

SCENES FROM COPACABANA  
REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION IN THE LAKE TITICACA REGION

BY

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## DEDICATION

To Omar P. Sangüeza, MD, who made it all possible.

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## ABSTRACT

Based on interviews and secondary sources, this paper documents the current religious climate in Copacabana, Bolivia. The origin of creation myths from earliest recorded times, the site's power as a sacred space has persisted through history, from 1200 CE to the present. This paper traces the evolution of religious beliefs and practices from the Colla nation to the Inca Empire, the Spanish Conquest, the Bolivian Republic, and the Plurinational Republic of Bolivia.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

My interest in Bolivia stems from my marriage to a man who grew up in La Paz and our frequent visits to the country. Almost every trip has included a visit to Copacabana, a small town on the shores of Lake Titicaca. On our first visit, in 1985, we attended the wedding of a Bolivian groom and Peruvian bride at the basilica. They arrived according to their respective time zones, and the wedding Mass was exceptionally short since the priest had already waited a full hour for the bride to arrive. The event left an indelible impression of the culture, landscape, and importance of the place on me.

Since then, we have returned to Copacabana many times because it is lovely, the local trout is delicious, but mostly because it is the home of the Virgin of Copacabana, patron saint of Bolivia. This sculpture of the Virgin Mary is closely tied to Bolivian history, and we honor her by lighting candles at her feet and requesting health and well-being for ourselves and our



Figure 1. Map of Bolivia, courtesy [www.theodor.com/maps](http://www.theodor.com/maps), used with permission.

extended families. We wonder at the extravagance of the church and the devotion of those who visit and photograph this quintessentially Bolivian place.



Figure 2 Bolivian Altiplano

The road between La Paz and Copacabana traverses the *altiplano*, the high plateau between the eastern and western ranges of the Andes Mountains, which are 3,000-4,000 meters (9,500-13,000 feet) above sea level.<sup>1</sup> The snow-capped

peaks draw the eye; the flat land before them is cultivated with the Andean crops of potatoes, quinoa and fava beans, and sheep and camelids graze on the native grasses. Villages are few and far between, mostly comprised of adobe houses. Driving through this region feels like travelling back in time; power lines and the occasional tractor or greenhouse do not seem to have changed rural life very much. Old technologies are in common use; shepherds in the fields use drop spindles to spin wool into yarn, and

farmers still use the ancient *huiso*, a primitive plow made of wood, leather, and metal.



Figure 3 Totora reed boat.

Travelling west, the waters of Lake Titicaca come into view before arrival at the strait of Tiquina. This narrow stretch of water is where travelers cross to

continue on to Copacabana, cars are transported on a rustic ferry while passengers

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<sup>1</sup> José de Mesa, Teresa Gisbert, and Carlos D. Mesa Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (La Paz: Editorial Gisbert y Cia., 2008), 670.

clamber into a small motor boat. The fields are greener, the crops are more robust, and dahlias and gladiolas add color. Restaurants along the road offer fresh fish and rides in boats made of dried *titora*, a subspecies of giant bulrush sedge. At 12,000 feet above sea level, the lake is the highest in the world and large: 120 miles long and 30 – 50 miles wide. It is filled with fish, surrounded by wildlife such as frogs, foxes, chinchillas and Andean hares, and is the water source for the entire region. Its blue water, sparkling in the midst of the harsh, monotone landscape explains why local people have long considered it a sacred space

Through repeated visits to Copacabana, I have become familiar with how the statue of the Virgin Mary came to be beloved by the Bolivian people. However, not until I took a MALS class with Dr. Neal Walls did I begin to look into the more distant history of the place where she resides. I learned that in Copacabana, we can trace the syncretistic changes that have accompanied political change in this community. Local expressions of religious faith changed to accommodate colonizing powers throughout the region's known history and into the present.

One of the things I found fascinating and confusing about Bolivia on my first visit was the celebration of feast days and religious rites. Bolivians both urban and rural celebrate with activities that are a clear mixture of Catholicism and indigenous traditions. For example, the Aymara have adopted a date significant in the Catholic calendar, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, to celebrate *martes de ch'alla*, when land and buildings are blessed by strewing colorful serpentine streamers and confetti and spilling drops of alcohol on the ground. The pan-Andean earth goddess known as

*Pachamama* is honored and asked to provide the owners with health, prosperity, and well-being. Non-Aymara people celebrate it as a hedge against bad luck. It is a clear example of syncretism, a two-way exchange influencing expressions of faith of two different cultures.

As I have watched the political climate in Bolivia change, I have wondered how the expression of religion would change. I expected that religious practices would reflect the emergence of indigenous politicians and the recognition of indigenous languages and religion in the constitution of 2009. This paper will show that in the area surrounding Copacabana, spiritual practices reflect changes in government. The area retains its historic importance as a religious center; without abruptly changing core tenets, daily practices have adapted to political reality.

Whenever cultures collide, one may impose its customs and beliefs on the other, but rather than achieving complete dominance, both are changed. When we discuss the way religion is changed by such encounters, we talk about syncretism. This concept is useful when studying religion and considering the changes that take place over time. The situation in Bolivia, particularly around Copacabana, fits Eric Maroney's definition of syncretism:

[Syncretism] occurs when a religion adopts, absorbs or otherwise accepts elements of another religion. It is a reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief in religion, especially when the results are heterogeneous.... [It] is a kind of borrowing that involves exchange and transformation. Both the replacing and the replaced religions are changed by the contact. Syncretism is ad hoc; it is not planned, nor is it a

formal choice, but rather the natural consequence of historical circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

My confusion at that first *martes de cha'lla* can be explained when we consider that people's expressions of faith result from both the history and current reality of the place in which they live. With its strong religious traditions, Copacabana is a good place to examine how syncretism has influenced current religious practices in Bolivia. Over the last thousand years, repeated encounters changed the political structures and religious practices of the region. In her introduction to *From Viracocha to the Virgin of Copacabana*, Verónica Salles-Reese states, "Lake Titicaca has performed a sacred function for all of the cultures which have flourished on its shores. In both ancient and modern times, each culture has marked the lake's sacredness through various modes of representation, through its own material production, its own intellectual constructs and its own narratives."<sup>3</sup> She summarizes the region's politics, narratives, archeology, and mythology from the earliest recorded to acceptance of the image of the Virgin of Copacabana as a national symbol in 1954.

My thesis relies on her work, including several of her original sources, as well as histories of Bolivia and more recent documents on how religious expression continues to reflect political change. I learned about the significance of geographical features to the Colla people; how the Inca leader determined that the birthplace of the sun god Inti was on an island in the lake; and how Tito Yupanqui honored the Christian Virgin by

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<sup>2</sup> Maroney, *Religious Syncretism* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 6, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *From Viracocha to the Virgin of Copacabana: Representation of the Sacred at Lake Titicaca* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 1.

sculpting her to resemble an Andean woman. I read chronicles recording miracles performed on behalf of exploited indigenous people and attributed to the Virgin by the friars who accompanied the Spanish conquistadors. I saw paintings portraying the body of the Virgin as a mountain, identifying her with the *Pachamama*. I read about the coronation of the Virgin as Patroness of Bolivia and heard stories from urban professionals who visit her with petitions they expect to have granted. I talked with leaders of a remote indigenous community, who told me about the days they dedicate to honoring the earth in expectation of a bountiful harvest.

My research included three visits to Bolivia between June 2010 and February 2012. On the first, I attended the Conference of the Association of Bolivian Studies in Sucre, where I made invaluable contacts and had the opportunity to read in the National Archives. In Carmen Pampa, I was able to speak with Hugh Smetlekop of the *Unidad Agrícola Campesina* (UAC)<sup>4</sup> and Father Freddy del Villar Zuñiga, a Franciscan friar. Suzanne Dulles of the ConBolivia Foundation put me in touch with Genaro Ticona, a resident of the Island of the Sun, and a graduate of the UAC in Tiahuanaco. Ruth Choque drove me back and forth from La Paz to several sites and introduced me to her husband, Luis Fernando Condori, who is a guide in Copacabana.

Ticona, Choque, and Condori are all indigenous names. In earlier visits to Bolivia, I had never had in depth conversations with people who have indigenous names, and this opportunity illustrates the change in Bolivia in the last decade. Such meetings were

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<sup>4</sup>Rural Agricultural Unit (campuses associated with the Catholic University that teach technical skills in rural areas).

never prohibited but had to be intentional. Our paths would not have crossed without planning. This observation is confirmed by Felix Munuchi's experience as a child in the 1950s in a mining camp near Potosi: "Even in the night school, students were treated differently because of the names or the color of their skin. The rural children who had names like Mamani, Quispe, Condori and Mita were treated worse than the children of *criollos*, who are people of Spanish origin."<sup>5</sup> Indigenous people were believed unable and unworthy to compete in academic and economic spheres with their Western counterparts.

Today, education is more available to indigenous people. Two of the men I spoke with completed secondary education, attended college, and are pursuing careers in tourism, which has increased with recognition of the cultural value of indigenous traditions. The services these men offer include mystical and religious tourism, accenting ancient customs.<sup>6</sup> Genaro arranged for me to visit the Island of the Sun and to interview six leaders from the community of Challa. Gentlemen surnamed Ticona, Mendoza, Mamani, and Ramos sat with me in the dining area of a small, rustic guesthouse one rainy morning and answered my questions about their traditions and beliefs. They spoke chiefly in Aymara, which Genaro translated into Spanish for me. They talked about their livelihoods and responsibilities to the larger community in particular the celebration of agricultural ceremonies.

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Kohl, and Linda Farthing with Felix Muruchi, *From the Mines to the Streets: A Bolivian Activist's Life* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 34.

<sup>6</sup> Wily Genero Ticona Guanca, "Invertariacion y puesta en valor de los recursos y atractivos turísticos de las comunidades de: Challa, Ch'issi, Coata, Kopacati, Kusijata, Pueblo de Copacabana, Santa Ana y Siripace del Municipio de Copacabana, Provincia Manco Kapac del Departamento de La Paz" (Tiahuanaco, Bolivia: Proyecto de Grado Technico, Unidad Academica Campesina, 2011), 11, 13.

Having witnessed the balance of power shift since the ouster of President Sanchez de Lozada in 2003, I expected to find a re-emergence of pre-Columbian traditions. Indigenous people have taken their place in the public sphere, demanding recognition for themselves, their history, their ideas, and their religion. These demands were legally granted with the referendum approving the new constitution in 2009. It “guaranteed the rights of the indigenous community’s government ... [and] ... was an excellent expression of the demands the mestizo and indigenous leaders had been making ... for basic recognition.”<sup>7</sup> Discrimination based on ethnicity, language, or dress was no longer tolerated. The relevance of pre-Columbian traditions to the Bolivian landscape and climate were recognized, and traditions that had been surreptitious came out into the open.

Today, as a “plurinational state,” Bolivia is no longer officially Catholic. The government recognizes all religions, cultural groups, and thirty-four indigenous languages in addition to Spanish.<sup>8</sup> The nation is no longer divided between a European elite and a majority population of indigenous people with little voice or power. “No longer does European culture represent the future and indigenous culture the past.”<sup>9</sup> The new constitution is an attempt to change the social order.

However, not everyone, especially those who do not benefit from it, even pay lip-service to accepting these changes. Indigenous people “have a double demand: to be first-class citizens without discrimination on the basis of ethnic origins, while at the

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert S. Klein, *A Concise History of Bolivia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 291.

<sup>8</sup> Constitution of Bolivia, 2009, Articles 4, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Klein, *Concise History*, 291.

same time their right to be different respected. In other words they want to be equal while maintaining their different cultural identities.”<sup>10</sup> These demands for change are the source of social tension in Bolivia; they are being made but have not yet been fully granted.

The change in indigenous peoples has been obvious in my recent visits to Bolivia. Some ethnic groups use distinctive clothing, such as the full skirts and bowler hats worn by Aymara women. Educational opportunities and public interactions have changed. All government employees must now speak an indigenous language as well as Spanish, so my sister-in-law, a native Spanish speaker educated in a German school, who studied English in the United States, had to take classes in either Aymara or Quechua. I have also noticed a change in public spaces. In 1985, when I would stand in line, people in traditional clothing would defer to me. In 2011, women in full skirts and bowler hats assertively demand their space.

At the meeting of the Association of Bolivian Studies in 2011, I attended a discussion entitled, “*Estado Plurinacional, doble republica y crisis civilizatoria*.”<sup>11</sup> I heard much talk of decolonizing the country, which meant going back to pre-Columbian aesthetics. Some suggested that all whites and mestizos should be asked to leave the country, allowing it to return to the peak of the Inca Empire, the glory days of *Tahuantinsuyo*.<sup>12</sup> While these

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<sup>10</sup> John Crabtree, and Laurence Whitehead, *Unresolved Tensions, Bolivia Past and Present*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Plurinational State, Double Republic, and Civilizing Crisis. Course offered at the Association of Bolivian Studies, Sucre, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Gene Savoy, *Antisuyo: The Search for the Lost Cities of the Amazon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 207. *Tahuantinsuyo* is what the Inca called their empire, which consisted of four different worlds, or quarters, with Cuzco at the center. “These four worlds had great climatic and cultural extremes.... Kollasuyo consisted of the old altiplano inhabited by the Kolla or Aymara people of the Titicaca region.”

views are extreme and not shared by most Bolivians, they reflect the desire of indigenous people for “recognition of their dignity and worth as full citizens by the state and the elite white society.”<sup>13</sup> In 1952, agrarian reform gave indigenous people property rights, but the rights of full citizenship did not extend to the social sphere. Since 2009, legal rights have increased rapidly, but social changes continue more slowly.

Indigenous people feel more open to follow their religious practices, as seen in the mystical and religious tourism discussed by Genaro in his thesis. He quotes the *Practical Manual of Tourism* published in La Paz in 2003: “Mystic tourism offers the opportunity to live the experience and participate in the richness of the beliefs, legends and divine rituals a people inherited from their ancestors.”<sup>14</sup> I saw changes in the attitude of the religious shaman in Copacabana between 1985 and 2011. In 1985, when I wanted to take a photograph of a shaman, he chastised me and told me to go away. At the same place in 2011, I was encouraged to take photographs

The recent political changes have been accompanied by a change in religious attitudes. I found that since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has become more open to non-Western traditions. In the sixteenth century, the Church in Latin America considered indigenous beliefs heretical, and those who followed them were zealously punished. In the seventeenth century, Jesuit priests ordered that

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<sup>13</sup> Klein, *Concise History*, 291.

<sup>14</sup> José Valdivia, *Practical Manual of Tourism* (La Paz, 2003), quoted in Ticona, “Invertariacion y puesta”. (My translation “José Valdivia menciona que el turismo místico es ofrecer la oportunidad de vivir la experiencia de conocer y participar en la riqueza de las creencias, leyendas y rituales divinos de un pueblo, heredados por sus antepasados.”)

buildings and images sacred to indigenous people be destroyed.<sup>15</sup> In the next generation, mestizo chroniclers educated in Catholic theology but Andean by birth tried to make indigenous histories consistent with Christian theology,<sup>16</sup> giving the protagonists Christian identities. In the long period of dominance by Spanish elites that followed, indigenous people were left to their own practices in private, but in public, only Christianity was recognized. Today, ancient traditions co-exist with European teachings in a locally specific syncretism that is both Andean and Catholic.

In the following chapters, I will discuss my research on the relationship of politics and religion in different historical periods. Chapter 2 discusses the Aymara-speaking Colla people who lived near Lake Titicaca from 1200 to 1400 CE. They believed that Viracocha used clay to create humankind in all its diversity. They recognized the spiritual power of place deities, stones, mountains, and sites.

Chapter 3 looks at the changes caused by the colonization of the Colla region by the Incas. The Colla were convinced to accept the supremacy of the sun over their own gods, and the Inca found it convenient to place the birth of the sun in Lake Titicaca, so the area retained its religious significance. This syncretism was defined by fusion, as each culture brought something to, and absorbed something from, the other.

Chapter 4 considers the Spanish conquest and the introduction of Christianity. Here, a religion was carried far from its origins and violently encountered a completely different culture.<sup>17</sup> Copacabana is but one of many places in Latin America where

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<sup>15</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, 135.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>17</sup> Marhoney, *Religious Syncretism*, 9.

Catholicism embraced new representations of the Virgin Mary in order to accommodate local beliefs.

Chapter 5 details the research methods I used to collect data while in Bolivia. Chapter 6 discusses Copacabana in 2012. I consider how ethnicity, education, and socio-economic position influence the way religious traditions are practiced. I found that isolation has yielded a locally specific practice of faith that embraces both Catholicism and indigenous traditions.<sup>18</sup> Chapter 7 looks at the influence of both the Catholic Church and the Bolivian political situation on religious practices today. Finally, in Chapter 8, I draw some conclusions about what I learned through my research.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## Chapter 2. Pre-Inca Societies



Figure 4. Map of Lake Titicaca Region. Wikimedia Commons, used with permission.

From archeological remains, we know that people have lived in the Andean region of South America since about 10,000 BCE. Tiahuanaco, just south of Lake Titicaca, was the center of a large, advanced culture from 250 BCE until the eighth century CE.<sup>19</sup> A sunken temple, pools built on hilltops to reflect the night sky, large monoliths, and an

advanced irrigation system indicate that these people were skilled in agriculture and astronomy and had a complex religion. Their downfall may have been drought caused by climate change, but even without more detail, we do know that their well-organized government was followed by chaos and division into smaller nations scattered across the region.

According to Spanish accounts, the two largest groups living along the shores of Lake Titicaca between 1200 and 1400 CE were the Aymara-speaking Colla and Lupaca people. They lived near each other in fortified towns;<sup>20</sup> each boasted a fierce army, and they fought many battles, vying for dominance. Like other Andean communities, they had different moieties, known as the *urcusuyu* and *umasuyu*. The *urcusuyu* lived in the highlands, cultivating quinoa and potatoes, and raising livestock for meat, while the

<sup>19</sup> Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 17, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Klein, *Concise History*, 14.

*umasuyu* were associated with the coastal areas and lowlands, harvesting fish, fruit, and coca.<sup>21</sup> The *altiplano* could grow only limited crops, and highland populations relied on goods produced at lower elevations.

No single, definitive source describes the beliefs and myths of these people; sometimes conflicting versions were compiled following the Spanish conquest. Some were based on stories told by elderly natives, while others record the direct observations of the authors. Both the Inca and the Aymara kept historical memories alive by telling stories. Narrators used repetition and mnemonic devices, most notably the *quipu*, strings that encoded values in knots, to pass stories from one generation to the next.<sup>22</sup> These stories influenced the Spanish chronicles, most written by priests. Chroniclers born in Spain, like Father Bernabe Cobo, viewed native traditions as devil worship.<sup>23</sup> Others, such as Guaman Poma de Ayala, who was of indigenous descent, were more sympathetic to the local beliefs.

Salles-Reese compiled a history of the customs and beliefs of the Colla people based on many chronicles. She examined the creation myths and histories recorded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries<sup>24</sup> and looked for places where the stories overlap. I rely on her interpretation to explain the importance of the Lake Titicaca region to the pre-Inca people living there. This region was known as the *Collasuyo*, or the *Collao*, and was home to several cultures in addition to the Lupaca and Colla. The peninsula now

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Harold Osborne, *South American Mythology* (Middlesex: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1968), 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> Bernabe Cobo, *Inca Religion and Customs*, trans. and ed. Roland Hamilton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), xix.

<sup>24</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, 1.

known as Copacabana juts into the lake and nearly divides it into two distinct bodies of water. On it, the town of Copacabana borders the lake and looks out toward two islands that are at the center of Colla creation myths.<sup>25</sup> Originally known as Titicaca and Coati, they were later called the Island of the Sun and the Island of the Moon, respectively.

The creator god, Viracocha, is said to have appeared on the Island of Titicaca to bring order to the universe. Colla legends say that the whole region was in darkness before the sun or moon was created. Viracocha arrived on the banks of Lake Titicaca after travelling through Tiahuanaco, where he created giants, humans, animals, and other living things. Arriving at the Island of Titicaca, he created the sun, moon, stars, and, using clay carried from Tiahuanaco, humankind in all its diversity. He gave different styles of clothing and skills to different groups, who migrated to populate the Andean region. Once people inhabited caves, mountaintops, the banks of rivers and streams, and the lakeshore, Viracocha left and disappeared into the sea along the coast of what is now Ecuador.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 5 . Sunken temple and monoliths in Tiahuanaco.

Several variations of this myth all “indicate that Lake Titicaca is a primeval place. The variants coincide in the presentation of an extraordinary being who appears at the lake

<sup>25</sup> Here, the term is used inclusively for all the Aymara-speaking people of the Collasuyo.

<sup>26</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, 53-54.

and performs an organizing or creative function.”<sup>27</sup> One of the prime elements of this organization was dividing night from day and creating order where there had been chaos.<sup>28</sup>

One variation on the creation myth explains how the sun came to be identified with the Island of Titicaca. Father Bernabe Cobo, a Jesuit priest and firm believer in the biblical story of Genesis,<sup>29</sup> nonetheless recorded many Andean creation myths, including the following:

The shrine of the Sun, which was on the Island of Titicaca, was a large solid crag. The reason it was consecrated to the Sun and worshiped can be traced to a ridiculous story.... the people of the Island of Titicaca saw the Sun come up one morning out of that crag with extraordinary radiance. For this reason they believed that the true dwelling place of the Sun was that crag, or at least that crag was the most delightful thing in the world for the Sun. ... Whatever the origin of this shrine may have been, it was very ancient and highly venerated by the people of the Collao before they were subjugated by the Inca kings.<sup>30</sup>



While the origin of the name *Titicaca* is unknown, it has been translated as *Rock Puma*, and this crag, shaped like a puma, is an

Figure 6 The crag shaped like a puma, Island of the Sun.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>29</sup> Cobo, *Inca Religion*, xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

example of a *huaca*.<sup>31</sup> A *huaca* is anyone or anything sacred or believed to have supernatural powers.<sup>32</sup> It may be as concrete as a specific place, stone, or animal or as abstract as a meteorological phenomenon, such as lightning. Each *huaca* is believed to have “a soul capable of working good and evil among men;”<sup>33</sup> each has a name and is venerated with sacrifices of food, drink, fire, and music. The concept of place deities is still central to pan-Andean beliefs.

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<sup>31</sup>Andres Orta, *Catechizing Culture: Missionaries, Aymara, and the “New Evangelization”* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 232-33. Also written as *wa’ka*, or *guaca*, and translated as place deity. “Wak’as are typically named places with which people enter into more or less balanced exchange relations, making a variety of offerings and receiving in return crop and animal fertility, luck, or simply avoiding misfortune. [These are] flat fields, to rock outcroppings and local peaks, to water sources and the glacier-covered peaks that loom large in the views and thoughts of altiplano dwellers. .... [The term] references a general condition of potency and reciprocity inherent in certain places in the landscape.”

<sup>32</sup>Cobo, *Inca Religion*, 53-4.

<sup>33</sup>Phillip Ainsworth Means, *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes* (New York and London: Scribner and Sons, 1931), 418.

### Chapter 3. The Inca in Copacabana

The Inca were a Quechua-speaking people who developed an extraordinary civilization in the Andes sometime in the early twelfth century. Inca is also the title given to the ruler of this empire, a position that passed from father to son. It was the civilization the Spanish conquistadors encountered in the 1530s, and it became the best known and documented pre-Columbian culture in South America. Manco Capac was its founder in the area near Cuzco, and he also established an organized religion. Written records of the names and exploits of the twelve generations that followed him end with the encounter with the Spanish.<sup>34</sup>

Inca rulers remained close to Cuzco until the mid-to-late fourteenth-century reign of the eighth Inca, Viracocha Inca (not to be confused with the god). The empire expanded in all directions, forming the territory known as *Tahuantinsuyo*, and the Inca controlled lands and people as far away as what is now Quito to the northwest and modern Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina to the south and east. The Inca government utilized the diverse foods and technologies that they found in the “great climatic and cultural extremes,”<sup>35</sup> of the peoples they conquered.

Military force was used to overpower the nations in these territories and impose a new government. New regulations were established, and communities were restructured. To reduce resistance and maintain control, the Inca displaced some populations forcibly. Those from a formerly conquered region would be moved into a

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<sup>34</sup> Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Savoy, *Antisuyo*, 207.

newly conquered region so that its inhabitants were too disorganized and disoriented to rebel effectively against the Inca forces. Language was also used as a means of colonization and control. Quechua speakers moved into other language areas and learned to speak them. They worked to be accepted by wearing local dress and absorbing local gods into their pantheon. The one condition for accepting new gods was that the sun, *Inti*, must be honored as the creator and the moon as his consort.

The tenth Inca, Tupac Yupanqui, later known as Pachuti,<sup>36</sup> ruled from 1448-1482, when Inca forces reached the Titicaca region.<sup>37</sup> The Aymara-speaking people knew that a takeover was inevitable. Their lands were fertile and their governments weakened by fighting between the Colla and Lupaca. They made a plan to preserve and protect their holy sanctuary. As recorded in 1621 by Ramos-Gavilan and retold by Father Bernabe Cobo soon afterward, a Colla man who had served as an attendant at the holy site on



Figure 7 Inca ruins on the Island of the Sun.

the Island of the Sun travelled to Cuzco to extol its virtues. “He was moved to do this by his fervent desire that under the new leadership of the Incas the worship of this shrine would not wane but be augmented, and that the shrine would be exalted.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Means, *Ancient Civilizations*, 238.

<sup>38</sup> Cobo, *Inca Religion*, 92.

He spoke directly to Pachuti Inca Yupanqui and explained that the sun emerged from a rock on the island of Titicaca, and it was so sacred, not even birds dared to land on it.<sup>39</sup>

The Inca was intrigued and made the journey to the Island of the Sun, where he paid homage. He considered the arrangement of this shrine dedicated to the sun and the fact that the Incas boasted of being descendants of the sun and was pleased to have found a place so appropriate to increase the worship of the sun among his subjects. "He declared himself absolute sovereign of the island, appointed some pious elders to take care of the spot, and sent those people he considered unworthy to live across the lake in Yunguyo. Inca people from as far away as Quito and Chile were chosen to settle on the Island of the Sun."<sup>40</sup> A village was built, and a thousand people settled to cultivate crops, craft gold and silver images, and brew corn beer to be used as offerings to the sacred rock. Structures were built to house sacred virgins and priests and to store food.

On the neighboring Island of the Moon, or Coati, more shelters were constructed for approximately six-hundred virgins who were dedicated to the sun. At Copacabana, a hostel was built for pilgrims to stay in before making their journey to the island. Large storehouses provided food for them.<sup>41</sup>

During the occupation of the Island of Titicaca, a new creation myth replaced the one the Aymara-speaking people told. According to the Inca version, the Island of the

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<sup>39</sup> Alonso Ramos-Gavilan, *Historia de Copacabana y de la Milagrosa Imagen de su Virgin* (Lima, 1621; rpt. Arequipa: Imprenta de El Eco de Misti, 1879), 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ramos Gavilan, *Historia de Copacabana*, 6. My translation "Luego se declaro soberano absoluto de la isla, y mando salir de ella a sus habitantes naturales, y sin darles audiencia los traslado al pueblo de Yunguyo, pues no eran morales...Con esta visita y dispociones de Topac-Yopanque, fue tal la importancia que recobro ests santuario del sol que veniana a el desde Quito, de Pasto, de Chile y de los angulos mas remotos de la monarquia peruana."

<sup>41</sup> Cobo, *Inca Religion*, 93.

Sun was the birthplace of the first Inca and where the sun gave him responsibility to rule over other peoples. Salles-Reese summarized the Inca creation narrative by compiling sixteen sources:

On the island of Titicaca, the Sun - a resplendent personage in the form of a man - summoned the Incas and adopted them as his children. Since humankind was living in a state of barbarism, the Sun conferred a civilizing mission upon the Incas. These divine emissaries traveled to the north and emerged from the mouth of Pacaritambo, a cave near Cuzco. These original Incas, a brother and a sister or four brothers and four sisters wore clothing richly adorned in gold and carried corn seeds. The men and women carried slings and metal utensils, respectively. One brother, Manco Capac, also carried a golden rod that would sink into the ground at the exact place where, according to the wishes of the Sun they should settle. The rod was thrust into the ground at either Pacaritambo or Cuzco. Three of the original four brothers were turned into huacas. The remaining brother, Manco Capac, had a son with one of his sisters, thus becoming the progenitor of the Inca dynasty.<sup>42</sup>

After the death of Pachuti Inca Tupanqui, the Inca dynasty continued in Cuzco for two more generations before the arrival of the Spanish. Although they continued to expand into the southern lowlands, the Titicaca Lake region was the limit of their reach into northeastern Bolivia.<sup>43</sup> Eventually, their empire was weakened by the difficulty of controlling non-Inca states as well as a struggle over the inheritance of power following the death of Huayna Capac in 1525.<sup>44</sup> Civil war facilitated their unlikely conquest by a small band of Spaniards.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, 93.

<sup>43</sup> Klein, *Concise History*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Mesa, Gisbert, and Gistbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> Klein, *Concise History*, 29.

#### Chapter 4. Conquest and Colony

The beginning of the end for the Inca Empire came in 1532, the year that Francisco Pizarro and a band of 168 Spanish soldiers arrived in its territory.<sup>46</sup> The empire was divided by internal fighting, making it susceptible to outside attacks. Following the death of Huayna Capac, the eleventh Inca, Huáscar, his legitimate son, should have become the sole Inca. However, Atahualpa, Huayna Capac's son by a concubine, had been his father's favorite. Atahualpa fought for control of the central government from his base in the northern regional capital on the coast, near what we now know as Quito, and Huáscar from Cuzco. Atahualpa had the benefit of military advisors who had aided his father, and following a series of battles, he emerged victorious. As the legitimate heir, Huáscar was allowed to live, but all of his family members and advisors who might have claimed a right to power were put to death.<sup>47</sup> Huáscar sat on the throne but was demoralized and without military strength.

When the Spanish arrived in Cuzco, they captured Atahualpa and charged him with blasphemy. Legend says that when he was handed a copy of the Bible and told that it contained the true word of God, Atahualpa held it to his ear. Hearing nothing, he threw it to the ground, saying that it said nothing, that it was empty.<sup>48</sup> He was held hostage, so the Spanish could "wrest control of his empire. After Pizarro promised to spare the Inca

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<sup>46</sup> Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 87.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Genesis*, vol. 1, *Memory of Fire*, trans. Cedric Belfrage (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 87-88.

king's life in exchange for filling three rooms with tons of gold and silver the conqueror then ordered him killed, fearing... an uprising."<sup>49</sup> At first, Huáscar was willing to help the Spanish, believing that with the defeat of Atahualpa, he would regain power. He did not foresee that his brother's loss would lead to the loss of the whole empire.

The battle for domination continued for more than ten years. In 1543, the Spanish crown was victorious and dominated Inca lands for the next three centuries.<sup>50</sup> The heaviest fighting around Cuzco took place in 1534-1536, with Manco Capac leading the Incas. In one battle in 1534, the Inca torched a church built by the Spanish, but it did not burn. The Spanish attributed the miracle to the intercession of Mary, who was seen covering the thatched roof with her cloak as a reward for their devotion. The indigenous people may have seen a similarity between the Spanish praying to an image for miracles and their own adoration of huacas in expectation of better weather or crops. Since the Spanish were victorious, their patroness, Mary, was seen as stronger than the indigenous gods. Nations conquered by the Incas, still hoping for revenge, allied with the Spanish and their miraculous Mary.

Spanish domination introduced Catholicism to the Andes. The Catholic monarchs Isabel and Fernando, who financed Columbus, saw expeditions to the Americas as a continuation of the reconquest of Spain, which forced out Muslims and Jews. The idea of converting heathen Indians to Catholicism was part of the rationale for funding the voyages. The crown appealed to Rome for approval, and in 1493, Pope Alexander VI

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas A. Robins, *Mercury, Mining and Empire: The Human and Ecological Cost of Colonial Silver Mining in the Andes* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>50</sup> Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 92.

made Spain sovereign in perpetuity over western South America on the condition that it “send learned, God-fearing men to evangelize the natives.”<sup>51</sup>

Christopher Columbus felt a close allegiance to Mary and considered himself a “Christ bearer” — just as Mary brought Christ into the world, he would bring Christ to the Indies.<sup>52</sup> His crew also had a strong devotion to Mary.<sup>53</sup> She was the patroness of mariners and protected them from the dangers of the deep.<sup>54</sup> The Spaniards who landed in Peru and went to battle against the Incas often carried banners with images of Mary. They also had great allegiance to St. James, or Santiago, credited with helping to remove the Moors from Spain. His name was often invoked in battle, and the Inca came to associate him with Tunupa, their god of lightning.

The Inca saw Mary as a strong protector, and some of the explanations given by Spanish priests made it possible for them to associate her with their own deity, the *Pachamama*.<sup>55</sup> In the Mediterranean region, including Spain, Mary, like Pachamama, was identified with the earth; for example, “Jesus Christ grew in her as plants grow in the fertile soil.”<sup>56</sup> According to Ramos-Gavilan, “The Indians of Cuzco and Copacabana, who were similar as they all traced their origin to that place revered the earth, and before working it they would offer her sacrifices asking that she care for them as a good

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>52</sup> Linda B. Hall, *Mary, Mother and Warrior: The Virgin in Spain and the Americas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 19), 55.

<sup>53</sup> Teresa Gisbert, *Iconografía y mitos indígenas en el arte*, (La Paz: Editorial Gisbert y Cia, 2008), 28.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 45-46.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 21.



Figure 8. Cerro Rico, Potosi.

mother would care for her children.”<sup>57</sup> The *Pachamama*, the spirit of the earth that produced all life, could be seen as one and the same as Mary. If the indigenous people revered the earth as *Pachamama*, the Spanish seemed to revere it for the gold and silver it produced. One of the most important cities in the colonial Andes was Potosi, a name that became synonymous with wealth.<sup>58</sup> It grew quickly once the Spanish discovered rich veins of silver in the nearby mountain that became known as *Cerro Rico*, or “rich hill”. The ore was smelted and refined in Potosi, and the ingots were carried overland on llamas and shipped to Spain.<sup>59</sup> Indigenous people throughout the region were required to perform a period of service in the mines as an obligation to the Spanish crown. Thousands died from collapsed shafts, mercury poisoning, and exposure.<sup>60</sup>

mother would care for her children.”<sup>57</sup> The *Pachamama*, the spirit of the earth that produced all life, could be seen as one and the same as Mary.

If the indigenous people revered the

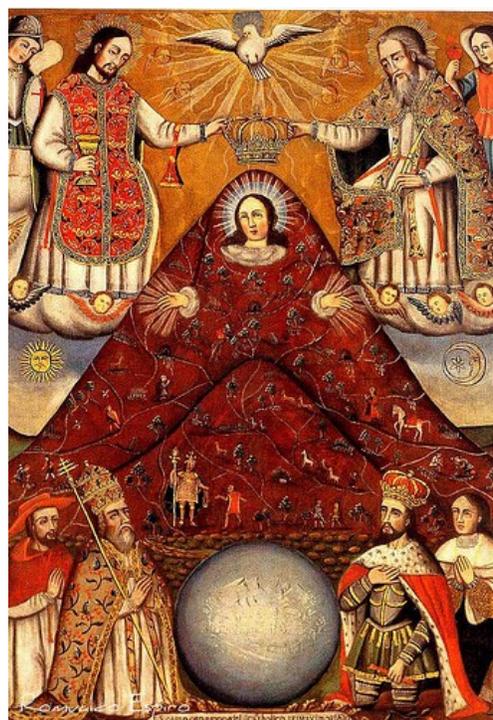


Figure 9 The Virgin del Cerro, Casa de la Moneda, Potosi. Photo by Tristan Savatier, used with permission.

<sup>57</sup> Ramos-Gavilan, *Historia de Copacabana*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Robins, *Mercury*, 17; Klein, *Concise History* 32; Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Klein, *Concise History*, 50; Mesa, Gisbert, and Gisbert, *Historia de Bolivia*, 98-99.

<sup>60</sup> Robins, *Mercury*, 76-79.

The form of the Cerro Rico was elided with the Virgin Mary in paintings of the *Virgen del Cerro* created between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries by now-unknown artists. In these depictions, the mountain has Mary's face and hands. On either side, the sun and moon are represented in an obvious "identification of Mary with the *Pachamama* or Earth Mother, in such a way that she substitutes for an ancient goddess."<sup>61</sup> The image complies with the teachings of the Catholic Church and the ancient beliefs of the indigenous people at the same time. It is a powerful visual representation connecting sacred feminine entities of the two cultures and concrete evidence of a depiction of the Virgin Mary meaningful to indigenous people. Some of these paintings can be found in museums in Potosi and La Paz.

Another depiction of Mary that became popular throughout the Andes is the *Candelaria*, or Candlemas, in which she is portrayed in a triangular dress standing on a crescent moon, which reinforces her identification as the divine companion of the sun. The gradual visual and spiritual shift from the *Pachamama* to the *Virgen del Cerro* to the *Candelaria* made transfer of allegiance easy. The new images can be seen as slightly different representations of the older ones. In this way, the indigenous people assimilated Mary as a new representation of an existing divine spirit.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Teresa Gisbert, and José de Mesa, "La Virgen María en Bolivia: La Dialéctica Barroca en la Representación de María," in *Barroco Andino: Memoria del I Encuentro Internacional* (La Paz: Viceministro de Cultura y la Unión Latina, 2003), 27. My translation.: "...allí hay una identificación de María con la Pachamama o Madre Tierra, de manera que se trata de la sustitución a una antigua diosa."

<sup>62</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 138.

The sculpture on the altar at Copacabana is a *Candelaria*, created in 1582 by Francisco Tito Yupanqui, a descendent of Tupac Yupanqui, the tenth Inca. In his own story, the Virgin appeared to him in a dream and asked him to create an image of her. She was his guide and companion, encouraging him as he encountered ridicule and disappointment.<sup>63</sup> He had long wanted to create an image of her, although at that time, indigenous people were prohibited from making sacred images by the viceroy of Peru.<sup>64</sup> Yupanqui persisted, eventually making his way to Potosi, where he apprenticed with



Figure 10 . Statue of Francisco Yupanqui, Copacabana.

Spanish artist Diego de Ortiz. After making one statue, he painted an illustration of it, hoping it would convince the Bishop in Chuquisaca to give him permission to found a brotherhood in the Virgin's honor. Instead, the Bishop laughed at Yupanqui's painting, saying it looked "more like a bearded monkey than a woman."<sup>65</sup> Yupanqui went back to work, and another attempt was more successful. With this sculpture still unfinished, Yupanqui went to La Paz for further help and at the Church of San Francisco, exchanged unskilled labor for instruction from a Spaniard named Vargas. Finally, the statue was gilded and ready to be presented in Copacabana.

Another version of the story recounts that the Copacabana region experienced unrest in the 1580s. Food was scarce due to either untimely freezes<sup>66</sup> or drought.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Virachocho*, appendix, Yupanqui letter.

<sup>64</sup> Edgar Valda Martinez, *Francisco Tito Yupanqui: La Ch'uujilla y La Janaxacha* (Potosi, 1992), 17.

<sup>65</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, Yupanqui letter.

Having seen the strength of the Christian god, community leaders decided to appeal to a saint for help, but various groups disagreed about which saint would be most helpful. Some argued for their patroness St. Anne, Mary's mother;<sup>68</sup> others for St. Sebastian, protector against plagues;<sup>69</sup> another for Mary, the most powerful of all saints. It was known that Yupanqui was in Potosi, working on a statue of Mary that could become the physical representation of the saint who would watch over the region.



Figure 11 Detail of a basilica door showing Yupanqui arriving at San Francisco.

Arrangements were made to carry the finished work to Copacabana on February 2, 1583. Priests, politicians, and many others, both powerful and ordinary, came out to meet the procession. Once the figure was unwrapped, people were

pleasantly surprised: "They had imagined that it would be inferior to the images that had been brought from the Iberian Peninsula, not expecting that an indigenous artist could create something better than the greatest sculptor... Her color was not as white as

<sup>66</sup> Sabine MacCormack, "Human and Divine Love in a Pastoral Setting: The Histories of Copacabana on Lake Titicaca", *Representations*, 112, no. 1 (Fall 2010):60; retrieved 25 May 2011 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525rep.2010.112.1.54>.

<sup>67</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 164.

<sup>68</sup> MacCormack, "Human and Divine Love," 60.

<sup>69</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 164.

the images brought from the Peninsula but was more like that of the people of the *altiplano*. It was a dark, pearly color, which had a shining luminosity.”<sup>70</sup>

In addition to being beautiful, the statue seemed to offer protection. Once installed on the altar, a soft rain began to fall, protecting the crops from the freezing weather. Received as a gift from the Virgin, the rain was enough to convince all groups around Copacabana that she was a strong and loving patroness who would provide for them.<sup>71</sup>

The church in Copacabana was constructed on the site where pre-Columbian pilgrims began their journey to the Island of Titicaca, home of the temple to the sun. Once on the altar, the statue of the Virgin was quickly recognized as housing the spirit of the place; she became the representation of what was sacred in Copacabana. As Sabine MacCormack writes, “In all but appearance, the image of the Virgin of Copacabana could replace a *huaca*.”<sup>72</sup> The image was credited with supernatural powers, and people began to approach it with requests and petitions.

When built, the church in Copacabana was staffed by Augustinian friars. In contrast to the Jesuits in Lima, who were destroying local idols and punishing native peoples for heresy, the Augustinians in Copacabana were creoles, sympathetic to the indigenous people. In their desire to teach about a loving God, accessible to all, the Augustinians

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<sup>70</sup> Victor Santa Cruz, *Historia de Copacabana*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (La Paz: Ediciones Camarlinghi, 1971), 168-69. My translation, “Grande fue el asombro de los vecinos de Copacabana cuando contemplaron por primera vez la obra del su conterráneo. Ni los más optimistas pensaron nunca que la imagen labrado por Yupanqui hubiera alcanzado tanto perfección y belleza. Creían que, en el mejor de los casos sería una obra un tanto inferior a las que traían de la Península los españoles. Pero, jamás se imaginara que el artista indígena hubiera superado los mejores esculturas....su color no era el blanco de los imágenes traído de la Península sino que se asemejaba en cierta manera al de los nativos de la mesta altiplánica. Un color perla, obscuro, brillante al mismo tiempo.”

<sup>71</sup> MacCormack, “Human and Divine Love,” 61.

<sup>72</sup> MacCormack, “From the Sun of the Incas to the Virgin of Copacabana” *Representations*, 8 (Autumn 1984):53; retrieved 19 July 2012 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928557>.

told stories about how the Virgin helped local people. The most prolific recorder of these stories was Friar Alonso Ramos-Gavilán, who wrote *El Historia del Celebre Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Copacabana y sus Milagros* (The History of the Celebrated Sanctuary of Our Lady of Copacabana and Her Miracles) in 1618. The book attributes 132 miracles to Our Lady of Copacabana, which began as soon as the statue was placed on the altar. One illustrates how the Virgin helped indigenous people to recover their voice, which had been lost in the conquest.

[It is] the miracle of a young man who travelled to the Yungas region in the lowlands, where the Indians grew coca, aji peppers, fruit and cotton. There a sorcerer told him his destiny was to care for the *huacas*. He was shown the secrets of the *huacas* and became a minister to them. This caused the Devil to possess the boy and both cripple and silence him. When he returned to his mother in the altiplano, she took him to Copacabana, where it was determined that he had been possessed by a demon. A Mass was offered to the Virgin, to no avail. A second Mass was offered, during which the boy was given a candle to hold and the expression on his face changed. After being carried out of the church, he was put down. Suddenly, he got up, walked and told the story of what had happened to him.<sup>73</sup>

The clear message was that any native voice in the Church and the Spanish-based government would come through the intercession of the Virgin of Copacabana, not their traditional gods. Indigenous people had to change their spiritual allegiance, so the people in power would hear their concerns. They would regain their “voice only when they participate[d] in a Christian discourse and ultimately bec[a]me advocates of the

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<sup>73</sup> Ramos-Gavilan, *La Historia de Copacabana*, 75-6.

faith.”<sup>74</sup> They were able to reclaim an identity by accepting the religion of their conquerors.

Other miracles attributed to the Virgin included the salvation of workers in a collapsed mine in Potosi and the revival of dead pack animals. They illustrate how Our Lady of Copacabana secured the indigenous people’s increasing devotion. Her association with Christianity was less important than her presence in this holy place. The image seemed to have power, not only as a representation of the mother of Christ, but because it housed a spirit tied to the place where she resides. She was recognized as the new representation of the divine space of Copacabana.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, 138.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

## Chapter 5. Contemporary Conversations: Research Methods

This paper traces how the geographical area of Copacabana in Bolivia has maintained its importance as a sacred space from antiquity to the present. To understand the present, I had to speak with indigenous people who have maintained their traditions. Catholicism has been incorporated into the older traditions, which have been adapted but not abandoned. Without developing relationships through an extended stay in a village, an outsider, associated with Western culture, will have difficulty eliciting valid information from indigenous people due to language barriers and lack of trust. In addition, the Western elite in Bolivia has not shown respect for indigenous people and their traditions, often considering them backward and standing in the way of progress. Not until land reform was achieved in 1952 were the citizenship rights and privileges of indigenous people recognized.

To gain access to leaders in an indigenous community, I needed someone to help me bridge the cultural differences. My first interview was with Genaro Ticona, a young man I met through Suzanne Dulles, the wife of one of my husband's friends. Suzanne and her husband, Juan Velasco, operate a nonprofit organization, ConBolivia, that provides scholarships to students in rural Bolivia, so they can pursue postsecondary education. Juan's elderly mother lives in La Paz, and one of her caretakers is from the Island of the Sun. Through this caretaker, Suzanne and her husband met and visited Genaro on the Island of the Sun. A strong friendship developed, and Genaro was asked to help identify good scholarship candidates. Eventually, he requested and was awarded the chance to

study tourism at the UAC in Tiahuanaco. When I met him, he had recently completed his thesis and received his certificate as a licensed tourist guide. His research was a comprehensive study of the possibilities for tourism in each of the small villages around Copacabana.<sup>76</sup> He was most sympathetic to my need for help with my research.

At our first encounter, we met in front of the Church of San Francisco in the historic center of La Paz. Genaro was with a friend, and the three of us walked to a nearby café, where we ordered juice and *salteñas*, a particularly delicious Bolivian type of empanada. I paid for all the food and drinks; I wanted to establish an understanding of our working conditions. I asked for and was granted permission to take notes on the conversation. Over the course of one hour, I recorded five pages of observations.

Genaro talked mostly about his thesis, which had taken him to thirty-three communities on the shores of Lake Titicaca to observe the religious customs and geographical and archeological points of interest in each. He gave me an overview of the religious celebrations that take place over the course of the year to ensure a bountiful harvest. They are mostly pre-Columbian rituals that have been given the names of the Saint's days on which they are celebrated. We talked about my interest in meeting some of the indigenous people from the Island of the Sun. I indicated that I hoped to interview individuals who would be willing to talk with me about their religious customs and how they relate to the Virgin of Copacabana.

Between November and February, Genaro and I emailed many times while he arranged for my daughter and me to travel to the Island of the Sun. He knew a boat

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<sup>76</sup> Ticona Guanca, "Invertariacion"

owner who was willing to transport us from Copacabana to his home village of Challa. We stayed at the guesthouse of Genaro's uncle. Genaro arranged with the village *mallkus*, leaders responsible for the different crops grown there, to talk with me, and he offered to translate from Aymara to Spanish.<sup>77</sup> Finally, he agreed to serve as our guide as we hiked across the island. He opened the doors I needed to be able to gather information from the village.

Genaro, my daughter, and I left Copacabana for Challa on the Island of the Sun on a Tuesday afternoon. A direct trip in a motor boat takes about two hours. Although we did not find the place as dismal as Adolph Bandelier did when he visited in 1894, his observation about the climate is still valid: "monotonous, cold, moist and abounding in threatening phenomena."<sup>78</sup> Bright sun one morning was followed by a grey drizzle the next. The nights are extremely cold—small wood fires on the beach were the only source of heat—but with no street lights, the skies are spectacular. As the sun went down and darkness fell we watched the stars come out, gradually at first until the Milky Way was fully visible and the stars were too numerous to count.

Genaro had arranged for the six community leaders to come to the guesthouse dining room on a rainy morning to answer my questions. The men were all between sixty and eighty years of age and had spent their lives in the village of Challa. Their faces were brown and wrinkled from exposure to the strong sun at high altitude. Several held wads of coca leaf in their mouths as we talked. They wore broad-brimmed fedoras or

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<sup>77</sup> Although 75 percent of Bolivians speak Spanish, according to the 2001 census, 20 percent of 1.3 million Aymara-speakers were monolingual. Most are older, rural people like those I interviewed.

<sup>78</sup> Adolph F. Bandelier, *The Islands of Titicaca and Koati* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1910), 20.

baseball caps, and warm sweaters or ponchos. Our meeting lasted a little more than an hour. I asked the questions I had prepared ahead of time (see appendix), although conversation was more free flowing than a question and answer session. I spoke in Spanish, and they spoke mostly in Aymara. Genaro translated my questions into Aymara and their responses into Spanish.

My questions centered on community religious traditions and the relationship between this community and the basilica in Copacabana. Most of the responses were about island traditions and sacred places, the changes seen during their lifetimes, and the rituals that are still observed to ensure a generous harvest.

These community leaders had no reason to want to talk to me about their traditions. They conceded the privilege because a member of their community made the arrangements on my behalf and because they would be compensated for their time. The agreement was that I would give them each fifty Bolivianos (approximately \$7.00) at the end of the interview. We had no formal agreement, just an understanding through the intercession of my guide and translator. At the beginning of the conversation, I made clear that I was gathering information for university work, not for a book that would be sold for profit.

As attested in my Institutional Review Board proposal, I neither recorded nor photographed my interview subjects. I took seventeen pages of notes based on the conversation. The translation process allowed me more time to write than if we had spoken in one language. My adult daughter, who is also fluent in Spanish and has a Master's degree in Latin America studies, was present at the interview. As we hiked

later that afternoon, we reviewed much of what we had heard. In our subsequent contact, Genaro has clarified several follow-up questions for me.

I took extensive photographs of the place but not the interview subjects. The six mature men in ponchos and hats sitting around a small table covered with printed oilcloth would have made a great picture. I should have asked permission to take a picture that did not show their faces, but I had agreed not to photograph recognizable subjects. Instead, I took pictures of the sacred rock, Inca ruins, and the fields under cultivation, but very few of people.

In addition to the conversation with community leaders from the Island of the Sun, I had three other significant interviews. One was with Father Freddy Zuñiga, a Franciscan friar who teaches at the *Unidad Académica Campesina* in Carmen Pampa, a region of the Yungas in central Bolivia. He agreed to talk with me while I was visiting the school to meet with Hugh Smeltekop. He gave me an important insight into how to understand the easy co-existence of indigenous traditions and Catholic teachings.

I also spoke with Fernando Condori, a tourist guide in the Copacabana region. I met him through his wife, who had been my taxi driver both when I visited Carmen Pampa and on one of my trips to Copacabana. During those drives, we talked extensively, and she told me about her husband's work. She later made the arrangements for me to meet him at a small café not far from my brother-in-law's home. We sat at a table for about an hour and drank fruit drinks, and he ate a piece of pizza, while I took ten pages of notes. I paid for his pizza. He talked mostly about Francisco Tito Yupanqui, his creation of the Virgin of Copacabana, and how Catholic saints came to be associated

with the deities revered in pre-Columbian times. He talked a little about how indigenous people perceive their position in Bolivian society since Evo Morales was elected president in 2006.

Finally, I interviewed Father René Vargas, a Franciscan friar who serves at the basilica of the Virgin of Copacabana. I happened to visit Copacabana on one of the feast days of the Virgin celebrated by the community of Cochabamba, so the priest did not have much time to meet with me. The town was full of pilgrims who had come to decorate the church, attend Mass, visit the Virgin, request memorial Masses, and purchase holy water. During a lull in this activity, Father Rene met with me to talk about the symbolism of the Virgin. He was not particularly interested in discussing the history of the place but rather in serving the people who worship there. He did share some copies of “La Voz de Copacabana,” a small, regularly published pamphlet with local notices.

Talking with more people, hearing different points of view, would have been useful, but exhaustive interviews were beyond the scope of my project. I would have liked to talk with catechists working in rural areas but did not think of this approach until after my return. One-on-one interviews in Spanish with the two priests were the least formal of my conversations and perhaps gave me the greatest insight. These men are surrounded by people whose religious practices combine elements of Catholicism and indigenous traditions. One interview took place standing in front of classrooms, and the other in the administrative offices of the basilica.

The interviews with the tourist guides, conducted in Spanish in neighborhood cafés in La Paz, were also very easygoing. I hoped their answers to my questions would help me to understand their points of view about contemporary Bolivia. Both young men used Aymara words, such as *mallku* (community leader), *ayullu* (the community), and *ainoka* (the community fields), that best expressed the concepts, but went on to explain what they mean in Spanish. I ran into these words repeatedly in my reading, as they convey concepts that are central to traditional communities.

The interviews in Aymara were less relaxed because I was very much an outsider. The men were called together specifically to speak with me and did so in part for payment and in part because of their good will toward Genaro. He served as my bridge, both linguistically and culturally. Without his help, or the intercession of someone like him, I would not have been able to conduct this kind of interview. To develop the language skills and trust that would allow such a conversation to take place without intercession would take an extended period of living among the people. Once the conversation began, however, it flowed freely. I asked questions, and group members responded, sometimes one at a time and sometimes joining together in agreement and building on one another's stories.

## Chapter 6. The Region Today: Three Points of View

In order to give a historical background to my findings I have used the research and writings of others to illustrate how the area around Copacabana has remained a center of spirituality through several changes in government. I have relied on the work of Veronica Salles-Reese, who, in her book on the placement of the Black Virgin, as Yupanqui's sculpture is known, called this image "the latest avatar of the sacred on Lake Titicaca."<sup>79</sup> Linda Hall writes about Andean Virgins and mentions how Copacabana continues to be an important site for pilgrimages:

The different culture groups express their devotion of Mamita de Copacabana in different ways and in different languages; those from Cochabamba, for example, sing in Quechua in their processions, while those from the southern highlands sing in Aymara, accompanied by traditional Andean instruments. Worshipers from major urban centers usually express themselves in Spanish. Within the populations, the meaning apparatus and content of the celebrations continue to differ.<sup>80</sup>

What I encountered in 2012 is a situation that is even more complex than what Hall described in 2004. As the country has become a plurinational state, the ways religion is expressed have become more pluralistic. Having visited Copacabana many times over the course of twenty-five years, I have seen that more than language differs among groups. Each group brings distinct traditions and beliefs about how to celebrate and worship. Some come to celebrate the Virgin on her feast days; others come to have

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<sup>79</sup> Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 182.

their automobiles blessed and to fulfill promises made; others come to offer Masses, prayers, and gifts of flowers and candles. Still others come because the location is rich in *huacas* where offerings and requests can be made. Urban Catholics visit only the church, while indigenous people may worship at both the church and the ancient sacred spaces. This chapter, based on observations from current conversations, illustrates how, in today's environment, Copacabana and the image of the Virgin are important to three different, broadly defined groups of people.

### Urban pilgrims

For urban Catholics the basilica of Copacabana is important and its sculpture an



Figure 12 The basilica in Copacabana.

beloved representation of the Virgin Mary. The image reminds those who follow the catechism of the Catholic Church of Mary, who “continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ.”<sup>81</sup>

People ask for her divine intercession when approaching her with their petitions. They come to pray, to light candles, and to fulfill promises in hope of being blessed with her aid and protection.

My observations about urban people from a Catholic background are based on personal experience and family stories. For example, my brother-in-law made a promise

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<sup>81</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, Article 9, Paragraph 6, Section 975.

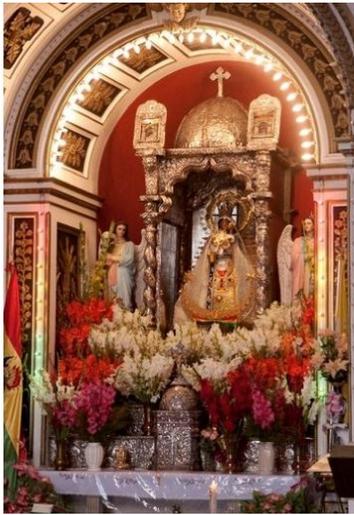


Figure 13 The upper chapel, facing Peru.

to the Virgin that he would visit her if he passed his exams while in medical school. He succeeded, and in gratitude, he and his wife made a pilgrimage, walking most of the approximately 150 kilometers between La Paz and Copacabana.

As a boy, my husband listened to Radio Fides, a station run by the Jesuit priests



Figure 14 The main altar of the basilica, with the Virgin facing Bolivia.

who taught at the school he attended. One night, it transmitted a report of a big storm on Lake Titicaca, with waves threatening to damage boats and communities on the shore. The Virgin in the basilica can face land on the Bolivian side or be turned to look out over the lake toward Peru. During the storm, as people prayed for protection, the image was turned to face the lake. The storm ended almost immediately without causing extensive damage. The Virgin was credited with this miraculous calming of the waves.

A third story comes from a Peruvian friend who made a trip to Copacabana while visiting friends in Bolivia. A well-travelled architect, she was between jobs and in a promising new relationship. She had six candles to light at the Virgin's feet and debated whether she should petition for a new job or for the romance. She decided to ask for a job since she knew that work was essential to her happiness and balance. Returning to Lima, she found three messages about job prospects on her answering machine and



Figure 15 The chapel of candles.



Figure 16 Candles for sale outside the basilica.

accepted one. The relationship also worked out; she married the man. While the visit to the Virgin prompted self-scrutiny, to this day my friend credits the Virgin with helping her to make good choices.

These stories illustrate how urban people approach the Virgin, asking her to intercede on their behalf. Supplicants make requests and pay homage through the sacrifice of a pilgrimage, prayer, or offerings of candles, masses, and flowers. Candles are sold just outside the church so that they can be lit and placed in a small cavernous chapel with long stone tables below a reproduction of the Virgin's image.

### Rural Pilgrims



Figure 17 A truck being blessed in front of the basilica.



Figure 18 Vendors in front of the basilica.

For people of the *altiplano* who follow indigenous traditions, the Virgin of Copacabana is a symbol of the Christian faith, which co-exists with indigenous beliefs. They

come to Copacabana on the feast days of the Virgin to honor her with gifts of flowers, jewelry, and clothing. They also visit place deities, where they make libations and offerings of incense and confetti.

Indigenous people, both Quechua- and Aymara-speakers from across the *altiplano* flock to Copacabana on the feast days of the Virgin. The most important are from 5-7 August and the feast of Candlemas, which is 2 February. On these days, Copacabana is filled with Bolivians and Peruvians from the surrounding rural areas. According to one of my contacts from the Island of the Sun, the central plaza turns into an open market, selling everything from food to hand-made sweaters to radios and TVs. Most of the commerce takes place in Peruvian rather than Bolivian currency. This influx of people provides income to the local merchants and townspeople as well as the Church.

In 2011, thirty-thousand automobiles were brought to the basilica to be blessed. According to my taxi-driver friend, “Drivers have their cars blessed out of superstition— with the belief that the Virgin will protect them, so they will not have accidents.” The blessing of automobiles is particularly frequent during the feast days, but it is a year-



Figure 19 Miniatures for sale to be used in ch'allas.

round activity. Each auto owner makes a donation to the Church in exchange for the blessing.

Rural pilgrims visit the Virgin on her feast days to honor and praise her and to ask for material rewards. Vendors in front of the church always sell flowers,

sacred images, and swags to decorate vehicles. On feast days, they also sell small metal *milagros* representing the objects or blessings requested of the Virgin, everything from health to automobiles. These *milagros* can be pinned onto the dress of the Virgin, who is temporarily lowered off the altar and placed in a corner of the church.

Smaller feast-day celebrations are specific to localities. On 16 November 2012, I witnessed a festival of the people of Cochabamba. A delegation had arrived to decorate the church with yellow flowers and to pay homage to the Virgin. As I waited to meet with the priest, people stood in line in the parish office to offer Masses for the repose of souls, give thanks for health, or to fulfill promises. They purchased containers of holy water from Copacabana to take back to those who had been unable to come. According to the priest, the turnout was low that year due to roadblocks to protest political decisions. The use of roadblocks has recently



Figure 20 The main sanctuary decorated by Cochabambinos, November 2012.

become a common phenomenon for protestors to call attention to their concern. In this case it was about a highway which was to be built through a protected area pertaining to indigenous people.

For rural pilgrims coming to Copacabana, not all activities center on the Virgin and the church. As Hall notes, “Copacabana has continued to be a pilgrimage destination throughout the colonial period and into the twenty-first century. The rites conducted there combine Christian and native elements.”<sup>82</sup> Apart from the processions, blessings, and offerings to the Virgin, people also visit pre-Columbian place deities. The *Boca del Sapo* (Mouth of the Toad) is a geological feature resembling a toad, located at the base of the hill known as Santa Barbara on the shore of Lake Titicaca. The mouth reportedly opens on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> of August. Here, people offer a *ch’alla* to the spirit of the place. In its simplest form, the *ch’alla* is an offering of libations to the *Pachamama*. Often, it is more complex. Andrew Orta describes his participation in a *ch’alla*:

We gathered around a small stone altar covered with a cloth and set with coca [leaves], cigarettes and alcohol ... one of the older catechists performed the *ch’alla* ritual libation of the sort performed in the context of a range of traditional ritual practices. The catechist prepared a shot glass of alcohol in which he place three coca leaves; he aspersed the altar with the alcohol and then invited a female catechist to perform a *ch’alla* with the wine.<sup>83</sup>

Other offerings include confetti, brightly colored strings of serpentine paper, and incense to accompany the request for good luck and a prosperous year.

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<sup>82</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 170.

<sup>83</sup> *Catechizing Culture*, 12.

Another example of the conflation of the Virgin of Copacabana with traditional beliefs is literally spelled out on the mountain that overlooks the town, known as *Calvario* (Calvary), or St. Christopher. Calvary is the hill where Christ was crucified. A path leads to the top, which offers a spectacular view of the lake and the Islands of the Sun and the Moon. At the base, a plaque on a concrete cross reads:

#### HEART OF JESUS

This sacred place, also known as a huaca (a Quechua word meaning sacred place) is located between twin hills one that is male known as St. Christopher and the other female known as St. Barbara to get to the top you follow a path with steep, stone steps which follow the fourteen stations of the Way of the Cross. This sacred place is a natural viewpoint from where one can see the Island of the Sun, the Bay of Titicaca, the community of Chani and the incomparable beauty of the sunset from about five in the afternoon. On this Calvary there are also ceremonial tables, which are used for different purposes such as the blessing of objects, the perfuming or dousing with incense and curing of patients by Andean Shaman.<sup>84</sup>

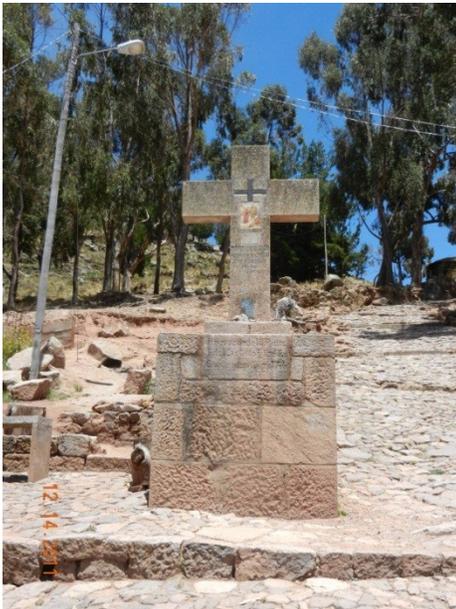


Figure 21 One of the stations of the cross on Calvario.

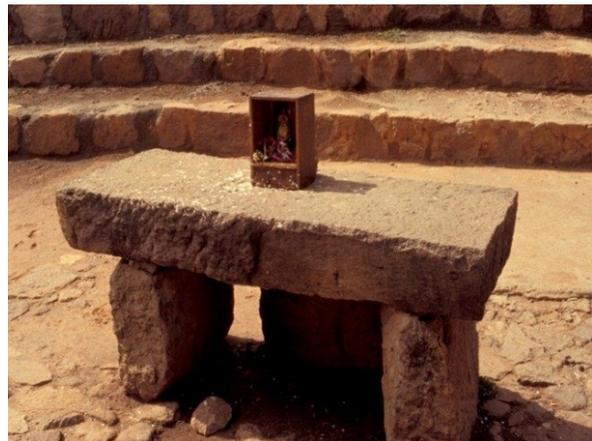


Figure 22 A stone altar for offering a cha'lla.

<sup>84</sup> The English statement as written on the plaque; a Spanish version is also offered.



Figure 23 Looking towards Copacabana.



Figure 24 The twin hills above Copacabana.



Figure 25 Rural pilgrims offering a ch'alla.

This sign was not here in 1986. The English reflects the increased international interest in Andean and indigenous spirituality that has made this unique co-existence of beliefs a point of pride for some local people.

The idea of Copacabana as a center of indigenous or mystical spirituality is also exploited to some extent. In 2006, about five hundred thousand tourists visited Bolivia, mostly young backpackers, as few luxurious accommodations are available. As you ascend the path, you pass fourteen concrete crosses representing the fourteen Stations of the Cross in Catholic tradition.

Along the same path, in places that overlook the lake, many *mesas* (stone altars) are attended by shamans, who, for a fee, will make an offering to the place deities. Miniature versions of the thing requested—from items of food to trucks,

buildings, and dollar bills—are for sale at kiosks at the top of the hill. After purchase, they are

placed on the altar, sprinkled with alcohol and confetti; incense is burned. Libations are offered to the *Pachamama* and then consumed by the participants.

At the top of the hill, another sign reads, “Welcome to the Sacred Heart of Jesus where all your desired objects, cars, houses, dollars, etc., can be purified with incense and blessed.”<sup>85</sup> Clearly, for many, Copacabana remains a sacred place where post-Columbian Catholic teachings and pre-Columbian traditions co-exist without any apparent conflict.

### **Local Residents**

For the Aymara-speaking people who live near Copacabana the Virgin is one in a panoply of deities both female and male. For those who grow crops, the agricultural cycle is closely tied to the spirits of the earth, both the *Pachamama* and those particular to their fields, which are celebrated on days related to planting and harvesting. Although these spirits and traditions have pre-Columbian origins, the celebrations are named for Catholic saints. They are the foundation of the people’s spiritual life and more relevant to daily life than either the Catholic Church or the Virgin of Copacabana. The contemporary Church is peripheral, providing sacraments that are considered essential but make demands on their time and money.

On the Island of the Sun, traditional culture and Catholic teachings co-exist as part of daily life. More than five hundred years after its introduction, Catholicism is thoroughly

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<sup>85</sup> My translation: “Bienvenidos a sagrado corazaon de Jesús donde se sauman, challan todos sus objetos deseados, autos, casas, dolares, etc.”

integrated into the spectrum of religious beliefs that are practiced in rural areas. Local Catholic authorities accept the fact that people observe the rites of the Church but continue their traditional rites and ceremonies. The priests I spoke with had no problem with the desire of indigenous people to maintain their own traditions while participating in the life of the Church. As I will discuss in the next chapter, one outcome of the Second Vatican Council was development of the theology of inculturation.<sup>86</sup> It implies the embodiment of the Christian message within a specific culture. In the Andes, particularly Bolivia, a *teología india* interprets Catholic teachings in a way that is culturally relevant to indigenous people.

Catholicism is not seen as a threat to indigenous traditions because during the five hundred years of co-existence, the two have become one set of beliefs. As one blogger said, "Today Christianity (meaning Catholic Christianity) is part of our religion ... it must share its customs with our *Pachamama*, with our *Apus* (mountain huacas) and our divinities. It is not syncretism; it is the co-existence of gods in our customs and our minds."<sup>87</sup> This statement coincides with my belief that the concept of syncretism is useful for academic study but not for people of faith. Those who have faith that their religious beliefs are true do not care where they came from or what influenced the development of the religion.

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<sup>86</sup> Edward L. Cleary, "New Voice in Religion and Politics in Bolivia and Peru" in *Resurgent Voices in Latin America: Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change*, ed. Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 62.

<sup>87</sup> Max Murillo Mendoza, "Bolivia no es país católico," retrieved 6 October 2012 from <http://max-max-historiasmarginales.blogspot.com/2011/11/bolivia-no-es-pais-catolico.html>.

Evangelical Christianity is now seen as a threat to traditional beliefs because it does not tolerate allegiance to the old gods. Around 2002, many in the village of Santa Ana on the Island of the Moon converted to some version of Evangelical Christianity that forbade invoking indigenous deities or using alcohol and coca leaves. At planting time, no offerings were made to the *Pachamama*. As soon as the seeds began to sprout, a heavy hailstorm destroyed the tiny plants. Fields were resown, but a freeze destroyed the new sprouts. The community was sharply divided between those who wanted to continue with the Evangelical teachings and those who wanted to return to traditional “Catholic” ways. Most villagers believed that if the *Pachamama* was not recognized, she would punish the farmers. At the time these events took place, thirty-five percent of the community was Evangelical; now, according to Genaro’s research, only seven percent maintain their Evangelical faith. The rest have reverted to an Andean interpretation of Catholicism that incorporates indigenous traditions.

On the Island of the Sun, the Virgin of Copacabana does not take the place of any indigenous deity; she is one more representation of divine femininity. She plays a different role than the *Pachamama*, although both are seen as mothers providing for their children. When Catholicism was first introduced, similarities between the two were emphasized, so the Catholic teachings would be more readily accepted. During the early colonial period, indigenous people prayed to the Catholic Virgin outwardly, while in their hearts they worshipped the *Pachamama*.<sup>88</sup> Now, both exist in the minds of the people, and the *Pachamama* is part of the “the daily practices, devotions and rituals

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<sup>88</sup> Gisbert, *Iconografía*, 17-22.

outside of and often parallel to official ceremonies.”<sup>89</sup> The Virgin Mary is associated with the official ceremonies on Church feast days. Most traditional Andean rituals center on the agricultural year and the need for divine help to assure an abundant harvest.

Religion is essential to agriculture, and agriculture is essential for the survival of rural communities.

The people of the Island of the Sun have a profound understanding of the agricultural cycle. The crops essential for survival are planted in communal fields (*ainokas*) and rotated on a regular basis, so the soil is not depleted. The *mallku* in charge



Figure 26 A quinoa field on the Island of the Sun.

of determining what and where crops will be planted is well aware of the need to manage fertility. This pattern of administration is standard in communities across the *altiplano*. The Island of the Sun stands out because it

has always been a center of spirituality

due to its powerful *huacas*, proximity to Copacabana, and place in one version of the Inca creation myth. Its people know they live in a sacred area.

The island people I interviewed spontaneously told long stories about the ceremonies and rituals pertaining to the agricultural cycle. Many stories related how life used to be before land reform, before transportation and communication increased,

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<sup>89</sup> Stephen P. Judd, “The Indigenous Theology Movement in Latin America: Encounters of Memory, Resistance, and Hope at the Crossroads,” in *Resurgent Voices*, ed. Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004) 223.

when people were more religiously observant. The most sacred space on the Island is the giant crag, described by Cobo as the place from which the sun first emerged. Next to it, a flat stone has indentations said to be the footprints the sun made when it stepped out from



Figure 27 Footprints of the sun near the sacred crag on the Island of the Sun.

behind the crag. I was told that in the old days, if people dared to approach the sacred stone, they would drop dead. Birds flying over it would fall from the sky. The spirits commanded more respect and were more powerful prior to the modern era. For older residents today, these sacred areas cannot be approached without offering prayers and pouring libations onto the earth.

Current agricultural practices follow the ancient tradition of having a *mallku* for each crop planted in a communal field. A couple chosen by the community to sponsor the ceremonies in the fields prepares an altar for a *ch'alla* and makes offerings, accompanied by bands and dancers. Food is prepared and shared with all community members. The first ceremony of the agricultural year, known as Saint Andrew, takes place in November. It is celebrated prior to plowing and asks the land's forgiveness for cutting it open. The ceremony involves the sacrifice of a llama, whose beating heart is taken from its body and buried in the field. Other ceremonies are conducted to ward off frosts and hail, to ensure sufficient rain, and to celebrate the harvest of the first fruits. They all involve the preparation of altars for the *ch'alla*, music, dancing, and food. In

times of drought, frogs are put into ceramic bowls and carried up to a particular peak, where their cries are believed to bring rain.

The week of Ash Wednesday, which begins Lent in the Christian calendar, is a period of many special ceremonies on the Island of the Sun. These activities are more closely tied to the potato harvest than to the concept of Lent as a time of penance in preparation for Holy Week.



Figure 28 The guest house in Challa on Martes de Ch'alla.

Some other Catholic feast days are seen as important enough for people to make the trip to Copacabana to pray and to ask for forgiveness. The people I spoke with revere the representation of Mary in the basilica. They recognize her as

having given birth to the creator of all that is good. One man remarked, “We understand that even as virgin soil yields a good harvest, the Virgin, Mother of God, gives us good things.” People also travel to Copacabana to have their newborns baptized in the Church. An unnamed child is considered to bring bad luck and damaging hail storms. Once again, we see that religion is tightly intertwined with the agricultural production necessary to sustain life.

Interviewees took great pains to explain their agricultural ceremonies, noting why the rituals are performed, who is involved, where they take place, and what music and

dances accompany each. Although the ceremonies are named for the corresponding saint's feast day on the Catholic calendar, the timing is based on the agricultural cycle. Through enacting these ceremonies, people appeal to the spirits of the fields and nature for compassion and assistance in providing an adequate harvest.

In contrast, the few times they mentioned the Virgin of Copacabana directly, they used such concise phrases as "We recognize her as the True Mother of Jesus"; "The image of the Virgin of *Candelaria* is the one image that we know; she is brown and looks like us"; "We do not place any importance on other images of the Virgin." The remarks seemed more repetition of learned phrases than spontaneous. The image of the Virgin is distant; she resides in the basilica across the lake rather than accompanying them in the fields. Through catechesis and history lessons, they know the importance of the Virgin in the life of the Catholic Church, but she is less present in quotidian practices.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, Copacabana is significant as a religious center for Bolivians of many different backgrounds. Although different populations interpret the significance differently, all of them understand it as holy place, where they can obtain protection and blessings in exchange for offerings and adoration. Urban visitors understand Copacabana as the place that houses the patroness of their country. It is a wholly Catholic place, where the Virgin is a representation and reminder of the kindness and generosity of the Mother of God, worshipped in accordance with Catholic teachings.

Indigenous people revere the “Mamita of Copacabana” because she was created by an indigenous man, her face reflects their own, and she inhabits a sacred space. As MacCormick writes, the placement of this image in a landscape recognized as sacred prior to the introduction of Christianity has made present-day Copacabana a “product of political, cultural, and demographic change,” allowing “a dynamic adaptive accommodation of practice and belief to religious political and social change.”<sup>90</sup> People from across the *altiplano* with different backgrounds and experiences share a devotion to Copacabana. They come here to worship and to fulfill their obligations to the spirit of the place.

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<sup>90</sup> MacCormack, “Human and Divine,” 75.

## Chapter 7. Bolivia in 2012

When the Republic of Bolivia was founded in 1825, most of the institutions established by the Spanish colonialists remained in place. Despite the fact that the newly formed Bolivian government reduced the financial power of the Church, the nation remained officially Catholic. Indigenous spiritual traditions were not eradicated but were driven underground. The Virgin of Copacabana was named patroness of the new nation. However, the priests of the Augustine Order who served her and many other religious orders were soon forced to leave when the government closed monasteries and took over Church holdings to help finance the new state.<sup>91</sup> The Franciscans were allowed to remain and became the main missionaries in Bolivia.<sup>92</sup> In 1894, the order took over responsibility for the basilica and remains in charge to this day.

In 1925, the centennial of Bolivian independence, the basilica was renovated, and the image of the Virgin was displayed in front of the church, where it could be adored by pilgrims. In 1954, the national police named the Virgin of Copacabana its patron and a general, and the Navy gave her the rank of admiral.<sup>93</sup>

The Constitution of 1961 established the separation of Church and State; although it acknowledged Catholicism as the official religion, others were recognized.<sup>94</sup> Further change came with the Constitution adopted in 2009, which states that Bolivia “respects

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<sup>91</sup> Mesa, *Historia de Bolivia*, 280.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-37.

<sup>93</sup> Hall, *Mary*, 181-83.

<sup>94</sup> Mesa, *Historia de Bolivia*, 685.

and guarantees freedom of religion and spiritual beliefs according to their cosmologies. The State is independent from religion.”<sup>95</sup> In the 2010 census, eighty percent of people identified themselves as Catholic.

The atmosphere surrounding traditional beliefs today is more transparent than it was twenty years ago. When I visited Copacabana in 1985 and climbed *Calvario*, stone altars were set up, and a shaman was preparing an offering. I raised my camera to take a picture, and he became very angry. A photograph would have diminished the value of his ceremony and exposed his actions. A young indigenous woman who worked for my mother-in-law explained that indigenous people believed that photographs steal a bit of the subject’s soul. When I climbed *Calvario* in 2011, a number of stone altars were attended by local shamans. Signs offered their services to passing pilgrims. When I asked if I could take a picture, I was told, “*Saca no más, Senora*” (Just take the picture, ma’am). I was also encouraged to pay a fee to have an offering made on my behalf. Unlike my experience in 1985, no effort was made to hide the remnants of recent offerings. The current environment makes many indigenous people proud of their traditions and willing to explain them to outsiders. The international interest in *turismo místico*, or New Age Andean spirituality,<sup>96</sup> has also led some people to share their beliefs proudly, rather than practicing them surreptitiously. This kind of tourism provides

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<sup>95</sup> Bolivian Constitution, Article 4. My translation, “El Estado respeta y garantiza la libertad de religión y de creencias espirituales, de acuerdo con sus cosmovisiones. El Estado es independiente de la religión.”

<sup>96</sup> Michael D. Hill, “Myth, Globalization, and Mestizaje in New Age Andean Religion: The Intic Churincuna (Children of the Sun) of Urubamba, Peru,” *Ethnohistory*, 57, 2 (Spring 2010):265; retrieved 7 November 2012 from [Ethnohistory.dukejournals.org.go.libproxy.wfubmc.edu/content/57/2/263.full.pdf](http://ethnohistory.dukejournals.org.go.libproxy.wfubmc.edu/content/57/2/263.full.pdf).

economic opportunities for some of the practitioners and may lead to a more commercially attractive but less authentic practice of religion.

When I asked the community leaders in the guesthouse dining room what the plurinational status of the country and the election of an indigenous president meant to them, they were less than enthusiastic. The man who responded looked around to see who was listening and said, “We like the idea of having an indigenous president, but it has not made much difference for us.” He mentioned President Morales’s program to provide tractors to some *altiplano* farmers. The other men laughed. They explained that island fields are small, and the traditional *huiso* plow serves them well. Challa residents had asked for boats to facilitate travel between the island and the mainland and increase tourism, but none were received. An aged gentleman who remembered conditions prior to the 1952 reforms went on to say that they are so far from La Paz and so isolated from government that what happens there has little meaning for them. This distance and the difficulty of travel to the island are part of the reason that traditions have changed so gradually.

On the other hand, the tourist guide told me that for urban Aymaras, the change under the Morales government is significant. He said, “It is like receiving a message from the ancestors, the way people see themselves has changed. There is no longer such an identity crisis.” He used the word *indio* (Indian) to describe people. The word has had derogatory connotations—primitive, uneducated, uncivilized—and after the 1952

revolution, it was replaced by the word *campesino* (peasant).<sup>97</sup> However, since 2002, the indigenous population has had an increased presence in the political sphere and reclaimed the word *indio* to describe themselves.<sup>98</sup> In the same way that religious observances are no longer hidden from public view, indigenous ethnicity is openly stated and claimed with pride.

In a blog post, a historian from Cochabamba credits the changed political climate with the open discussion of indigenous beliefs: “We adopted Christianity as one more god in our pantheon of gods ... It must share its customs with those of our *Pachamama*, the spirits of our mountains and our deities.”<sup>99</sup> These words echo some of the presentations I heard at the meeting of the Bolivian Studies Association in Sucre. Young indigenous people in urban areas seem more attuned than their elder, rural counterparts to a change in attitude created by the Constitution of 2009.

Not only national politics has created more diversity in the expression of religion in Bolivia. The position of the Catholic Church has also changed since the Second Vatican Council and Indians no longer had to be assimilated into a Eurocentric Church.<sup>100</sup> In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical in which he acknowledged problems in evangelizing throughout the modern world. Addressing missionaries, he stated: “Elsewhere the obstacles are of a cultural nature: passing on the Gospel message seems

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<sup>97</sup> Lisbet Crandon-Malamud, *From the Fat of our Souls: Social Change, Political Process, and Medical Pluralism in Bolivia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 241.

<sup>98</sup> Cleary, “New Voice,” 52.

<sup>99</sup> Murillo Mendoza, “Bolivia No Es País Católico.” My translation. “Hoy el cristianismo es parte de nuestras otras religiones y religiosidades. Tiene que compartir sus costumbres con nuestra Pachamama, con nuestros Apus y divinidades.”

<sup>100</sup> Cleary, and Timothy J. Steigenga, “Resurgent Voices: Indians, Politics and Religion in Latin America,” in *Resurgent Voices*, 19.

irrelevant or incomprehensible and conversion is seen as a rejection of one's own people and culture."<sup>101</sup> This philosophy has been applied in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Known as the theology of inculturation, it has had profound repercussions in Bolivia, where it has been applied by catechists who teach that both Catholic and traditional Aymara beliefs reflect the Gospel message. In *Catechizing Culture*, Andrew Orta explains how this has allowed "embracing and affirming local cultural traditions":

these approaches constitute a pastoral vision of Aymara identity, finding in Aymara culture expressions of Christian values. Practices once denounced by missionaries as idolatrous or superstitious—ritual drinking, use of coca, and offerings to local place deities (wak'as)—are now embraced as profoundly Christian, or at least as expressions of an indigenous religiosity that are not intrinsically antithetical to a Christian frame of meaning.<sup>102</sup>

An example of how Andean realities are interpreted as Christian ideals is the idea of the pre-Columbian *alluyu* (community). Members cooperate to provide food and protection for all. All adults must offer a period of labor for community service. These practices are now said to reflect a more Christian approach to life than that of the haciendas, where one landowner controlled large parcels of land and forced peasants to work for his gain. Catechists today embrace ancient blessings and rituals and make them fit into a Catholic framework. Many celebrations currently incorporate both traditional rites and Catholic

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<sup>101</sup>Redemptoris Missio, paragraph 35; retrieved 20 September 2012 from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html).

<sup>102</sup> "Syncretic Subjects and Body Politics: Doubleness, Personhood and Aymara Catechists," *American Ethnologist*, 26, no. 4 (November 1999):869; retrieved 27 June 2012 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/647235>.

prayers. Orta recounts a ritual fast that he attended on the feast day of Santa Barbara. Beginning early in the morning, *ayllu* members assembled at the local Catholic chapel at the base of a small hill. Over the course of the rite, they ascended to the top, where a *yatiri* (ritual specialist) instructed the outgoing authorities to kneel. He placed an offering of flowers, fronds, and incense on a flat stone with smoldering embers that he held aloft. As the smoke drifted into the sky, the rest of the community, on their knees, circled the authorities and *yatiri*, pausing to pray the Our Father and read aloud the Christian liturgy of the Stations of the Cross.<sup>103</sup>

The theology of inculturation was reflected in what I saw and heard in Bolivia. One of the first people I spoke with was Father Freddy Zuñiga, a Franciscan friar working at a rural Catholic college. I expressed my curiosity about the mingling of traditional ritual and Catholicism in Copacabana. He replied that it was related to the difference between spirituality and religion. For him, spirituality is the way people live their daily lives, the choices and offerings they make, and the ways they celebrate. Religion, on the other



Figure 29 Boat at the dock in Challa.

hand, provides a name and the rules for the way people worship. I understood him to mean that for many indigenous people, the practice of spiritual rituals pertinent to agriculture and daily life have not changed so much as they have been renamed. In today's political and

<sup>103</sup> Orta, *Catechizing Culture*, 1-2.

religious climate, the quotidian behavior of indigenous people is not considered in conflict with Catholic teachings. Rather, the old traditions are explained in ways that contribute to understanding the gospel message.

In a later discussion, I asked Friar René Vargas, who serves at the Copacabana basilica, about the region's history and the ways in which indigenous people understood Catholic teachings, but he was not very interested in pursuing it. He said, "You are the historian; you probably know more about that than I do." He was anxious to get back to the people waiting to request that Masses be said for loved ones or to purchase holy water to take home with them. As I pressed him about the continued practice of indigenous rites, he answered without directly mentioning the theology of inculturation that, since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has worried less about the rules and more about the people and their well-being. The Church exists to serve more than to be served. He labeled local people's attitudes and practices as syncretism, suggesting that they feel no conflict in simultaneously practicing Catholic and ancestral rites. He acknowledged that what does not make sense to outsiders is normal for people from the region. He went on to say that part of what gives this particular basilica its importance is the historical significance of its physical location as a sacred space. He stated that the beliefs of the people cannot be suppressed, and in today's world, the rules imposed by both civil and religious authorities are more flexible. I believe he was implying that changes in government and the Church's introduction of the theology of inculturation caused this increased flexibility.

One concrete example of how Catholic sacraments and Aymara traditions co-exist on the Island of the Sun is the way weddings are celebrated. Civil and sacramental marriage services in Copacabana are combined with traditional elements that take place on the island. Once the couple chooses a wedding date, use of the church and availability of clergy must be confirmed at least one month in advance. The couple must attend three weekly classes to receive catechesis on the Sacrament of Matrimony. The weekend of the wedding, on Friday afternoon, they take a boat to Copacabana for the civil ceremony to be performed that evening. Early the next morning, they go to the basilica to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to celebrate the Nuptial Mass. This schedule permits them to return that day to their home village, where the wedding is celebrated with traditional ceremonies. Their families wait for them on the beach where the boat lands and white altars decorated with white flowers and banners have been constructed. Musicians play, and food is provided for all receiving them. Accompanied by village leaders, the newlyweds process from the beach to their new home. The civil ceremony is required for legal reasons, and the Catholic Sacrament of Matrimony is necessary for social reasons. The local celebration assures the couple's place as part of the community.

Father Vargas told me that the rural tradition of receiving sacraments for major rites of passage, even among those who do not actively practice Catholicism, may be a remnant from the era prior to land reform in 1952. The haciendas were large, self-sufficient farms owned by elite patrons and worked by indigenous laborers who were treated as slaves. Each hacienda had a chapel and a resident priest to tend to the

spiritual needs of the patron and his laborers. All children born to the laborers had to be baptized, and the landowner was the godfather. He made sure they received the sacraments but did not worry at all about their everyday struggles. As long as they provided labor, indigenous people could follow their own traditions in their own homes.

While on the Island of the Sun, I asked the men I interviewed about the old hacienda system. Some remembered the times prior to land reform and told me what life had been like. At one large hacienda near their village, tribute had to be paid to the landowner in both service and crops. He insisted that firewood, cheese, and potatoes be taken across the lake to his other house in Puno by boat and burro.

Not only landowners demanded service and foodstuffs. I was told that prior to the 1952 reforms, a bride was obliged to give a month of work as a domestic servant at the church before her wedding. That obligation no longer exists, but payment must be made to use the church for a wedding mass. The interviewees also laughed that even though Challa has a chapel, a priest only comes when invited for specific feast days and must be paid to make the trip.

Isolation, coupled with strongly held beliefs passed on from one generation to the next, have kept pre-Columbian traditions alive even when they were officially oppressed. Today with the re-emergence of power in the indigenous community these traditions have come out of the shadows and are publically embraced. Recognition of a *teología india* by the Catholic Church acknowledges that “there has been an inter-religious dialogue taking place for five hundred years...and that what has emerged is a

distinct way of being Christian.”<sup>104</sup> The practice and beliefs of the people around Copacabana have “accommodated religious, political and social change.”<sup>105</sup> The practices I observed in 2012 reflect the current realities of both the government and the Church in Bolivia. The mountains, stones, and lake endure as symbols of nature’s spiritual power and are honored by the ancient rituals. The Catholic Church has embraced these rituals so that there is peaceful co-existence between traditional spirituality and Catholic religion.

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<sup>104</sup> Judd, “Indigenous Theology,” 228.

<sup>105</sup> MacCormack, *Human and Divine*, 75.

## Chapter 8. Conclusion

In the area surrounding Copacabana, spiritual practices continue to reflect changes in government. The religious customs of pre-Columbian, colonial, and early republican Bolivia have been well documented. In this paper, I have shown that the area maintains its importance as a spiritual center in today's political climate. The adoption of a new constitution in 2009 led to official recognition of the value of indigenous traditions and more openness in the practice of religious rites retained throughout Bolivian history.

Despite centuries of religious oppression under Spanish colonial rule, the territory's vast, difficult terrain and multiple languages kept indigenous beliefs alive. Isolation has helped the Aymara people maintain strong community systems and religious traditions, which are thriving today. Under the current government, people feel free to speak openly in their own language, practice their customs, and demand recognition for the value of their traditions. Appreciation of the unique values of this culture has been strengthened by the interest of international visitors. In 2002, a Bolivian sociologist commented on the strength of the Aymara community:

Aymara populations have distinguished themselves throughout history by their cultural and organic cohesion that maintains their traditional authorities in a form parallel to the State. Despite the State, the Aymara people have continued to develop because of their desire to rely on

cultural, economic, and social institutions and, in the present, can be said to be reinventing traditions.<sup>106</sup>

In the twenty-five years that I have been visiting Bolivia, I have observed that the religious traditions are not being re-invented but revealed. They have been there all along but were hidden for fear of reprisals. Prior to 1961, they were illegal, and, until recently, they were disparaged. Now, they are practiced with pride in the public sphere.

Today, the beliefs practiced in and around Copacabana are pluralistic, reflecting the idea of the plurinational state. They evolved “from a long history of entanglements within dominant state systems – Incan, Iberian and modern nations.”<sup>107</sup> The expression of faith has evolved along with each change of the governing power. Bolivians recognize that their history is woven from many strands, and its complexity is reflected in many facets of daily life, including religious celebrations. Several gods co-exist in the minds and customs of Aymara people. In contrast to the Christian need for one, totalitarian God, indigenous people recognize many gods. The Christian God was imposed by force but is now embraced as part of Andean spirituality.

I heard some resentment expressed during the Bolivian Studies Association Meeting in Sucre and on the Island of the Sun. Indigenous people are now speaking up about the indignities that were forced upon them in the past, including the tributes demanded in

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<sup>106</sup> Zalles-Cueto, “De la revuelta campesina a la autonomía política: la crisis boliviana y la cuestión aymara” *Nueva Sociedad*, vol. 182 (December 2002): 107. Retrieved November 7, 2012 from [Nuso.org/upload/articulos/3090\\_1.pdf](http://Nuso.org/upload/articulos/3090_1.pdf). My translation: “*la población aymara, ...se ha distinguido a lo largo de la historia por su cohesión cultural y orgánica, manteniendo de forma paralela al Estado sus autoridades tradicionales....El pueblo aymara se ha desarrollado a pesar del Estado, y en su voluntad de contar con operativas instituciones culturales, económicas y sociales, en el present, incluso podríamos decir que viene reinventando la tradición*”

<sup>107</sup> Orta, “Syncretic Subjects”, 867.

both the colonial period and the early republic as well as the inferior status given to them and their languages. However, although these excesses were often committed by clergy, neither the Christian God nor the Virgin Mary is held responsible. They are recognized as deities who demand and deserve homage.

The new pluralism can be seen in the way that the Catholic clergy now accepts celebrations that combine Christian and non-Christian elements. In a parish pamphlet, Monsenor Jesús Juárez Parraga, Bishop of El Alto, writes about the church in Copacabana:

It is in the sanctuary that people demonstrate who they are; where their identity is made manifest. It is a space that belongs to the people, a place where believers confirm their dignity as children of God; it is a place that holds the cultural memory. It has the symbolic power to summarize this memory and to shake loose the collective consciousness.<sup>108</sup>

Keeping these ancestral memories alive strengthens the power of the Virgin residing in the basilica. She is both an authentic representation of the Mother of God and an autochthonous Catholic image in which local people see a reflection of themselves.

Pluralism is also seen in the way that agricultural rites coincide with Catholic feast days and both the Virgin Mary and the *Pachamama* are invoked for protection.

Pluralism is observed when pilgrims to Copacabana celebrate both the Virgin and the

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<sup>108</sup> Monseñor Jesús Juárez Parraga, Obispo de El Alto, "Nuestra Señora de Copacabana", *La Voz del Santuario de Copacabana*, no. 13, (November 2011), 8. My translation: "En el santuario el pueblo dice quien es, manifiesta su identidad. Es un espacio propio donde el pueblo creyente confirma su dignidad de hijo del Padre, es lugar de la memoria del pueblo. Tiene una capacidad simbólica para resumir esa memoria y hacerlo aflorar al consciente colectivo".

place deities. Pluralism is obvious when friars come out of the sanctuary to bless automobiles in a way reminiscent of a *ch'alla* asking for good luck and prosperity.

This pluralism, this new openness and acceptance of intertwined religious beliefs, is the result of a gradual shift in practices that reflects a shift in government. In today's climate, the *Pachamama*, of Aymara tradition, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of Catholic teaching, can be worshiped simultaneously. Copacabana continues to be a dynamic place where religion adapts to social and political change. The core tenets of belief and the daily practice of the people did not change abruptly but evolved gradually. The sacred spirit found on the shores of Lake Titicaca is strong today.

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## APPENDIX

## Interview questions

1. In recent years have traditional ceremonies been more openly celebrated?
2. In recent years have more ceremonies been celebrated or have more people participated in the ceremonies?
3. What would happen if the ceremonies do not take place
4. Do young people continue to value the traditional ceremonies?
5. What are the most important *huacas* in this area?
6. What do you ask of the *Pachamama*?
7. What do you ask of the Virgin of Copacabana?
8. Why is the Virgin of Copacabana revered?
9. What importance does the basilica have for your community?
10. Do all children receive sacraments in the basilica
11. Do you feel any conflict between celebrating traditional ceremonies and attending Mass

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