



## ETHNICITY IN BOLIVIA?

### THE PARADOX OF AN INDIGENOUS CATEGORY, THE *FOLKLORISTA*

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La Paz, June 2nd, 2007, 11:30 AM. The festival of the *Entrada del Señor Jesús del Gran Poder* has been in full swing for three hours.<sup>1</sup> Folkloric groups from the old Indian parishes in the town's northwest head towards the center. In rhythm with the music, they perform the choreographed dances they have for months tirelessly practiced. Young and less young, in couples or alone, all progress with the same joyous frenzy. A group of women of all ages – *cholitas*<sup>2</sup> – pass before us, executing a half-moon step in unison; they twirl their ruffled skirts like tightrope walkers, never losing the bowler hats posed on their heads. The man standing next to me, just as carried away as the other half million spectators watching the festival, calls for perfection from the dancers. He explains to me that this is the famous *Fraternidad Eloy Salmón*, in which shopkeepers and *profesionales* rub shoulders.<sup>3</sup> All is color, harmony, uniformity. Or nearly, for next comes a group consisting of several couples in which the women are in

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<sup>1</sup> The festival of *Gran Poder*, named after the La Paz neighborhood where it was born, takes place between late May and early June on the Saturday preceding the festival of the Holy Trinity. It consists of a parade of some 30,000 dancers brought together in various folkloric groups, including the *fraternidades*. It is today considered one of the country's most important cultural events and has since 2002 been recognized by the state as part of Bolivia's Cultural Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> Women clothed in *manta* (shawl), *pollera* (ruffled skirt) and *sombrero* (bowler hat).

<sup>3</sup> Term widely used in La Paz to refer to those with higher education diplomas, lawyers, academics and other liberal and/or intellectual professionals.

*cholita* dress and the men suits which stand out sharply against the costumes. All are wearing a richly embroidered scarf indicating their patronymic and the term “*fundador*” (founder). They are closely followed by another row of four couples, who, like them, are without costume and also sport a scarf. These latter scarfs, however, read “*pasante 2007*”.<sup>4</sup> With a small nod of the head, they pay their respects to President Evo Morales, who has come to watch the event. In contrast to the other dancers, their expression alternates between bliss and solemnity and their body movements are marked by formality.

The presence of the country’s highest-ranking politician at this festival demonstrates the important place occupied by *fraternidades* in Bolivia.<sup>5</sup> The origin of these groups, which can number several thousand men and women, dates back to the era of Spanish colonization, when they were referred to as *cofradías* or *hermandades*.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the latter, however, the *fraternidades* are secular communities<sup>7</sup> whose members come together, like their counterparts in the *cofradías* and *hermandades*, to express their faith and glorify God and the Virgin Mary. Indeed, the *fraternidades* also organize street performances (*entradas folklóricas*), where their faith is expressed through dance and music, making these performances one of the most elaborate and complex forms of urban Bolivian folklore.<sup>8</sup> The *fraternidades* can therefore be defined as structured and hierarchized groups of individuals who have come together to religiously

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<sup>4</sup> The *presterío* (or *pasantía*) is a religious office mainly responsible for overseeing the financial organization of a saint’s day festival. The related status of *pasante* (very often held by one or several couples) is sometimes compared to that of sponsor (<http://www.bolivia.com/noticias/autonoticias/DetalleNoticia20796.asp>).

<sup>5</sup> David M. Guss, “The Gran Poder and the Reconquest of La Paz”, *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 11 (2), 2006, pp. 294-328.

<sup>6</sup> Pedro Carrasco, “The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Pre-Spanish Background and Colonial Development”, *American Anthropologist*, 63 (3), 1961, pp. 483-497; Fernando Fuenzalida Vollmar, “La matriz colonial de la comunidad de indígenas peruana: una hipótesis de trabajo”, *Revista del Museo Nacional*, XXXV, Lima, 1967-1968, pp. 92-123; Tristan Platt, “The Andean Soldier of Christ. Confraternity Organization, the Mass of the Sun and Regenerative Warfare in Rural Potosí (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)”, *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 73, 1987, pp. 139-191; Thomas Abercrombie, “To Be Indian, To Be Bolivian: ‘Ethnic’ and ‘National’ Discourses of Identity”, in Greg Urban, Joel Sherzer (eds.), *Nation-States and Indians in Latin America*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1991, pp. 95-130.

<sup>7</sup> “Whoever does not belong to the clergy or a religious order”, definition of the Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales (CNRTL).

<sup>8</sup> In Bolivia, the term ‘*folklore*’ in no way refers to petrified cultural practices that one attempts to keep alive via festival and tradition. On the contrary, it is perceived as a ritual activity of devotion the performance of which is fully recognized and anchored in everyday practices.

and festively celebrate a saint, an activity that reflects the social characteristics specific to the place where it occurs.

In Bolivia, moreover, these groups play a role that goes well beyond the spheres of religious and cultural practice. Indeed, folklore presents itself, not only as a repository of identity by means of which individuals categorize one another on the basis of shared socio-cultural traits, but also as an issue of growing importance on the political scene. Studying the festive practices associated with it allows one to grasp several categorizations that play an important role in everyday sociabilities and differ from those typically drawn upon by political actors. I will try to show what precisely the identity-based categorization '*folklorista*' refers to in addition to members of the *fraternidades*. Indeed, even if it is the case that an ethnic dimension is not absent from these entities, it is impossible to understand their significance if one confines oneself to the ethnic categorizations that dominate political debate and scholarly discourse in contemporary Bolivia. Attending to the place occupied by *fraternidades* in Bolivian society allows one to fully appreciate the identity dynamics to which a diversity of regional origins and social levels has given rise in a country that has, since the middle of the twentieth-century, been turned upside down by regional and international migration. I will mainly give attention to the *Entrada del Señor Jesús del Gran Poder*, a patronal festival that is today known internationally. My discussion will be supplemented by an examination of the festival of the Bolivian collectivity of São Paulo in honor of the Virgin of Copacabana and Urkupiña as well as of Buenos Aires' Charrúa festival, which is also devoted to the Virgin of Copacabana.<sup>9</sup> Generally considered to be an "Indian" cultural relic, the *Gran Poder* festival has since the mid-1980s been a favorite subject for studies of urban Bolivian folklore. I will approach the matter from a different angle, that of the organizations that participate in this type of worship. By shifting the analysis from the general level – that of the "festival" understood as a totality – to that of its basic constitutive units, I hope to emphasize the plurality of the representations associated

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<sup>9</sup> This study draws on four ethnographic field studies that took place from November 2006 to June 2007 (Bolivia), September 2007 to June 2008 (Bolivia), October 2009 to September 2010 (Bolivia and Peru) and August to October 2011 (Brazil and Argentina).

with it and thereby come to a better understanding of how ethnicity is organized from these various perspectives.

The paradoxical situation of a social and economic elite whose members, however obvious the reality of their social status, do not figure as such in sociological discussions of the festival inspired my interest in those centers of power, the *fraternidades* of La Paz. Indeed, to the degree that they are mentioned at all, it is only in connection with their capacity to resist the dominant order<sup>10</sup> or their efforts to enhance their status<sup>11</sup> and modify the perception that they are a fundamentally “lower class” phenomenon<sup>12</sup>. From the perspective of these considerations, festive practices are systematically analyzed in confrontational terms as social resistance to *class* domination or cultural resistance to ethnic domination. These theoretical approaches, which fall well short vis-à-vis the complexity of Bolivian urban folklore, in part reflect the dominant paradigms in Bolivia. As dimensions of identity, ‘Indianness’ and ethnicity continue to be employed in both the social sciences and political life, with the new Constitution adopted in 2008 proclaiming the country’s plurinational character. However, among the multiple identities available to an individual, ‘Indianness’ and ethnicity are sometimes asserted, sometimes played down. In many cases, they play a minor role relative to other categories that make more sense in everyday social relations.

I will examine the present state of the social institution of the *fraternidad* in a major ritual space – that of Catholic worship – in order to show how these groups’ annual performance continuously nourishes a hierarchic schema that tends to reflect unequal social relations. More precisely, I will seek to determine whether the ethnic variable is present in *fraternidad* formation as an explanatory factor in the constitution of a socio-economic elite mindful of its future.

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<sup>10</sup> Xavier Albó, Matías Preiswerk, *Los Señores del Gran Poder*, La Paz, Centro de Teología Popular, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Gérard Borrás, “Les Indiens dans la ville?: fêtes et ‘entradas folklóricas’ à La Paz (Bolivie)”, *Carravelle*, 73, 1999, pp. 201-218.

<sup>12</sup> Germán Guaygua, “Las estrategias de la diferencia: construcción de identidades urbanas populares en la festividad de Gran Poder”, *Cuaderno de investigación*, 11, IDIS, UMSA, 2001.

## Social Markers and Raisons d'être of the *Fraternidad* in an Urban Context

In La Paz, as elsewhere, the professional associations that were at the origin of the growth of commercial districts saw to the foundation of *fraternidades*. In the town's northwestern zone, for example, the *fraternidades* symbolically marked the opening of new markets (resale of coca, manufactured products, meat, etc.). Today, Bolivian migrants residing in São Paulo and Buenos Aires reproduce this mode of operation: the vast majority of *fraternidades* members in these two towns are concentrated in the textile sector.<sup>13</sup>

The *morenada*, the dance most commonly associated with the *Gran Poder* festival and the district of La Paz-Murillo, is an illustration of this commercial prosperity. Its success has gone hand in hand with the expansion of these new commercial sectors. The association of commerce with the *morenada* is all the more striking given that, in contrast to "liviana" (light) dancing – in which *presterío* are absent and the economy assumes a less important role (evidence of distinct social orientation) – the latter is considered a "pesada" (heavy) dance. Yet this association is not to be found among all groups. Of the seventeen *morenadas* included in the *Gran Poder* festival, six refer directly to their commercial sector of origin, while professional origin is sometimes implicit in the other cases.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it is more a matter of proximity between a milieu of professional interaction and a *fraternidad* – as is the case of the *Eloy Salmón*, the *Viajeros Charaña*, the *Seimpre Vacunos de La Paz* and the *Unión Comercial* – than real interdependence such as it is to be found among the *Transporte Pesado a Larga Distancia* and *AMABA* (the Mixed Association of Self-Taught Artisan-Embroiderers) unions.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the members of a *fraternidad* are not all drawn from its principal

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<sup>13</sup> An historic activity of the Brás neighborhood in São Paulo, textile manufacturing more recently spread to the Flores neighborhood of Buenos Aires. In this area of activity, trades are classified according to a hierarchy that distinguishes between designers (*costureros*), workshop managers (*talleristas*) and clothing manufacturers (*confeccionistas*). The São Paulo and Buenos Aires *fraternidades* are in general directed by the latter, who enjoy more prominent social status and economic success.

<sup>14</sup> In La Paz, for example, one finds for example many sellers called *mañaneras* – in reference to the morning hour at which they go to the Tumusla Street to sell clothing in bulk – in the *fraternidades* known as the *Cultural Unión de Bordadores Señoriales Morenos y Achachis Fanáticos del Folklore en Gran Poder* and *La Nueva Elegancia del Gran Poder Morenos Achachis Verdaderos Intocables*. In neither case is their name directly referenced by the *fraternidad's* title.

<sup>15</sup> Thus, the name of the relevant socio-professional sector explicitly dictates that of the *fraternidad* and refers to specialized commercial zones (streets or covered markets). For example, the appliance and

sector of economic activity. They may work in related trades –the members of *Los Vacunos*, for example, do not only consist of butchers and wholesalers but also of artisans in tannery and truck drivers. When speaking of the relationship between a commercial sector and a *fraternidad*, it is thus useful to take into account the guild (*gremio*) as well as the union. This distinction does not constitute an abuse of language since the members' interdependence is not solely tied to the authority of an organization but also to forms of social control. Alongside the question of professional sector, the place of origin asserted by several *fraternidades* supplies evidence of the latter's organizational characteristics. In some of them, the continuous presence in La Paz of "residents" (*residentes*) of the provinces of Ingavi and Omasuyos throughout the second half of the twentieth-century is clearly evident: the close ties uniting the villages of Viacha and Achacachi are common knowledge.<sup>16</sup> This observation also holds at the international level: there are similarities between the migratory movements that originated in the rural exodus following the agrarian reform of 1953 – first or second generation immigrants – and the Bolivian diaspora of Argentina and Brazil. Independently of the number of *paceños*<sup>17</sup> residing abroad, the predominance of the *morenada* within Bolivian migrant collectivities confirms their ties with the region of La Paz, ties that center upon the worship of the Virgin of Copacabana, the patron saint of Bolivia since 1925 and, more importantly, of the small town of the same name located five kilometers from the border with Peru.

Whether the selected identity references have to do with professional sector or a field of interaction defined by geographical origin, the principle of social control asserts itself. Depending on the circumstances, profession, like place of origin, can significantly

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multimedia shopkeepers of the *Eloy Salmón* are concentrated in two perpendicular streets (Eloy Salmón and León de la Barra); those who belong to the historic sector of the *Unión Comercial* (middle-men resellers of coca and coffee from the Yungas) are mainly located in Sebastian Seguro and León de la Barra streets; the *Fraternidad Viajeros Charaña* directly refers to the shopkeeper association of the same name located at the bottom of Huyustus Street, as is also the case of the *AMABA*, specializing in the preparation of party costumes, which is located in Los Andes Street and at the bottom of Kollasuyo Avenue.

<sup>16</sup> These localities are at the basis of the creation of the *fraternidades Morenada Juventud Rosas Residentes de Viacha "Los Legtimos"*, *Sensacional Morenada Juventud Residentes Verdaderos Rosas de Viacha Revelación 82*, *Poderosa Morenada "Plana Mayor"* and *Morenada Juventud San Pedro Residentes de Achacachi "Los Catedráticos" del Folkloer en Gran Poder*.

<sup>17</sup> Residents of the town of La Paz and, more generally, in a migratory context, residents of the district of the same name.

structure the system of values specific to the group to which one belongs. To be appointed by his peers, for example, the *pasante* of the *Fraternidad Los Vacunos* must have his own meat shop. In the case of *Eloy Salmón*, he is very often chosen from amongst the ranks of appliance and multimedia shopkeepers. In 2009, the *pasantes* of *Los Catedráticos* had to be from Achacachi, the place of origin of the *fraternidad's* members. The distinctions between *fraternidades* correspond to lines of professional and / or geographical demarcation that are, for every guild or village, reflected in a discourse presenting the significant cultural traits of each (color, dance, name, etc.). In this respect, one of the most representative cases is that of the *Fraternidad Morenada Los Catedráticos*. Although it was founded by residents of Achacachi who moved to La Paz after 1953, its diacritical identity characteristics have recently been modified by a growing number of *profesionales* in its ranks. The symbol of the North American Mortar Board (the tasseled cap worn by professors and students) was added to symbols of the *Fraternidad's* self-consciously local identity on visual materials and the term *Catedráticos* (professors) was integrated into its title (*Fraternidad Morenada Juventud San Pedro Residentes de Achacachi "Los Catedráticos" del Folklore en Gran Poder*) – incontestable signs of close ties with this professional sector. Independently of any ties with a specific social class or ethnic identity, professional activity, like place of origin, is thus essential to understanding what is today at stake in urban Bolivian folklore.

Another important factor, the composition of the *fraternidad*, also depends on the ties that unite individuals in the framework of peer groups, ritual co-parenthood<sup>18</sup> and the family. In addition to professional activity and/or region of origin, the impetus of several individuals drawn from one or more families is a common basis of all *fraternidades*.<sup>19</sup> To the degree that it forms a network of obligated individuals, the family supplies (all the more so if it is well off) the necessary foundations for the consolidation of a *fraternidad* over time. Parents, brothers, sisters and their spouses constitute generations of possible *pasantes*, the condition *sine qua non* of the group's

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<sup>18</sup> Sponsorship initially defines the tie that unites, in the framework of baptism, the parents of a child to that child's godparents. In Bolivia, this social relationship is generalized to all types of sponsorship, whether sacred or profane.

<sup>19</sup> "On June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974, a group of parents, all *viacheños* like Antonio and David Quispe, Juan Aduviri, Esteban Yupanqui, Juan Silva and their respective spouses, founded a *fraternidad (...)*", *Breve reseña histórica de la Fraternidad Morenada Juventud Rosas Residentes de Viacha "Los Legítimos"*.

perpetuation.<sup>20</sup> In lists of founding members of fraternidades, it is thus not unusual to find a large number of individuals related by kinship or baptismal parentage. In this respect, it is to be noted that the obligation of reciprocity and mutual respect implied by the relationship of sponsorship is equivalent to or greater than that of kinship.

## Is Urban Folklore Ethnic?

In order to situate one's self vis-à-vis others, an individual living in the old Indian parish of La Paz, the *ladera oeste*,<sup>21</sup> does not need to systematically draw upon the ethnic appellations of "indio", "cholo"<sup>22</sup> or "indígena". He will perhaps have recourse to them in certain sites of dialogue between social groups but not necessarily when interacting with individuals he considers his equals in a given social order and, specifically, that of patronal celebrations. What's more, as an urban Aymara, using the terms *cholo*, *mestizo* and *cholo-mestizo*<sup>23</sup> prevents one from extracting one's self from

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<sup>20</sup> It also happens that a family voluntarily calls upon another family to strengthen its *fraternidad* at the time of its creation. Thus, Buenos Aires' *Fraternidad Morenada 5 de Agosto*, which in the beginning was merely a group of dancers, first invited the eldest son of another family so that his brothers, all of whom had spectacularly succeeded in business, would later join him.

<sup>21</sup> The use of this geographical indication in vernacular speech refers not only to the historically discriminated place where the Indian parishes of the town of La Paz were located but also to an expression that has entered the social sciences as the designation of an ethnic place. See X. Albó, *La cara aymara de La Paz*, Bolivia, La Paz, Cuaderno de Investigación CIPCA, 1981-1982-1983-1987; G. Borrás, "Les Indiens dans la ville?: fêtes et 'entradas folklóricas' à La Paz (Bolivie)", article cited; Virginie Baby-Collin, "Des usages de l'indianité à La Paz: formes du métissage dans la ville", *Problèmes d'Amérique latine*, 48, 2003, pp. 71-90; Nico Tassi, "The Postulate of Abundance", *Cholo Market and Religion in La Paz, Bolivia*, *Social Anthropology*, 18 (2), 2010, pp. 191-209.

<sup>22</sup> This term originally referred to a child born of the union of a *métis* and an Indian. Thérèse Bouysse-Cassagne, Thierry Saignes, "El cholo, actor olvidado de la historia", in Silvia Arze, Rossana Barragán, Laura Escobari, Ximena Medinaceli (collective), *Etnicidad, economía y simbolismo en Los Andes*, La Paz/Lima, Instituto de la historia social de Bolivia. HISBOL – Institut français d'études andines. IFEA – Sociedad boliviana de historia. SBH – Antropólogos del Sur Andino. ASUR, 1992, pp. 129-143. Today, sociology uses it to define "Indians" residing in an urban context. Jeff D. Himpele, "The Gran Poder Parade and the Social Movement of the Aymara Middle Class: A Video Essay", *Visual Anthropology*, 16 (2-3), 2003, pp. 207-243; Javier C. Sanjinés, *Mestizaje Upside-Down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004; N. Tassi, *Cuando el baile mueve montañas. Religión y economía cholo-mestizas en La Paz, Bolivia*, Bolivia, Fundación Praia, 2010. Contrary to the term '*cholitas*', used to refer to women dressed in *la manta*, the *pollera* and the *sombrero*, the term *cholo* is rather pejorative when applied to men. *Cholitas* are particularly numerous among shopkeepers and domestic servants.

<sup>23</sup> N. Tassi, *Cuando el baile mueve montañas. Religión y economía cholo-mestizas en La Paz, Bolivia*, op. cit.



homogenizing categories where neither the time of migration nor the economic differences associated with it<sup>24</sup> nor religious denomination<sup>25</sup> are distinguished. In fact, we are here confronted with several discourses that apply to the same sociological object – to wit, the festival. In political debate and scholarship alike, one must thus take in how one addresses the question of ethnicity in Bolivia. It is also worth considering whether, though the term ‘Indian’ is historically associated with patronal celebrations, the *folkloristas* actually constitute a homogenous sociocultural group.

Given the various social fields in which is involved, religion is of particular interest in this specific case. At the junction of various orders of classification, patronal celebrations – and, in particular, that of the *Gran Poder* – call into question a good number of presuppositions specific to “Andean” studies of categorization. First of all, it is very difficult to stigmatize them as “Indian” to the degree that their actors do not present such a social or cultural profile. Moreover, few spontaneously lay claim to this attribution of identity. While a portion of them identify with an Aymara universe, for many others, affiliation centers on the notion of *métissage*. Rossana Barragán’s study of representations of class and ethnicity in La Paz illustrates this point and additionally demonstrates the non-correlation of *classist* and ethnic categories.<sup>26</sup> On the basis of the negative and positive attributes identified by her survey, she shows that the categories of ‘*mestizo*’ and ‘Aymara’ are not exclusive, with the result that a single individual can simultaneously identify with both. She also observes that, ‘*mestizo*’ refers to the terms ‘lower’ or ‘middle’ class no more or less than does ‘Aymara’. From the point of view of the present study, Barragán’s results are all the more valuable given that her sample consists of shopkeepers working or residing in the neighborhoods where the festival of *Gran Poder* takes place. One of the most important characteristics of urban Bolivian folklore is the promotion of its integrative dimension, with emphasis placed on its refusal

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<sup>24</sup> Laura Fléty, “Jeux du corps et jeux identitaires chez les *Cholas*”, *Civilisations. Revue internationale d’anthropologie et de sciences humaines*, 60 (1), 2011, pp. 23-42.

<sup>25</sup> One can probably explain the new interest shown by the Catholic Church in the *Gran Poder* festival in terms of the not insignificant success today enjoyed by several religious confessions in an urban context, including the Evangelicals, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

<sup>26</sup> R. Barragán, “Más allá de lo Mestizo, más allá de lo Aymara: Organización y representación de clase y etnicidad en La Paz”, *América Latina Hoy*, 43, 2006, pp. 107-130.

to take the supposed ethnic or social origins of participants into account.<sup>27</sup> By its definition, then, folklore is neither indigenous nor *métis* nor even totally foreign to those sometimes referred to as *jailones*,<sup>28</sup> in reference to the *profesionales*. Indeed, starting in the early 1990s, a growing number of people considered as belonging to the middle or upper classes – that is, individuals who do not live in segregated neighborhoods, are not born in the provinces and do not speak a vernacular language (all criteria for objectively defining ‘Indianness’)<sup>29</sup> – have become infatuated with folklore. This long stigmatized and stigmatizing practice had thus penetrated the various segments of the urban population. In 1995, during the mayoralty of Monica Medina Palenque, the festival of *Gran Poder* was promoted to the rank of Heritage of La Paz. It thus appears that ‘Indianness’, like ‘*mestizo*’, does not contribute to understanding the social composition of the *fraternidades* or their evolution.

However, while urban Bolivian folklore does not openly proclaim itself “Indian”, is ethnicity for all that absent from it? We have seen that the *fraternidades* are associated with particular professional and/or geographical domains of interaction, which in turn guarantee their smooth operation. The professional sector in particular acts as a category of identity without presuming that a given social and/or ethnic origin is associated with a particular profession. Yet the participation of the *profesionales* in the folklore of the 1990s was accompanied by an institutionalization of the *fraternidades*, with significant consequences for the contemporary political scene. It is to be noted that the *profesionales* are heavily represented in the leadership of the *fraternidades* and that of the association responsible for organizing the festival – the *Asociación de Conjuntos*

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<sup>27</sup> “Due to its eminently folklorico-cultural nature, any activity that denotes a discrimination of race, sex, language, belief or economic condition is forbidden in each and all of its forms, whether public or private. For this reason, all activity of partisan political propaganda is prohibited.” Organic statute, *Fraternidad Cultural Unión de Bordadores Señoriales Morenos y Achachis Fanáticos del Folklore en Gran Poder* (p. 6); “Due to its cultural, folkloric and religious character, all forms of partisan political interference are categorically forbidden. Similarly, any form of discrimination, whether social, racial or other, that is contrary to the objectives of the *fraternidad* is excluded.” Organic statute, *Fraternidad Morenada Juventud San Pedro Residentes de Achacachi “Los Catedráticos” del Folklore en Gran Poder* (art. 8).

<sup>28</sup> This pejorative term is used to refer to the white, middle or upper class inhabitants of certain residential neighborhoods of southern La Paz (*zona Sur*). The word ‘*jailón*’ comes from the English term ‘*high*’ and the augmentative or depreciative suffix *-ón*. Alex López Illanes, Ronal Jemio Peralda, Edwin Chuquimia Vélez, *Jailones, en torno a la identidad cultural de los jóvenes de la élite paceña*, La Paz, Fundación PIEB, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Pierre Lavaud, Françoise Lestage, “Compter les Indiens (Bolivie, Mexique, États-Unis)”, *L’année sociologique*, 55 (2), 2005, pp. 487-517.

*Folkloricos del Gran Poder*, or *ACFGP*. This new state of affairs is the consequence of a social classification in which all parties have specialized, as it were, according to their socio-cultural practices. The shopkeepers who, by virtue of their economic situation, find themselves at the head of the most prestigious *fraternidades* or in competition to assume the duties of *pasante* have left the task of legally organizing their institutions to these “experts”. For their part, the *profesionales* have not sought to become involved in practices such as the *presterío*, even though godparenthood is commonly practiced in Bolivia, or the *ayni*,<sup>30</sup> for which they have not been socialized. In addition to coming together in *bloques* – the sub-groups that make up *fraternidades* – the *profesionales* have found a place for themselves in the administration of the latter. Interviews and an examination of the archives of the *ACFGP* reveal that they were the principal instigators of the *fraternidades*’ institutionalization and perhaps of the changed political perception of these groups. Indeed, up till the early 1990s, only a few *fraternidades* had applied to the Bolivian Institute of Culture (and, more precisely, the Department of Ethnomusicology and Folklore) for a certificate of recognition. With the exception of the *Morenada Transporte Pesado a Larga Distancia*, which had done so beforehand, the *fraternidades* began, starting in the mid-1990s, to apply to the Prefecture for cultural recognition and “legal personality”. Protected by the state thanks to these steps, the *fraternidades* were henceforth officially registered under article 52 (General Enumeration), chap. 1 (General Measures), title 2 (Collective Persons) of the Civil Code as non-profit associations, which obliged them to draft regulations and organic statutes as well as establish an administration that would see to their application. The *fraternidades* were thus structured following the same administrative presuppositions as unions and professional guilds. Above all, however, they henceforth possessed a new organ of power, the administration. Other elites forming a mixed group of power in this way grafted

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<sup>30</sup> In the strict sense of the term, the *ayni* consists of a system of exchanges of services of the same nature (in days of agricultural work, for example) in a rural context. Today, it has taken on new, particularly material forms: “The *ayni* is still practiced on the occasion of festivals: when one of my acquaintances has to take on, as a *pasante*, significant expenses, it is my duty to offer him help in the form of goods or money without immediate compensation; but I know that he will help me in the same way when I am a *pasante* in my turn.” Nathan Wachtel, *Le retour des ancêtres. Les Indiens Urus de Bolivie XXe-XVIe siècle. Essai d’histoire régressive*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 112. In urban folklore, this help in kind mainly consists of cases of beer.

themselves onto the local shopkeeper hierarchy. Today, shopkeepers, intellectuals, artists and politicians all seek to promote their standing by means of folkloric practice.

What the ongoing reform of the legal framework of the *fraternidades* shows us is that the characteristics of the *folkloristas* who participate in patronal festivals, though associated with an area of professional specialization, are not for all that exempt from differentiated socio-cultural practices, a fact that reflects heterogeneous sociabilities. Yet these characteristics or traits are in no case those which the actors themselves consider significant in the organization of social relations.<sup>31</sup> Evidence of this can be found in the homogeneity displayed by the *fraternidades* during public performances as well as their desire to give no place to ethnic or “racial” differences between members of the group in their mutual relations. Though the *profesionales* and others drawn from what are commonly considered the dominant classes have little truck with the practices and spaces specific to the world of the *fraternidades* during extra-festive periods, this fact in no way diminishes their standing as *folkloristas*. The conflicts and issues of identity inherent to folklore stem more from struggles for power between economic agents and familial or value conflicts (e.g., honor, group commitment). The identifications encountered in the course of my research must thus be rethought. The *folklorista* category seems to me the most fitting of these identifications as it allows us to underscore strategies of power among actors who are categorized in the terms of what have historically been considered hermetically sealed orders of classification. In this way, we can move beyond an explanation of folklore or the festival as a “lower class” and/or “Indian” phenomenon.

### **Hierarchization within a Category: Scales of Assessment**

With only a few exceptions, the *fraternidades*, whether in Bolivia or established abroad by migrants, are organized in the same fashion. Due to their growing institutionalization and the use of so-called customary conventions, not all individuals are equal in these groups. Declared equality of law is accompanied by de facto inequality in which

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<sup>31</sup> Fredrik Barth, “Les groupes ethniques et leurs frontières”, in Philippe Poutignat, Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart (eds.), *Thésies de l’ethnicité*, Paris, PUF, 1995 (1969), pp. 203-249; Danielle Juteau, *L’ethnicité et ses frontières*, Montréal, Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1999.

seniority, office and prestige dictate a status hierarchy. While it presents itself to the external observer as a homogenous entity, in its internal operations the *fraternidad* is subdivided into various *bloques* which, duplicating the structure of the parent organization, also have a name, administration, history and *pasantes* of their own. Each sub-group brings together novice and veteran *fraternos*. Most of the former have been members for less than two years and have a limited right to speak relative to the latter. More senior members, by contrast, have the right to vote in the various elections and can take on the duty of *pasante* or seek a post as delegate to the Assembly. The latter brings together the representatives of each *bloque* and the administration, which consists of a president and secretaries. Yet, in contrast to ordinary non-profit associations, the structure of the *fraternidades* contains two additional statuses, that of the *pasantes* and *fundadores*. In the hierarchized order of the *fraternidad*, they comprise a group of power and their respective points of view are taken into consideration by the administration in making decisions.

Appointed for a period of one year, a couple or group of couples recognized for their significant economic capacity and attachment to the group are given the prestigious title of *pasantes* by the outgoing authorities.<sup>32</sup> Prior to actively assuming their new duties, the *pasantes* pass through a series of ritualized actions (*sartha*, *posesión*<sup>33</sup>), followed by a *recepción social* at which the economic power of the new authorities is displayed by way of demonstrations of wealth. Indeed, in the course of their one year tenure, the *pasantes* finance the musical groups, among others, and cheerfully dispense *cariños* (gifts of food and drink, souvenirs (*recuerdos*) of their period in office). The *pasante* symbolizes the vitality of the *fraternidad*. His position must be

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<sup>32</sup> The term “appointed” can be understood in the literal sense to the degree that it is sometimes the moral pressure of the group that obliges the couple or couples to accept. Yet, in most cases, the appointment only consecrates a prior agreement reached between the outgoing sponsors (*pasantes*) and the incoming ones (*recibientes*).

<sup>33</sup> This ritual sequence includes three major steps: first of all, the new authorities are officially designated; next, they are officially presented to the *fraternidad* (*sartha*); and, finally, they are invested with their new authority (*posesión*). The *sartha*, synonymous in Aymara with *sar'aña* (“demanding the hand in the case of marriage”), takes place in the month preceding the patronal festival and formalizes the acceptance of the future *pasante*. This act takes place in the context of a party to which the members of the *fraternidad* are invited. The *posesión* either takes place on the day after the patronal festival, the Sunday of *Diana*, or the following day. On this occasion, ex-*pasantes* are discharged from their obligations, which they transmit to the new authorities.

thought of at two levels: a religious level (since he sponsors the commemoration of a saint)<sup>34</sup> and a social one (due to the moral import of his mission vis-à-vis the group of belonging). The *presterío*, which can be interpreted as a *system of offices (sistema de cargos)*, nevertheless results in one of the *fraternidad's* hierarchizations since it does not necessarily correspond to a fair circulation of the office between members of the collective. The *fundadores*, for their part, are only recognized as such if they were present for the *fraternidad's* act of foundation – required by the Prefecture –and, above all, on condition that they remain over the course of the years. Being a *fundador* implies a highly appreciated, long-term commitment. Wealth is thus not the only characteristic proper to this status, which is all the more desirable as it cannot be legally transferred. The *fundadores* form an elite whose legitimacy operates in the public and private spheres alike. The strongest symbolic dimension of this legitimacy is expressed by the epithet *Tata*, which is nothing less than a descriptive term of saintliness.<sup>35</sup> The general organizational chart of all *fraternidades* observes this distribution of roles between a base, which brings together the totality of the *bloques*, and an elite, whose legitimacy is founded on its involvement in the professional sector, attachment to a place of origin, ties of alliance and kinship and authority over the discretionary power it draws from the accumulation of the most enviable statuses. Indeed, the prestige attaching to their office only lends to the *pasantes* and *fundadores'* attractiveness as baptismal sponsors to the degree that their status as comrades in the construction of networks of sociability and influence in trade are decisive in this region.

Yet one's identity as a *foklorista* cannot be solely reduced to holding office in a *fraternidad*, it is also a matter of the influence that it exercises on the social trajectory of an individual. Indeed, folkloric practice is a performative act in which each party can construct an identity in reference to his status as a dancer, his seniority or his involvement in the *fraternidad*. Thus, at the end of his first two years, a simple *fraternalo*

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<sup>34</sup> Hugo G. Nutini, Betty Bell, *Parentesco ritualestructura y evolución histórica del sistema de compadrazgo en la Tlaxcala rural*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989 (1980).

<sup>35</sup> Olivia Harris, "The Eternal Return of Conversion: Christianity as Contested Domain in Highland Bolivia", in Fenella Cannell, *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 51-76. The polysemy of the Aymara word '*tata*', which signifies '*lord*', expresses the ambivalence of its use since it can be employed both as a term of address and as a "mark of the divine". The type example is that of the paternal figure incarnated by Francisco Mamani, founder of *Los Fanáticos del Folklore en Gran Poder*, who was nicknamed "*Tata Pancho*".

can have access to the Assembly as a delegate of his *bloque*. He may then apply to become a representative of his *fraternidad* at the *ACFGP*. After a while, if he is recognized by his peers, he will be allowed to join the administration of the *ACFGP* as one of its secretaries. He can even become its President, a public recognition capable of opening up new opportunities for him, particularly in politics. While certainly ideal, such an “institutional folkloric trajectory” is not unheard of, as shown by the case of Nicolas Huallpara, who reached the post of municipal councilor of La Paz after thoroughly climbing the rungs of his *fraternidad*. While the administration of the *ACFGP* serves as a springboard for some, others become involved in the practice of the *presterío* or in matrimonial strategies aiming at social promotion. In an urban context, the *fraternidad* today constitutes a space capable of offering possibilities for social ascension. There are multiple and differentiated strategies of power but these are always mixed with affective relations, group involvement and, above all, power struggles in which “civil death” is the counterpart to social ascension when duties are not properly fulfilled.

Moreover, one's status as a *folklorista* is tied to an interlocked set of real or imagined communities to which the individual refers over time, depending on the circumstances. The meaning attributed to this category varies depending on whether one situates it in a migratory context or a local one, in which interaction is the result of proximity with a given milieu. In local situations, characteristic of most patronal festivals, there is a status hierarchy between dances that is determined by their particular expressions. As we have seen, the *morenada* symbolizes a series of identifications having to do with shared situations, including the experience of rural exodus and affiliation with a commercial sector or the district of La Paz-Murillo. It can also happen that they are united by their uses, as in the case of the relationship between the *kullawada* and *morenada* dances: the first is the privilege of the unmarried, the latter is that of matrimonial stability. Similarly, as we see in the festival of *Señor Jesús del Gran Poder*, which is recognized as part of the heritage of several countries, certain patronal festivals gradually spread beyond the space of their neighborhood of origin to become emblematic of a town, region or country. Always in terms of attraction, it is worth mentioning the predominance of certain Marian figures. To the degree that their space

of worship exceeds the physical limits of national frontiers, they can be allied with a region – the lakeside zone of Titicaca, for example – and/or an imagined community. Those who worship the Virgin of Copacabana, for example, form a community of worship bringing together co-nationals as well as Bolivian migrants.

The present situation of political tension between Bolivia and its neighbors, Chili and Peru, incites one to consider another level of analysis. For a decade, the country's authorities have consistently denounced the "theft" of Bolivian dances and traditions by these two nations. This is reflected in the 14 June 2011 law promulgated by Evo Morales declaring the *morenada*, *kullawada*, *caporales*, *llamerada* and *saya afrobolivienne* dances part of the cultural and immaterial heritage of the Plurinational State of Bolivia as well as a 24 December 2011 polemic over the lakeside town of Puno between Peru's ambassador in Bolivia, Silvia Alfaro, and the Bolivian Minister of Culture, Elizabeth Salguero.<sup>36</sup> Beyond its condemnations of Peruvian plans to exploit these dances as a tourist attraction, this polemic reveals the issues at stake in a deeper anthropological debate: the political partition of cultural continuity. Indeed, the patronal practices found in the region of Lake Titicaca are based on a socio-cultural heritage shared by its Aymara-speaking inhabitants, Bolivian and Peruvian alike. What's more, many matrimonial ties unite the inhabitants of this region on both sides of the frontier.<sup>37</sup> Whether justified or not, responses to this polemic in Bolivia demonstrate a desire to promote folklore as a national phenomenon. Finally, it seems that this has always been a politicized category: formerly stigmatized for its "Indian" characteristics, it is today promoted for those same characteristics in a national context that favors the "traditional" and "native". In the Bolivian collectivities residing in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, *folklorista* takes on an additional meaning. Not only are the characteristics intrinsic to the category as it manifests itself in Bolivia confirmed, with professional identity, geographical origin and family relations all playing a role, but ethnographic facts also show a clear relationship between the *folklorista* attribution and the demonstration of national sentiment. Thus, individuals who have not been socialized to folklore in their childhood and who stood aside from this type of activity when they resided in Bolivia

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<sup>36</sup> See [http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2011/2011\\_12/nt111224/6\\_01clt.php](http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2011/2011_12/nt111224/6_01clt.php).

<sup>37</sup> According to remarks by a representative of the Bolivian Consulate, Puno 2010.



have “rediscovered” their affiliation with this identity in the framework of the migratory process. Moreover, the installation of patronal festivals in these places does not only take place along lines of reproduction but also as an extension of cultural practices. Since the beginning of the century, many São Paulo and Buenos Aires *fraternidades* have established themselves as subsidiaries of their *Gran Poder* counterparts.<sup>38</sup> This association reflects, on the one hand, a desire to adopt the name of a prestigious La Paz *fraternidad* and thereby better attract those seeking to participate in the event and, on the other, a desire to ensure a local guarantee for the signature and follow-up of contracts with the artisans of La Paz. This relationship is not limited to the exchange of goods alone, however. Each year, delegations are exchanged between the mother *fraternidad* and its subsidiaries in the course of larger events such as the *recepción social*. Moreover, host country governments are now obliged to take regulatory steps to favor the flow of folkloric commodities from Bolivia and must, above all, reconsider the place of this collectivity in the political landscape.<sup>39</sup> In fact, participation in folklore has become an affirmation of citizenship and an expression of one’s attachment to a political community. As such, it contributes to host country recognition of migrants.

The Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia today provides legislation for what were formerly just “Indian festivals”.<sup>40</sup> Yet the discourses of the authorities and the categories promoted on these occasions remain politicized constructions and must not be taken for granted by the social sciences. The rich terminology generated by sociological studies of the festival testifies to the non-congruence between ordinary categories and political categorizations. If one is to avoid once again falling into the trap

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<sup>38</sup> For São Paulo, these are the *fraternidades Morenada Juventud Intocables* and *Poderosa Morenada Nueva Revelación São Pablo Brasil Los Catedráticos*. For Buenos Aires, they are the *fraternidades Verdaderos Intocables Unión Talleres La Nueva Elegancia, Morenada Orgullosos Rebeldes de La Paz, Morenada Verdaderos Fanáticos del Folklore*.

<sup>39</sup> Beginning with Bolivia’s bicentennial independence celebrations in 2009, the festival of Charrúa, the main festivity of the Bolivian collectivity in Buenos Aires, has split in two. To the parade taking place in this neighborhood has been added another parade in the city center the following Saturday. The latter runs from the main avenue of *9 de julio* to the *casa rosada*, where the President of the Argentine Republic, Cristina Kirchner, resides. In 2011, a new step in the recognition of the Bolivians of Argentina was symbolized by a resolution on the part of the Argentine government facilitating, for the purposes of carrying out this festival, the passage of men and merchandise across the border between Villazon and La Quiaca.

<sup>40</sup> “This wealth – natural, archeological, paleontological, historical, documentary and that resulting from religious worship and folklore – is the cultural heritage of the Bolivian people, in accordance with the law” (art. 99, line 3).

of ethnic mono-identification and the social identification with which it is sometimes associated, the manner in which the first studies of Bolivian folklore conceived of their object will need to be revisited. As we have seen, the difficulty of understanding the festival is in large part due to its historical association with the Indian condition. Systematic recourse to official categories prevents us from going beyond the many debates relating to the place of *métissage* in these societies and thus the greater propensity of *métis* and indigenous people to participate in this form of worship. What must be kept in mind, by contrast, is that patronal festivals continue to serve as a barometer for grasping the forms of alterity in Bolivia.

In order to understand the internal processes that drive the *fraternidades* and give them an important place in contemporary Bolivia, it is useful to compare my ethnography with the analysis of classical categories in the sociology of the Indian, the *métis* and the lower classes. In this way, one may identify an ordinary category that better captures the manner in which the distinctive identity of the groups under investigation is constructed. The present study has shown that the category of *foklorista* best reflects the social markers uniting the *fraternidades* with professional sectors, geographical origin and family networks. Above all, it allows for an approach that is simultaneously local and global. This category makes it possible to study the ongoing urbanization of urban folklore among “external Bolivians”<sup>41</sup> and follow the manner in which transnational religious networks are organized linking the mother *fraternidades* of La Paz with their subsidiaries abroad.

The obvious conclusion is that the *fraternidades* are characterized by a constant transfer between festive activity and the collective they represent. They are not superimposed upon social groups but are rather constitutive of their symbolic and material practices. In fact, this “folkloric society” is a universe in itself, with its own categories and means for promoting them and fully contained in a hierarchized order within which a certain elite can demonstrate its symbolic and economic power.

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<sup>41</sup> Virginie Baby-Collin, Susana Sassone, “Mondialisation de la *Virgen de Urkupiña*? Religiosité, fêtes populaires et territoires urbans des migrants boliviens, de Buenos Aires à Madrid”, *Autrepart*, 56, 2010, pp. 111-132.

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