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CATECHISTS AT THE CROSSROADS: NEO-CATHOLICISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND THE SHIFTING SOCIOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF AYMARA LIFE

A few years ago, I was invited by a longstanding informant and friend, an Aymara Catholic catechist I'll call Clemente, to accompany him in celebrations at the start of his tenure as *jach'a mallku*. The term designates a position of maximal regional indigenous authority. The *jach'a mallku* presides over a council (*kawiltu*, from the Sp. *cabildo*) incorporating leaders from dozens of Aymara communities (*ayllus*), composing (in this case) the regional polity of Jesús de Machaqa. Catechists have had ambivalent relationships with such positions of indigenous authority, and their reputation as teetotalers, with a history of denouncing many of the ritual practices that underlie institutions such as the *cabildo*, might make Clemente seem an odd choice for the position. Complicating matters further, as Clemente was taking office (indeed, as he was being selected for the position), Machaqueños were wrestling with a profound change in their political organization. Recently constituted as a distinct municipality as part of a far reaching decentralization of the state tied to a neoliberal program of economic and political reorganization, Machaqueños had just elected a mayor and a five-member municipal council. They were taking office for the first time, just as Clemente was beginning his tenure in an office that had been the singular regional authority for centuries. The relationship between the *jach'a mallku* / *cabildo* and the mayor / municipality was unspecified; it would be worked out in practice beginning with the year of Clemente's tenure.

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This essay is an effort to examine Clemente's selection as jach'a mallku in the context of his career as a catechist. Alongside the contingencies of history and individual life paths (it fell to Clemente's community to provide a number of the candidates for the office that year, and he was among a small group of senior men eligible to serve) which surely play a part in this story, I am interested in the ways that that Clemente's service as catechist positioned him perfectly for the job by entangling him directly within the sociopolitical processes being tested and stretched by the new municipality. In part, my argument rests on the longstanding centrality of both a repertoire of Catholic practices and the presence of "foreign" institutions and personnel of Catholicism to the reproduction of local Aymara communities. Left there, the discussion would add to a line of work in Andean studies (and Latin American Studies more generally) concerned with the legacies of the colonial evangelization of indigenous communities and the interlacing of indigenous and missionized beliefs, practices and institutions (e.g. Abercrombie 1998, Adelman, 1999; Albó 1966, 1999; Berg 1989; Clendinnen 1987, 1990; MacCormack 1984, 1991, Mills 1997; Platt 1987a,b, Harris 1982 2006, Salomon 1981; Warren 1989). A second goal of this essay, however, is to detail the ways the salience of Catholicism as a constitutive element of local Aymara sociopolitical life has been revalued in contemporary Bolivia. One element here is the very position of catechist –reintroduced to the region since the 1950s and linked, over the past two decades to a pastoral ideology premised upon the recuperation and realignment of Aymara religiosity with the ideals of late 20th century global Catholicism. A second element concerns the transforming sociopolitical landscape of Bolivia over this time: from the changes precipitated by the revolutionary policies of the MNR government in the 1950s, through the no less dramatic reforms implemented since the mid-1980s by a sequence of neoliberal governments (Albó 1994; Kohl 2003; Medieros 2001). It was these reforms that brought the local municipal elections to Jesús de Machaqa.

Legacies and entanglements

Jesús de Machaqa sits in the altiplano heartland, along the Desaguadero River, some 100 kilometers to the west of the cities of La Paz and El Alto. The region is notable for a complex intercommunity ayllu structure, comprising two moieties –“*parcial arriba*” (ay. arax saya, “the upper part”) and “*parcial abajo*” (ay. manqha saya. “the lower part”) – each comprising in turn a set of component communities (Albó et al. 1972; Bonilla 1967; Choque and Ticona 1996; Wachtel 1990; Orta 2004: ch.1). This sort of nested structure of contrasted social groupings – the upper/lower contrasts of the moieties are replicated in contrasting relations between communities and comparable structural features organizing the relations of groups within communities – is a classic feature of indigenous Andean society, sometimes dubbed “complementa-

ry opposition" (Allen 1988; Isbell 1986; Platt 1986, 1987b). Far from separating social groups, these contrastive valences help organize their interactions. Festivals, for instance, bring "upper" and "lower" groups together; these and other processes aimed at achieving an ephemeral social totality are understood to be crucial to the productive abundance of crops, herds, and people.

The valenced relationship of social units is mediated and given expression through another classical feature of indigenous Andean society: rotative systems of leadership. Over the course of their married (i.e., publically adult) life, couples participate in a ladder of community service, moving, through periodic yearly turns, along a hierarchy of public positions. Over a life career of such service (called a *thaki* or "path" in Aymara) Aymara represent their households, the valenced sections of the community, their community, their parcial, and, potentially, even the regional whole. Over time, these annual positions of service rotate among different and differently valenced units at each of the nested levels of social structure. The maximal leaders (mallkus) of all of the communities, for instance, form a cabildo, and the cabildo is led by a head mallku (jach'a mallku). The responsibility to provide the jach'a mallku rotates annually among the component communities of the region, and the rotation is organized as an alternation between communities from the two moieties. The longitudinal effect is a balanced alternation between "upper" and "lower" social groups, as well as a coordination among multiple thakis (each aligning a different household across multiple scales of social organization) that Aymara, evoking the ubiquitous technology of weaving, describe as "braiding" of the paths. In these ways, public service thakis connect and align the most intimate spaces of social reproduction (conjugal households) with the reproduction of sociopolitical units of much larger scale.

Throughout the Spanish Colonial and Incan periods, such systems of rotative local administrative and ritual service existed alongside inherited positions of authority, known as mallku or kuraka. Validated as indigenous nobility—and given the Arawak-derived title of "cacique"—by the Spanish, such caciques played a crucial role in mediating relations between local ayllus and the imperial state systems they lived within. Renowned for their abilities to coordinate the action of component social groups, circulate products from across the many ecological zones comprised by the Andean mountain system, and for their gluttonous and powerful splendor, caciques embody indigenous Andean political ideals concerning the mediation of local and distant values and the potential plenitude implicit in the valenced social order (Saignes 1987, Abercrombie 1998). In Machaqa, an influential line of caciques called Guarache, were especially effective at translating traditional modes of political authority into the terms of the emerging Spanish Colonial system. Among a series of accomplishments I have detailed elsewhere, Guaraches converted traditional forms of access to an archipelago of ecological zones (cf. Murra 1975) into inheritable property rights under Spanish law, used resources from these holdings

to purchase recognized title to Machaqueno lands on behalf of the ayllu, and, more to the point of the present discussion, financed the construction of an enormous in the central town of Jesus de Machaqa (Choque 1979; Orta 2004).

The location of the Church bears some additional comment. The town or marka is something of a symbolic center to the region: less a component ayllu than a microcosm of the whole region. The cabildo meets here. The central plaza contains a grid of inlaid stones, with each square said to belong to a component ayllu of the region. For many years, each ayllu maintained a house off of the main plaza; some still do. Of course, the Church itself – its construction and subsequent operation—plays a role in all of this. The houses off of the plaza may have once served to lodge the work crews recruited from each ayllu for the construction of the church. The grid in the plaza is most evidently a microcosm of the contemporary region on the Catholic feast day of Rosario, when groups from various ayllus come and dance each on their respective square. In these data we can see the complex position of Catholicism within Aymara society: on the one hand, Catholicism appears as an external value harnessed and localized in a pattern familiar from other Aymara practices; on the other, Catholicism has become constitutive of many dimensions of Aymara social and political life.

The matrix Cathedral built in the marka anchored a parish that interlaced the regional communities and families in new ways. Early records from the parish detail the structured participation of ayllu leaders in celebrations in the marka; a network of dispersed chapels in the communities and a corresponding calendar of saint's day celebrations provided the framework for a sensuous catechism suffusing Aymara time and space (cf. Platt 1987a; Kubler 1946). The institutional routines of the Church echoed and reinforced elements of the nested, multi-scalar structure of Aymara sociopolitical organization, and helped shape their reproduction over time even as Aymara engagement with the Church drew on local practices and sensibilities. For instance, the cathedral, inaugurated in 1754, comprised a network of 12 altars. The origins of the system remain murky, but data from the early and mid twentieth century document the practice of indigenous mayordomos caring for the altars, with different communities responsible for sending a mayordomo to care for a specific altar in the church.² The altars were ranked and sorted into a moiety-like system of "left" and "right" altars, designations that are also applied to moiety divisions in Aymara society.³ Mayordomo service obligations for each community rotated over time, with a succession of annually-serving mayordomos from a given community moving through the ranked set of altars in a pattern that also involved alternation of mayordomos from commu-

² The mayordomos as a group had other service obligations to the parish priest; they likely were lodged in the respective households maintained by their ayllus in the town/marka.

³ Thus, the "upper" section or parcial of an ayllu may also be figured as "right" (or as "male"), with "lower"/"left"/"female" valencing the complementary section.

nities from each of the two paricals. I have seen no evidence that this rotation was tightly in sync with the service patterns of mallkus from the ayllus, however the analogy is not lost on the Aymara, who refer to the mayordomo/altar/saint complex as a “*jisk’a kawiltu*” or little/lesser/junior cabildo.

Catechists

Mayordomos were the predecessors of contemporary catechists. The mayordomos passed from the scene in the 1960s, likely as a result of a dynamic combination of factors including the modernizing reforms implemented in the wake of the revolution of the MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) in the 1950s. Not the least of these reforms was an end to *pongeaje* – indentured service obligations for indigenous people living on landed estates. Mayordomo service to the parish priest is remembered today as a variant of that system. The growth of evangelical Protestantism in the area as well as the growing ambivalence of sectors of the Catholic Church in Latin America toward saint festivals and related practices also contributed to the decline of the mayordomos.

The catechists, in turn, are products of a reorientation of Catholic pastoral work in Latin America beginning after the Second World War. The decades of the 1950s and 60s saw a massive influx of Catholic missionaries to Latin America from Europe and the United States. (Bühlmann 1978, McDonough 1992).⁴ Prompted in large measure by Vatican concern to counteract the perceived spread of Protestantism and materialism and reassert the Church as a factor in the post-War global order, missionaries to many parts of Latin America also found themselves increasingly concerned with what they experienced as the inheritance of a flawed colonial evangelization. In the Bolivian highlands, the pastoral practices of this era, sometimes dubbed “neo-Catholicism,” discouraged and downplayed festival and saint-related practices, associated as they were with other excesses linked to drinking and dancing. And their approach to indigenous ritual practices was even more extirpative, targeting indigenous ritual specialists, known as *yatiris*. Local lay catechists were utilized to maintain a permanent pastoral presence in remote communities, some of which might only be visited once or a few times a year by a circuit-traveling priest. Communities were asked by priests to appoint catechists; in many cases, the request verged on an ultimatum: appoint a catechist who will teach doctrine and prepare people to receive sacraments and sponsor saints festivals, or I will not attend to this community.

⁴ In Bolivia, between 1956 and 1968, the number of regular and secular priests increased from 495 to 899. The percentage of foreign clergy, already high, increased over this time from 70% to 78%; in 1968, of 701 foreign priests, 690 came from nations outside of Latin America (Pascual and Aguilo 1968, Orta 2004: 80).

The force of the ultimatum indexes the crucial position of Catholicism in the reproduction of Aymara society. It is also telling that many communities initially responded by assimilating the position of *catequista* among the set of annually rotating service obligations in their ayllu. The pastoral workers' vision of long serving lay specialists prevailed. However, data from a survey of catechists undertaken by the Bolivian Episcopal Commission indicate that a majority of the catechists who were appointed by their community had also reached the upper levels of their paths of community service. Notwithstanding this alignment of local modes of authority and local conceptualizations of catechetical authority, catechists are often contentious figures in their communities. Some positioned themselves as rivals of the traditional yatiris and worked aggressively to extirpate a range of Aymara and Catholic derived ritual practices. Meeting each Sunday for bible study and hymn singing with their neo-Catholic faith groups it is little wonder that some Aymara described the catechists to me in the late 1980s as another in a set of protestant "sectas." At the same time, many Aymara spoke favorably of the catechists (if not always of the disapproving faith group followers) as adepts of long distance travel, able to learn from and brave the perceived dangers of interactions with the powerful sites and personnel of the Catholic Church.

In my fieldwork with catechists I found that many compared themselves explicitly to traditional indigenous authorities – mallkus. Their long term service to the Church was seen as a thaki/path, their pastoral concern for the faith group and the community was presented as analogous to the preoccupation of mallkus, who are figured as mothers and fathers, and herders, of their ayllu during their period of service. However, and as I have discussed elsewhere (e.g., Orta 1995, 1998, 2004) and detail below, the catechists aligned these and other sensibilities of Aymara social and ritual authority within a transcendent field of power spanned by the hierarchy of the Church.

Inculturation and the Tradition of the Ancestors

Around 1990, as I was beginning my field research, a new approach to Catholic pastoral practice, one that had been circulating in Catholic missiological circles for a decade or so, was systematically presented to Aymara catechists for the first time. Dubbed "inculturation," this ascendant pastoral ideology approaches indigenous cultural practices as local expressions of what are taken by missionaries to be universal Christian values. In some cases, practices that were denounced as idolatrous only a few decades ago by previous pastoral teams, are embraced and encouraged today. Of course, the difference now is that in exhorting Aymara to recuperate their indigenous culture (to become better Indians), the missionaries are also encouraging them to recognize that they are thus becoming better Christians; that the ways of the ancestors are and always have been commensurate with and reducible to Christian meaning (Orta 2004).

For the missionaries, the aim of inculturation is to connect with what they imagine to be a deep and enduring indigenous spirituality and to peel away what they understand to be the accretion of an imperfect and compromised colonial evangelization. This effort put many catechists in a difficult spot. Urged to adopt a more tolerant, culturalist position, reversing many of their public stands, they also found that the neo-orthodoxy they were initially recruited to reinforce, was now part of the problem. Inculturationist missionaries spoke forcefully against catechists who served as local brokers of sacraments or who stressed the “mere” memorization and repetition of prayers and catechetical drills. In this they underestimate the impact of their predecessors and the deep relevance of Catholicism as an integral component of Aymara culture. Notwithstanding missionary interests to revitalize indigenous culture through references to “the ways of the ancestors,” it soon became apparent to me that among the attributes of the ancestors in the opinion of contemporary Aymara was a remarkable familiarity with Catholic doctrine: fluency with prayers and a vast stock of other memorized religious knowledge. This is precisely the sort of book learned orthodoxy that inculturationist missionaries disparage. In this regard, catechists approximate the ancestors in ways that inculturationist missionaries do not intend.

Similarly, despite missionary dismissals of some catechists who are seen as “merely” memorizing and repeating prayers and catechetical formulae for their faith groups, part of the local authority of the catechists comes from their assumed literacy skills and their abilities to memorize Christian doctrine. “Remembering” is a crucial mode of Aymara ritual practices describing the transaction of internalized sentiments in the contexts of offerings. In this light, the catechists’ famed capacities of memory are certainly not “mere.” Indeed, such ritual capacities should be seen as translatable across what are too often mistaken as discrete systems of meaning.

In the case of the “remembering,” the somatic source of memory and the seat of selfhood for Aymara is a complex of internal organs called *chuyma*. That the *chuyma*, which is often glossed as heart or soul, is the target of missionary and catechetical activity is not especially remarkable. This is an easy translation from the bodily poetics of Christianity. More significant, I think, is that Christian doctrine becomes entirely commensurable within a system of other ritual media entailed in the pragmatics of *chuyma*. For instance, external experiences are embodied through the *chuyma* in ways that enrich Aymara selfhood. In turn, transactions with others—people as well as place deities—are authentic and potent insofar as they originate in and from the *chuyma*. In a burnt offering to a *wak’a* (place deity), the rising smoke that feeds the *wak’a* is in large measure the embodiment of the *chuyma*-sent sentiments of the sacrificer who is thus “remembering” the *wak’a*.

For catechists and faith group members, Christian doctrine is largely assimilable to this technology of selfhood and circulation. They speak of the Word of God arriv-

ing in the chuymas, of striving to tie the Word in their chuymas. Faith group members who are able to recite lessons back to their catechist are praised for their "fertile" or "nimble" chuyma. For faith group members, moreover, this process of internalizing the Word of God within their chuymas is shaped by the technologies of contemporary catechization. Doctrine "tied" to one's chuyma is "as if it were written down;" others spoke of their chuymas as functioning like a tape recorder. On the other hand, when catechists and faith group members pray, when they offer petitions to God, when they go through the doctrinal formulae of a Mass or Celebration of the Word, they describe these as acts of remembering and sometimes as acts of "offering," using the same terms (e.g., *katoqaña*, *loqtaña*) that are used to describe burnt offerings to place deities officiated by *yatiris*.

Christian doctrinal knowledge is thus embodied and circulated in ways that make it commensurable with other potent media of Aymara ritual practice. For the catechists and the faith group members to whom they primarily minister, this not a neutral realization of translatability. Faith group participation is constructed as a source of personal completion, a realization of a selfhood that is authoritative and empowered in local as well as translocal terms. This is illustrated by observations from a course presented to a faith group by a catechist I'll call Nestor. The theme of the course was "the classes of Christians."

Most basic, Nestor began, are baptized Christians. He stressed the imperfections of this elementary class. These Christians may not come to Church every Sunday, he noted. They do not know their priest or their catechist. They come only for special Masses. What is more, Nestor added, when they do come, "they cannot make the sign of the cross, they cannot pray the Apostle's Creed, they have forgotten, they know only half." He called these "false Christians." A more advanced type of Christian has knowledge of the "signs of Christianity:" the basic prayers and ritual gestures that "false Christians" lack. Faith group members, Nestor noted, routinely perform some, but not all, of these. In contrast, he said, "the ancestors knew well how to do this; up to this day they have always taught their children and their grandchildren." The highest level of Christian identity involves a range of knowledge and experience grouped by him into 4 criteria: knowing the Apostles' Creed; complying with the commandments of God; receiving Confirmation; knowing seven prayers (here Nestor detailed some prayers the faith group knew and alluded to some others they still "lack.")

This sorting of Christian practices establishes a hierarchy of identities corresponding to knowledge of and experiences with Christianity. The knowledge is anchored in the cultural past as something that is properly genealogically transmitted, but more often forgotten. In other statements catechists and faith group members reference this forgetting of the Christianity of the ancestors as a rupture of basic Aymara sociability, as crucial and empowering information once transmitted from parents to

children is lost. In a range of ways, catechists constitute their faith groups as quasi households in which this knowledge of the ancestors is restored.

However even this valued knowledge of the ancestors falls short of the more complete Christian knowledge implied by Nestor. The faith group offers an unprecedented opportunity for surpassing and completing the Christian knowledge of the ancestors, largely through the position of the catechist as a local adept of ritual knowledge at once indigenous and exotic. "If you don't know the Doctrine, all else is in vain" said one catechist to his faith group. "I say this to you. I am not speaking for myself. I know. I am guarding this for myself, but I don't want to keep it for myself. Thus I speak for your benefit." The "benefit" here is the production and enactment of an Aymara self that is authorized at once by continuities with the past as well as capacities for extension across complex translocal settings.

Notwithstanding strong associations with the ancestors, the knowledge transacted in faith groups is constituted as coming from beyond the local community, deriving for instance from the missionary courses catechists attend. Catechists' are widely regarded in their communities as people who are continuously on the move. This travel indexes an accumulation of knowledge and catechists assert this as constitutive of their authority. Catechists speak of a sort of personal completion indexed by their esoteric experiences – one catechist, suggested he kept a record of all of the places he has traveled as part of his work and described the list to his faith group and in my presence as his "thesis." Catechists figure themselves as translocal adepts and they seek to extend the frames of reference of their faith groups. Catechists are sometimes accompanied by an entourage of faith group members to regional celebrations and they speak proudly to one another of the "amazement" of their followers when they take them to a new place.

Similarly, and despite the localizing inculturationist emphasis upon worship in the native language, Nestor's exhortation to the faith group included a challenge to learn the doctrine in Spanish as well as in Aymara. I recorded similar messages in my work with other catechists and faith groups. Such bilingual doctrinal knowledge, they suggested, was good for the faith group. Not only does it replicate the sort of knowledge the ancestors had, but these capacities enhance the spatial extension of faith group practices and reflect the spatial reach of catechists, who report that in their travels they find themselves in places where doctrinal fluency in Spanish is required.

A final issue here concerns the movement through space and time of the biblical knowledge transacted by the catechists. In ways that compound and extend the spatial imagery of words arriving in a person's *chuyuma*, catechists in their homilies would underscore the spatial and temporal distance of biblical texts –the epistles in particular—in ways that both emphasized the value accrued to faith group member and attested—to the enhanced capacities of the catechist in brokering the circulation of this esoteric knowledge.

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Thus far I have been interested to document the interlacing of the meanings and practices of Catholicism with the production of Aymara society. The ayllu-form aligns a set of productive practices across multiple levels of scale—from person, to community, to region, and beyond—linking the most intimate spaces of social production with the entanglement of Aymara society within broader fields of power. Catholicism resonates across these scales, from the nested hierarchy spanning local chapels and parishes as components of a universal Church, to the local assimilation of Catholicism to ideologies of genealogical connection and experiences of embodied personhood and its effective extension across social space. In returning to the case of Clemente, I want to trace the implications of these entanglements in the context of the shifting sociopolitical landscape of neoliberal Bolivia as evident in the career of one catechist.

Catechists at the Crossroads

I first met Clemente in 1990, just as the ideals of inculturation were being introduced in the area. Originally recruited to pastoral work in the early 1970s, Clemente had established himself as an influential and trusted catechist. In coordination with their presentation of inculturation to the catechists, the pastoral team also initiated an ambitious regional development program with projects ranging from greenhouses to extend the range of agricultural production on the cold dry altiplano, to training of health promoters, to the establishment of a local radio station. The catechists were broadly engaged with these activities. The timing of these initiatives was significant, coming as they did in the wake of a disastrous drought that afflicted the region in the mid-1980s, the transition from dictatorial rule to elected governments beginning in 1987, and periods of astounding hyperinflation over these same years. They also coincide with, and in the case of the pastoral ideology of inculturation, participate in, the ascendance of ethnicity as a framework for political mobilization.

Beginning with the transition to elected government, a string of administrations enacted a set of reforms ranging from economic “structural adjustments” to the reconfiguration of administrative authority away from the central state. Loosely and imprecisely dubbed “neoliberalism,” these policies were intended to open up the economy to global capitalism by reducing the government’s role in monetary policy, facilitating FDI and encouraging the privatization of state-owned enterprises, and reducing government spending by downsizing the role of government in social programs and outsourcing some government work to the burgeoning ranks of NGOs that filled the space left by the retreating state. Coordinate with these processes was an effort to remake the texture of Bolivian citizenship through the decentralization of governance. Over the course of the late 1980s and 1990s, a variety of legislative initiatives

and a rewritten constitution, called into being a “New Bolivia,” recognizing and empowering a range of local level groups as sites of civic involvement. Of particular note for this discussion was the Law of Popular Participation of 1994 which set aside 20% of the budget to be administered directly by municipalities, prescribed structural changes to make municipal government transparent and accountable, and created bureaucratic toe-holds for a range of civic groups to establish juridical “personhood” and participate in the decentralized state (Gill 2000, Kohl 2003, Medieros 2001). In areas like Jesús de Machaca, the direct implementation and impact of many of these reforms were experienced gradually.

This is comparable to the experiences of the region with another set of momentous reforms stemming from the 1952 revolution that brought the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR) to power. Among these reforms was the breaking up of large landed estates and the reorganization of communities on the newly redistributed land. These “*campesino*” (peasant) communities—the term reflects the modernizing ethos of the time and the MNR’s efforts to redefine rural highlanders in terms of class rather than ethnicity—were organized along the lines of European workers’ syndicates (*sindicatos*). Machaqueños, thanks in part to the achievements of the Guarache’s in acquiring recognized title to the area, had successfully resisted the encroachments of hacendados into their region. As in similar areas (Rasnake 1988), the reforms of *sindicatismo* were slow to be applied. However, by the 1970s, they adopted the structures and titles of *sindicatismo* with a number of interesting results.

Ayllus became syndicates and ayllu authorities (mallkus/jilaqatas/etc.) were merged with a *sindicatismo* prescribed set of administrative functions (“secretary of treasury, or sports, etc.). The organizational logic of syndicalism is also a nested structure and this worked out fairly neatly: The upper and lower *parciales* of the region became “subcentrales” and the *cabildo* became a “central agrario.” In concordance with the modernizing thrust of the moment (and reinforced by other developments, including Protestant and neo-Catholic evangelization), festival practices declined markedly and traditional dress marking ayllu authorities was abandoned.

The culturalist turn of the late 1980s and 90s reversed some aspects of this. Mallkus and other ayllu authorities readopted traditional forms of dress. Fiestas were revived in some communities. However, even in these cases, the ritual idiom had changed: some of the most popular festival events were soccer tournaments involving teams from neighboring communities. These practices also helped to draw back to the community younger Machaqueños, who were leaving the countryside for the city of El Alto and lowlands regions in increasing numbers.

Although the syndicate structures did serve as a vehicle for national political participation by some groups, in many rural highlands areas, they were relatively self-contained hierarchies—structural bridges to nowhere. Nonetheless, the environment of

sindicatismo created a new dynamic for local leadership structures in Machaqa: specifically, a sort of status inflation whereby the titles of syndicate authority were applied to lower and lower levels of social structure. A community/ayllu that was once a syndicate soon sought to constitute itself as subcentral. The component groups of the ayllu, by this logic, were now dubbed syndicates. Each of the two *parciales*, thus became a separate *Central Agraria*. Despite the complementary solidarity of indigenous ayllu logic, there was a gradual process of fissioning such that, by the early 1990s, the upper and lower *parciales* were essentially separate, with a handful of ayllus of the upper moiety hiving off and aligning themselves with the lower moiety.

In some cases, ayllu units fissioned and regrouped –now at a higher structural level—in efforts to draw state administrative benefits –rural schools or health posts—toward them. In this regard, inter-ayllu competition was expressed through a landscape of state projects. But the entropy of the *cabildo* was also a function of the landscape of rural capitalism. Jesús de Machaqa was a dusty terminus on a network of unimproved roads. The ayllus that separated from it, clustered around the town of Santo Domingo: no less dusty, but on a road that was much more intensively traveled by trucks and busses bringing people from Viacha and La Paz to the large regional market in the town of Jiwakuta and on toward the border with Chile.

The ayllus that clustered around Jesús de Machaqa (*parcial abajo* and a few additional communities) were relatively traditionalist in contrast to those anchored by the town of Santo Domingo, as evident in the dress of their authorities and efforts to celebrate and in some cases revive or even invent anew rituals that would affirm and produce ayllu and inter-ayllu solidarities. (e.g., Orta 2002; 2007). The work of the pastoral team in the parish –which continued to comprise the entire sector—was increasingly focused on *parcial abajo*. The inculturationalist preference for traditional communal forms, however, was increasingly strained by what many pastoral workers experienced as the accelerating fragmentation of indigenous society: by the mid-1990s some pastoral workers were telling me that they were reconceptualizing their efforts to focus on specific families within a community rather than on the community as a whole.⁵

Clemente, in the meantime, was moving up the catechetical ranks. In the early 90s, he was among a small group of catechists elevated to the new position of “minister of sacraments,” implemented soon after the introduction of the ideals of inculturation and part of an effort to enhance local control of Catholicism. By the late 1990s, he was among three ministers in the parish elevated to the position of indigenous

⁵ Some additional factors at this moment include: increasing out migration (particularly of young men and women) to the city of El Alto and low lying regions of the country, tensions between some elements of a broadening movement of Aymara ethnic revitalization and the Catholic Church, the aging of the catechists and their faith groups, longstanding competitive pressures from Protestant other churches, and what some have identified as the fragmenting pressures of the intensifying the neoliberal sociopolitical (e.g., Gill 2000).

deacon, which had been revived in Bolivia after a rather spectacularly controversial and short-lived debut some thirty years earlier (Orta 2004:90-97).

When I saw him in 1999, Clemente complained about the workload of his new position. He was responsible for a group of ayllus in the parish and found that the people of those communities made constant demands on his time. As a result, his faith group in his own community claimed that he had abandoned them.

In particular, Clemente felt besieged with requests from community authorities to assist with their proposals to have new chapels built in their communities. Why this growth of new chapels? I believe this was in part a response to converging processes of change at the local and national levels. Recall that the Law of Popular Participation set aside a portion of the national budget to be administered by municipalities across Bolivia. This was part of an effort to decentralize political administration away from core cities and toward the grassroots. It also reflected a retreat of the state from a number of social services and an opening for the increasing participation of private and other non-governmental actors in local sociopolitical life. In the rural highlands, as in other neoliberal contexts, the municipalities empowered by decentralizing reforms became important sites of administrative coordination of the development work of NGOs who flooded the country filling voids left by the shrinking neoliberal state. These NGOs were increasingly engaged in small-scale micro-development projects—latrines, cement road beds where streams cross dirt roads, water tanks for more efficient irrigation—targeting regions like Jesús de Machaca.

As the impact of the LPP intensified across the altiplano, this meant a new sociopolitical landscape for the people of Jesús de Machaca. The nearby city of Viacha became a newly relevant administrative seat for the region, comprising Machaca and six other rural “sections.” These administrative changes also resulted in a shift in local expectations of ayllu authorities, as it became an implicit standard of adequate service in the region that during the year of their tenure, ayllu authorities secure at least one micro-development project for their community. This entailed coordination with representative of NGOs, new administrative pilgrimage routes to municipal authorities in Viacha, and new modes of competition among the ayllus of the region (cf. Bretón 2002).

The decentralizing logic of neoliberal administration had the curious effect of reversing this process of fissioning linked to sindicalism. In the competitive environment of microlocal development funding, there was a new sort of capital in numbers; projects proposed by an ayllu leader were more likely to be funded if they involved larger numbers of people. There was increasing incentive, then, to coordinate the work of different ayllus, particularly at a time when the number of people from the region who now resided most of the time in La Paz was steadily increasing. Adding to this was something of a brain drain, as young people left the communities at the same time that new kinds of social capital and skills were increasingly necessary for

local political administration. This created additional incentive to pool leadership resources across community boundaries.

Much as the spatial logic of two generations of community fissioning was staked out through a series of construction projects –such as new schools—, here the newly allied communities often wanted to mark their new alliance through the construction of a new chapel or the refurbishment of an existing one. The new chapels were important, I was told, because newly unified ayllus would express their solidarity through the coordination of their respective saints' fiestas. Catechists like Clemente were stewards of this process. In this way, indigenous pastoral workers became players in the reorganization of the rural political landscape, which continued to be expressed through a grammar of Catholic sites and rituals as constitutive of local communities. What is more, their longstanding reputation as adepts of travel took on new significance in an administrative environment that compelled new forms of circulation by ayllu authorities.

When I saw Clemente the following year, in 2000, he had a new set of complaints. In the elections held at the end of 1999, Jesús de Machaqa had sent a candidate from the MIR party to serve as a councilman (*consejal*) to the mayor in Viacha. Along with the councilman, the cabildo of the region was asked to appoint a team to serve in the municipal offices in a variety of functions. from guard, and chauffeur to doorman⁶. These ranged from a “gendarme” to provided security to a “portero” (doorman/caretaker). These positions, which carried minor salaries, were seen as patronage positions and a source of some interpersonal envy. However they were very onerous in terms of time and this was compounded by what members of the Machaqueno delegation described as the racist and corrupt environment of Viacha. This was particularly the case for the porteros, whose service echoed pongueaje – a much despised form of debt peonage service that the MNR revolution is credited with doing away with. The mallkus recruited a small group and among them Clemente was tapped to serve as portero. I have no direct data concerning his selection. However, the job requirements of the portero position, including travel and residence in an ethnically distinct (and potentially dangerous) environment, echo many aspects of catechetical service and catechists, as I have suggested, are widely seen as being particularly well suited to these tasks.

For his part, Clemente was miserable. His family was strained by his extended residence in Viacha, his faith group and wider home community, already aggrieved by the time he spent attending to the needs of other communities, now felt completely abandoned by him. And there were more ominous murmurings of corruption involv-

⁶ This sort of service and participation in municipal administration is defined in the Law of Popular Participation which requires the oversight of municipal governments by representatives of civil society (see Kohl 2003).

ing theft of development monies. To my knowledge, Clemente's work in Viacha did not put him near any of the funding; rather, what was happening, I suspect, was a sort of guilt by association, as a growing popular mistrust of state institutions meant that many working in proximity to government institutions were assumed to be similarly untrustworthy. I have heard comparable suspicions about other catechists, involved in the distribution of food aid provided by Catholic charities, who were accused of "stealing like a priest." Clemente was quite relieved when his term came to an end.

Interethnic tensions in Viacha, the intensification of indigenous social movements throughout the country, as well as the ascending administrative logic of neoliberal decentralization meant that by the time of the next round of municipal elections in late 2004, Jesús de Machaqa had itself been constituted as a separate municipality, independent from Viacha. The new municipality comprised both of the moieties of the region, though the two cabildos continued to function separately. The 2004 balloting would elect the first mayor of the new municipality along with a municipal council. There was considerable debate in Machaqa about the elections. Much of this concerned the participation of national political parties in the process. As I have suggested, these years were a time of a remarkable level of mistrust not only of elected administrations but also of any national political party as a channel of opposition politics. Direct actions—road blockades, marches, sit-ins—were the primary modes of political expression and these actions (compounded by sometimes lethal responses on the part of the national government) effectively brought down and/or paralyzed a series of governments over the early 2000s.

In Machaqa, the rejection by many of national political parties, as well as an ideal that the new entity be an "indigenous" municipality (a category that to my knowledge had no official force) led to a creative solution. Deploying legal rights granted to local civil society groups as part of the decentralizing reforms, the *cabildo* of lower parcial constituted itself as a political party: MACOJMA (Marka de Ayllus y Comunidades Originarias de Jesús de Machaqa). MACOJMA fielded a slate of candidates for the offices of mayor and each of the five council seats (entailing the division of the region into five electoral districts). Two national political parties, the MNR and the MAS also fielded candidates.⁷ MACOJMA candidates won the office of mayor and three of the five council seats; MAS candidates won the remaining two seats.

Significantly, all of the candidates fielded by the MACOJMA party (and both of the winning MAS candidates) were "pasantes," men and women who had completed

⁷ The National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), the party of the 1952 Revolution and subsequent reforms, had a long history of support in the indigenous highlands. The Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) is the party led by Evo Morales. At this time, prior to Morales' eventual electoral victory, the MAS was linked most strongly to social movements in coca-growing valley areas of the country and viewed by some in Machaqa with suspicion for the participation of some elected MAS representatives in the national government.

their thaki obligations to their ayllu by serving as mallku. In this regard, Machaqueños have sought to constitute the positions of municipal governance as an extension of a thaki career, a continuation of indigenous modes of service and authority. In so doing, they have also sought to make the municipal administration commensurate with and accountable to these indigenous modes of authority—modes embodied most fully in the cabildo.

As it turned out, the very same year that the new municipality went into effect, Clemente's ayllu was responsible for providing the jach'a mallku to lead the cabildo in 2005. Clemente was one of four men nominated by the four component sectors of the community and placed before a Machaqa-wide gathering for a vote in June of 2004. Although Clemente did not have the support of his own ayllu, he won decisively in the Machaqa-wide vote and he and his wife had the honor and the burden of leading the cabildo throughout 2005.

Conclusion

Clemente's experiences over this time set in relief both the long-term salience of Catholicism within local modes of social and political reproduction in Aymara communities as well as the changing value of Catholic practices and institutions in the shifting political landscape of contemporary Bolivia. Decentralizing neoliberal reforms facilitate and compel translocal alignments. The requisite flexibility and adeptness at moving across multiple social scales place new demands on indigenous leaders and on local institutions (Bretón 2002, Fox 1996, Medieros 2001, Radcliffe, Laurie and Andolina 2002).

The nested ayllu form has proved remarkably resilient over colonial and postcolonial history (Rivera 1990, Molinie-Fioravante 1986, Platt 1982). Its multiscalar flexibility takes on new relevance and poses new opportunities in the neoliberal environment. It is not surprising, then, that it has been seized upon as an apt local voicing of a sort global civil society entailed by neoliberal policy (Hoffman 2005, Medieros 2001). Catholicism—as doctrine, a repertoire of practices, a landscape of places, and a network of indigenous and foreign people—has been missionized and assimilated into Aymara life in ways that interlace with these features of the ayllu and constitute the Church as a frame for both the local mediation of necessary foreign value and the scalar extension of local practices. Clemente's resume, exemplifying some of the promises of Christian identity as taught by his catechist colleague Nestor, puts him in the ironic position of representing the most indigenous of regional institutions as it was trying to harness the neoliberal municipality to the regional ayllu structure.

This was not a frictionless process. Clemente's relative success as an adept of the neoliberal landscape came at the cost of the support of his home ayllu, who felt aban-

done by him. There was also the matter of some nasty allegations of his “stealing like a priest.” In this we have a glimpse of the ways Christianity remains an ambivalent (if necessary) value in places like Machaqa. And there remains a serious concern, voiced by some in the region, that the presence of national political parties in the Machaqueño municipal administration reflects a degree of failure on the part of the aspiring “indigenous” municipality.

Nonetheless, for others, Clemente’s brokering of the new needs of communities realigning within the neoliberal landscape, his experience as an administrative representative in the municipality, along with the fact that ministers and deacons typically accumulate dozens of god children and compadres in the communities they serve, all likely contributed to his election as jach’a mallku. In these and other ways, Clemente as a representative of contemporary missionary Catholicism, came to inhabit the complex salience of the Church in Aymara life and realize its revalued significance in shifting local and translocal contexts.

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Abstract

Andrew Orta

**CATECHISTS AT THE CROSSROADS:
NEO-CATHOLICISM, NEOLIBERALISM AND THE SHIFTING
SOCIOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF AYMARA LIFE**

This article examines the intersection of religious and sociopolitical reform in contemporary highlands Bolivia. The case at issue is an Aymara region, where the institutions, personnel and practices of Catholicism have long been crucial to the production of local society. Over the last decades of the 20th century, a series of pastoral strategies initiated by the Church have sought to localize Catholic practices through the empowerment of community-level catechists and, more recently, efforts to reclaim elements of Aymara culture as expressions of Catholic meaning. These pastoral developments have overlapped with a set of neoliberal political reforms aimed at decentralizing administrative practices through the creation and empowerment of municipalities at the local level. I focus here on the experiences of one catechist to examine the ways his career as a local agent of missionary Catholicism entangled him directly within the sociopolitical processes being tested and stretched by these neoliberal reforms

Key words : Aymara, Catechist, Culturalist, Evangelization, Global Catholicism, and Pastoral.

Резиме

Ендрју Орта

КАТЕХЕТЕ НА РАСКРШЋУ: НЕОКАТОЛИЦИЗАМ, НЕОЛИБЕРАЛИЗАМ И МЕЊАЊЕ СОЦИЈАЛНИХ УСЛОВА У ЖИВОТУ АЈМАРА

У овом чланку разматра се међусобно пресецање процеса верске и друштвено-политичке реформе у планинама данашње Боливије. Реч је о региону насељеном Ајмарима, у којем су католичке институције, службеници и пракса дуго имали суштински значај у животу локалног друштва. У последњим деценијама 20. века, црква је почела да користи низ стратегија пасторског деловања, које су имале за циљ „локализацију“ практиковања католичке вере кроз давање већих овлашћења свештеницима (катехетама) на нивоу локалних заједница и нарочито, у последње време, кроз напоре да се елементима ајмарске културе да католичко значење. Опредељења за коришћење оваквих модалитета пасторског деловање преклопила су се са неолибералним политичким реформама, које су имале за циљ административну децентрализацију кроз стварање општина и ширење њихових надлежности на локалном нивоу. Тежиште текста засновано је на искуствима једног свештеника кога је лична каријера локалног заступника мисионарског католичанства директно увукла у те друштвенополитичке процесе, јер су неолибералне реформе његову улогу заступника католичанства „растеглиле“ и ставиле на велика искушења.

Кључне речи: Ајмари, катехете, културализам, евангелизација, глобални католицизам, пасторско деловање.