chola* woman deeply and emotionally, as witnessed by her mention of a worry that affected her physically and was deleterious to her health, added to her joy once she solved the issue. All of these references to emotion play into the notion that instinctive or indigenous knowledge is associated by these women with affect and is the opposite of the cold rationality that reigns in the corporate world. Arminda put great store in her gut feeling or touch of inspiration that provided the answer to her dilemma.

In addition, given that language is a powerful marker of class and of ethnic identity in Cochabamba, the *chola* unique brand of trade practices is indexed by the younger generation with the use of Quechua language terms as opposed to Spanish. The Quechua term *t’inkaso* that Arminda employed to describe her inspiration for *desdoblaje* is something *cholas* would use time and again when describing and coding similar indigenous market activities. This word denotes an intuition that provides a glimpse of the future, or an insight into what future consequences might hold for a specific action. Indeed, *t’inkasos* were usually described vividly by the *cholas*, as involving all five senses, in keeping with the belief that they are part of an Andean worldview and body of knowledge (Morató Lara 2003). Arminda and her colleagues agreed that *cholas* would instinctively know the success of a market practice thanks to these gut feelings. These *t’inkasos* also contribute to the notion of an intangible knowhow that comprises the young *cholas*’ indigenous legacy. This belief is confirmed by Arminda’s invocation in her story to other market women in her lineage that would have approved of her business decision to carry out

desdoblaje, such as her mother or godmother, in this way upholding the idea that this type of market knowledge is inherited and passed down the female line.

Finally, Arminda herself pointed out that the main reason why the practice of *desdoblaje* could be categorized as indigenous was because of the people who carried it out. She brought my attention to the fact that the girl running back and forth with the shoes for a client on the main street was her goddaughter. The other girl taking care of the shoe stall was her niece, and she had a cousin and another goddaughter, both high school students, who would help her out on their free time on weekends and afternoons. Arminda explained that the way *cholas* operated was through the employment of young women who were fictive kin and related by blood as young apprentices; expanding the market lineage and extending their social networks into the next generation as yet another type of *desdoblaje*. She said that this also served a more pragmatic purpose as it provided a method by which profits could be made in the highly fluctuating and variable world of the informal market, given that these young women very seldom worked for wages but were instead paid with commissions from sales, with merchandise so they could operate their own side business, or with the promise of future favors. When probed further into what type of favors Arminda would need to give in return, she provided as examples the fact that she would be paying for one of her goddaughter's school supplies for the following academic year and noted that her niece had recently asked her to contribute with the drinks for her parent's anniversary party the following month.

My observations disclosed that most if not all *cholas* used this complex system of reciprocities that had two obvious results. One was that overhead was cut down considerably if you could operate without paying your help a monthly wage, and instead relied on doling out occasional cash contributions. The other and most important result is that the world of the

informal market ruled by these *cholas* is revealed as an exclusive domain monopolized by these women, their families and kin. In this view, it is easy then to characterize and code most if not all of the practices that take place within their marketplace as “indigenous” as long as they are carried out and performed by the *chola* women vendors and their closed circle of associates. The idea of a clear boundary set between insiders and outsiders to this world of informal trade is further explored in the following example on what is characterized by *cholas* from the youngest generation as a non-indigenous market practice.

Corporate Businesses Hit the Streets

In contrast to the instinctive indigenous market knowledge of Arminda’s story of *desdoblaje*, a different commercial practice that young *cholas* in the markets clearly label and code as “non-indigenous” is that of advertising and marketing practices from large formal corporations in the informal market stalls. When asked about any practices that the youngest generation of *cholas* had learned about in their university studies, nine out of ten people pointed to *cholas* who dealt in dry goods and groceries and the recent incorporation of salesgirls who offered customers free samples of some of the wares on sale. On a tour of the market with a young *chola* named Elsa who had recently graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Economics from the local state university, I accompanied her to collect payment from a number of small stalls that bought merchandise wholesale from her. While passing through the sector of the market where dry goods were sold, we were accosted every couple of steps by young girls offering us samples of everything from herbal tea, to laundry detergent, to noodles, to yogurt, to crackers and cheese.

Upon closer inspection, all of these girls proved to wear colored smocks that covered their jeans and shirt with the logo of the brand they were selling. For instance, bright blue and

yellow uniforms bore the name “Unilever” for soaps, deodorant, detergent and other similar products; orange and brown smocks noted “Nestlé” for the brand’s instant coffee, teas, and soups, and red and green promoted “Kellogg’s” for a series of breakfast cereals. Many of these girls also sported baseball caps that matched the company brand logo and colors. The girls all looked to be in their late teens and early twenties, spoke good Spanish, did not wear ethnic dress or accessories and acted as belonging to the white middle class. When we accepted some coffee from one of these salesgirls, she immediately told us of the offer where the larger jar of instant coffee could be bought for a considerable discount. We ended up buying a small number of purchases at that particular vending stall and were impressed by the young woman’s efficiency as she was able to run off the prices of another half dozen unrelated items even though she was apparently only offering samples and did not work there. Surprisingly, when the shopping concluded, the young girl deftly stepped into the stall, bagged the purchases and collected our payment, which she promptly gave to the *chola* woman who obviously owned the vending space.

This situation struck me as curious as the *chola* who owned the stall sat silently near the back throughout the entire transaction. I have a vivid image of an older woman with crossed feet at the ankles displaying a heavily-embroidered pleated skirt and flounced blouse—the distinctive *chola* ethnic garb—while eyeing everything intently. This picture of silent *cholitas* sitting within their stalls while eyeing the work of a bevy of enthusiastic young women who carried out the sales for them and offered product samples contrasts sharply with *cholitas* in other sectors of the market, where they interact garrulously with customers and with the younger family or kin who help them out. My curiosity piqued, I later returned to this part of the market to ask questions about these *cholitas* and their salesgirls, particularly about how the *cholitas* had chanced on the idea of hiring their help. Unexpectedly, I was told that their salary was not paid by the *cholitas* but by

the corporations whose brands they marketed. That is, in the example above, the young salesgirl who helped with our purchases had been an employee of Nestlé, the company that manufactured the instant coffee we sampled.

This situation was best summarized by Elsa, the young educated *chola* who had business dealings with several of the dry goods stalls and this interesting sales setup. When asked to clarify a situation where girls who were only supposed to offer samples to passersby were also basically running the vending stalls for the *chola* vendors, Elsa countered this query with a question: “Do you know,” she asked, “who has won the best sales award for breakfast cereals for the past six years in a row?” “Who had the best sales record for laundry detergents the past two years? or the highest sales in noodles and instant soups?” She answered, not the local supermarket chain, but *cholitas* in the sector of dry goods stalls. She then explained that the young girls hired to provide samples were part of an ongoing business agreement between a handful of large corporations and the *cholitas* in this part of the market. The companies paid for and placed these part-time workers at the *cholitas*’ disposal, under condition that the *cholitas* agree to sell only their products—to the exclusion of all competing brands—as well as permit the brand marketing carried out by the young girls with their samples and, in some cases, also allow the company’s logo to be prominently displayed on their stalls. When I asked how these arrangements had been made, Elsa explained that she along with a number of other young educated *cholitas* had former classmates working at these corporations, and thus it was easy to establish these mutually-beneficial instances of business cooperation.

Though this looked to me as an extension of the *cholitas*’ vast business networking, Elsa concluded her explanation by stating that the arrangement between dry goods *cholitas* and corporate salesgirls was a good example of a *non-indigenous* trade practice that she and other

young *cholas* associated with the market knowledge acquired at university. Elsa had a number of reasons why she justified naming this a “non-indigenous” practice, detailed in this excerpt from her interview:

“You can’t consider this arrangement “indigenous,” because it’s not something that we *cholas* know and it’s not something we have been doing in the markets since the time of our grandparents. This is something that the corporations have made up. We *cholas* accepted. ‘All right,’ we said... Because it’s in our benefit, right? It benefits us if the girls who give out samples come to our stalls to help with sales and we don’t need to pay them... But, you know also that we really don’t need this. You already noticed that our kin, our goddaughters... can help with sales in the same way, without charge. But if outsiders offer us this help, we accept and in exchange we sell their products, which we would be selling anyway. ‘Marketing’ they call it. This is something you learn in college. But in the Cancha what works in books doesn’t work without the *cholas*’ backing, and this is why I think corporations such as Quimbol, or the one for Nescafé ... pay for us to sell for them.⁵²”

Elsa provides a list of reasons why the business arrangement between dry goods *cholas* and corporate salesgirls is coded as “non-indigenous.” These reasons include the fact that these “marketing” techniques are something mentioned in business textbooks and are a practice that the corporations who train and employ the salesgirls have designed without any input from the *chola* market women. The fact that in the excerpt above Elsa used the English word for marketing to refer to this practice from outside the *cholas*’ informal markets helps to further

⁵² “No puedes considerar este arreglo como “indígena,” porque no es algo que las *cholas* conocemos o que hemos estado haciendo desde nuestros abuelos en los mercados. Esto es algo que las compañías han inventado. Nosotras, las *cholas*, hemos aceptado. ‘Ya pues,’ hemos dicho... Porque nos conviene, ¿no ve? Nos conviene que las chicas degustadoras vengan a nuestros puestos a ayudar con la venta y no les tengamos que pagar... Pero tu sabes también que en realidad ni siquiera necesitamos eso, ya te has fijado que igual las comadres, las ahijadas.... pueden ayudar con la venta igualito, sin cobrar. Pero si unos de afuera nos ofrecen esta ayuda, aceptamos y a cambio vendemos su producto, que igualito lo estaríamos vendiendo. ‘Marketing’ le llaman. Es algo que aprendes en la universidad. Pero en la Cancha lo que funciona en los libros no te sirve sin el aval de las *cholas*, así que por eso creo que las compañías como la Quimbol, o la de Nescafé... nos pagan para que se lo vendamos.”

highlight how this is indeed a foreign or non-indigenous concept. What this arrangement is *not* is part of the *cholas'* market repertoire.

Another reason why this market practice is not coded as indigenous is that it is considered to elicit only cold indifference from the *cholas*. Unlike with the practice of *desdoblaje*, no strong emotions were involved. Indeed, young educated *cholas* always spoke of the knowledge learned from textbooks in their college business training as cold and rational. This pragmatism follows discourses on the free market economy as impartial and devoid of emotions (Applbaum 2005). As such, it was viewed negatively by the *cholas* who insisted that passion, strength and affection marked a successful business. In Elsa's statement, the most important of all the reasons why the practice of having the white middle class salesgirls helping out at the market stalls could not be considered indigenous is the fact that the arrangement with the corporations involves using outsiders to the informal market world of the *cholas* and to their complex web of reciprocal kin networks. The fact that the salesgirls are not *cholas* and actually belong to a white class that until recently discriminated against the *cholas'* ethnic identity has not stopped these market vendors from taking advantage of this beneficial business practice. In addition, aside from the *cholas'* pragmatic view of this trade practice, another reason why it is allowed to flourish has to do with the *cholas'* younger generation's newly-formed ties to the formal sector including a new network of contacts they have developed attending college. The contacts these college graduates acquired during their higher education journey permitted some of these young women to establish themselves working in the formal sector, while they provided the *cholas* who returned to the informal marketplace with the means to create new forms of interaction between the formal and the informal.

Market Ties to Indigeneity, Business Ties to the Market

Using Quechua words to describe how a commercial idea came about, speaking about distinct feelings, directly invoking other *cholas* in the family business, and operating within a network of reciprocal kin relations are all ways in which Arminda, the young *chola* of the first story, indexed that the framework within which *desdoblaje* took place is “indigenous.” On the second anecdote, the presence of outsiders to the informal market networks within the sampling and sales transactions in the dry goods stalls, as well as the obvious links to the formal market businesses and the allusions that these practices had been learned at university, all made these practices non-indigenous. Coding either market practice as either indigenous or not cemented the ties of the informal marketplace to indigeneity by young *cholas*.

These new forms of interaction are one of the most striking results from the mobility acquired by the youngest generation of *cholas* who were able to make business contact and network with their college peers. In fact, these contacts, as proudly described by the young *cholas* were made on an equal footing with the formal business representatives in a situation they contrasted with that of their mothers who struggled with issues of discrimination given their ethnicity and lack of formal education in previous attempts to network with this same group. Nevertheless, the growth and importance of the *cholas*' business ventures is such today that the formal sector is setting its eye on the informal markets and willing to expand cooperative enterprises. The two ethnographic vignettes on the marking of indigeneity in the informal markets, though clear in the eyes of the young *cholas* as either indigenous or non-indigenous market practices within those particular ethnographic moments, could arguably be reversed. That is, *desdoblaje* could be claimed as a non-indigenous practice, or the use of corporate outside salesgirls by the *cholas* in the markets could be defined as an indigenous practice. This ratifies

the notion that indigeneity requires to be claimed individually, but also shows that the *cholas*' entrepreneurial practices can be deployed with great flexibility as with any cultural practice (Meisch 2002; Pape 2009).

The market practice of *desdoblaje* that was marked as indigenous by the young *cholas* in the market, as well as the business arrangement with local corporations coded as non-indigenous shared many structural similarities. Both took place within the informal market and its stalls, both involved the sale of merchandise under the immediate supervision of *chola* vendors and both required the help of underlings, be it fictive kin apprentices or corporate salesgirls. Yet another similarity between these two groups of young helpers was that the *cholas* who owned the stalls in both instances did not pay either of the young women's wages as part of their overhead expenses. In fact, both cases represent instances in which payment to these young women was made in kind. In the first case, the *cholas* paid occasional amounts of cash to cover the costs of specific family functions that benefitted the young apprentices or paid in merchandise or with other favors. In the second case the *cholas* paid the corporations in kind in the form of exclusivity of sales, and by permitting these companies to use the *cholas*' vending stalls as advertising spaces for specific products.

Beyond all these structural similarities, and the argument that market practices and knowledges are being used by the younger generation of *cholas* to claim indigeneity, there are other issues that emerge from the two commercial practices described to this point. One of these is the notion that *cholas* continue to be at odds with the formal business sector that excludes informal vendors from trading rights, protections and privileges, despite *cholas*' notorious commercial success. The recent development of large formal corporations now entering the informal marketplace and paying to have the *cholas* sell their products exclusive of other

competing brands reflects the fact that *chola*'s business success has grown in the past two decades thanks to new economic policies to the point where *chola* vendors beat large supermarket chains when it comes to sales of certain products. However, these arrangements with the formal sector, though often cited by the *cholas* with pride, were just as often accompanied by comments that reflected a pervasive attitude of mistrust and resentment towards formal businesses and their owners given centuries of exclusionary practices from the formal to the informal (Waddsworth and Dibbits 1989).

Comments on the inequalities between the two sectors were expressed within the markets as stories on how formal business gentlemen (*caballeros*) refuse to receive *cholas* in their offices downtown or would make them wait for hours or go back repeatedly before seeing them. These stories, recounted bitterly by the older *cholas*, were followed by grumbled comments on how these men had the time to make the *cholas* wait as they loafed around their offices or homes, where they had servants and people who took care of their every need. This situation was unfair, the *cholas* argued, as market vendors were very hard workers, often up at two in the morning to purchase goods wholesale or prepare them for transport and oftentimes carrying out housework and raising kids on top of their commercial activities. These grumblings were balanced with pride-filled narratives of the children or godchildren of these same market women who currently have their own downtown offices or are acquainted with these same *caballeros*, to the point where they are invited to company business events. In other words, the *cholas*' complaints and resentment with the formal sector continue to be tempered by their desire to belong to it and their pride in having members of the younger generation who have achieved this mobility.

From further conversations with Elsa, the young *chola* from the second story on market practices, I learned that the arrangement the dry goods *cholas* had with the transnational

corporations that provided them with the young salesgirls, was the result of the contacts of young *cholitas* who had acquired their degrees at the private university and had former classmates from their business program who worked for these private corporations. In other words, the ties from the *cholitas* to the formal business sector were made possible through the young *cholitas*' forays into the formal world outside their market stalls. I was able to confirm Elsa's statement on this connection between the formal and informal markets with some of the interviews I carried out with this group. When asked young *cholitas*, who had gone to the best business programs in the country in Cochabamba and the capital city of La Paz, ratified that it helped to have their former classmates working for the same transnational corporations that produced or imported the products that *cholitas* were selling in the informal market. This is not to say that the informal and formal sectors have not relied on each other before. Scholars have referred to this relation as one in which the informal sector depends on the formal sector for its sustenance while the formal sector uses the informal sector to increase its profits (Bhowmik 2010: 4). The difference in this new case of cooperation is that the informal market *cholitas* seem to be the ones earning a profit from the formal corporations when these companies send their employees to work for the *cholitas* in the market stalls under the company's paycheck.

Just as the young *cholitas* establish ties to indigeneity through the market that reject cold rational entrepreneurship, ties are also made to the formal sector based on a long-unfulfilled desire to form part of this economy. New ties are also being made between the formal and informal market economies among the older generation of *cholitas* who never left Cochabamba's informal markets. These relationships can be observed with the complex interactions of informal produce wholesale *cholitas* with microcredit and formal sector businesses. The following paragraphs examine the lives of these *chola* wholesale vendors who have taken upon themselves

to provide some of the facilities and services available to the formal sector to their informal marketplace counterparts. With these stories, I further explore the blurring between the formal and informal as well as the ambivalent appeal of the formal economy to the market *cholas*.

“Now they come to us”: Traditional and new wholesale trade in Cochabamba’s informal market

Some of the most powerful *cholas* in Cochabamba’s market are those who deal with wholesale trade. Two of the largest—and arguably most important—sections of this city’s informal wholesale market deal with a product that is the diet staple of the region as well as with a product that is becoming Cochabamba’s chief export to neighboring Peru and Chile; potatoes and chicken. Potatoes have been sold and bartered in these markets for centuries, while the sale of packaged poultry by wholesalers and their trade networks is very recent. An examination of how a group of the most successful and experienced of informal market vendors deals with the commercialization of these two items discloses some interesting points about the interactions between the formal and informal economic sectors in Cochabamba.

The potato has figured prominently in economic studies of the Andean region and what is now Bolivia since precolumbian times given its role as a diet staple (Mancilla 1999; Mayer and Glave 1999). The valleys surrounding of Cochabamba and the highlands to the West all grow dozens of varieties of the tuber that are transported into this city and sold by the truckload on the wholesale informal market for distribution throughout the urban area, other cities, and some rural areas⁵³. The price per kilogram of potato fluctuates daily and oftentimes by the hour

⁵³ Indeed, potatoes are important to broader socioeconomic processes in the Andes as witnessed by how their cultivation and its effects on climate have been the study of anthropology and ethnoclimatology (*see* Orlove and Chiang 2000 and 2002, and Orlove 1996). Also, by how the influence of potato trade on the

and directly affects the price of a number of other items, given that the same network of wholesalers will use the cash left after the potato negotiations to then bid for other vegetables and staples. The site for these transactions is a cavernous hangar, enclosed on three sides by unpainted brick walls and covered with a corrugated tin roof, where hundreds of sacks of potatoes are set down in seemingly-random patterns along a packed-dirt floor. Trucks loaded with this Andean crop begin arriving in the small hours of the morning and are parked outside the hangar to the point where they surround it completely. The majority of the truckloads have already been purchased in advance by the wholesalers, nevertheless, vigorous haggling takes place over any unclaimed loads. By four in the morning, a veritable army of retailers arrives and spirits the sacks of potatoes away to the local market and beyond. Though this febrile trade is interesting in and of itself, what caught my attention in my observations was not so much the wholesale to retail process but the business activities of the wholesale vendors once the bulk of their sale transactions ended for the day.

In the chilly predawn, two potato wholesalers who were best friends, Doña Genoveva and Doña Ernesta, sat in the wooden bench across from me as we all took sips of *api*; a thick hot drink made from white corn flour. We chatted in a desultory manner while we looked at passersby as sellers in the vegetable section of the market scurried to clean and setup their stalls for the early morning customers. A middle aged man suddenly disengaged from the hurrying pedestrians and approached Doña Genoveva hailing her and saying he had looked for her in the wholesale market. The man was introduced to me as a potato farmer from the rural town of Morochata, approximately a thirteen hour drive from the city. After a brief whispered consultation, Doña Genoveva flicked her woolen shawl back and dug into her capacious apron

regional Andean and global economies has been the discussion topic of choice for rural sociologists and economists, amongst other scholars (*see* Godoy 1992 and Scott and Maldonado 1999, to name a few).

pockets to bring out a worn woven bag. She extracted a tight wad of US dollar bills, and proceeded to count out a quantity that approximated a couple of thousand, which she then handed to the man. The man took the money, quickly placed it in his jacket pocket and sealed the bargain by grasping Doña Genoveva's right hand while half-embracing her shoulder with his left arm before getting up and leaving. I noted to myself that I had been on the receiving end of this type of embrace several times when I was introduced to market *cholas* for the first time. The timid clasp would be gradually replaced by greeting the *cholas* with a firm handshake or a kiss on the left cheek as my relationship progressed with these women, a fact which made me think the man was a stranger to Doña Genoveva.

My suspicion was confirmed when the wholesalers answered my query by stating that he was an acquaintance of one of the farmers that they had carried business with for years. At my joking comment that Doña Genoveva was better than a bank, she looked at me with a serious expression and nodded. Later she would explain how my remark had made her reflect on her business relationships in the markets and how she proudly viewed her role as a substitute for the formal services provided by banks and credit unions. Her loans to rural farmers and retail vendors benefitted members of these groups who could not or would not access credit loans from these financing institutions.

Throughout many more conversations the fact emerged that Doña Genoveva, like the majority of her wholesale peers, collected on her loans with interests either in cash or in goods and services. In most instances the wholesale vendors insisted on the farmer's pledge of the sale of his entire upcoming potato crop to the woman who gave him the loan. When the time came to bring the crop to market, the farmer would seek out the wholesaler and, depending on the going price for potatoes on that day, he would either walk away having settled his debt, or with a small

cash profit. Very rarely did the farmer walk away still owing some sum to the wholesaler. In any case, the cycle would probably repeat itself again given that as soon as a potato crop was delivered, the farmer had to worry about planting the next one. For this, he or she would need seeds and equipment, which the wholesaler could provide. In fact, most of the sums given by the potato wholesalers on loan, I was told, are used to purchase seeds, equipment and fertilizer for the farmers and to pay for transportation costs and provide goods for retail vendors. Some wholesalers could even provide farmers with seeds, chemical fertilizers and farming equipment directly, as they also dealt in seeds or imported farming goods as a side business. Additionally, all wholesalers dealing with this produce owned their own line of trucks and/or had working relations established with independent truckers so that they also controlled the transportation costs of the potato trade.

The control of every single aspect of trade, from the doling out of capital for production, to transportation, to sales, is by no means a recent or uncommon occurrence in the Cochabamba region and is indeed what has made and continues to make informal traders so powerful (Lagos 1994; Larson 1998). Nevertheless, barring the business aspect of these transactions, Doña Genoveva and Doña Ernesta both went to great lengths to explain why borrowing from them was preferred by their customers over borrowing from a financial institution. These were Doña Genoveva's words when she explained why she had agreed with my comment that acquiring a loan from her was preferable to doing the same from any bank:

“Do the banks know how soon the customer will be able to pay back the loan like I do? They don't know a thing. I know well when that [year's crop of potatoes] has suffered from a blight, I also know if my debtor's mother has passed away, right? I also know well when... a debtor has come into some money, or when the crop is healthy and whole because the rains came on time and there was no frost... Can a bank know all this? No way! ... Then I can approach them and know what they need to hear: 'give me what you

owe me now' or 'I will collect from your next crop' ... I know how to calculate when I can collect. I have been fooled very few times because... [In this business] you need to be very, very sharp."⁵⁴

Doña Genoveva drew on her undoubted expertise on potato farming to show how she could better serve clients who had borrowed from her. She knew how the weather and other conditions affected crops and their delivery to the city, so she was ahead of her customers in adapting and making allowances for these events, unlike a bank that would resort to other legal measures for collection. Her solution was to postpone payment which also had the result of more firmly entrenching the customer in her web of reciprocal relations. In this way, she explained, she could ask the farmer to return the favor at some other time by lowering his price, or extending his exclusive agreement to only sell his potatoes to her for an indefinite period of time.

Also of note is that Doña Genoveva added that she had a veritable network of contacts in every single potato growing town in the region. This meant that she was also willing to make allowances for personal changes in circumstances for her clients, such as the death of a family member. However, and more significantly, this also meant that she heard of news that could affect her investments before anyone else and, in a complex game of educated guesses and on-the-spot calculations, decided on how and when to best collect, as well as on which farmers to invest her money over others. This reflected a larger system in which these wholesalers always bought crops from farmers from the different potato growing regions each year. In this way, they covered all bases and spread out the risk that inclement weather, poor roads and political unrest

⁵⁴ *Acaso saben pues los del banco cuándo van a poder cobrar su plata? No saben naaaaaada. Yo sé bien cuando ese año hay gusanera [en la cosecha de papas], cuando el que me debe se le ha muerto su mamá, ¿no ve? Sé también bien cuando... le ha caído una platita, o cuando la cosecha está sanita y completo porque la lluvia ha llegado a tiempo y no ha habido escarcha... Acaso puede saber esto un banco? ¡Manachu, mamita! ... Entonces yo me puedo acercar y decir lo que necesitan oír: 'dame no más ya,' o 'de la próxima cosecha me voy a cobrar' ... Pero yo ya sé bien calcularle, cuando voy a [poder cobrar.] Pocas veces me han fumado porque... muy, muy vivo tienes que ser [en este negocio].*

could have on their investments, ensuring that at least part of them would bear fruit. Indeed, Doña Genoveva's description of the risks wholesalers took, their required instant decision making and their focus on the present was reminiscent of Wall Street stock traders. Similar to the stock brokers, the wholesaler *cholas* also were "in the market, both driving and riding it with the goal of getting as much out of the present as possible" (Ho 2009: 180).

The speculative side of potato production that makes dealing with this product wholesale reminiscent of stock trading doesn't apply as easily to the recently instated wholesale trade of packaged and frozen poultry by informal market *cholas*. Indeed, poultry wholesale vendors work differently from their potato vending counterparts in that the transportation and distribution of the packaged chicken throughout the city is carried out by the formal sector companies that produce the chicken because these also own the refrigerated trucks in which they transport their goods. There is a street corner a scarce five blocks from the potato wholesale market where these white refrigerated trucks make a stop every morning. In a broad stretch of pavement where two wide avenues meet, a passerby who approaches this street in the chill pre-dawn will face a line of fifty to sixty trucks with logos from about five different companies that produce and sell poultry. On my visits to the spot I saw how a handful of these trucks open the back and unload a seemingly-endless number of whole chickens, packages of chicken sausage, chicken ground meat and chicken liverwurst that were then spirited away by a number of young girls or boys on handcarts, in bicycle baskets or even in large packs that they heaved on their backs. These were then taken down the labyrinthine streets and alleyways of the *Cancha* and distributed to a large number of informal vendors who dealt in these products in these market streets. However, the majority of these trucks would just stop for a few minutes, open the back for the inspection of

different market women standing or sitting on the sidewalks, jot some notations down on the clipboards they carried, and drive away.

One of the *chola* women whose family I had known for several pre-dissertation fieldwork visits had decided to invest in the growing wholesale trade of poultry in the city and had established vending relations with one of the largest of these type of companies in Cochabamba. Because of this, I was able to witness firsthand how one of this *chola*'s daughters placed an order with one of the trucks in the wholesale market for a couple of thousand dollars. The truck would make its way around the city to deliver its entire load to an approximate fifteen locations where *cholitas* who were in business with the *chola* trader placing the order would sell the poultry. A few of these *cholitas* had established butcher shops that carried out a brisk business while others sold chicken and other deli products as part of their home-based grocery stores. The *chola* wholesale vendor herself had a small store her daughter-in-law operated out of the front of their home in a neighborhood at the other end of the city from the informal markets. The truck that had begun its rounds at five in the morning at the informal market ended its trip about six hours later at the *chola*'s home, where it unloaded the last of the produce and settled accounts. The *chola* paid the truck driver—and thus the company that produced these goods—once every month after she collected payment from the nineteen women who sold chicken retail and depended on her for their supply.

That the *cholitas* were acting as intermediaries between the formal market companies and a number of retail informal businesses is a practice that is commonplace in the informal markets, as there are wholesale vendors for every item sold in the city streets. What is new about the example I have described with the poultry vendors is the scale of these operations, no doubt having to do in great part with the growth of the city itself, and the fact that now the formal

market companies go to the vending spaces of the *cholas* in the informal markets and transport these goods for them instead of the *cholas* carrying out their purchase orders at the company offices and arranging for their own transport. As one of the *chola* wholesale vendors put it: “now they come to us” (*ahora ellos vienen pues a nosotras*).

This telling phrase encompasses much that has changed in the past two decades in the wholesale informal market that, juxtaposed with some of the new directions taken by more traditional wholesale activities, can be very telling of the extent to which formal and informal markets have blended with each other. The fact that formal corporations are carrying out marketing campaigns in the informal market, as in the example given earlier on the salesgirls in the dry goods stalls, and are taking their products down for the inspection and purchase of the *chola* market vendors, such as in the case of the poultry wholesale vendors, evidences that the informal market is seen by formal businesses as a trading space equally important to the downtown offices of these corporations. More to the point, *cholas* are now being sought by the formal companies on their own terms. It could also be said that the formal corporations seeking the *cholas* is a practice that is the opposite of *desdoblaje* or the extension of the *chola* vendors into other spaces. Now the world comes to the cramped stalls in the informal markets or, arguably, these humble stalls are now officially acknowledged as part of a much broader trade circuit.

Microcredit Funding and the Balance of Differing Market Knowleges

The concept of informality in the marketplace has undergone many revisions from its early adoption by international development programs in the 1970s when it was considered a set of survival activities performed by destitute peoples in the margins of society. Its present form—

and a definition embraced by economic anthropologists—is that of an important sector of the economy characterized by its extra-legality (Tranberg-Hansen and Vaa 2004: 10). However, the degree of legitimacy or illegitimacy varies widely from country to country. The trading activities of Cochabamba's *cholas* are within the purview of the law; yet theirs is a case where they pay limited or no taxes given the purportedly small scale of their vending operations. In fact, it's hard to reconcile images of the precarious infrastructure of the informal market with some of the very powerful trader women who represent the more successful end of the *chola* spectrum. I have shown this in the examples of traders who own and run their own business empires in which they deal with the production and transportation of goods such as potatoes or poultry and control every single aspect of their trade. These women are anything but the destitute marginal traders of the first definition of informality.

From both the examples of the wholesale vendors and the younger generation of these market women who have returned to the informal marketplace, *cholas* are quite central to the regional economy and the scale of operations of some of these market women rival and at points overlap the formal economic sector. Though *cholas* have been successfully trading in the Bolivian regional economy for centuries, it is only with the recent advent of economic structural reforms that a substantial number of them reached a level of economic profit that placed them on a level where they were competing with their formal counterparts. Because of these new circumstances, *cholas* are also using new resources to continue furthering their business interests. An interesting fact that was revealed through the example on the nature of the lending activities of the potato wholesale traders is that quite a few of these women had incorporated microcredit banks into their trade and financing activities and were borrowing as much as they could from these financing institutions to invest in their own business ventures or loan money to poor

farmers and vendors who had no access to this type of credit. The mid 1990s saw the emergence in Bolivia of a number of financing institutions that, modeled after the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, were set up with World Bank funds and the infrastructure of NGOs to provide funding to small businesses such as those owned by *chola* market vendors (Buechler et al 1998). As I noted in previous chapters, the creation of these microfunding institutions provided wealthy *chololas* with access to ready cash, in this way advancing their fortunes.

The fact that wealthy and powerful *chololas* have better access to these funds confirms what some studies have observed of microcredit funding in Bolivia. Namely, that these funds that were meant to help the poor and provide them with opportunities for economic development, ended benefitting what Navajas et al. have dubbed “the richest of the poor” (2000: 336). The survey study carried out by this team of researchers with the five largest microcredit banks and cooperatives in Bolivia revealed that microfinancing was only reaching traders who had successful businesses within the informal market. Indeed, traders who had access to and were given microcredit loans were also overwhelmingly found in the urban instead of the impoverished rural areas. More recent studies in Cochabamba also show that well-to-do *chololas* have made good use of credit opportunities through these lending agencies and NGOs, while recent immigrants from the rural areas who as a norm are at an economic disadvantage to the resident *chololas* have had little or no access to these finance sources (Antequera 2007; Cielo and Céspedes Quiroz 2008).

The story I told before of Doña Genoveva and her wad of ready cash available for loans in the potato wholesale market illustrates the type of capital these “humble” market vendors can move in one day of sales transactions. Indeed, several wholesalers agreed that the average amount of money they dealt in daily goods was approximately US\$ 3,000. In a country where the

average per capita income is less than five dollars per day, this confirms that these *cholitas* should be numbered among the very powerful and wealthy (Sanchez and Ramirez 2005). The contradiction in this situation is that the World Bank and NGOs are lending money to these very wealthy sectors of the population, instead of to those who are truly poor. The simple explanation and one that is hinted at by the microfunding studies I mention before is that what is seen as “poor” by World Bank standards could still include some of the wealthier *cholitas* because, though they clearly hold great economic power, their position in the local ethnic and class hierarchy has been subordinate for so long, that they can easily continue to “pass” as marginal before microcredit funding agencies and be the recipients of funding for the poor in developing nations (Navajas et al. 2000). Once again, in circumstances similar to those of *cholitas* upbraiding government officials for their duty to protect the exploited and the poor, or of *cholitas* feigning ignorance and lack of education to avoid tax collection from municipal inspectors, this is an example illustrating how *cholitas* can and will deploy their perceived role as humble indigenous women to their advantage.

The sections in this chapter explored the spaces where the boundaries between the formal and the informal market are blurred and disappear. In chapterd previous to this one I explained how the current Morales administration in Bolivia has embraced an alternative discourse of indigenous nationalism, which in turn promotes ethnic dress and indigenous language as part of a number of gate-keeping strategies to control who belongs to the new Bolivia. In this chapter, I told the story of how the youngest generation of *chola* traders who have shed their distinctive dress is now claiming a place in the Bolivian nation by means of coding their market knowhow and practices as markers of an indigenous identity, partly because of this political rhetoric. What I related here on the coding of indigenous and non-indigenous

practices by the younger cohort of *cholas* provides a better understanding on how the term “indigenous” is being deployed by the younger generation of *cholas* through these practices. Indeed, this is shown by the words of Arminda, the young *chola* in the vignette on her group’s deployment of entrepreneurial practices to claim their ethnic identity:

“Now, I belong to a *chola* family, which means I am also indigenous. Just because... I no longer dress with a pleated skirt, with braids; this does not mean that I can’t be indigenous. We *cholas* know trade like no one... I also have a bachelor’s degree, which is useful in the formal sector. But first I am *chola* because I know trade. No one teaches this trade knowledge to us and it’s not something that can be learned. If your mother was a *chola*, if your godmother was a *chola*, then you are also a *chola*. This is clear, and you will also feel a need to trade, and want to trade.”⁵⁵

What is striking from Arminda’s words is the desire of this young woman to continue being part of the *chola* class and her obvious pride in this identity and her group’s commercial knowhow. In this sense, Arminda seems to regard her formal education and training as a mere complement to the much more important knowledge of the markets and trade that she has inherited as part of her *chola* legacy. Her words also emphasize the *cholas’* need to trade. This feeling runs so deep in these women that it seems to define them both as a group and as individuals. Indeed, in the chapter preceding this one (Chapter Five), I described instances in which this identification and equivalency of *cholas* and trade are taken to a new level and used by the state to blame *cholas* for broader economic processes in the market.

⁵⁵ *Ahora, yo soy de familia chola, lo que quiere decir que somos indígenas también. No porque no.... no porque ya no sé vestirme con pollera, con trenzas, esto no quiere decir que yo tampoco puedo ser indígena. Yo soy chola porque sé vender. Las cholas nos conocemos el comercio como nadie... Puedo ser licenciada también, lo que ayuda en el sector formal. Pero primero soy chola porque conozco la venta. Esto de la venta, nadie nos enseña y nadie puede aprender, se nace conociendo la venta. Si tu mamá ha sido chola, si tu madrina ha sido chola, entonces tú también eres chola, clarito es y tu también necesitas vender, quieres vender.*

The pride in an ethnic identity firmly grounded in the informal markets feeds into the belief *cholitas* have that they deserve to be in the game of global and national distribution of products that used to be the sole province of the formal business sector. This sentiment is echoed by statements from the wholesale *chola* vendors on the ascendancy of *chola* businesses over some of the corporations that produce and market daily consumer goods in Cochabamba given their dependence on the *cholitas* and their distribution networks. The stories on differing and contrasting market knowledges and practices narrated in this chapter not only confirm the fact that the markets of the *cholitas* are powerful, but that the establishment by these women of trading networks with global circuits of goods is a logical next step.

This chapter showed to a certain extent the frustration felt by the *cholitas* with the barriers that prevented them from achieving global trade transactions through formal channels. Indeed, these interactions suggest that they are the future of Cochabamba's market in these global extensions of trade. They also confirmed the importance of the *Cancha* and of the *cholitas* of both generations in processes of trade and the construction of ethnic identity in ways that, to quote one of the market women, can't be found in books but, rather, in the *cholitas'* intimate knowledge of the markets.

Cochabamba's *chola* market women are exceptionally useful to examine the relation between the informal and the formal markets. Their stories support the work of economic anthropologists who for some time have no longer opposed these two sectors as a dichotomy but rather compared their interactions in varied contexts (Obukhova and Guyer 2002: 199). The ethnographic stories presented here confirmed the sense that the barriers between formal and informal are hardly there anymore but also evidenced *cholitas'* ambivalent relation to formality and informality and how market practices and knowledges now work bidirectionally. Finally,

cholas are attracted by the formal economy's promise of upward mobility while at the same time they begin to realize that they can now do quite well without it and its privileges as their economic success and power grow, proof of which is that the formal sector is coming down to the markets searching to establish partnerships with the *cholas*.

CODA:

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY *CHOLAS* IN BOLIVIA'S SOCIAL IMAGINARY

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, there was no place devoid of the market. The question of whether the market was a good thing had become politically moot. The market was all there was.

*Julia Elyachar*⁵⁶

The ubiquitous market that Julia Elyachar found in her dealings with development programs in Cairo was my constant companion and a palpable presence throughout my fieldwork in Cochabamba. I say this not so much out of the obvious observation that my core fieldsite was the city's outdoor marketplace, but because, like Elyachar, the Cochabamba I experienced was caught deep in the continuing effects of neoliberalism, where the market had become a presence as politically powerful and pervasive as the state or its institutions. Market *cholas*, who for generations held an important role in crafting the region's imagined identities, had become critical in defining the characteristics of a new Bolivia. The chapters of this dissertation have disclosed how the *cholas*' barter and negotiate these identities with each other, with the state, with the *mestizo* and white classes, and even with subordinate groups such as recent immigrants to their city.

The main argument I have presented in this dissertation is that just as *cholas* in the past caused the definition of Cochabamba's urban middle class to "shift" and stretch to encompass their group and their unorthodox combination of ethnic markers and commercial success, the younger generation of these market women is now creating a similar shift for the definition of indigeneity in Cochabamba. The stories of these market vendors show how indigeneity is no

⁵⁶ From *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 4.

longer only an ethnic but also a political and economic category, claimed by the youngest generation of *chololas* through market knowledge and practices. In tracing how the market is practiced and imagined by both generations of *chololas*, there are hints of yet a third shift taking place in the identity of these market women; in the description of the informal market as it stretches to engulf many of the services and privileges that used to be sole purview of the formal sector. Consequently, a *chola* trader emerges that is at home in global and transnational trade circuits where she is no longer considered a marginal or alternative player. Evidence of this new type of *chola* is the insistence of the Bolivian government of placing these women in the formal sector category or, rather, of collapsing both sectors under the global free market.

The transformations in the *chola* identity are illustrative of broader changes on what it means to belong to the Bolivian nation after the catalyst that is neoliberalism. In this work I have followed these changes at the sprawling outdoor markets that the *chololas* rule and where the visitor to the city is taken to gaze on and consume *chololas* in their ethnic dress as symbolic of indigenous identity. My explorations under the awnings of the trader stalls show that Cochabamba's *chololas* are no longer represented by tourist postcards, political posters or even previous ethnographic studies, but twenty-first century *chololas* are modifying their sense of who they are in novel ways where dress is no longer a critical marker (Babb 2001; Seligmann 1989; Weismantel 2000). Few women in the *Cancha* today dress in the complete archetypal *chola* garb. The majority of the market traders I observed chose to—instead—play with countless combinations of the local *chola* dress elements and blend them with what they themselves label as *chola* accessories. For instance, women dressed in the traditional pleated skirts would pull on a baseball cap, show bright tennis shoes peeping under their aprons, or tie the end of their braids with ribbons engraved with the colors and logo of the Miami Dolphins. The use of expensive

watches, showy gold jewelry and shawls stiff with colorful hand-embroidered patterns were a few of the frills used by more established *cholas* to set themselves apart from the women who also wore pleated skirts but had recently arrived from the country. More importantly, this blend in accessories served to emphasize how current *cholas* no longer rely only on the visible marker of dress to define their indigeneity. Rather, identity is now more a matter of performance (Paulson 2002: 151).

The ethnographic stories in the chapters of this dissertation give us different glimpses of the *cholas*' performances and new articulations of identity. In Chapter Three, a *chola* trader plays the role of a "humble, uneducated, indigenous vendor" to avoid paying taxes; *chola* performances of citizenship at national rallies and road blockades are described in Chapters Two and Four, and the performance by the Minister of Finance to defy speculative *cholas* in their own markets is included in Chapter Five. The performative aspect of the *cholas*' identity negotiations takes place daily and, sometimes, two conflicting presentations can take place side by side. On a visit I made to a successful meat vendor whose family had been in these markets for several generations, I witnessed a dramatic change in attire that illustrates this statement. I had asked to interview this woman and, when she found I was an anthropologist, she awaited me with a performance of cultural indigeneity staged for my benefit. On that visit, she spoke about Quechua traditions interspersing her tale with phrases in this native tongue and dressed to the nines in her heaviest pleated skirt and embroidered blouse and shawl. Mid-performance, she paused, and in under two minutes had pulled a pristine white smock over her colorful skirts and hidden her braids under a tightly-fitting white cap, a transformation she accomplished with graceful ease and which was undertaken for the benefit of a city inspector who abruptly arrived

on the scene. Shifting from a relaxed to a stiff-backed posture, the vendor moved briskly and asked me to step aside while she accosted the man in flawless Spanish on his unexpected visit.

This example, aside from bringing out the wonderful dramatic abilities of my interviewee, shows that *chola* market women have a sophisticated grasp of the workings of both the indigenous and nonindigenous spheres to the point that they are able to move effortlessly and quickly within the slippages of the two. A similar example is seen on the ethnographic examples of Chapter Six of this dissertation where the youngest *cholitas* struggle to claim their vending heritage through the performance of indigenous symbols such as language or Andean kinship. In the example I give here, the vendor knew exactly what she wanted to serve me in my role as “foreign scholar” and what she wished to show the local government representative. The youngest *cholitas* who have returned to the markets of their mothers play on the dual symbolic capital of market women as both indigenous and sharp business negotiators and also know which identity to emphasize or serve to outsiders to help their cause.

Although *cholitas* have historically been defined and stereotyped by those in power in order to keep their insurgent gender and ethnic personae subordinate to men, *mestizos* and whites, the pervasive force of the market in the new millennium has empowered *cholitas* and augmented the value of their symbolic capital. Evidence of the *cholitas*’ growing power and relevance is that in the past two decades, these market women participated in grassroots social movements that toppled governments and instated indigenous representatives in politics; sent their children to earn degrees in higher education and to conspicuously work in the formal sector; controlled specific market niches against recent immigrant would-be *cholitas*, and entered into open business collaborations with formal corporations. What these stories point to is that Cochabamba’s market *cholitas* are inextricably linked to the cultural, economic and political

processes that are changing the Bolivian nation. In the past, *cholas* were used as the yardstick against which to better understand class and political changes. This dissertation study of Cochabamba's market *cholas*, if nothing else, has shown that these women will continue to be fertile ground from which to carry out productive discussions on these social issues in present-day Bolivia, to improve our understanding on the role of marginalized sectors in postcolonial developing societies.

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