

# The Gran Poder and the Reconquest of La Paz

By

David M. Guss

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

---

---

## RESUMEN

---

---

En este artículo se analizan las enormes transformaciones en el uso del espacio público ocurridas en La Paz, Bolivia, en los últimos años y los variados significados atribuidos a las mismas. En primer lugar, una revisión de la historia colonial de la ciudad revela una geografía de tipo racial impuesta por los españoles, afectando sobre todo a la comunidad aymara de Chuquiago. Seguidamente, se analiza el impacto de la masiva migración indígena desde el campo a la capital a principios del siglo XX, tomando como foco la festividad del Gran Poder y su ambivalente relación a las fuerzas dominantes de la sociedad boliviana de la época. Esta fiesta se convirtió en vehículo poderoso de movilización de la nueva población urbana; en complejo aparato discursivo que reflejaba las identidades raciales y étnicas en formación. En consecuencia, el Gran Poder no fue simplemente un barómetro de cambio de la sociedad boliviana, sino también un evento constitutivo de la misma. Finalmente, este artículo demuestra que la “indianización” de La Paz que ha acompañado la aceptación gradual de la susdicha fiesta ha crecido paralelamente al indigenismo resurgente, el cual ha culminado en la elección de Evo Morales a la presidencia del país en el 2005.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** performance, fiestas, Gran Poder, política de etnicidad, Aymara, La Paz, Bolivia. **KEYWORDS:** performance, festivals, Gran Poder, cultural politics, Aymara, La Paz, Bolivia.

---

---

### Landscape and Race

It's hard to forget the first time you arrive in La Paz. Few cities are so dramatic and almost none so unusual. It's not a classic beauty, a city huddled around an island-filled bay like Rio or San Francisco or even an assemblage of architectural gems framed by a magnificent river such as the Seine or Hudson. La Paz sits more like a

*Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No.2, pp. 294–328. ISSN 1085-7025, online ISSN 1548-7180. © 2006 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permissions to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, [www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm](http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm).

lunar crater, nearly treeless and completely exposed at more than 12 thousand feet. But one doesn't climb to this city set high in the Andes. One descends from the barren plains of the altiplano.

The road that spins down into the bowl over 1,200 feet below emerges from another satellite city that has been built above it. El Alto, or "The Heights," now almost equal in population, didn't even exist 50 years ago. Yet today, its sprawling unpaved streets lined with open markets and half-finished, hollow-brick homes have engulfed La Paz's John F. Kennedy International Airport. In fact, it is the fastest growing city in Latin America. But the unemployed miners and campesinos who have been drawn there by the hope of work do not present the picturesque image one has of an ancient Andean community. If one arrives in La Paz by plane, it is likely you won't even see El Alto. The daily flight from Miami lands just before dawn before its inhabitants have begun to stir. Only as one passes over the *Ceja*, the "eyebrow" that forms the border between El Alto and the other, more prosperous city below, does the first light start to pick up the ring of snow-capped peaks that surround it—Mururata, Chacaltaya, Huayna Potosí, and most dramatic of all, Illimani. It is this 21 thousand foot mountain, visible from any vantage point, that has become the city's most important landmark.

When the Spaniards founded the city in 1548, they came from the same direction, across the altiplano and down the steep slopes into the basin below. Pizarro and Carvajal's insurrection had just ended and the Crown wanted a safe place for soldiers and traders to rest as they traveled between Cuzco and Lima in the west and the mining centers of Sucre and Potosí to the east. Led by Alonzo de Mendoza, Nuestra Señora de La Paz was founded twice; the first time in the altiplano church of Laja and then three days later in its present, more hospitable location. Of course, Mendoza and his small group were not the first Spaniards to visit the area. Drawn by rumors of gold, the Pizarros and others had come to see what from pre-Inca times had been one of the most important centers of the Aymara world. Its name, *Chuquiago*, meant "principal" or "head staff," indicating its political and spiritual centrality. As to its economic importance, the river that flowed through the valley was named *Choqueyapu*, "field of gold," and was well-known for the many treasures it had yielded.<sup>1</sup>

The Spaniards were not the first strangers to arrive. A number of groups had fought over the city, most notably the Incas who under Maita Capac tried to subdue it around 1185. Armed resistance combined with diplomacy enabled Chuquiago to remain independent (Valdez 1948:36–39). Various groups did settle in the area, however, and by the time of Alonzo de Mendoza's arrival the population was a mixture of Pacajis, Lupacas, Collas, and other Aymara-speaking groups. There is no record of how large the native population was at this time but 38 years later when the first census was taken there were a total of 5,820 Indians and 260 Europeans (Guía de La Paz 1948:12).<sup>2</sup> Already the indigenous population was being

transformed into a single entity, similar to what occurred to Native Americans in the rest of colonial America. Even more significant was the way the new city was being constructed. Immediately, two plazas were established—a Spanish one on the site where Alonzo de Mendoza took possession, and an Indian one several blocks away on what would eventually become Avenida América.

From the start, the city was divided in two, with strict limitations on which parts the indigenous population could enter. This continued well into the 20th century with legal restrictions preventing native peoples from setting foot in the Plaza Murillo, the city's administrative and cultural center.<sup>3</sup> The Choqueyapu River served as an unofficial border. As with all colonial cities, the closer one lived to the main plaza, the higher one's status and greater one's income. Native groups were kept at the margins where for many years they maintained their traditional agricultural communities. But as La Paz grew and the demand for additional land increased, these communities too were absorbed one by one. This process, which accelerated dramatically in the 19th century, is well documented by the Bolivian historian Rossana Barragán (1990). According to her, the disappearance of La Paz's native population was not the result of intermarriage and attrition, but of the loss of collective land ownership and of the social systems that allowed people to identify as Indians. The fact that La Paz's native population declined from 81 percent in 1650 to 30 percent in 1909 does not reflect a racial shift as much as it does a cultural one (Barragán 1990:233). The mestizos who replaced them were racially indistinguishable, yet culturally they no longer identified as Indians. Instead of subsistence farmers with the collective support of the *ayllu*, they were now wage-earning artisans. They might also be bilingual, wearing clothes and celebrating holidays they formerly disdained. For Barragán, this mesticizing process was a cultural phenomena driven by the stark economic realities of colonialism; uprooted and detached from the land, indigenous peoples entered a new cultural orbit that transformed their identity.

Barragán, like many Andean scholars, has focused on the difficulty of establishing racial categories in a society so clearly obsessed with them. In fact, early observers were quick to perceive the arbitrary nature of most Andean classifications. In 1945, Julian Steward wrote of the Peruvian Andes, "When Indians have adopted the Spanish language, European clothing, and other national traits, so that they are no longer conspicuously different from other people, they are classified as mestizo, though racially they may be pure Indian" (1945:283). And three years later, Olen Leonard observed:

With such class, rather than caste, distinctions, it is obviously an easy matter for an "Indian" to become a mestizo or for a mestizo to cross over into the white class. Examples of the former are witnessed in La Paz every day. The Indian moves in from the country with his distinguishing dress of home-spun, knitted cap and sandals for

the men; shawls, multi-colored and pleated skirts, derby hat and bare feet for the women; secures employment, develops fluency in Spanish and is henceforth classified generally as cholo or mestizo (1948:450).

The fluid nature of such identities, which scholars have continued to appreciate for the last 50 years, has resulted in a great deal of anxiety for those moving between these different realities. What many claim anchors, or in turn dislodges these identities is the relationship one has to the land. Barragán wrote about this in terms of the actual social and economic structures created in the communities of the original inhabitants of La Paz. Others refer to it in more symbolic terms. Orlove, for example, writes of a “narrativization of the earth” whereby rural indicators of earthiness—sandals, adobe, clay pots, fertility rituals—become emblems of virtue in one context but stigmas in another. Once in the city, the proximity to the earth is not only left behind but strongly discouraged. What was spiritual and positive is now backward and unhygienic. In leaving the countryside for the city, Indians also trade one identity for another, a mestizo one, which according to Orlove (1998), is associated with both the nation and progress. Weismantel identifies this process as the “geography of race,” an Andean phenomena in which identities are continually shifting depending not only on one’s location but on the person one is addressing. Race is a relational category, both binary and unstable, with the greatest opposition between that of country and city (Weismantel 2001).

Given this scenario, one might ask whether Indians can even exist in the city, or if in order to flourish in a dignified manner, they have to reinvent themselves as mestizos. And until now, this has certainly been the case. In addition to the public spaces from which they were excluded, were the many institutions, such as schools and government, that barred people in traditional dress. This has been particularly discriminatory for indigenous women whose large *pollera* skirts, long braids, and bowler hats marked them as Indian. But men too, as a result of their names or faulty Spanish, faced similar exclusion. In order to gain access many changed their clothes, took new names, and improved their Spanish. In other words, they became mestizos. But even that did not dissolve the barrier that exists between the two halves of the city. In fact, as many have noted, La Paz remains the only capital in Latin America with two names, its official Spanish one and that of Chuquiago, the original indigenous one, which has never been forgotten (Pacheco 1997:229). There are indications, however, that after nearly five centuries, this may be changing and the city is slowly being remapped. Some believe it is the fulfillment of the revolution started by Tupac Katari in 1781 when he blockaded the city for seven months and nearly expelled the Spanish. As he was brutally executed he promised: “I will return and I will be millions.” Today the city is under siege once again, from both within and without.

## La Paz 1900 and Julio Cordero

Once established, La Paz quickly became Bolivia's most populous city. Yet it remained little more than an agricultural center for the first 350 years of its existence. In 1900 it had fewer than 50 thousand people.<sup>4</sup> However, the country was starting to change and La Paz was to assume an important new role. The emergence of tin on the world market revived Bolivia's depressed mining industry with La Paz positioning itself as the new financial center. This was soon followed by a dramatic rise in manufacturing, particularly textiles, which in turn attracted a new wave of immigrants from the countryside. La Paz also became the country's official capital, until then located in Sucre. Construction boomed and within 30 years the population tripled. It was becoming an Indian city once again with most of its new inhabitants monolingual Aymara from the altiplano. They settled in an area called Chijini on the steep western slopes overlooking the valley. Its name meant "grassy" or "pasture," a reminder of its recent use as a hacienda.

A new geography of race, made possible by innovations in transportation such as streetcars and automobiles, soon developed. Proximity to the main plaza became less important as the upper classes migrated to the lower parts of the city—the Prado, Sopocachi, San Jorge, and eventually the Zona Sur. The indigenous population, on the other hand, lived in the higher elevations where services and amenities were noticeably fewer. It was also much colder with the steep, treeless slopes more susceptible to landslides during the winter rains. Status and ethnicity now corresponded to the altitude one lived at—lower, paradoxically, being higher.<sup>5</sup> But the frontier between these communities remained the same, the Choqueyapu River, and, when that was hidden in tubes below ground, the main street that passed above it. Laws also continued to restrict movement, creating what Xavier Albó has referred to as a "dual state system," a Bolivian version of separate but equal where access to many parts of this nominally democratic society were limited to the Euro-Bolivian minority (1997:129).

The enormous changes that occurred in La Paz during the first two decades of the 20th century were not unlike those in other major Latin American centers. Cities like Rio de Janeiro, Lima, and Havana were also transformed by the influx of huge numbers of poor migrants from the countryside. Even the United States saw similar changes as blacks fled the South in record numbers, transforming such cities as Chicago, Detroit, and New York. Most analyses of these radical shifts in population focus on the tremendous social upheaval they engendered—the appalling living conditions, health and sanitary problems, epidemics of crime and violence, the exploitation of workers, and the intense discrimination coupled with the repression that met any attempts at redress. While these accounts may be true, they ignore the cultural explosion that routinely occurred when groups met at what Lipsitz aptly calls "the dangerous crossroads," that place where inter-cultural dialogue between

immigrant and host is charged with the legacies of colonialism and oppression (1994:121). Inevitably, it is a place of struggle from which dynamic, often disturbing, new forms emerge.

La Paz became as rich an incubator of these new cultural forms as any city in Latin America. At the same time, the struggle for legitimacy and acceptance has been equally if not more arduous. In fact, many of these forms are still stigmatized as pagan legacies, emblematic of the primitive Indian past hindering Bolivia's successful modernization. Only over the last several years, as Bolivia reels from the political, economic, and social chaos brought about by neo-liberal restructuring has a new inter-cultural dialogue been initiated, and with it, a reevaluation of the many expressive forms which for decades have been resisted. Whether this will change the actual face of the city is still a question; but the realization that there are different notions of public space has certainly been acknowledged. As Armando Urioste, La Paz's recent director of culture wrote: "Cities are not simply the physical imposition of buildings and streets. They are above all spaces of symbolic interchange whereby cultures that share these environments manifest their right to the use of its public space" (Araoz et al. 2004:1). This declaration is an important concession on the part of officials who have long wished to impose a single definition of order and discipline.

When the first wave of Aymara immigrants began arriving in La Paz in the early 20th century, they found a city in which the use of public space for celebration or any other demonstration was strictly reserved for Euro-Bolivian men. And not simply native peoples, but women and children too were denied the same access to streets and plazas. Similar to the Victorian culture just losing its grip in the United States, Great Britain, and many other parts of the world, a strict division existed between domestic and public space: women and children belonged in the former while men had the privilege of occupying the latter. People of color, indigenous or otherwise, existed at the edges as servants or laborers. This world, where the elites held center stage, imprinting their domination on public space, would undergo a tremendous challenge with the arrival of La Paz's new inhabitants. By the 1920s, as Chijini grew and the upper classes migrated southward, the culture of the city began to change. Fortunately, this process was documented in great detail by Julio Cordero, Bolivia's most famous photographer.

Cordero, whose turn-of-the-century cityscapes and portraits now adorn restaurants, hotels, and offices throughout the city, was a pioneer of the new medium in Latin America. Born in 1879 in the small Aymara village of Pucarani, not far from Lake Titicaca, Cordero moved to La Paz at an early age, apprenticing with the Peruvian brothers, Julio and José Valdez. By the age of 21 he had opened his own studio on Calle Comercio. Like his more famous Peruvian contemporaries, Martín Chambi and Max Vargas, he earned his living doing studio portraits. But he was also an official government photographer and as La Paz expanded so did his business.



Figure 1 *Self-portrait of Julio Cordero, 1900.*

*Photo by Julio Cordero*

He traveled everywhere shooting the radical changes taking place—the construction of new buildings and factories, the arrival of streetcars and planes, the comings and goings of presidents and officials. He also focused on celebrations and public ceremonies—weddings, funerals, inaugurations, parties, even executions, and of course, festivals, which in the first 20 years of the 20th century did not mean Indians in picturesque costumes. His numerous images of *comparsas* and fraternities, either posed or riding through the streets, offer a rare glimpse of a world on the verge of disappearance. Of course, the same elite continued to dominate but the culture of



Figure 2 *The Black Hand.*

*Photo by Julio Cordero*

the upper and middle classes would soon be different. Polleras and bowler hats would now be worn only by “Indians,” and mass public celebrations would be considered undignified, even savage. For the moment, however, these Euro-Bolivian groups still announced that the streets were theirs and that blacks and Indians were unwelcome.

Cordero’s photographs show a festive world dominated by white and criollo men, professionals and business leaders joined together in small fraternal orders. They traveled through the streets in horse-drawn carriages or even cars. Their names—Terrorists, Anarchists, Bohemians, Casino Strikers—were all subversive yet they were not.

The members of the Black Hand are typical, all dressed as European dandies with tuxedos, cummerbunds, skimmers, and white bucks. They were also wearing black gloves to mark their membership in a secret order. The Terrorists of 1913 appear even more elite in their double-breasted white suits. Were they going to a carnival or to the British Open? What is it that they wished to display? One is reminded of New Orleans and such Mardi Gras krewes as Rex and Comus which were formed in direct opposition to the inclusionist politics of Reconstruction. As Mitchell points out, these krewes were composed of a white elite anxious to reestablish their





Figure 3 *The Terroristas*, 1913.

*Photo by Julio Cordero*



Figure 4 *The Terroristas* traveling down Calle Evaristo Valle, Carnival, 1913.

*Photo by Julio Cordero*

dominance and with it their “grandiose claims of ruling the city” (1995:62–63). The celebration they promoted was a double inversion, as chaos and disorder were replaced with a rigid and exclusive hierarchy. According to Mitchell, “they also helped change Carnival from something in which people participated on an individual basis into something in which audience and actors were clearly delineated” (1995:60). Images too of Mardi Gras krewes and early 20th century Paceaña comparsas are strikingly similar. They move through the streets elevated above the masses like royalty, tossing small gifts to the Indians who can only stand and watch, while from the balconies women throw streamers, welcoming them as conquering heroes.

The comparsas could also be brutally satirical, as in the 1912 photograph of a group calling itself the *Durmientes*. Like other groups of this period, they were composed of Euro-Bolivians. However, they were dressed as Indians, or at least they signal Indianness through the wearing of *chullo* hats, shirts, and bags. One holds a sign reading “donkeys for sale,” while young *pongos* or native servants are forced to hold up their banner: “*Durmientes*,” sleepers, lazy ones, Indians. It is an offensive and humorless stereotype, far outlasting groups such as these who used Carnival and other festivals to articulate such views. In fact, they would soon to be replaced by the very indigenous peoples they were mocking, and within a short time become targets themselves of new satirical forms.



Figure 5 *The Durmientes*, 1912.

Photo by Julio Codero



Figure 6 *The Fugitivos del Amor.*

*Photo by Julio Cordero*

All of this was captured by Julio Cordero who meticulously photographed the city's transition from a 19th century backwater of white privilege and domination to a bustling urban center filled with immigrant voices straining to be heard. It would be a long time, however, before these groups gained access to the streets controlled by the Anarchists, Terrorists, and Black Hand. But Cordero photographed these new actors as they prepared to enter from the wings. With names like Fugitives of Love, New Harbor of Pleasure, and Always Alert, they presented a strong contrast to the white male fraternities that preceded them. Cordero's portrait of the Fugitives of Love, for example, shows a wonderfully mixed group, with men, women and children joined together. They look as if they've been partying for a long time. Empty bottles of Pilsner along with their instruments are on the grass in front of them. Most of the women are dressed in the pollera style that would soon become common among all urban Indians. In the middle are a group of men with simple masks and large buttoned coats similar to those worn by pepinos. Reclining in front are two men in elaborately embroidered costumes. They are Ch'utas and this is one of the first photographs anyone has ever taken of them.

Derived from Chukuta, or native of Chuquiago, Ch'uta was claimed to refer to any indigenous person born in La Paz. The Ch'uta dance, on the other hand, has a



Figure 7 *This early studio photo of a Ch'uta standing beside a Pepino reveals his relation to the humble figure of the pongo. The mask in his right hand, however, could easily be the face of his former master.*

*Photo by Julio Cordero*

close association with the most oppressed of all figures, the pongo who was the indentured native child forced to sleep beside his master's front door in order to let him in.<sup>6</sup> The Ch'utas' elegantly worked costumes are based on the much simpler outfits worn by the pongos, a kind of Cinderella fantasy completed by a mesh mask with rouged cheeks, blue eyes, and moustache. This mask, which can be seen resting on the hat immediately in front of the *Fugitives of Love*, was used to parody the pretensions of the whites. It was a classic performance of Andean ambivalence, a dance of both repulsion and desire, of status elevation and identity assertion. Or as Manuel Vargas noted: "Without denying his Indianness, and at the same time ridiculing the whites, the Ch'uta assumes through his costume a level of economic well-being in a society whose ruling class is not exactly Indian" (1993:48). Today, it is the

Ch'uta who dominates Carnival, dancing in large groups through the same streets where the Terroristas of 1913 once rode.

The Ch'utas weren't the only new form developing at this time. In fact, the importance of the La Paz Carnival was beginning to wane, overshadowed by a much newer celebration called the *Fiesta del Gran Poder*, the Festival of the Great Power. A moveable feast taking place eight weeks after Easter on Trinity Sunday (late May to early June), the Gran Poder, which began as a small neighborhood event, would eventually grow into the largest urban Indian celebration in the Americas. While Gran Poder cults date back to Europe in the 15th century (Albó and Prieswerk 1986:9), the one occurring in La Paz was only initiated in the early 1920s. Only then did the newly arrived residents of the Chijini section start banding together to honor another recent arrival to the community, a miraculous 17th century painting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

### Señor Jesús del Gran Poder

The painting that arrived in the expanding Chijini neighborhood some time around 1915 had been on a long journey of its own. Created by an anonymous colonial artist, the three and a half by six foot canvas was part of a long and controversial tradition of images of the Holy Trinity. Many suggest that such paintings originally derive from Celto-Roman pagan forms or the *Vultus Trifons* images of Cerberus, Janus, and Geryon. By the early Middle Ages, such trifacial paintings had become common though the Church was increasingly uncomfortable with what it considered primitive monstrosities. In the mid-16th century the Council of Trent outlawed them entirely, and then in 1628 reiterated the ban with an even stronger prohibition (Pettazzoni 1946:151). In place of representing the Holy Trinity with a single body and three heads, artists now developed new variations. The Father was depicted as an old man with a globe on his lap, the Son as Jesus holding a cross or chalice, and the Holy Spirit as a dove. This was the form of Titian's Trinity, painted for Charles V in the early 1550s. However, the safest and preferred variation became one in which all three figures were represented as separate but identical images of Jesus, often as part of much larger allegories.<sup>7</sup>

In Colonial Latin America all of these versions flourished, although the one that first appeared in La Paz in the early 19th century was considered the most offensive—a single body with the three faces of Jesus perfectly joined together by four eyes. Between the figure's outstretched arms was an equilateral triangle that reached to its feet. At the corners of the triangle were circles containing the Latin words for "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit." A fourth circle, located in the center, was attached to all the others by separate lines. Inside it was the word "God." Along the inner lines was written the word "is" while in the triangle's outer lines running between



Figure 8 Image of the Gran Poder, Museo de Arte, Lima, Peru.

“Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit,” were the words “is not.” This diagram was an illustration of the Holy Trinity dogma.

The painting, which became known as Señor Jesús del Gran Poder, “Lord Jesus of the Great Power,” entered the Concebidas Convent in the possession of a young novitiate named Genoveva Carrión.<sup>8</sup> In addition to bringing objects, the nuns were also permitted to bring two orphans who after being adopted worked as servants. They eventually became nuns themselves and inherited the property of their adoptive parent. This is how the image of the Gran Poder was handed down from one Carrión to another until the convent was forced to relocate from the center of the city. This occurred around 1904 when the Church officially labeled the painting *imagen contra rito*, prohibiting it from being included in any Catholic ceremony. Irene Carrión and María Concepción, heirs of the painting’s original owner, decided to leave the convent, taking the image with them. It now began a long peregrination journeying from house to house. Many devotees can still name all the

stops it made like Stations of the Cross—Miraflores, the home of the Miranda brothers on Calle Juan de la Riva, a year at number 45 Calle Mercado, and other stops on Calles México, Yungas, and Figueroa. And with each stop, it came closer and closer to Chijini. Vilela del Villar's description of this journey is filled with religious passion and foreboding until, like a huge epiphany, it is offered a permanent home in the community which would eventually adopt it:

And then one day as the anguished devotees headed up one of those steep streets, with no idea where to turn to find shelter for their Image, they met by chance a good-hearted neighbor named Mostacedo, who was astonished to hear of their terrible situation. And immediately he offered his house on Calle León de la Barra. Afterwards, he rejoiced and was inwardly pleased because Divine Providence had shown him such special favor. According to his own account, "that lucky day, I went out to the street for no reason beyond a strange impulse, as if some unknown force was driving me from inside." (1948:373)

Followers soon began visiting the image on Fridays, burning candles and leaving flowers. They also prayed and asked for various favors which when granted, increased the belief that the image had miraculous powers. In either 1922 or 1923, no one is quite sure, a small celebration honoring the image occurred on the day of the Santísima Trinidad, and the fiesta was born.<sup>9</sup>

Chijini, still beyond the official city limits, was growing rapidly. In 1926, the original Jawira hacienda was subdivided and sold. For the Aymara Indians flooding into this area, the Señor del Gran Poder was the perfect patron saint. He too was a new resident, displaced and marginalized just as they were. Eventually, their identities would become so intertwined that the neighborhood itself would become known as the Zona del Gran Poder. Their relationship would also be the source of one of the greatest creative explosions the Andes has known.

As more and more adherents came to worship, an agreement was reached to build a special chapel in order to house the painting. Land was found on Calle Gallardo and in 1928, construction on the Capilla del Gran Poder begun. But the Church hierarchy was not happy. An image which had been labeled heretical and unworthy of any sacraments was being adopted by a large and extremely passionate group of followers. The Church also questioned the manner in which the image was being worshiped. Was it too close to various pre-Colombian deities who were also portrayed in the form of a trinity (Gisbert 1994:88–90)? And were these Indians capable of distinguishing between the two? Or were they perverting the Holy Trinity with their own, deeply-rooted superstitions? It was widely held that supplicants asking for a favor for a loved one prayed to the face on the right. On the other hand, if they wished to have someone harmed, they prayed to the face on the left. For requests for oneself, the middle face was addressed. Finally, in 1930,

unable to stand it any longer, the Bishop of La Paz, Augusto Schieffert, ordered that the image be repainted. The fact that it belonged to the Carrión family and the neighborhood that had adopted it didn't seem to matter. It was impossible, however, to find a local painter who would agree to do it. In the end, two foreigners, thought to be Peruvians, were located. Stories abound about the terrible consequences that befell them. Some say they fell off their ladders and went crazy. According to Vilela del Villar:

It was retouched by two inexperienced foreign painters who had lived a somewhat loose life. At one point these painters arrived drunk to finish the last details on the Image's face. As one of them moved his brush over the eyes, the extraordinary figure, according to witnesses, moved his head and narrowed his eyes in a sign of reproach. The terrified painters fled and were never seen again. (1948:372)

The painting was now left with only one face, and the triangle and circles on its chest covered up. But the popularity of the image was not diminished and, to the Church's dismay, it began to be considered even more powerful. In fact, many claimed that the faces still manifested themselves despite being hidden. At the same time, a new parish was established in order to meet the area's growing needs. Placed under the authority of a group of Dutch Augustines, their first act was to build a church on Max Paredes, a street several blocks below the one where the Gran Poder was housed. In 1942, a year after the area was officially incorporated into the city, rumors began to circulate that the image was to be relocated to Bajo Chijini, the site of the new church. The neighborhood quickly divided with the upper and lower parts fighting pitched battles in the streets. When the moment came to actually relocate the image, a group from the *Junta de Vecinos*, or "Neighborhood Association," snuck into the chapel in the middle of the night and stole it. They eventually located one of the Carrión heirs and purchased it from her for one thousand Bolivianos. Several months later, confident in their ownership, they returned the image to its home on Calle Gallardo, announcing plans to renovate and expand the chapel.

The Bishop was enraged and immediately prohibited any religious ceremonies from taking place in the chapel. It would be a full five years before a truce was brokered, the terms of which included relinquishing control of the image to the Church while at the same time guaranteeing that it would not be moved from Calle Gallardo. Despite this agreement, the renovation of the capilla was a masterpiece of syncretism. The stained glass windows were filled with references to pre-Incaic ceremonial sites. Even more impressive was the new altar. The painting was flanked on either side by enormous wooden *monolitos* identical to those found in Tiahuanaco, the national symbol of Bolivia's illustrious pre-Columbian past. Together, the three figures formed a new trinity. The Gran Poder had not only been adopted, it had also been mesticized, just like those who had taken it in.





Figure 9 *Señor Jesús del Gran Poder*, La Paz, Bolivia. In the lower left is Saint Augustine and in the lower right Saint Thomas Aquinas. They are both holding pens, a reference to their scholarship on the Holy Trinity. One can still see part of the image that was painted over just behind the figure's hands.

In the meantime, the fiesta had also gained momentum. It was now large enough to warrant a detail of 200 police officers although the largest activity was still not the organized procession of dance fraternities known as the *entrada*. It began instead with a soccer tournament and ended in the evening with fireworks. In between, different dance troupes would pass through the streets at random, each parading in front of the chapel to pay homage to the Señor del Gran Poder. These



Figure 10 Church of the Gran Poder, Calle Gallardo, La Paz, Bolivia.

Photo by David M Guss

early groups were relatively small, composed of the humblest members of the community. The *Cebollitas* or “Little Onions,” for example, credited with being one of the first groups, was made up of newspaper sellers. They wore ponchos and danced with pan-flutes known as *zampoñas* not unlike a procession in a small indigenous village. The *Choclos* or “Ears of Corn” were another early group who performed a dance known as the Suri Sikuri. This dramatic dance, which some claim pre-dates the Christian era, originated from an ostrich-hunting ritual. Today dancers still balance enormous feathered crowns up to six feet in diameter while



Figure 11 An early *Diablada* group photographed by a contemporary of Julio Cordero named Jiménez.

beating drums and playing *sikuri* pan-flutes (Urquizo Sossa 1977:111). Another pre-Columbian dance transported from the countryside was the *Kullaguada*, said to be inspired by weavers from the altiplano. In this somewhat coquettish dance, decorative spindles are carried by masked couples dressed in colorful costumes with embroidered hearts sewn onto them.

One dance not imported from the countryside by the new residents of Chijini was the *Diablada*, the Devil Dance. This form was a direct byproduct of colonialism and the brutal conditions under which Indians had been forced to work. Originating in the mining center of Oruro at the end of the 18th century, the *Diablada* was an allegory in which the forces of good and evil struggled for supremacy. While the Archangel Michael, representing both Christianity and European civilization, appears to triumph, the devils too achieve their own liberation emerging from the underworld of mines to which the conquerors condemned them. It was the perfect pageant for an indigenous community that had itself been demonized and was now trying to establish itself in a new environment. La Paz's first *Diablada* was founded in 1927 and remains the oldest continuous fraternity in the Gran Poder. Unlike the other troupes that had already formed such as the *Choclos* and *Cebollitas*, the *Diablada*'s membership was not composed of porters, shoeblacks, and newspaper sellers. Their founders were costume and mask makers, hence their name, *Unión de Bordadores del Gran Poder de La Paz*, the Union of Costume Makers of the Gran Poder of La Paz. These were the artisans responsible for the fantastic creations that would soon become the signature of the festival itself—the grotesque masks with terrifying teeth and huge horns covered with serpents

and lizards and bulging eyes made from thermoses, the shimmering capes studded with colored stones and sequins, the breastplates with their golden dragons, and the heavy aprons with hundreds of antique coins sewn on. Here was a glimpse of what the festival would eventually become and the cyclone of creativity that would drive it. At the moment, however, it was still a dispersed and somewhat disorganized celebration. It would be several decades before it moved beyond the borders of Chijini to challenge the status quo of La Paz. For now, it remained a neighborhood event, an instrument through which the identity of a new community was established.

### **The Asociación de Conjuntos Folklóricos del Gran Poder and the Birth of the Morenada**

For most of the 1940s and 1950s, the Fiesta del Gran Poder remained relatively unchanged. The number of dancers and devotees increased, yet it remained an informal neighborhood event with sports competitions, fireworks, and a handful of fraternities dancing past the church at different hours. By 1960, the population of La Paz started to spike dramatically. Bolivia's revolution had occurred eight years earlier bringing an MNR-led civilian government to power.<sup>10</sup> There was extensive education and land reform. Universal suffrage was also granted and the largest tin mines nationalized. In an attempt to eliminate discrimination, the term *indio* (Indian) was legally replaced by that of *campesino* (peasant). These changes were accompanied by large shifts in population. In the next 25 years the number of people in La Paz would double. Even more dramatic was the growth of El Alto, the satellite community located on the altiplano above it. With only 11 thousand people at the time of the revolution, El Alto grew nearly ten-fold by 1976 and then ten years later, after more than doubling, became an independent city (Arbona and Kohl 2004). Most of these immigrants, the vast majority of whom were indigenous, found their way to the neighborhood of Chijini, and when residing there became too expensive and congested, to El Alto. They also found their way into the dance troupes of the Gran Poder.

Joining a dance fraternity upon arriving in a disorienting new environment had many advantages. It was a way to integrate oneself into a ready-made community, with rehearsals, parties, and dances providing an important bonding experience. Many of the fraternities were also organized around prior affiliations such as trade associations, villages of origin, or even neighborhoods within the larger Chijini community. The choice of group would also become an increasingly strategic decision as it offered new members a chance to network with more established figures in different occupations. Of course, religious devotion was a key incentive, especially for poor immigrants desperately in need of help. For them, the image of the Gran Poder was a magnet, a magical figure whose countless miracles were legendary

throughout La Paz. When one needed help, the Gran Poder was often the first place to turn. Prayers and appeals always ended with a promise, a solemn vow that the supplicant would fulfill some task in honor of the sacred image. More often than not, the promise was to dance on the day of the Santísima Trinidad. And so the Fiesta del Gran Poder continued to grow.

By 1969 there were 15 dance fraternities with enough participants to require a more organized entrada, the official entrance of the groups on the Saturday just before the Santísima Trinidad. A predetermined route was now established with a set order based on the seniority of each group. A program was also published and a set of rules issued determining how the dances would be judged and the prizes awarded. All of this was the responsibility of the Junta de Vecinos, the same neighborhood association that had rescued the image when it was threatened with theft in 1943. This was also the group that had spearheaded the construction of the Capilla del Gran Poder on Calle Gallardo. They remained devoted to the church and to the important relation between the Gran Poder and the relatively new community of Chijini. But in 1974, after decades of controlling the event, the Junta de Vecinos was suddenly displaced by a newly formed organization with a radically different vision of what the Fiesta del Gran Poder should be.

1974 was an important year for not only the Gran Poder, but for Bolivia in general. While Hugo Banzer had controlled the country for the past three years, it was only then that he consolidated his power, outlawing political parties and unions, closing universities, and eventually forcing thousands of people into exile. In a classic populist gesture, he also chose it as the year to participate in the Gran Poder, the first time a president of the Republic had ever done so. He sat in the review stand (*palco*) on Calle Buenos Aires, Chijini's principal avenue, watching as the *diablos*, *morenos*, *suri sikuris*, *llamaradas*, *kullaguadas* and other dancers wound their way through the neighborhood's hilly streets. It was a tremendous validation not only for the Fiesta del Gran Poder but for the newly formed association that had taken over the organizing responsibilities for the entire event.

The *Asociación de Conjuntos Folklóricos del Gran Poder* (ACFGP) had been officially established on May 12th only weeks before the 1974 entrada. Its founders, Lucio Chuquimia, Luis Calderón, and Carlos Suárez, conceived of it as a congress where each of the fraternities—27 when it began—would have two elected representatives who would meet regularly to debate questions related to the festival. There would also be a separately elected directorship with a president, vice-president, treasurer, and various other figures who would carry out the work of the executive body. For the Association's first 12 years, Lucio Chuquimia served as president with the headquarters located in his home directly above one of his numerous businesses.<sup>11</sup> Chuquimia, whose father had helped found the Gran Poder's first Diablada, controlled every aspect of the Association. While many criticized his

autocratic style, he insisted that he had been democratically reelected every two years. But criticizing Chuquimia was dangerous as his brother-in-law and Association cofounder, Luis Calderón, discovered. A radio announcer and folklorist, Calderón found himself ostracized when he challenged Chuquimia's leadership. One anonymous source described his style as typical of Latin American dictators:

What's happened is very similar to Stroessner in Paraguay, where there are certain fanatical supporters who have created relations of spiritual kinship with him. And the same thing happens with the elections: the president of the electoral committee is his *compadre* . . . Completely fanatical people who identify the Gran Poder with Lucio Chuquimia. (Albó and Preiswerk 1986:116)

More than Stroessner, it was Bolivia's own dictator, General Banzer, who Chuquimia admired most. And it was to him that he turned to fulfill his vision of a greater Gran Poder, one that would extend beyond the borders of Chijini, becoming a nationwide symbol. As Chuquimia explained to me in a 1999 interview, Banzer hadn't simply appeared at the Gran Poder, he was personally invited by Chuquimia who went to great efforts to meet him:

In 1974, when I was already president, we thought: How do we make this really fantastic, great, because I already had the idea of elevating folklore, not just doing the same thing the [Junta de] Vecinos had been doing. So the first idea was the President, to invite him, to get his support. And so I went to work right away, but, *señor*, how do you meet the President? I didn't know anybody who knew him, not even a neighbor who did. It was so hard to do, it really made me weep. But you know how it is when you have faith. I ran into him on the Batallón Colorados. The amount of guards the President has! I spoke to him though, and he promised me right there, the President, that he would come to the Buenos Aires. And the situation then was very serious politically. And then it snowed, so should we dance or shouldn't we? Should we even hold our festival? But through the Palace we heard that the President was coming, so right away I ordered all the groups to get ready and that's when we did it. And then the entire press started writing about it: "The President is at such and such a place. He's been at the *entrada folkórica*." (Personal Communication)

With Banzer's participation, the festival immediately achieved a new national prominence and the following year, the general led the dancers all the way down the Prado, La Paz's most elegant commercial avenue. It was the first time they had crossed the Plaza San Francisco and the invisible border that had divided the two halves of the city since the time of the Conquest. According to Chuquimia, this had always been his goal. He had wanted Bolivia's folklore to be recognized as a vital, national form in the country where it was practiced, fully aware that its acceptance would pave the way for a new appreciation of the marginalized actors who per-

formed it. He explained this in the same 1999 interview:

It was really a tremendous feat, that I had gotten La Paz's, or should I say, the Gran Poder's folklore recognized. And after that, I found it a lot easier, because of course, we want to please all the people of La Paz, because this is a free spectacle that we put on. We charge absolutely nothing for the seats, and the government understood this and gave us permission to come all the way down [into the center of the city], which was prohibited at that time. It was prohibited to just play a flute (*zampoña*), because our music was an embarrassment, because one couldn't even dance a *cueca* in refined circles.<sup>12</sup> I had become so, so bitter. I had traveled. I was in Mexico. I was in Spain. I was in Argentina. And how they loved our dances. "Wow, your folklore, your culture!" And it made me weep to tell them what was happening, that in our country what mattered was the tango, the waltz. But we had our own beautiful forms. That's why I went to all the authorities and said to them: "Come on, let's go, don't be ashamed of who we are. Pick up a flute. Let's export our own folklore treasures that we've hidden away." And they understood. And that's how we began to spread the Gran Poder.

If the President has, with his presence, accepted our folklore, then it's like I'm telling you, it's time for all Bolivians to do the same, to cherish their folklore. And now the young people have adopted it and that was for me the most, the most beautiful thing, together with the University that started its own *entrada*. Now, now then, now there's no shame, now there's no more of this imported stuff. So then now there's no twist any more, now all that is off a little to one side now, all of that. So why wouldn't I be happy that we've gotten the young people interested, and even the small children who I see dancing in the schools. Thank you, Señor del Gran Poder! For we have entered into the heart of every Bolivian, and now we can say that as Bolivians we love our richness which is our folklore!" (Personal communication)

New organization and leadership weren't the only things to change in the Gran Poder. A new dance had begun to dominate the event, transforming it as dramatically as the new Association and direction of its powerful president had. The *Morenada*, as the dance was known, had existed in various forms for a number of years but its adaptation to the Gran Poder was unique, and it allowed the festival to reposition itself in just the way that Chuquimia had envisioned. These fraternities would expand to incorporate hundreds of dancers, each with two brass bands of 60 musicians apiece. They would also appeal to the new urban Indian now inhabiting Chijini, a more prosperous and independent entrepreneur with middle-class aspirations. With its costly membership and lavish costumes, the *Morenada* quickly became a way to display one's new economic status. No dance would equal its prestige, and while participants still insisted that religious devotion was their principal motivation, the reality was



Figure 12 *Moreno from the Morenada Comercial Eloy Salmón, 2000.*

*Photo by David M Guss*

often different. “The popular bourgeoisie,” as *La Razón* labeled the morenos, “showed themselves off in the festival” (*La Razón* 2005:11). And as the same article went on to say, they reflected a growing diversity within the community:

The popular class with the most economic power distinguishes itself from those with less resources through the opulence of their costumes and activities. In the Gran Poder, economic and social differences run deep. Some fraternities are elitist, reflecting a new bourgeoisie, while other groups, in particular the older ones, try to survive amidst the excess of wealth. (*La Razón* 2005:11)



Unwilling to be confined to the neighborhood of Chijini, the *morenos* would be at the forefront of the new *Gran Poder*, challenging a Bolivian oligarchy that had marginalized the indigenous population, whether urban or not, for generations. For them the dance would be a vehicle through which the city would be remapped, erasing old boundaries and with them the stigmas that had been long associated with native cultures. Through the ostentatious display of their new economic power the dancers would inevitably receive the respect and acceptance that had always eluded them. Or at least that was the hope, as using dance to negotiate new social realities can be fraught with ambiguity and conflict. As Goldstein (1998a, 1998b), Mendoza (2000), and Salomon (1981), among others, demonstrate, dance has been a frequent device through which Andean groups have made the difficult transition from country to city. And yet, whether in Peru, Bolivia, or Ecuador, these dances reflect the contradiction and tragedy of “group[s] poised in the space between two cultures”—neither rural nor urban, traditional nor modern, Indian nor mestizo (Salomon 1981:164).

The *Morenada*, for all its assertiveness, captured this collision of identities perfectly and along with it, the longing to transcend them. In this sense, the dance has been as much about ethnic mobility as about social mobility, reconfirming the racial geography that has continued to define one’s identity in the Andes. To live in the city, surrounded by all the material symbols it connotes, is to be mestizo if not nominally “white.” Yet the same person, living in the country, speaking Aymara and working in the fields, would be unquestionably Indian. The *Morenada* became the dance of choice for those engaged in this psychologically traumatic transition. It is little surprise, therefore, that its images and symbols are bound up in a painful play of shifting identities, reflecting the same “racial estrangement” that Weismantel has characterized as the chronic Andean condition (2001).

The *Morenada*, which may be defined as the “dance of the blacks,” is of disputed origins. Some claim it arose from African slaves parodying their masters while working in the silver mines of Potosí, while others say that it is based on the movement and songs of Africans in the lowland vineyards where they were put to work producing wine. Still others support the increasingly popular belief that it had nothing to do with African slaves at all but originated among Aymara groups living on the Altiplano near Lake Titicaca. From there it traveled with the coca merchants who brought it along with their wares to the miners of Oruro where it appeared as early as 1913 (Abercrombie 1992:302).<sup>13</sup>

In its early stages the dance appears to have been performed without masks although the dancers did wear wigs based on the style of the colonial courts. The masks that were adopted were grotesque caricatures of African slaves suffering from the harsh Andean conditions, their eyes bulging and their lips and tongues extended. They also wore miner’s hats with colorful feathers and fruits on top. These



Figure 13 *Achachi*.

*Photo by David M Guss*

were worn by the *morenos* or “blacks” who formed the core of these large troupes. But there were other figures as well such as the *achachis*, the “old men” with white masks who carried braided whips and were said to represent the overseers. Whether this choreography tells a story of rebellious subversion or painful submission is also disputed. And yet, one wonders why the Indians are playing blacks in this drama, since it was their own ancestors who were forced to work in the mines during the colonial *mita*. Such racial displacement is at the heart of the *Morenada* where native campesinos on the way to becoming middle class mestizos dress up as African slaves who in turn are parodying their white masters.

The costumes meanwhile continued to grow with huge barrel-like skirts, embroidered vests, and enormous high-collared shoulder-pieces, all reaching up to a hundred pounds. When women were finally included in 1982, the groups increased even further in size forcing the Association to limit the number of fraternities allowed to dance the Morenada lest the festival be completely taken over by it. It was even awarded a special category in the annual competition and commonly referred to as the *pulmones del Gran Poder*, “the lungs of the Gran Poder.”<sup>14</sup> The largest Morenadas, such as the Fanáticos del Folklore en Gran Poder, would eventually reach a thousand members and the effect of seeing them dance down the streets of La Paz four abreast with *matracas* clacking was that of an approaching army. At least that was the impression it seemed to have on the city fathers, who after Banzer’s departure in 1978 became much less welcoming of the event.

Chuquimia’s vision of a festival that was not only embraced by the city but actually defined it would not be realized for nearly 30 years. For most of the interim between it served as a symbol of excess and waste, of backwardness and superstition. *Cosa de indios*, or “just another Indian thing,” was how one dancer claimed the Euro-Bolivian community thought of the event. And indeed, for nearly three decades it seemed to embody every negative stereotype associated with indigenous people. The church complained that it was not a serious religious celebration but merely an excuse for lewd and drunken behavior. And the business community protested that it shut the city down for days on end, causing thousands of man-hours to be lost. The government, meanwhile, did all it could to prevent the festival from arriving at the city’s center. Every year, it seemed, there was a confrontation between the Association and the mayor’s office over the exact details of the route. And when the Prado was redesigned, the government, fearing the dancers and crowds would destroy the benches and landscaping, rerouted the event away from the main street altogether. But there were other problems as well. In 1998, an earthquake in the Department of Cochabamba hundreds of miles away was used as a pretext to postpone the event for a full month. And in 2001 when Víctor Paz Estenssoro died two days before the entrada, the mayor summarily announced that the festival would have to be canceled out of respect for the former MNR leader. Risking tear gas and the national guard, the festival proceeded as planned with the Association insisting that the streets belonged to the people and that the date of a religious celebration was not negotiable.

The dancers, meanwhile, had no illusions about the origins of this hostility. It was simply part of the country’s long history of racism which viewed indigenous culture as a major impediment to progress and development. It was only logical, therefore, that the city’s elites would resist what they perceived as an invasion of the very forces they had condemned since the time of the Conquest. Why else had the Carnival in Oruro, only several hours away, received continued praise and support

while the Gran Poder was relentlessly pilloried in the press? The Oruro event had even been nominated for a UNESCO Cultural Patrimony of Humanity award and yet the Gran Poder was dismissed as a disorganized rabble and nuisance.<sup>15</sup> The difference, according to many, was that the Oruro Carnival had become a safe, middle class, mestizo event while the La Paz celebration was still an indigenous festival threatening the very identity of the city. Alejandro Chipana, a prominent member of the Association, put it simply in 1999:

We're the number one enemies of everyone, attacked by every side, from everybody.  
We're a perfect target for the whole world. There's no one who doesn't attack us.  
(Personal communication)

And yet, changes over the last several years in Bolivia have led to a startling repositioning of the Gran Poder. In October 2003, the city had been blockaded by an enraged coalition demanding that the country's natural gas reserves be re-nationalized. Following a number of deaths, the protesters succeeded in ousting American-backed president Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada who fled to Miami. The leaders of this insurgency were a former guerrilla named El Mallku (Felipe Quispe), who was attempting to reestablish an Inca-style Aymara state, and Evo Morales, the popular champion of a union of coca growers opposed to the plant eradication policies of the U.S. government. The convergence of these two movements had reinforced the enmity between native populations and those Euro-Bolivians still seen as not simply conquerors but as emissaries of the United States. The government that emerged vowed to reevaluate the country's neo-liberal policies as well as to enact new forms of power sharing. To do so, they pledged to hold a referendum on the exploitation of natural gas as well as convene a constitutional convention.

Given the perennial antagonism between the government and the Gran Poder and the fact that the Aymara dancers were the same people who had protested only months earlier, I expected the 2004 entrada to be particularly explosive. And yet what I found surprised me. The festival had become an important instrument of reconciliation in a country traumatized by unprecedented violence. Suddenly, the government was ready to take advantage of the event. President Mesa himself danced, becoming the first to do so since the 1970s when Hugo Banzer participated. The Gran Poder was now portrayed as an important natural resource, a unique cultural form which symbolically mirrored the other valuable riches the electorate was anxious to defend. Not only did the government, press, and church treat the celebration differently, but the festival organizers were also quick to perceive this sea change. For the first time they began characterizing the festival as a "response to globalization," and an important part of the national heritage.

Throughout 2005, the crisis in Bolivia continued to worsen. By the end of May, when the festival was scheduled to take place, La Paz was a city under siege, overrun



Figure 14 *Cartoon from La Razón, May 23, 2005. It compares the Gran Poder to the blockades and other chaos the county was experiencing, questioning the difference between the two. Which was worse: the Gran Poder or the demonstrators? In the back seat, a passenger is about to commit suicide.*

*Artwork by Trond Scheen*

by protesters clogging the streets with daily demonstrations. Many doubted whether there would even be a Gran Poder and yet a three-day truce was suddenly declared in order to allow the event to take place. Commentators hailed the festival as a force for hope and dialogue. Some said the celebration should be held 365 days a year as it was the only peace the country had seen in nearly a year (Paulovich 2005). Once again an event that had been excoriated as divisive and disorganized was now being extolled as representing the very best of Bolivia. Was this evidence that festivals, whose typically ludic and transgressive response to a normative status quo, would reverse themselves, becoming exemplars of order once the state dissolved into chaos? Or was it recognition that the Fiesta del Gran Poder had indeed reconquered La Paz, transforming it into an indigenous city once again? Six months later, Evo Morales was elected the nation's first indigenous president. At his inauguration, he compared Bolivia to South Africa at the end of apartheid, recalling a time when "Indians were barred from entering the plaza" (Smith 2006:A8). He then invoked Tupac Katari's prophecy: "I will return and I will be millions." The Gran Poder had arrived.

## Acknowledgments

My thanks to Javier Sanjines who first suggested I visit the Gran Poder and to Lisa Markowitz who made that 1994 visit possible. My research for this project has been supported by generous grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation, and the Tufts Faculty Research Fund. I am especially grateful to Julio Cordero for sharing his grandfather's photographs with me and to Peter Yenne for his superb scans of them. Wolfgang Schuler also contributed with his wonderful photographs documenting the history of our *Diablada*. While in Bolivia, I received support from a number of people, but none more so than Godofredo Sandoval and the members of PIEB, the *Programa para la Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia*. I am also grateful to the *Asociación de Conjuntos Folklóricos del Gran Poder* whose members opened their doors to me year after year, and to the presidents who led the Association during my visits there—Victor Hugo Rodríguez, Federico Centellas, Nicolás Huallpara, and Marcelo Pabón. But it was in the *averno* of the *Diablada Internacional Juventud Relámpago del Gran Poder* that I really found a second home. To all the *diabólicos*, my many thanks, and in particular to Lucho Pérez, who has continued to hold this fraternity together. But of all the devils, none deserves more thanks than Kate Wheeler, *un Relámpago de corazón*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Chuquiago* is derived from the word *chui*, the plant which staffs or sceptres are made from, and *ago* or *agu*, a variant of *apu*, “the supreme” or “main one,” as in a God. There are several variants of the spelling including *Chuquiagu*, *Chuquiabo*, *Chukiyawu*, and *Chukiwayu*. It is sometimes written as well with the suffix *marka*, which means town or place. The Choqueyapu River's name is derived from *choque*, “gold,” and *yapu*, a “planted field” (Valdez 1948:39).

<sup>2</sup>Barragán notes that even before the Conquest, the area around La Paz was the most densely populated region of Alto Peru, the name given to Bolivia during the colonial era. In 1573, only 25 years after the foundation of the city, the district population of La Paz was put at 194,717 (1990:23–24).

<sup>3</sup>Albó confirms that in 1925, the 100 year anniversary of Bolivia's independence, a law was still in place prohibiting any native person from entering the Plaza Murillo (1997:129).

<sup>4</sup>Reports vary on La Paz's population at this time, in part due to the dramatic decline occurring after the War of the Pacific (1879–1884). Schoop claims that La Paz's 1877 population may have been as high as 69,180. By 1900, however, its population may have shrunk as low as 31,600, although Klein places it as high as 52,600 (Barragán 1990:74, Gisbert 1998:136, Klein 2003:270).

<sup>5</sup>An interesting parallel to this geography of race was recently made clear through the disproportionate damage wreaked upon the Black community of New Orleans by hurricane Katrina in 2005. As predicted by John McPhee in his 1987 article, “The Control of Nature: Alchafalaya:”

New Orleans, surrounded by levees, is emplaced between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi like a broad shallow bowl. Nowhere is New Orleans higher than the river's natural bank.

Underprivileged people live in the lower elevations, and always have. The rich—by the river—occupy the highest ground. In New Orleans, income and elevation can be correlated on a literally sliding scale: the Garden District on the highest level, Stanley Kowalski in the swamp. The Garden District and its environs are locally known as uptown. (2005:38)

<sup>6</sup>The term *pongo* derives from *puncu*, the Aymara word for “door,” a reference to the signal task associated with this legendary Andean figure.

<sup>7</sup>The most famous painting of the Holy Trinity may be that of Titian who painted it for Emperor Charles V in the early 1550s. In his version, the Father and Son are seated figures with the Holy Spirit a dove rising above them. They are atop a cloud emanating rays over a huge allegorical scene below. Included in this scene are Emperor Charles and his wife, Isabella, King Philip II, Mary of Hungary, Noah holding an ark, Moses, David, Ezekiel, Adam and Eve, the Spanish ambassador to the Venetian court (who asked to be included), and of course, the artist. For a comprehensive survey of this form, see Germán de Pamplona, *Iconografía de la Santísima Trinidad en el Arte Medieval Español* (1970).

<sup>8</sup>The Concebidas Convent, or Purísima Concepción as it was officially known when founded in 1663, was located on Calle Sanjines not far from the main plaza. It was eventually moved to the Miraflores section east of the city center. For the most thorough account of the images’s early history including its journey to its current home in Chijini, see Vilela del Villar 1948.

<sup>9</sup>*Santísima Trinidad* or Trinity Sunday takes place the week after Pentecost or eight Sundays after Easter and celebrates, as its name suggests, the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Celebrated as early as the 10th century, it was recognized as an official church holiday by Pope John XXII in 1334.

<sup>10</sup>The MNR, which stands for *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement) was founded in 1941 with support from various groups including the miners and campesinos. Ten years later, when the military denied Víctor Paz Estenssoro, the party’s co-founder, the presidency to which he was elected, the MNR led a successful rebellion. They came to power with a long list of promises including education and land reform, universal suffrage, and nationalization of the mines. The party’s two leaders, Víctor Paz Estenssoro and Hernán Siles Zuazo dominated Bolivian politics until 1989 when Paz Estenssoro finished his final term as president. Ironically, it was during this final term that Paz Estenssoro overturned the party’s key policy of nationalization of natural resources. It was the privatization of natural gas, engineered by his chief economic advisor, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, that would eventually lead to the party’s downfall. When Sánchez de Losada, by then president, used the military to end demonstrations demanding the re-nationalization of natural gas in October 2003, the resulting furor forced him to resign and flee the country. Not only did this end Sánchez de Losada’s term in office but it effectively ended more than fifty years of MNR dominance in Bolivian politics.

<sup>11</sup>Lucio Chuquimia Aguirre (1932–2003), whose name means “keeper” or “guardian of gold,” is the perfect example of the new, upwardly mobile, middle class resident of Chijini. He studied both law and engineering at La Paz’s principal university, the *Universidad Mayor de San Andrés*, and spent time afterward working in the United States. But he chose to return to his childhood neighborhood where he developed a number of business interests in hotels, real estate, and clothing. His specialty was school uniforms, which he sold in his *Lluvia de Oro* (Rain of Gold) store. Despite his considerable wealth, he remained in Chijini, becoming active in the Gran Poder in which his parents had been leaders since its start. In addition to his 12 years as president of the Asociación de Conjuntos Folklóricos del Gran Poder, Chuquimia also founded a *kullaguada* dance fraternity called the “X” del Gran Poder. This fraternity subsequently split when a faction of its members decided to form a Morenada with the same name.

<sup>12</sup>The cueca is a popular form with variations found in a number of South American countries including Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia. It is especially popular in Chile where it is considered the national dance. Energetically performed by couples either clapping or waving kerchiefs, the cueca is an extremely

suggestive and coquettish dance. Chuquimia's reference to the dance is clearly ironic since it is an established mestizo, rather than indigenous, form, and yet was still dismissed by Bolivian society.

<sup>13</sup>There are various sources for this contradictory information on the origins of the Morenada including Abercrombie 1992, Albó and Preiswerk 1986, 1991, Alvarado Reyes 1999, 2000, Boero Rojo 1991, 1977, Burgoa Andulce 1993, Fortún 1992, and Nash 1993. However, almost none of this literature deals with the symbolism involved in the dance itself. A more elaborate discussion of all of these issues including the political, historical, and semiotic will be discussed in my forthcoming book on the Gran Poder.

<sup>14</sup>The Asociación de Conjuntos Folkloricos del Gran Poder, which sets all rules for the festival, recognized that it was difficult for the smaller fraternities to compete with the enormous resources mustered by the Morenadas. It decided, therefore, to create three categories for the awards given at the end of each festival: the *bailes pesados*, "big" or "heavy dances" which were composed by the Morenadas alone, the *bailes livianos*, "light dances," which had at least one brass orchestra and included a range of dances such as the Diablada, Tobas, Kullaguada, Llamerada, Caporales, and Tinku, and finally the *autóctonos* or "autochthonous groups" which did not hire an orchestra but played their own indigenous music consisting of mainly flutes (*zampoñas*) and drums. Included in this category were the Wakas, Quena Quenas, and Incas. In the 2004 entrada there were 15 Morenadas among the 57 dance fraternities and in 2005 there were 14 among a total of 52 fraternities. Each Morenada, however, is many times larger than almost any other fraternity. The number of fraternities participating varies from year to year as some decide not to dance or may even be expelled temporarily.

<sup>15</sup>After an aggressive campaign by the Bolivian government, UNESCO awarded Oral and Intangible Patrimony of Humanity (*Patrimonio Oral e Intangible de la Humanidad*) status to the Carnival of Oruro in May 2001. Like the Gran Poder, Oruro's Carnival also has an *entrada* featuring many of the same dances. Yet if the Gran Poder is dominated by the Morenada, Carnival is dominated by the Diablada, a form said to derive from the mines in this area. For more on this event and its relation to the Gran Poder, see Abercrombie 1992, Boero Rojo 1977, and Harris 2003.

## References Cited

Abercrombie, Thomas

- 1992 Fiesta del carnaval postcolonial en Oruro: clase, etnicidad y nacionalismo en la danza folklórica. *Revista Andina* 10(2):279–352.

Albó, Xavier

- 1997 La Paz/Chukiyawu: The Two Faces of a City. In *Migrants, Regional Identities and Latin American Cities*. T. Altamirano and L. R. Hirabayashi, eds. Pp. 113–150. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association.

Albó, Xavier, and Matías Preiswerk

- 1986 Los Señores del Gran Poder. La Paz: Centro de Teología Popular.  
1991 El Gran Poder: Fiesta del Aimara Urbano. *América Indígena* 51(2–3):293–352.

Alvarado Reyes, Marianela

- 1999 La Danza del Moreno, Patrimonio de Bolivia. *Memorias de la Mesa Redonda La Milenaria Danza del Moreno*. La Paz: Fraternidad Cultural Unión de Bordadores and Fanáticos del Folklore en Gran Poder.  
2000 Profundizando en el origen de la Danza del Moreno. XIII Reunión Anual de Etnología. Tomo II. La Paz: Museo de Etnografía y Folklore: 115–131.



- Arbona, Juan M., and Benjamin Kohl  
 2004 City Profile: La Paz - El Alto. *Cities* 21(3): 255–265.
- Araoz, Gastón, José Bozo, Wilma Cordero, Edwin Chuquimia, Diego Noriega, Roxana Rodríguez, eds.  
 2004 Gran Poder: La Fiesta del Señor del Gran Poder. La Paz: Casa de Cultura.
- Barragán, Rossana  
 1990 Espacio Urbano y Dinámica Étnica, La Paz en el Sigo XIX. La Paz: Hisbol.  
 1998 La Ciudad Indígena. *In* La Paz 450 años (1548–1998), Tomo 1. José de Mesa, Teresa Gisbert, and Carlos Mesa Gisbert, eds. Pp. 166–177. La Paz: Municipal de La Paz.
- Boero Rojo, Hugo  
 1991 Fiesta Boliviana. La Paz: Los Amigos del Libro.
- Boero Rojo, Hugo, ed.  
 1977 Carnaval de Oruro, Tarabuco y Fiesta del Gran Poder. La Paz: Los Amigos del Libro.
- Burgoa Andulce, Edgar  
 1993 Gran Poder 1993. La Paz: Gobierno Municipal de La Paz.
- de Pamplona, Germán  
 1970 Iconografía de la Santísima Trinidad en el Arte Medieval Español. Madrid: Instituto Diego Velázquez.
- Fortún, Julia Elena  
 1992 Festividad del Gran Poder. La Paz: Ediciones Casa de la Cultura.
- Gisbert, Teresa  
 1994 Iconografía y mitos indígenas en el arte. 2nd Edition. La Paz: Editorial Gisbert.  
 1998 El Urbanismo de la Ciudad. *In* José de Mesa, Teresa Gisbert, and Carlos Mesa Gisbert, eds. La Paz 450 años (1548–1998), Tomo 1. Pp. 122–145. La Paz: Municipal de La Paz.
- Goldstein, Daniel  
 1998a Dancing on the Margins: Transforming Urban Marginality through Popular Performance. *City and Society: Journal for the Society of Urban Anthropology* 4:201–215.  
 1998b Performing National Culture in a Bolivian Migrant Community. *Ethnology* 37(2):117–132.
- Guía de La Paz  
 1948 Guía de La Paz y Breve Historia de la Ciudad en su Cuarto Centenario, 1548–1948. La Paz: Editorial IV Centenario.
- Harris, Max  
 2003 Carnival and Other Christian Festivals: Folk Theology and Folk Performance. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Klein, Herbert S.  
 2003 A Concise History of Bolivia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- La Razón  
 2005 La burguesía popular se revela en la festividad. *La Razón*. May 22:D11.
- Leonard, Olen E.  
 1948 La Paz, Bolivia: Its Population and Growth. *American Sociological Review* 13(4): 448–454.

- Lipsitz, George  
 1994 *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and The Poetics of Place*. London: Verso.
- Mendoza, Zoila S.  
 2000 *Shaping Society Through Dance: Mestizo Ritual Performance in the Peruvian Andes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McPhee, John  
 2005 The Sunken City. *New Yorker* 12:38–39.
- Mitchell, Reid  
 1995 *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nash, June  
 1993 *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in the Bolivian Tin Mines*. 2nd edition. NY: Columbia University Press.
- Orlove, Benjamin S.  
 1998 Down to Earth: Race and Substance in the Andes. *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17(2):207–222.
- Pacheco, Luz  
 1997 Las Dos Caras de La Paz. *In La Paz, Vista por viajeros y extranjeros y autores nacionales, Siglos XVI al XX*. Mariano Batista Gumucio, ed. Pp. 229–231. La Paz: Gobierno Municipal de La Paz.
- Paulovich  
 2005 El baile salvará a Bolivia. *La Prensa*. May 20:14A.
- Pettazzoni, R.  
 1946 The Pagan Origins of the Three-Headed Representation of the Christian Trinity. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9:135–151.
- Salomon, Frank  
 1981 Killing the Yumbo: A Ritual Drama of Northern Quito. *In Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*. Norman Whitten, ed. Pp. 162–208. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Smith, Fiona  
 2006 Bolivia Swears in New President: Indian Leader Vows to Reshape Nation. *The Boston Globe* 23:A8.
- Steward, Julian H.  
 1945 The Changing American Indian. *In The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. Ralph Linton, ed. Pp. 282–305. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Urquiza Sossa, Carlos  
 1977 Grandiosa festividad del Gran Poder. *In Carnaval de Oruro, Tarabuco y Fiesta del Gran Poder*. Hugo Boero Rojo, ed. Pp. 103–131. La Paz: Los Amigos del Libro.
- Valdez, Abraham  
 1948 Origenes de Chuquiago, La “Marca” o Pueblo Aymara. *In La Paz en su IV Centenario, 1548–1948, Tomo II*. Pp. 25–43. La Paz: Comité Pro IV Centenario de la Fundación de La Paz.

Vargas, Manuel

- 1993 Máscaras del Altiplano. *In* Mascaras de los Andes Bolivianas. Peter McFarren, ed. La Paz: Editorial Quipus.

Vilela del Villar, Luis Felipe

- 1948 Noticia de las imagenes milagrosas de La Paz y Provincias. *In* La Paz en su IV Centenario, 1548–1948, Tomo III. Pp. 357–378. La Paz: Comite Pro IV Centenario de la Fundación de La Paz.

Weismantel, Mary

- 2001 Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.