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Weaving Development: Cultural Preservation and Economic Improvement in Cochabamba, Bolivia

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Weaving Development:
Cultural Preservation and Economic
Improvement in Cochabamba, Bolivia

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Spring 2010

Senior Honors Thesis in Anthropology
Advised by Professor Olga González

Abstract

Grassroots development projects have long sought to integrate local knowledge as they attempt to improve quality of life in impoverished communities. However, in commodifying cultural artifacts, groups such as the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos (AAA), a weaving cooperative based in Cochabamba, Bolivia, find themselves with two seemingly conflicting goals. This ethnographic study examines the limits and possibilities of *cultural preservation* and *economic improvement* within the context of AAA by looking at different ways these goals are interpreted and the tensions between them. “Cultural preservation” provokes questions of continuity and challenges a static understanding of tradition that simplifies complex cultural practices. “Economic improvement,” although perceived to be stripping these practices of their significance and reducing textiles to a means for monetary gain, is essential to the sustainability of the organization because it provides incentives for participation. While these two goals seem to pull the cooperative in opposite directions, a nuanced analysis of the ways they are manifested in three weaving villages shows that they in fact support one another through a discourse of difference that fosters flexibility and ultimately strengthens the organization.

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Introduction

Crouching in the entrance to the main living area of the small house, I braced myself against the doorframe, video camera in hand. Doña Delia gestured widely at the textile propped between us and it was all I could do to keep her beaming smile from wavering on the tiny screen as my legs began to cramp. Outside, Doña Ana sat on the stoop, shaded from the hot Bolivian sun, absent-mindedly spinning sheep's wool into thick, bunched yarn as she translated our conversation. "In one day we only weave two *k'aris* [notches on the loom]," Doña Delia said, pointing to the tightly woven textile she soon hoped to sell.¹ "For the blanket," she continued, pointing to another loom where a bright, thick weaving sat unfinished, "we weave four or five." She beamed at me again, indicating that she was done speaking. In her sing-song Spanish, spoken with a cadence shaped by her native Quechua, Doña Ana translated, telling me that with "this wool [the finer thread], [Doña Delia weaves] one or two *k'aris*. 'That's all,' she says. It's thinner. For that reason she doesn't work very quickly." I nodded and turned to my next question. It was logical that weaving with finer thread would take longer – it was a quarter of the size of the homemade yarn Doña Delia was using to make a blanket for her family and therefore required more passes across the loom to advance the same length as the thicker thread. However, the extra time required to make this more compact piece would be compensated monetarily when Doña Delia brought the finished textile to the weaving cooperative in which she and Doña Ana participate.

Though Doña Delia weaves two distinct kinds of textiles, both styles are decidedly Andean. Their differences directly relate to the intended purpose of each weaving. Doña Delia,

¹ All quotes pertaining to Doña Delia come from a personal interview in Quechua conducted in Chulpakasa, near Aramasí, Bolivia on November 24, 2008. All translations from Quechua to Spanish by Gladys Espinoza. All translations from Spanish to English are my own.

an indigenous Quechua woman from the valley of Aramasí near Cochabamba, Bolivia, uses the less-expensive yarn she makes out of wool from her own sheep to create thick, coarse blankets that will ward off the chill of the Andean wind better than the finer, decorative pieces. She dyes her wool with powder, purchased in Cochabamba, which produces vivid colors to brighten the dim interior of her windowless home. On the other hand, Doña Delia, a member of the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos (AAA), or the Andean Artisans' Association, a group of Quechua weavers based in Cochabamba, uses the thinner, naturally dyed thread procured from the Asociación to weave strong, tightly woven bags that AAA will purchase from her and sell to a largely foreign consumer market.

The Asociación de Artesanos Andinos began in 2000 under a European Union development initiative called PRODEVAT (The Program for Development of the Arque and Tapacari Valleys) that hoped to bring economic growth to some of the poorest provinces in Bolivia by using local skills. The E.U. additionally hoped the project would prevent migration to areas of illicit cocaine production. The Asociación is now owned and operated by its 400 indigenous members, roughly 97% of them women, and four employees (InterAmerican Foundation 2008). Weavers live in rural, subsistence-based communities and bring the textiles they produce to monthly meetings at one of four *centros artesanales*, or artisan centers, located in the four main villages that compose AAA. Products are evaluated for quality and a democratically elected president from each *centro* transports them to the organization's headquarters, a store in Cochabamba called Arte Andino, where they are catalogued, packaged, and put up for sale. Through this process AAA weavers are able to increase the income of their families without leaving their homes for urban or seasonal employment opportunities and can dedicate time to the age-old cultural practice of hand-weaving textiles.

Yves Van Damme, former Co-Director of PRODEVAT, identified two main goals that spawned the Asociación's formation: *el tema cultural*, the cultural aspect of the organization that attempts to "bring back," "rescue," and "preserve" culture; and *lo económico*, which hopes to increase the monthly income of weavers living in two of the poorest provinces of Bolivia, Arque and Tapacarí. In grassroots development project style, both goals serve to empower local indigenous people. By emphasizing pride in cultural heritage, supplying a means to accumulate wealth and confidence through increased participation in capitalist markets, and facilitating collaboration, AAA encourages weavers to take ownership of the organization. However, aspects of the two goals seem distinctly contradictory. For example, commercializing once symbolic cloth might take away cultural meaning and corrupt the product's authenticity, resulting in an unnatural alteration of culture for monetary gain. Alternately, strict adherence to historical cultural norms would relegate weavers to a life of poverty. Tensions between these goals manifest themselves when differing factions of the Asociación privilege one goal over the other. In spite of this, the Asociación has functioned independently for over five years.

During my work with AAA, I grappled with these two goals, often seeing one gain in importance to the potential detriment of the other. However, my fears were never realized, as the scale would always tip back to a temporary state of balance between the two. Analysis of the ethnographic data has subsequently allowed me to see the conflict within the organization more clearly. Tensions arise not only from conflicting aims, but also differing interpretations of goals within the context of each *centro*. Collaborative development practices give equal voice to all perspectives, allowing for constant conversation. This increases the flexibility of the organization, making it more responsive to the demands of weavers and customers alike while also creating the movement between goals that I observed. Additionally, cultural characteristics

are used in marketing products and achieving economic ends while monetary incentives encourage participation in cultural practices. As a result of my research, I now believe that the two goals are more intimately related than I initially imagined and are defined by their complexity. I argue in this thesis that the seemingly contradictory objectives of AAA's two goals of cultural preservation and economic improvement are strengthened by the tensions between them and the various ways they are manifested in different villages.

Prospectus

To better understand the questions that drive this thesis and the ethnographic data that led to my conclusions, this paper is organized into three main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One introduces my fieldwork, the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos, and the Bolivian context using narrative accounts from my time in the *departamento* of Cochabamba. Focusing on a comparison of three distinct villages that participate in the Asociación, I use information from interviews and participant observation to explain the history, functioning, and structure of the project. Even in this brief overview of the situation, tensions arise. Descriptions of village life show stark contrasts between weavers in Totora Pampa and Aramasí, for example. These fissures only become clearer as the thesis progresses to analyze the two major aims of the Asociación.

Expanding into the first of the two goals, Chapter Two discusses the implications of *cultural preservation* and how it interacts with understandings of tradition. In looking at the progression of weaving over time, I argue that passive understandings of tradition fail to account for constantly changing demands on culture. Concepts of preservation reduce culture to an objectified list of products and traditions. Subsequently, cultural representation and the essentialization of weaver identity serve to create an image of a unified, homogeneous weaving

cooperative that can easily be presented to the outside world. Cultural intermediaries provide a medium for AAA to transmit this representation to foreign audiences. However, the many layers of translation this requires threatens to reduce an already simplified vision of the weavers to the bare minimum, causing tension between weavers' identity and marketing strategy.

Taking the simplified representation of culture described in the previous chapter, Chapter Three shows how weavers use stereotypical images and assumptions about their culture to increase sales. *Economic improvement* is the chief incentive for weaver participation in the Asociación, though what that means varies among villages. Funds are also necessary for organizational sustainability, which would allow AAA to continue its work in the future. While much of the chapter focuses on marketing, the main tool for increasing funds, migration and fluid communities also factor heavily in the analysis. Different levels of integration with urban lifestyles affect the ways weavers use their new income and their propensity to remain in their villages of origin. Decreasing migration by providing income generating activities on the local level is one main objective of *lo económico*. Tension arises as weavers use money earned through AAA to leave their rural homes, an action that contradicts Asociación intentions and potentially jeopardizes the future of the cooperative.

Rather than try to resolve this conflict, the Conclusion seeks to show that tension brings strength to the organization. In simultaneously striving toward the two goals, AAA avoids stripping weavings of all symbolic qualities or forcing weavers to choose between pursuing employment that would not leave time for cultural traditions and having sufficient food, the two extreme ends of the economic improvement and cultural preservation spectrum. Constant dialogue near the middle of this continuum allows for more flexibility as the different *centros* decide how to participate in the organization. Diverse voices within AAA speak in favor of

opposite goals, which ensures that both will be taken into consideration when planning for the future of the group. This does not mean that all weavers are happy with the results of their participation, but collaborative development practices allow for individual decisions to leave the Asociación. That AAA still exists five years after the end of PRODEVAT's mandate indicates that at least some weavers feel they are benefiting from what the Asociación provides.

Methodology

I began working with the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos in September 2008 as an intern in their store. My objectives were simple: improve my Spanish, fulfill the language requirement of my study abroad program, and learn something interesting. Over three months I tackled various projects aimed at promoting the weavers and their products. Before my arrival, the Asociación had received approval to sell their textiles through Sephari, an online marketplace for international handicrafts. My first task was to compile product information into a spreadsheet for the site and write English descriptions of each kind of weaving that would entice Western consumers to purchase them. Along a similar vein, I created colorful informational posters about the weaving process to inform visitors to the store of the quality of the textiles.² The information I used to design these promotional pieces came largely from AAA employees and advisors, though I also participated in three monthly meetings of the *directorio*, or the indigenous board of directors. Other on-going projects in which I assisted included designing a line of fashion handbags in conjunction with a local leather worker and working with the Universidad de San Simón in Cochabamba to create an in-store display of ancient textiles from the region.

² See Figure 4: Posters Made for Arte Andino. Pp. 88.

Late November marked the beginning of a month-long Independent Study Project (ISP) for those of us participating in the SIT: Bolivia study abroad program³ and I found myself headed to the villages to make a film about the Asociación. Over a two-week period, I spent three days in Totora Pampa, two days in Chuñu Chuñuni, and one full week in Aramasí, three of the villages that house weaving *centros* for the organization. Because I was filming, my focus was on visual representation of the weaving process and the lives of weavers, but I also wanted to learn more about the Asociación and what it has meant to individuals. In total I conducted 25 formal interviews with staff, management, the *directorio*, and the weavers themselves in addition to participating in casual conversation about the aims of the organization.⁴ All formal interviews were filmed, which affected the kind of information I received; some weavers felt uncomfortable around the camera while others spoke directly to it and the presumed audience of the film.

Several other factors influenced the data I gathered, including language barriers and translation issues, the comfort level of my informants, the extremely limited amount of time working in the communities, and the tone of the information I was given based on my position as a potential consumer. Finding weavers in the villages who spoke Spanish comfortably proved challenging, as all of the weavers speak Quechua natively, meaning many of my interviews took place in a mix of Quechua and Spanish. With the help of volunteer translators like Martín, the Asociación's driver who traveled with me to Totora Pampa, or bilingual weavers, I was able to talk to more people, but probing for deeper meaning was difficult. My translators merely summarized responses to questions, if they translated them back to me at all, making it impossible to ask follow-up questions. As a result, these interviews tended toward more

³ The School for International Training study abroad program based in the city of Cochabamba.

⁴ Of the interviews, seven exceeded an hour, four were approximately 30 minutes, and the rest ranged from two to 15 minutes in length. These interviews involved 21 female weavers and two male weavers, plus the three weavers in the *directorio* (one female and two male), two men from the communities, and three AAA employees. Pseudonyms will be used for all interviews related to weavers in the villages.

straightforward free-response questions such as “what are some of the benefits of working for AAA?” and “what do the weavings mean to you?” Additionally, I had difficulty conveying what I meant to the weavers. For example, when asking about the figures used in weavings, I would often refer to their significance, saying things like “what do they mean?” or “what do they stand for?” This usually drew responses such as “they are from our culture.” Not knowing how my questions were being interpreted for weavers, I could not figure out how to ask what aspects of culture they represented or how they were used. Gladys Espinoza, who translated the interviews by watching film clips with me upon my return to Cochabamba, suggested that I had asked the questions in the wrong way, and should have instead asked weavers “why” they used a specific design, a distinction I could not understand in the field due to my lack of knowledge of the local language.

Interviews with AAA employees and members of the *directorio* were more in depth, with seven exceeding an hour in length.⁵ Here open-ended ethnographic questions were used to prompt narratives on involvement with AAA, significance of the project’s work, and structural and historical information. Because these interviews took place in Spanish, it was easier for me to probe for further information. However, these members were more familiar with AAA marketing rhetoric and outside consumers, which led to different answers than what I might have received talking with a weaver who was unfamiliar with AAA’s inner workings.

One major barrier to my research was the limited amount of time I spent in the communities, which not only restricted the number of interviews and the quantity of information I could feasibly gather, but also informational quality and depth. Weavers did not feel comfortable sharing details of their lives with a stranger, as exemplified by their succinct

⁵ Informants from these interviews consented to be identified by their first name. Yves Van Damme and Melissa Draper have both consented to be fully identified.

responses, and there was insufficient time to build close rapport. This is another reason my most in-depth interviews were with the *directorio* and AAA employees who I became acquainted with over four months. Finally, because weavers only saw me briefly and knew of my work to produce a film about their organization, they spoke to me as a potential consumer. For them, interviews were about personal promotion rather than anonymous ethnography and some consciously presented themselves accordingly.

All of this resulted in data steeped in marketing rhetoric, a fact that has obviously shaped my analysis. Observations of villagers help me to problematize the often-simplified information I received, as I discuss later in this thesis. Additionally, existing scholarship on similar development cooperatives serve as catalysts for thinking about the ethnographic information from alternative perspectives. Finally, theoretical works inspire and supplement my own conclusions about AAA, its goals, and its continued existence.

Review of Literature

The Asociación de Artesanos Andinos is by no means the first development project of its kind. Its two main goals of cultural preservation and economic improvement encompass ideas expressed in a wide range of academic literature, making an overview of relevant works necessary for analyzing ethnographic data. Specifically, cultural commodification brings up issues of hybridity, essentialized culture, space and place, authenticity and tradition, and the role of development institutions within these categories.

Hybridity, Contact Zones, and the Negotiation of Culture

The Asociación de Artesanos Andinos is situated in a globalized cultural art market where different cultures connect with and react to one another as they exchange ideas, values, and products. These interactions and the cultural changes they spur take place at what Mary Louise Pratt has dubbed contact zones, “places where cultures that have been on historically separate trajectories intersect or come into contact with each other and establish a society, often in contexts of colonialism” (Pratt 1996:1). Pratt found that even in the asymmetrical power relationships of colonial America exchange occurred to a greater or lesser degree in both directions with changes in cultural production on both sides. Case studies such as those of Cuna seamstresses in Panama (Salvador 1976), Mayan weavers in Guatemala (Green 1999), or Zapotec weavers of Oaxaca (Wood 2008) show how contact between cultures in the context of economic development projects has affected cultural production in more recent history. In each of these Central American cases, artisans have significantly modified traditional products to appeal to a consumer base that exists outside their cultural boundaries. As weavers produce goods that can be found in homes continents away, their own lives are influenced by the material culture and economic values brought from the ideologically “Western” perspective.⁶ This mixing of ideals, where what one group finds important becomes significant for another, is repeated in countless examples of cultural production on every continent. As the AAA case study shows, it is through contact and the hybridity it produces that weavers make decisions regarding the kinds of cloth they produce.

Hybridity entered the academic discourse as a response to 1970s discussion of “cultural imperialism,” which addressed the dominance of one culture in situations of contact, and is used

⁶ For purposes of discussion “Western” refers to a set of ideologies and values most commonly associated with the United States and Western Europe rather than any specifically defined geographical area.

to describe cultures formed through cultural mixing. Kraidy (2005) notes the broad scope of the term, which can be applied in contexts ranging from equal exchange to nearly asymmetrical dominance where only small portions of one culture are maintained in the process of mixture. Power relations, as discussed in depth by Michel Foucault (1980), greatly influence the extent to which interactions between two or more cultures result in imposition of assimilation versus integration of parts to create an equal whole. Hybridity scholars including Martin Stokes (2007) fear that this cultural integration and leveling will result in a homogenous global culture disproportionately influenced by imperial world powers. For this reason, Stokes and others emphasize the valuing of diversity and advocate against hegemonic powers that seek to assimilate unique groups.

Within this context, “the idea of borrowing is sometimes taken to imply a weakening of culture” (Hutnyk 2005:81). However, “capitalist modernization... does not always destroy traditional cultures as it moves forward; it can also appropriate them, restructure them, [and] reorganize the meaning and function of their objects, beliefs, and practices,” (Garcia Canclini 1993:viii) through various processes of simplification. Anthropologist John Hutnyk cites Paul Gilroy’s 1994 book *The Black Atlantic* to demonstrate one limitation of hybridity scholarship. Gilroy explains that “the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities” (Hutnyk 2005:82), effectively objectifying contributing cultures by distilling them to a list of characteristics. In attempting to keep Asociación weavers separate from other groups, the variation of cultural and historical backgrounds among the villages is ignored, effectively homogenizing the internal hybridity that was formed when these villages joined together. Still, these distilled versions of culture can be advantageous as Gayatri Spivak (1986) suggests. Her concept of strategic essentialism allows subaltern groups to present themselves using simplified

descriptions that will help improve their situation. I argue that this strategy has been particularly effective in Asociación marketing because of Western perceptions of the Andes.

Andeanism

As with most essentialized representations of culture, global understanding of the Andes comes from decades of publications that presented simplified versions of the complex cultures encountered by researchers. The term “Andeanism” refers both to Andean Studies as a regional discipline and to a connection with Edward Said’s classic critique of Orientalism. Said primarily argues that studies of the Orient reshaped the Orient itself by defining it as exoticized and in opposition to the Occident. He notes how outside conversation surrounding the Orient in turn manipulated inside actions; “in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” he said, “[and] European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against [it]” (Said 1978:3). By only looking at the “exotic” aspects of Oriental traditions and grouping all people as a homogenous society, Said remarks that Western ideologies created a cultural hierarchy that privileged the West.

In the same way, Andean scholars of the 1960s presented their knowledge of the region in a simplified format, largely ignoring the complexities of Andean belief systems. Prominent authors such as John Murra, John Rowe, and R. T. Zuidema effectively shaped academic discourse on the Andes and most current Andean researchers cite at least one of these founders in each paper (Starn 1994). “During the 1970s and 1980s, much of the research of U.S. Andeanists tended to implode around topics such as the structure of the *ayllu* and the role of ‘verticality’” that were introduced by these early works (Starn 1994:17).⁷ Concepts of Andean duality and

⁷ Verticality refers to the vertical archipelago, an organization of Andean communities proposed by John Murra. Villages in various ecological zones form political and communal bonds and trade diverse crops across growing

complementary opposites⁸ permeated Andeanist literature through the 1980s as various scholars wrote on their Andean experiences.

Anthropologist Michelle Bigenho (2006) discusses the romanticized vision of Andeanism, or *lo andino*, that began with the foundational work of Murra and continues today in assumptions about Andean worldview. “The core of the ‘Andean tradition’ is presented as timeless, grounded in the preconquest past,” and easily classified into complementary pairs of beings or objects (Starn 1991:66). Romantics saw this past as “the highest expression of human values and the way of life to which humanity should return,” while assuming that peoples of the Inca Empire were “a homogeneous and autonomous whole” (García Canclini 1993:22). Anthropologist Orin Starn critiques the degree to which this image continues to be reproduced in Andeanist literature and propaganda, noting the use of “traditionally dressed peasants next to Machu Picchu with llamas to market the highlands as a land of ancient mysteries and perennial closeness to nature... [which] reflects and incites the hunger of metropolitan observers to imagine the inhabitants of the highlands as an uncorrupted ‘native’ Other” (Starn 1994:19). This pristine characterization appeals to outsiders who wish to connect with the historical Inca Empire that supposedly lives on in contemporary Andeans. Asociación weavers recognize this perception of their history and attempt to embody it in their work, while also trying to maintain a connection to their culture as they understand it. Unfortunately, outside desire for purity disregards the hybrid complexities of today’s Andean cultures and conflicts arise as weavers negotiate how to present themselves to others.

regions. The result is a community of “islands” arranged vertically in altitude in the Andes to facilitate mutually beneficial trades.

⁸ Duality and complementarity refer to a belief that all things have an opposite that complements them and makes them whole. For example, man and woman or dark and light.

Space and Place

One way that an essentialized image of culture restricts the notion of hybridity is through the assumption of homogeneity over space. The heterogeneity of the Andes is largely forgotten in discussion of the region. Andean groups have always spoken different languages, farmed diverse crops, and come in contact with various other cultures throughout their history. In her article “Rethinking the Vertical Archipelago” Mary Van Buren deftly summarizes Murra’s original model of Andean movement:

John Murra’s model of the vertical archipelagoes ... posits that Andean societies established colonies in distant and often non-contiguous ecological zones in order to gain access to the goods produced in them. In this way they could diversify their resource base without engaging in trade with other ethnic groups, thus preserving what Murra (1972) has characterized as an ancient cultural ideal of economic self-sufficiency. (Van Buren 1996:338)

Even in the beginning of Andeanist literature, Andeans were noted as having diverse ecological environments that varied within and between *ayllus*, a form of political organization that encompass a number of villages. Murra notes that the structure of *ayllus* could change as each cultural group established colonies, opening the door for a more fluid definition of space.

The argument that Andean groups continue to expand their economic bases has been taken up by migration studies, which note the movement of Andeans from rural communities to urban or agricultural centers where employment is available. Two major draws within the country are the Chaparé and the Yungas, fertile growing areas of the Andean valleys.⁹

Additionally, according to the research of Lily Whitesell (2006), nearly one of every four Bolivians born in Bolivia now lives abroad with the largest numbers of emigrants residing in Argentina, Spain, the United States, and Italy. Bolivians leave their homeland, Whitesell argues, in search of employment opportunities and earning capacities they cannot find at home. The

⁹ See Figure 1: Maps of Bolivia. Pp. 28.

remittances earned by these emigrants continue to fund families who remain in Bolivia, just as money earned in the city is still used to support families who remain on rural farms (Goldring 2003).

This movement of people over space contributes to the creation of new contact zones where aspects of other cultures are incorporated into the lives of individuals who carry them back to their home villages. Arjun Appadurai (1996), who has written extensively on modernity, cites the permeability of modern borders as one contributing factor to hybridity and deterritorialization, or the existence of cultures that do not pertain to a specific locale. Along the same lines, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson challenge notions of space and place, questioning “the spatial assumptions implicit in the most fundamental and seemingly innocuous concepts in the social sciences such as ‘culture,’ ‘society,’ ‘community,’ and ‘nation,’” all of which imply discontinuous spaces with defined borders (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:75). Through migration and cultural integration, these borders become blurred until none of these concepts can be contained within a clear area. For example, a community¹⁰ is defined by a group of people who are connected by like characteristics who interact with one another frequently whether or not those people live in the same geographical location. Texts by Appadurai (1996) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997) cite Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined communities to describe how modern groups are formed through social connections as opposed to historically spatial segregations. This is particularly true in the Andes, where political organization in the form of *allyus* is constantly shifting to include areas that bring benefit to the group. . The result is an understanding of migratory labor and remittances that differs from the less-fluid Western perspective. However, AAA has limited participation to weavers living in specifically defined

¹⁰ The word “community” is used in this thesis primarily to refer to a village or group of similar villages where there are social relationships between members. Reference to creation of a broader mentally *imagined* community is specified in text.

areas, which conflicts with historical understandings of community connections. If hybridity is seen in the more complex context of ambiguous ideas of space and place, individual actors are given more agency to negotiate processes of hybridization at the contact zone and AAA weavers would have more freedom to define their community.

Tradition and Authenticity

Just as Andean characteristics vary over space and change through contact, culture transforms over time. Ideas of pure Andean traditions that connect to the past imply a static state that is not present in any living culture. However, tradition, authenticity, and historical connections appeal to foreigners who long for an exotic cultural experience. Consequently, “tradition” and “authenticity” are used as evaluating factors in discussing the origins and value of cultural art pieces (Gmelch 2004). However, definitions of tradition and authenticity vary greatly both in academic and general usage making them fairly non-specific. Throughout the history of anthropology and sociology the word tradition, “like culture, ... has been used so often and in so many contexts that as Shils (1971) suggests, it may not have any meaning at all” (Shanklin 1981:86). Authenticity is loaded with similar complications. Its meaning is changed by the context of and actors involved in its use. Still, both of these ambiguous terms are an integral part of the discussion of cultural products sold to an external market because of their connection to essentialized views of Andean culture.

The allure of these two characteristics may be based in what Renato Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia,” a concept through which “agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed” (1989:107-8). Westerners, feeling guilty, want to atone for the actions of their colonizing ancestors by investing in and affirming the existence of

pieces of pristine culture, which supposedly date back to a time before invasion. In the Andean context there is a booming market for goods produced “in the way of the Inca” with roots supposedly stemming back to a romanticized pre-colonial era. Ironically, the Inca Empire controlled many smaller cultural groups and demanded they produce textiles with Inca designs, meaning that even Inca weavings were not necessarily traditional or authentic to those who wove them (Murra 1962). “Nostalgia for a static past ... [fails] to acknowledge that traditional and modern worlds are no longer separate, and that many people in Latin American live in both at once” (Rowe and Schelling 1993:2), making it impossible to find a product that has had the same design, meaning, use, and significance for hundreds of years. “An authentic culture is not one that remains unchanged, which seems impossible under any condition, but one that retains the ability to determine the appropriateness of its adaptations” (Duggan 1997:31), as all cultures must in order to be viable.

In the absence of pure tradition, the term must be viewed from a more flexible perspective. According to Handler and Linnekin, “tradition refers to an inherited body of customs and beliefs” (1984:273), understood by a particular society and developed as “a consensus *through time*” (Shils 1971:126, emphasis added). This definition is constricting despite being consistent with popular understandings of the term. Vernacular usage of tradition assumes a long-term persistence, repetition, and preservation of particular customs, beliefs, or rituals, passed down from generation to generation. However, in her article “Two Meanings of Tradition,” Eugenia Shanklin suggests an alternative, saying that “tradition was seen as an ideal type construct and as a useful analytic concept... a passive, stultifying force that engendered and enforced cultural homogeneity” (1981:72) but, “at the same time ... anthropologists were noting its indigenous, active uses” (1981:74). Passive tradition is a categorization, a label applied to

events that are assumed to be an ingrained part of a particular culture. Active, on the other hand, refers to the constant recreation, invention, and affirmation of tradition as a process by which new forms become embedded in the culture.

Generally tradition is thought of in terms of the former definition, as a passive category that is applied by social scientists to describe the persistence of or historical reasoning behind a certain group action or belief. However, this usage of the word does not account for how traditions change over time, vary within a culture, or are shaped by outside influences. Handler and Linnekin explain active tradition as a relationship between the past and the present, in which nothing can be considered traditional without being deemed so by the present, but where present traditions cannot be “wholly unrelated to the past” (1984:285). “In its active sense as recorded by ethnographers, tradition serves instead to evaluate current circumstances, to explain why things are as they are” (Shanklin 1981:75) and to validate certain practices. This mirrors Rowe and Schelling’s description of modern culture as something that “does not necessarily entail the elimination of pre-modern traditions and memories but has arisen through them, transforming them in the process” (1993:3). Hobsbawm and Ranger discuss this kind of tradition at length in their volume *The Invention of Tradition*:

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (1983:1)

Here is the dialogue between past and present where behaviors repeatedly used through history serve as a response to new situations. These responses accumulate over time and become tradition as they are internalized by a culture as ‘the way things are done,’ regardless of how long the practices have actually been in use. While active tradition accounts for and responds to cultural change, it is important to note that tradition forms only a fraction of culture. Traditional

practices are, simply put, one manifestation of culture. Because culture is constantly changing, I argue it is necessary to view tradition through this active lens. Using this definition, it is apparent that the textiles produced by Asociación weavers are indeed traditional.

Development and Discourse

One factor that mediates the way the specific case study of the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos converses with the aforementioned theories is its position as a development project. The premise of development provides a place of contact and recycles the Western perception of the Andes back to weavers allowing for what Spivak (1993) calls strategic essentialism. It expands the horizons of the imagined community while simultaneously confining identity to a geographically delineated region. Fortunately for AAA, their development process has allowed for a certain amount of collaboration.

Throughout its history, development has gone through three major stages: modernization theory, which sought to bring about economic development through technological investment; a dependency school of thought that focused on basic needs; and a move to neoliberal policies (So 1990). Current initiatives focus on grassroots or community development that seeks input from local people when planning projects, what the InterAmerican Foundation calls “self-help development” (IAF 2008). Efforts have been met with praise and indignant critique. James Ferguson (1990) and Arturo Escobar (1995) most notably use Foucault’s theories to question the imposition of power relationships inherent in development work.¹¹ These two anthropologists lean heavily toward the abolishment of development, citing its attempts to undermine the creation of legitimate state authority and impose ‘progress’ through neocolonial projects.

¹¹ For additional critiques look especially at agriculturally oriented projects, many of which proved unsustainable during the Green Revolution. For a case study in Peru, see Doughty (2002).

Alternately, funders and NGO workers herald development work as creating much needed change in the communities they engage. Little and Painter (1995) argue that Escobar's lack of fieldwork and focus on discourse rather than practice negatively affects his perception of development. Discussion remains polarized to this day with more moderate views only appearing in relation to specific case studies, and even then only rarely. This thesis adds to the literature by offering a more nuanced analysis of development within a specific case study and by refusing to make broad claims about development as an entirely negative or positive pursuit even within this narrow context.

A focus on collaboration and the grassroots has partially addressed critiques put forth by Escobar, Ferguson, and others.¹² However, even "grassroots" is a term with degrees. Grassroots development ranges from outside initiatives with specific goals that recruit local leaders to local organizations forming around an issue and applying for grants. "The key point is that these outsiders usually respond to the initiatives of local organizations and collaborate with them in a supportive role," allowing locals to dictate decisions (Kleymeyer 1994:5). In practice, this approach has been met with mostly positive results. The InterAmerican Foundation, which has been publishing a journal entitled *Grassroots Development* since the late 1970s, lauds the work of the NGOs it funds and focuses on how they empower local community members to take charge of their projects. According to Melissa Draper the empowerment of women specifically "became a catch phrase among development agencies in the 1990s, when major development institutions – led by the United Nations and including the World Bank – boldly recognized the centrality of women in the 'fight against poverty'" (2006:233). Yves Van Damme, a career development worker from Belgium, noted in a personal interview that development projects are

¹² Cochrane (1971), Cowen and Shenton (1996), Paiement (2007), Little (2008), and many others.

often granted or denied funding based on the terminology and buzzwords they use.¹³ This could potentially affect the kinds of projects that receive aid, as those that do not play to the larger development discourse are less likely to be considered, regardless of their plans. The Asociación meets these standards of the discourse as its goal of economic improvement simultaneously seeks to empower women and families monetarily. Empowerment through grassroots development seeks “to produce more viable, productive, and effective local organizations that can carry out further development efforts on their own, long after a specific project has ended” (Kleymeyer 1994:6). By focusing on collaboration, PRODEVAT was able to accomplish this in AAA.

After four months of participation in the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos, I had more questions than answers. Differences between textiles produced for the store and those used in the home seemed intimately related to the two goals presented by the organization. This thesis will further investigate questions surrounding the tension between these goals and the way they are manifested in various villages. Before doing this, however, I must introduce the Asociación and its members in greater detail.

¹³ All quotes pertaining to Yves Van Damme, AAA advisor, come from a personal interview in Spanish conducted in Cochabamba on November 29, 2008. Mr. Van Damme, originally from Belgium, helped found AAA while working for the European Union as Co-Director of PRODEVAT and continues advising the weavers in a volunteer capacity.

CHAPTER ONE

La Asociación

The wooden doorway stood propped open by a wicker basket containing three carefully positioned alpaca scarves. Peering at the wrought-iron sign further up on the whitewashed wall, which proclaimed this the residence of “Arte Andino,” I started up the cement steps. Down the cobblestone alley I saw a fountain, two travel agencies, a restaurant, a newspaper kiosk, and a classy coffee shop. At either end of Pasaje Catedral, literally the alley behind the cathedral that takes up one side of Cochabamba’s main square, were decorative but imposing gates that are locked at night for security, while a guard patrols by day.

Turning back to the door at hand, I stepped out of the sunlight into the comparatively dim interior of the store. To my left was a large trunk with more decoratively arranged scarves and a basket of sale items. Around the perimeter of the high-ceilinged room were varying sizes of wooden cubbies with neatly folded weavings, a bed displaying a number of pillows covered in woven pillow cases, and a table with coffee-table books about the region. Bundles of purses and belts hung from support pillars in the middle of the room. To my right were a huge foot-pedal loom, a window, and a woman sitting at a computer who looked up when I entered. “Hola,” I said in Spanish, and completely ignoring what I had been told about exchanging niceties before delving into the heart of a conversation, I let it all out: “My name is Sarah. I’m a student from the United States of America studying with a group at the University of San Simón, with the SIT [the School for International Training]. I’m looking for an internship to practice my Spanish and my academic director told me I might be able to volunteer here.” The woman, with shoulder-length brown hair and bright pink lips, blinked at me.

“You’ll have to talk to Yves or Carmen,” she said. Of course, neither of them was available, so I made an appointment to come back the following day and returned to class with my fellow study-abroad students. The next day I waited for over half-an-hour before either Yves or Carmen returned, which gave me ample opportunity to marvel at the weavings and stare around the store uncomfortably. When Yves strolled in, Miroslava, the pink-lipped woman in charge of sales, introduced me as “the girl I told you about.” “Excellent,” Yves said and, flipping between English and Spanish, he began to tell me about all of the projects I could do around the store. He used phrases that assumed I had already committed to volunteer and, rather than contradict him, I left Arte Andino with a sigh of relief, knowing that I had found an “internship” that would keep me occupied and fulfill the Spanish language requirement of my study abroad experience.

Throughout September, October, and November of 2008, I reported to Arte Andino every weekday I was in Cochabamba (which amounted to about 12 days per month) and worked on a number of projects focused on increasing sales. My interactions with Yves, Carmen, Miroslava, and the *directorio* led me to slowly understand how the cooperative functions and the benefits it provides for its members. The last month of my study abroad program was to be dedicated to an Independent Study Project. Through a serendipitous set of situations, it was collectively decided that I would make a promotional video for AAA during that time. This new project took me to the villages to meet the weavers in their home environment and film their work. Suddenly, I went from participant observer of one small aspect of the Asociación to ethnographer, systematically interviewing Asociación members from different communities and backgrounds and analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting the information I gathered into two short documentaries. The experience challenged my previously one-dimensional perspective on the Asociación and forced

me to think more critically about the group in which I was involved. This chapter introduces the context and structure of the Asociación, the three villages I stayed in, and the weavers themselves. In so doing, it highlights differences amongst the villages and illustrates the varying interpretations of AAA goals that influence larger decision making processes.

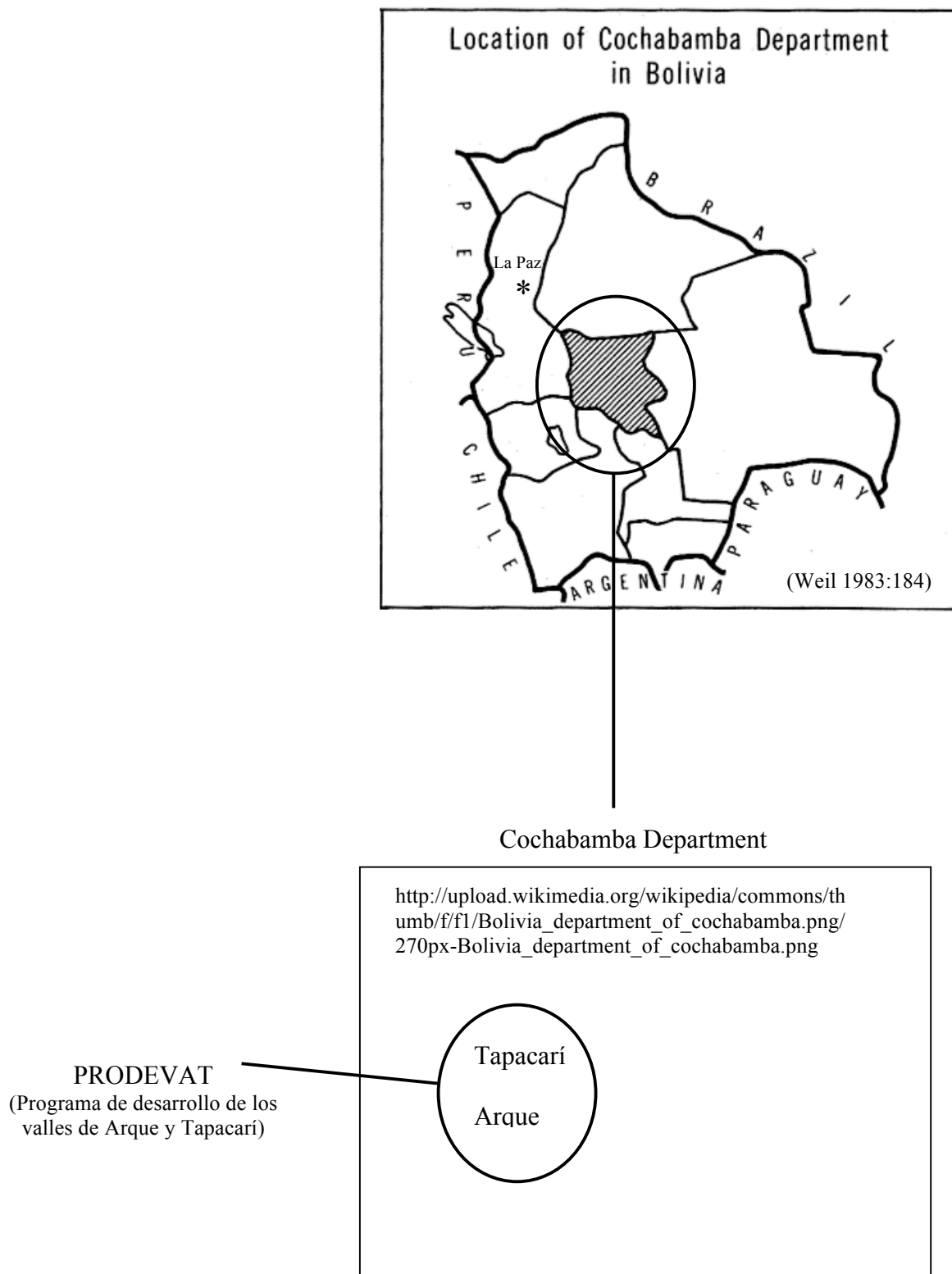
The Bolivian Context

The city of Cochabamba is nestled in a temperate valley in the Andes mountain range. At an altitude of approximately 8,500 feet, it is nearly 13,000 feet below the tallest peaks of the Bolivian Andes. Known as the City of Eternal Spring, Cochabamba is the capital of the *departamento*, or state, of the same name and is home to over half a million people. The landlocked Plurinational State of Bolivia encompasses extremely diverse ecological regions from the Andes in the west to the Amazonian lowlands in the east. Cochabamba is centrally located in the valleys between the two and serves as the country's most fertile agricultural region.¹⁴ Thirty-six indigenous groups lay claim to portions of the country, prompting the focus of the Bolivian government on vibrant folkloric aspects of the nation's diverse population (Rowe 1993:4). Many people with connections to one of these indigenous groups continue in agricultural lifestyles. However, recent decades have seen significant migration from rural to urban areas of the country with the Yungas and Chaparé regions, prime agricultural areas where fruits, vegetables, and legal and illegal coca are cultivated, seeing some of the largest influx of labor. Some rural farmers have moved their production to suburbs of Cochabamba, facilitating their participation in the urban produce market, while many others have abandoned the farm completely and taken up jobs driving taxis or selling wares at one of the hundreds of *casetas*, or kiosks, that line the city's

¹⁴ See Figure 1: Maps of Bolivia. Pp. 28.

Figure 1: Maps of Bolivia

South America: www.fhlfavorites.info/Links/South_America/south_america_map.gif



sidewalks.¹⁵

The weavers of the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos fit the profile of Bolivians most likely to migrate or participate in seasonal labor activities: they live in remote areas with few educational opportunities and small monetary economies and are members of one of the lowest socioeconomic classes in Bolivia (European Commission 2009). Many weavers still farm for subsistence, but everyone supplements their diet with packaged starches and vegetables from the market. These goods must be purchased and cannot be acquired through barter systems as was done historically. The market exposes weavers to amenities that are beyond their ability to purchase, which encourages them to earn more income so that they can buy more expensive material goods. Indeed, most villagers have seen a neighbor move to other parts of the country or even immigrate to Argentina in pursuit of a different lifestyle. Some weavers send their children to cities where they can get a better or more advanced education than what is offered in the village. This education could lead to more highly paid jobs, which might eventually translate to more money for all family members. Remittances and reciprocal sharing of income have become important to many Andean families. However, some national and international institutions, like EuropeAid,¹⁶ attempt to slow migration because of its potential to provide labor for illicit cocaine production or to strain already weak urban infrastructure.

The movement and interaction of people from various cultural groups is central to contemporary Bolivian politics, which have focused on the rights of indigenous people since the election of President Evo Morales, and Aymara Indian, in 2005. Between 2006 and 2009 the Bolivian government undertook a mandate to rewrite the national constitution to more fairly

¹⁵ Based on anecdotal knowledge from locals and Yves Van Damme as well as personal interviews with the Secretary of Economic Activity and the Secretary of Markets and Spaces for the Department of Cochabamba which took place in Cochabamba on October 28, 2008.

¹⁶ EuropeAid is the European Union commission that founded and funded PRODEVAT.

represent various groups within the nation. The result was a document that granted greater autonomy to indigenous tribes. Thus, within the particular historical moment examined in this paper, Bolivian national consciousness was altering to value indigenous cultures, both by recognizing the legitimacy of their traditional systems of organization and by using their products and music as national symbols. This valuing of the subaltern puts Asociación weavers in a unique position as compared to *artesanos* in other countries.

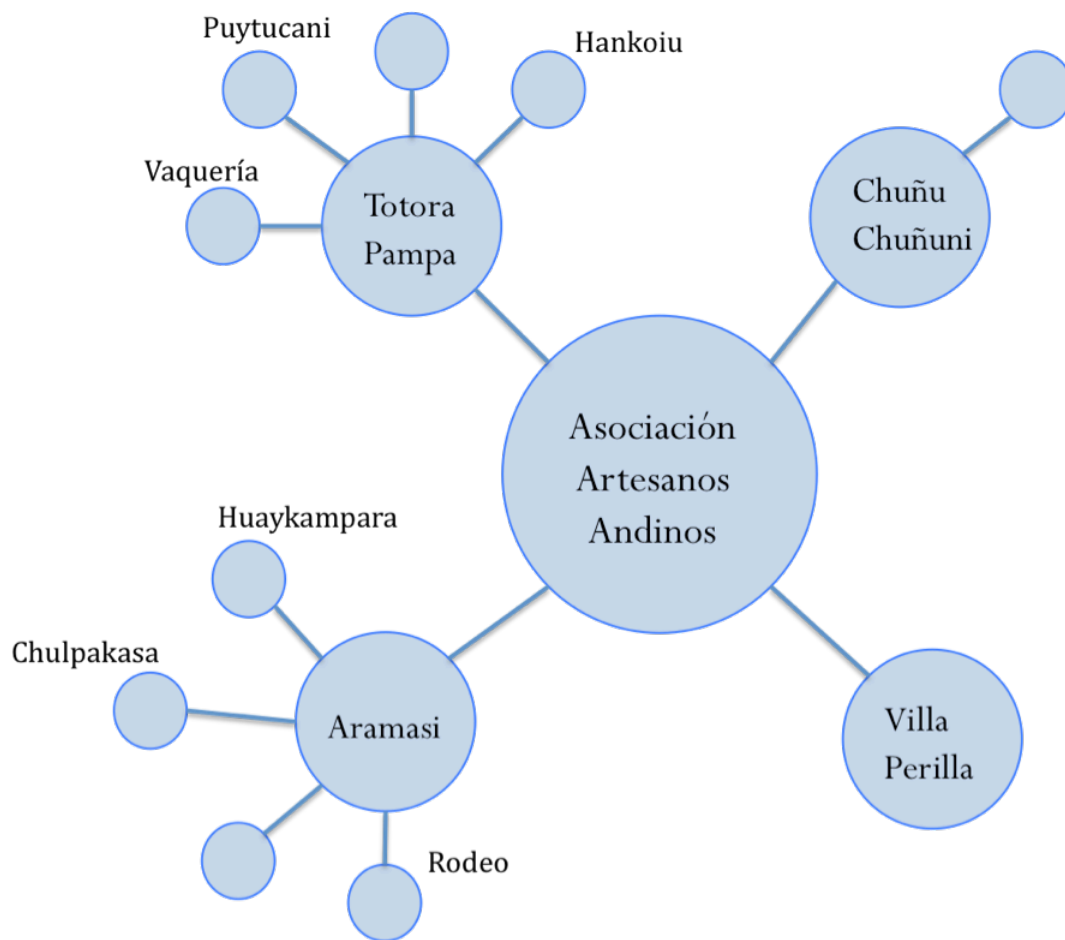
Organizing Artesanos

The Asociación de Artesanos Andinos is a non-profit organization composed of four members: the Artisanal Center of Totora Pampa, the Artisanal Center of Chuñu Chuñuni, the Artisanal Center of Aramasí, and the Artisanal Center of Villa Perilla. Each of these *centros artesanales* is an independent organization unto itself, based in the town for which it is named, and made up of member weavers known as *artesanos* or *socios*. Individuals from these villages and the smaller villages that surround them are free to apply for membership, with no dues required, and the group votes to accept or reject applications at each monthly meeting.

Because AAA is a project founded in collaborative development practices, *centro* membership is voluntary. Many villagers have chosen not to be involved with the weavers in part because of the rigorous quality standards implemented by the group. To meet these standards, which are described later in this chapter, requires significant practice and some community members have decided that the reward is not worth the effort. Others have found alternate sources of income they consider more attractive. Looking at historical and contemporary examples alike, individuals in villages known for their fine weaving have always abstained from participating in the local craft production (Murra 1962; Zorn 2004). As far as I could tell,

weavers and non-weavers co-exist peacefully in the villages, though one man in Chuñu Chuñuni did mention that he felt some former *artesanos* who had left the Asociación were lazy men who did not want to work. Weavers are free to leave the group at any time; their choice to participate indicates that the organization is addressing some of the concerns and desires of weavers, whether they are cultural or monetary.

Figure 2: Organizational Structure of AAA*



All *socios*, or members, of these smaller associations have equal standing and anyone can be elected to the local *directorío*, which is usually composed of a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. This organizational structure mirrors the egalitarian nature of unions,

*Only satellite villages I visited are labeled. Limited information on the number of satellites pertaining to each *centro* means Figure 2 is a proportional representation of the reach of each *centro*.

which are prevalent in Bolivia. Rotating leadership selected by the masses gives voice to all members and mimics traditional political organization. The union format also encompasses one of the original aims of PRODEVAT, which hoped to successfully integrate indigenous voices into project discourse and create a space for empowerment and ownership on the part of the weavers.

The democratically elected president of each *centro* is also that *centro*'s representative to the “*asociación grande*,” AAA itself, which is based out of its store in downtown Cochabamba. The *directorio* formed by these four presidents meets once a month for two or three days to review administrative and financial documents, discuss relevant agenda items, and prepare a new batch of products for sale. Meetings are largely run by the *gerenta*, Carmen, an administrative employee of AAA who manages the books, prepares each month's agenda, provides the *directorio* with the information they need to make the best possible decisions, communicates with foreign markets, and generally serves as manager and contact person for the Asociación.

Carmen plays an essential role in the functioning of the organization, and, though her slight frame and soft-spoken manner often allow her to slip into the background, she is integral in every decision making process, even if only as a facilitator. She has been with AAA since the beginning and knows how to run the business while nudging the *directorio* to take responsibility for their organization by laying out the options at hand in a calm, concise manner and offering suggestions. The weavers of AAA trust Carmen completely, an honor that is not lightly bestowed. They defer to her in nearly every decision despite the fact that she sees this as their Asociación and rarely offers an opinion. What often results is a discussion where weavers ask Carmen for advice and she responds by restating facts and summarizing the opinions of the *directorio*, essentially helping them to decide for themselves.

An Asociación is Born

Carmen joined the project as an employee of PRODEVAT,¹⁷ a European Union initiative intended to aid the two poorest provinces in Cochabamba, Arque and Tapacarí, which lie in the western part of the *departamento*.¹⁸ Their major goal, according to the European Commission on External Relations, was “to prevent the migration ... of workers tempted by their extreme poverty to move and to cultivate coca in the Chapare” (2009), coca that often finds its way into illicit cocaine production. In order to do so, businesses needed to be created in the communities, and weaving was a cultural skill with the promise of marketability.

Beginning in 2000, PRODEVAT began visiting villages in these two provinces, building up interest for weaving, and offering free classes on using horizontal looms and natural dyes. While the main objective of this project was to help people in the rural villages of the area, the “alternative development” aspect of the program encouraged the co-directors of the project – Yves Van Damme, a career development specialist from Belgium, and Dr. Jorge Quiroga Espinoza, a Bolivian development project manager – to focus their efforts on sustaining cultural practices that often fall to the wayside when people take on new jobs to supplement income. The two had worked together on a similar project in Potosí, a neighboring *departamento*, but after years of carefully gathering information on traditional weavings from the area and encouraging their production the project failed due to a lack of interest from locals. For this reason Yves, Jorge, and their team wanted to be sure there was interest in target communities. Limber, the son of a weaver in Puytucani, remembers when development workers came to his school in Totora Pampa recruiting participants:

¹⁷ PRODEVAT (The Program for Development of the Arque and Tapacarí Valleys) was a five-year project that served Arque and Tapacarí between 1999 and 2004.

¹⁸ See Figure 1: Maps of Bolivia. Pp. 28.

When I was in school a project called PRODEVAT came and brought *artesanía*. ... They explained to us that they wanted to make some small crafts [and asked if we wanted to]. “Yes,” we said, “How will we do it?” After that they brought sewing machines, looms. Here we make [crafts] to export to your country [USA], they told us. We didn’t join because we were still studying and we didn’t have time. In this way, they went out into the communities to look for others. Men used to make some sewn pieces, pants etc., but now there aren’t any, you see? Only the women have continued weaving. And when they first wove they didn’t make them like they do now. ... Only recently have they started practicing [weaving] here. One year, or almost two, that’s how long they have worked and improved.¹⁹

Though building on techniques that dated back centuries, PRODEVAT had to provide assistance and training to the weavers to help them hone their skills to a level of quality that approximated the tightness and durability of previous generations’ textiles. In striving toward similarity with ancient weavings the group hoped to appeal to a Western conception of passive tradition (Shanklin 1981) and perhaps even what Renato Rosaldo (1989) calls imperialist nostalgia.

Now control of the organization has shifted to the members of the group, but as Yves pointed out, development projects of this magnitude almost always begin with an outside spark:

While one might want it to be them [the weavers] who come up with the idea – it’s obvious that when a program like PRODEVAT comes, it comes with a lot of money and the necessity to spend that money in the best possible way in only four years, so it’s not always possible to wait until the idea occurs to someone. You can’t just wait to see what happens. So obviously the idea came from PRODEVAT.

While the production of cultural artifacts builds on local skills, the workshops and lessons required to bring weavers to the level of workmanship PRODEVAT sought indicates that there were other factors driving development project decisions. This possibly included a desire for historical connections, cultural authenticity, or providing aid to the less fortunate. More specifically, imperialist nostalgia may have played a role in European Union decisions as they designed a project targeted at reducing migration. Perhaps PRODEVAT directors simply knew

¹⁹ All quotes pertaining to Limber come from a personal interview in Spanish conducted in Puytucani, near Totora Pampa, on November 14, 2008.

that connections to assumptions about the past are good marketing strategies for convincing wealthy consumers to purchase fine weavings. There also may have been a feeling of altruism associated with the project, which in turn might have reflected positively on donating institutions. Regardless, outside influence and Western assumptions about Andeans and weaving have colored the Asociación since its inception.

By the end of 2003, *centros* had been built in five different communities.²⁰ PRODEVAT made contacts in a few stores in La Paz and arranged to have the textiles sold there. However, weavers' incomes depended on the tourists that frequented these stores, as they were not paid in full for their work until their product was sold. This changed as the organization established itself. Patricio, Secretary of AAA, explained saying, "At the beginning of 2004, seeing that our products sold [in stores in La Paz]... the idea was born to open our own store in our own city of Cochabamba."²¹ This store, Arte Andino, became fully owned by the *artesanos* after PRODEVAT was disbanded, as planned, at the end of 2004. Since then AAA has been an independent non-profit organization managed by the weavers whose products it promotes.

Finding the Funds

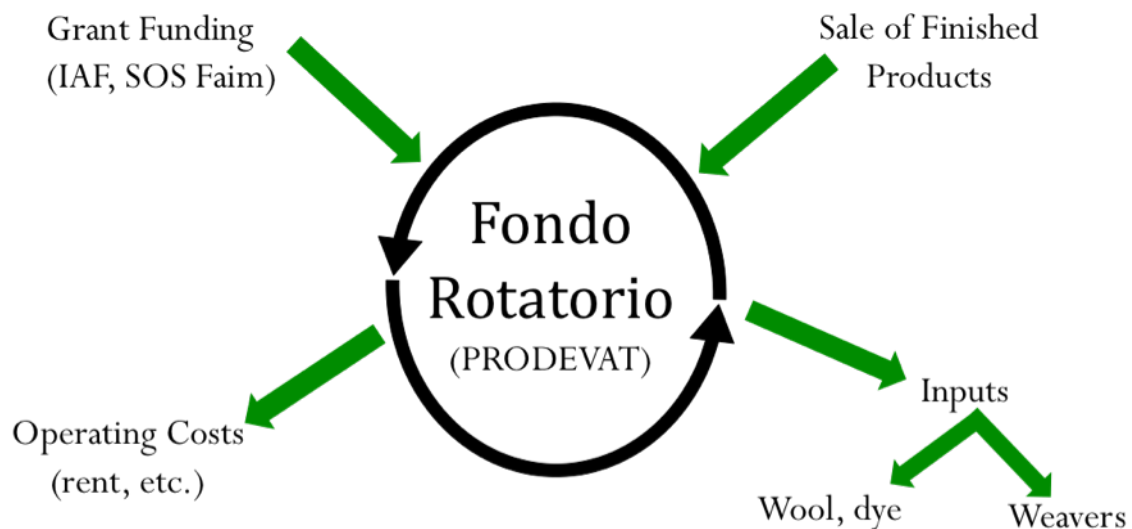
The departure of PRODEVAT forced AAA to reassess how to manage fixed costs such as rent, utilities, and the salaries of its few employees. Without enough income to consistently cover these expenses, AAA turned to grants that could help them continue their efforts without sacrificing income of individual weavers. Two non-profit groups – the InterAmerican Foundation (IAF) from the United States and a Belgian group called SOS Faim– agreed to

²⁰ One *centro* was subsequently asked to leave the organization following a corruption incident where Asociación funds and vehicles were used for personal use. See conclusion for more information.

²¹ All quotes pertaining to Patricio, Secretary of Acts of AAA and president of the Centro Artesanal de Chuñu Chuñuni come from personal interview in Spanish in Chuñu Chuñuni on November 16, 2008.

financially support AAA's mission through grants. These groups allow the Asociación the autonomy to make decisions on how funds should be spent. The money they provide goes into a fund called the *fondo rotatorio*, essentially a large bank account that can be used to pay for fixed costs, to buy inputs for products, and to purchase completed textiles from weavers, as diagramed in **Figure 3**. This system pays weavers for their work immediately rather than waiting for a weaving to be sold. The fund is replenished not only by grant funding, but also through profits gained on the sale of textiles.

Figure 3: Rotation of Funds



Of Villages and Weavers

The three villages I visited during my two weeks of filming were surprisingly diverse for a group that presents itself as a cohesive unit when marketing their weavings. Each *centro* brings something different to the Asociación because of distinct geography, history, and cultural backgrounds. For example, Chuñu Chuñuni sits high in the Andes where llamas and alpacas roam, while Aramasí is located in a warm valley with more donkeys than llamas. As Miroslava, who catalogs all of the weavings, put it, “there are four communities that work. Each community

has its history, its culture. For example, in Aramasí they weave geometric figures. In Totora Pampa and Chuñu Chuñuni they weave animals. Everything they see, they weave.”²² The communities also differ in their level of integration with urban lifestyles, which affects the products they consume. Highlighted below, these differences alter the way AAA goals are interpreted in the various villages and signal where tensions might arise when people from these communities attempt to create a cohesive vision for the organization.

Totora Pampa: A Village Apart

Martín cut the engines and leaned back with a sigh. “Aquí estamos,” (“Here we are,”) he said. There to greet us were Don Juan’s children, who had not seen their father for several days. I tried to peer through the smudged window at the town that sprawled down the hill to the valley below us before taking a deep breath and crawling out of the truck. Don Juan, president of the Centro Artesanal de Totora Pampa, gave us the tour of the building constructed with PRODEVAT funds for the weavers of the area, my home for the next three days. He rummaged around in a corner, emerging with a *chulu*, or woven stocking hat, a felt hat, and an embroidered red vest, all of which he carefully donned. Soon clusters of women dressed in black dresses embellished with colorful borders, belts, and accents began to arrive in preparation for my introduction and a day of dyeing yarn.

Arriving in Totora Pampa had taken around five hours from Cochabamba. Vehicles pass through the village only infrequently, limiting access to anything outside of walking distance. Many people have never been to the city. Most buildings, including the small shops that line the two, short streets, seemed to be familial dwellings with corral and garden attached. Houses dot

²² All quotes pertaining to Miroslava, AAA’s Sales Manager, come from a personal interview in Spanish conducted in Cochabamba on November 26, 2008.

the hillside in a sort of rural sprawl, though because of the rolling topography, the whole town can be seen from most vantage points. The village's school is by far the largest building in sight though what looked like a crumbling chapel was the tallest. In the satellite villages that house weavers who contribute to Totorá Pampa's *centro*, there are even fewer buildings and even more open space, with only very small concentrated centers that serve as gathering points for families separated by swaths of farmland.

The lifestyle of villagers represents what many in the city would call "*la vida campesina*," peasant life. People wear a mixture of "rural" and "urban" clothing. Most women sport dark woven²³ dresses embellished with brightly colored borders and a variety of hand-woven and machine made *aguayos*.²⁴ Men have purchased pants and shirts, but often wear neon-colored vests or jackets with embellishments similar to those of their female counterparts and alternate between baseball caps and traditional felt wide-brimmed hats with hand-woven hatbands. Meals consist primarily of *chuño*, a black dried potato, and fresh potatoes, though my visit was honored with sheep meat. The absence of electricity conforms to stereotypes about rural areas, but the cooking pots, t-shirts, soccer balls, and other odds and ends demonstrate that even the most remote villages have been exposed to outside markets.

Totorá Pampa is the most extensive of the *centros* with many contributing satellite villages and the largest number of active weavers, or weavers who bring in new textiles every month. The vast majority of these weavers are women and Don Juan is one of only a few males in his area who have taken up the Spanish treadle loom to weave alpaca products for the store. Most men still dedicate the majority of their time to agricultural and pastoral endeavors.

²³ Woven in this case indicates the appearance and texture of the thicker cloth, where threads were easily distinguished despite the tight weave. I assume machines made much of this cloth.

²⁴ *Aguayos* are large woven rectangular cloths used for warmth when wrapped around the shoulders like a shawl and for utility when wrapped around cargo and tied around the shoulders as a makeshift backpack. Decorative *aguayos* are used in festivals to express personal identity, regional affiliation, and/or to recount historical events.

However, Miroslava recognized the women of Totora Pampa as the weavers who generally produce the highest quality goods at one of the fastest rates when compared to weavers from the other villages. Employees at AAA believe this speed and skill stems from the fact that Totora Pampa is less integrated with urban areas of the country and that many women were still weaving various adornments for their families when the project came to the region.

Only a handful of men in Totora Pampa continue weaving, making Don Juan an unlikely candidate for president of the center. However, his selection is likely based in practicalities rather than the privilege of his gender. An accident injuring his leg left Don Juan bed-ridden during several months. He now walks with the aid of a cane and cannot stand for extended periods of time, making it impossible for him to complete certain farming tasks. His inefficient contributions to subsistence make him more expendable for the days of travel and meetings required of the *directorio*. Within the *asociación grande* Don Juan fills the role of Treasurer and *encargado de mercados*, which means he is in charge of opening markets and organizing participation in *ferias*, or craft fairs, around Bolivia where the weavers sell their products. His careful attention to detail and presentation has inspired jokes among the *directorio* about ironing textiles, a task Don Juan can frequently be found doing. By working administratively, Don Juan can more effectively improve the wellbeing of his family and his community.

Chuñu Chuñuni and Men of the Mountains

From Totora Pampa, Martín and I traveled to the windswept village of Chuñu Chuñuni, leaving Arque and entering Tapacarí. Though already in the highlands, we climbed ever higher, riding along rocky ridges that overlooked rolling hills of green farmland and jagged mountains, until we were enveloped in a cloud. Cresting an Andean peak, we began our descent, watching

the pointed mountaintops grow larger as we drove on. Soon, the rain began, and then the ride was over. Hustling from the car into the chilled cement building that housed the Centro Artesanal de Chuñu Chuñuni, I felt the temperature change our ascent had induced, a cold that the foggy mornings, biting wind, and drizzly weather did not help.

Though it seemed to appear out of nowhere on our approach, a walk to the edge of Chuñu Chuñuni revealed the main highway between Cochabamba and Oruro at the bottom of the mountainside. Vehicles constantly drive by on this road, which is about a two-hour walk from the village, making the three-hour car ride to the city a more manageable endeavor than in Totorá Pampa. While farming is still important, in Chuñu Chuñuni many houses are clustered near the school and the one local telephone, with backyards serving as gardens and crops planted outside of the village, offering a more centralized layout. The whitewashed mud-brick houses are still fairly small, many with thatched roofing and outdoor cooking areas, but most have the added benefit of in-home electric lighting. “The only other structures in sight are the llama and sheep corrals made of stone, a small white church, a one-room community building, and an elementary school,” said Asociación friend Melissa Draper (2006:217) though, different from Totorá Pampa, motorized vehicles occasionally join the llamas and sheep in the backyard corral.

Some men of Chuñu Chuñuni still wear their bright jackets, *chulus*, and felt hats, but virtually all were thrown over jeans and a commercial t-shirt. Women vary between woven clothing and the *pollera*, a machine-made pleated skirt introduced by the Spanish, and between handmade versus machine-made *aguayos*. There seemed to generally be more items purchased from Cochabamba, and the in-home stores were doing a booming business in sweets during a local soccer tournament. The shops also supply the community with dietary staples such as packaged noodles and processed cookies, reflecting a higher level of commercial integration and

the ease of getting to the city to stock up on products. The result is a mixed culture that embraces aspects of both the rural and urban while not privileging either, different from Totorá Pampa where the urban is largely an unknown entity.

Chuñu Chuñuni is known in the Asociación for its production of alpaca shawls and scarves, which are made by the fifteen or more men who participate in the organization. This is by far the largest proportion of men in any *centro*. Men and women use different looms to work with the different wools, and the foot pedal mechanism of the treadle helps the men to weave faster once the looms have been warped, or strung. On a treadle loom, men can make one shawl or two scarves in one day of work, while the women, working with sheep's wool on a horizontal loom, take several days to several weeks to finish a product like a table runner. Because of their increased speed, the fifteen men of Chuñu Chuñuni, along with the handful from Totorá Pampa, can produce enough shawls and scarves to keep the store stocked.

The greater balance of men versus women in this particular *centro* is one reason Chuñu Chuñuni also elected a male president, Patricio. Additionally, “the divide between men and women is more obvious when it comes to education,” (Draper 2006:221) as exemplified by Patricio and his brother, who were by far the most fluent and literate in Spanish of anyone I met in the villages. As Secretary of Acts for AAA, Patricio takes notes at all of the meetings, writes agendas, and often marks product information during the quality control process. He is also the *encargado de producción*, meaning he oversees production, keeps track of how many items are produced each month, notes production goals, and visits each of the “four centers monthly, or at least bi-monthly, to run courses. We focus on colors and quality,” with a little attention on sizes and measurements, he said. Though his center is very geographically limited, with only a few weavers coming from villages other than Chuñu Chuñuni, Patricio is a very active member of the

directorio, his enthusiasm, education, and dedication to improving organizational quality making him a great asset to the group.

Aramasí, Urbanization, and Change

After the cold and rain of Chuñu Chuñuni, the Aramasí sun beat down with welcome warmth. Located in a valley, with no llamas or bone-chilling winds to speak of, Aramasí feels as if it were guarded by the mountains that surround and rise above it. Martín and I were greeted at the *centro* by Doña Ana, the president of Aramasí and the *asociación grande*, and her husband Don Felix, who were sitting down to a lunch of brothy soup before the monthly meeting of the Centro Artesanal de Aramasí. Floating in the warm, salty liquid were finely chopped carrots and onions, larger chunks of potato, and a few stray grains of quinoa, most likely purchased at the market in Sipe Sipe, a small city bordering Cochabamba, where Doña Ana and Don Felix's children attend school.

Aramasí is only about a one and a half hour drive from Cochabamba. Most villagers make the journey on a weekly basis by hopping on the Sunday *flota*, a large public transportation truck that carries people and their wares to and from the large weekly market in Cochabamba. The *flota* stops by the *centro* and the Posta de Salud, or clinic, to load and unload people and their purchases.²⁵ Other roads branch off of this main artery, leading to a school, a grey-cement Catholic church staffed by a German priest, and a hillside cemetery dotted with wilting crosses. Most paths are lined with tin-roofed mud-brick houses with various utensils strewn about the front yard and a garden attached out back.²⁶

²⁵ The Posta de Salud is a clinic sponsored by a U.S. Catholic charity via Asociación Amistad in Cochabamba.

²⁶ Note that my fieldwork was structured such that I progressively moved closer to the city. The result was a progressive increase in urbanization and, interestingly, in the complexity of dwellings. However, this was not necessarily the case in satellite villages.

The people who traversed these pathways seemed set on similar missions to those I saw elsewhere: a young woman herding her sheep up to pasture, a man with a plow strung over his shoulder guiding an ox to a field, and an old woman with a load of firewood wrapped up in the *aguayo* on her back. However, their subsistence endeavors also focused on producing excess crops to sell in order to buy products that have come to be necessities including gas tanks for cooking, vegetable oil, noodles, and vegetables purchased in the market, which supplement homegrown and purchased potatoes. Clothes and accessories are also staples, with only a few women still sporting hand-woven *aguayos*. Fashion mimics indigenous counterparts in the city: men in pants, t-shirts, and baseball caps and women in the *pollera* and blouse combo with rubber shoes and a white, synthetic wide-brimmed hat complete with decorative ribbon.²⁷ Though many of these clothes are incorporated in Chuñu Chuñuni and Totorá Pampa, Aramasí is the only place where rural styles have been phased out entirely. By integrating into the national image of the *campesino*, rather than maintaining connections to a particular indigenous background, the men and women indicate their strong desire to be connected to and recognized by an outside world. Mixing and combining ideas of rural and urban into a macro-conception of indigenous culture is a form of hybridization that blurs imagined boundaries between cultures. Appadurai argues that “the loosening of holds between people, wealth, and territories fundamentally alters the basis of cultural reproduction” (Appadurai 1996:49) as an examination of change in cultural production throughout this thesis will show.

Aramasí is home to a unique set of designs, which are produced exclusively by women. Rather than “weaving what they see” like weavers in other villages, people in and around

²⁷ This style, now considered “traditional” indigenous dress and used to identify people of indigenous roots, was imposed by the Spanish during their colonial attempt to “civilize” the natives. The skirt and blouse resembles Spanish attire of the era. Today the *pollera* has been appropriated by Quechua and Aymara women as an expression of their connection with the indigenous community.

Aramasí weave geometric patterns that were originally abstract representations of cosmological bodies and the surrounding environment. However, because there is no longer a direct link between designs and symbolism, some patterns seem to have lost relevance. Many women now copy any design they like or they think will bring a good price. Some weavers become bored with this repetition, which can lead to burnout or an urgent desire to sell products because their sole purpose is to create income. Others incorporate designs they see in the market, adding variety to their repertoire. Very few create patterns of their own, a fact that may indicate a greater emphasis on selling textiles than on expressing oneself through weaving.

Of the three *centros* Aramasí seemed the least likely to remain involved in AAA over the long term because production is so focused on the monetary income that helps weavers participate in the urban market. There is little connection between weavers and the products they produce, making them more likely to find other ways to gain income. Though there are still around 50 weavers who turn in products regularly, many of them are getting older and their daughters and granddaughters are increasingly turning to education and employment in the cities as more efficient forms of wealth accumulation. Even Doña Ana noted that the younger generation was not excited about staying in Aramasí with its lack of infrastructure and resources, and her own children have moved to continue their studies. Still, she says she will never leave: “my fields are here, my mother, my brother. I have lived my whole life in Aramasí. I met my husband here when we were children. Nowhere else could be home.”²⁸

Doña Ana has been in charge of her *centro* since the project’s inception in 2003 and has served as president of the *asociación grande* since 2006. Women in the Andes have a large number of responsibilities, but with no male weavers in Aramasí, some of them have had to take

²⁸ All quotes pertaining to Doña Ana, president of the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos and the Centro Artesanal de Aramasí, come from two personal interviews conducted in a mix of Quechua and Spanish conducted in Aramasí on November 19 and November 23, 2008.

leadership roles. “We have our cows, our sheep, we can’t walk [leave for long periods], this is what they said,” said Doña Ana talking about why others did not want to run for president, “so I was reelected. This made me proud [of my abilities to lead] so I agreed.” Doña Ana does not have to worry about as many of these obligations because her children live in Sipe Sipe and her brother takes care of her sheep and fields. The arrangement allows Doña Ana the freedom to travel, something most rural women do not have. The once shy and reserved woman now leads with a quiet confidence, an achievement of empowerment many development projects would applaud.

Quality in Film

The result of my visits to the villages was two short documentary films. One uses interviews and images to articulate the function and benefits of the organization,²⁹ while the other consists solely of clips that explain the life of a textile from the villages to the shelf.³⁰ These films reflect some of the Andean essentialism Starn (1991,1994) heavily critiques. For example, images of the village landscape and herds of animals represent the agricultural and pastoral nature of the weavers, a facet of weavers’ daily life that connects with conceptions of Inca lifestyles. “The transformation of the Inca past into a utopian image of the future began in the sixteenth century,” say anthropologists William Rowe and Vivian Schelling (1993:51), confirming the occurrence of imperialist nostalgia in Andeanism. Because outsiders suggest that modern practices should mirror historical ones, use of chemical mordents to “fix the color” of dyes presented an issue for me in editing the films. Patricio explains the purpose of the

²⁹ Van Etten, Sarah. 2008 *La memoria que tejimos* (The Memory We Weave). 15 min. School for International Training, Bolivia. Cochabamba. (See Appendix: Synopsis of Films.)

³⁰ Van Etten, Sarah. 2008 *La vida de tejidos*. 7 min. School for International Training, Bolivia. Cochabamba. (See Appendix: Synopsis of Films.)

chemicals, which create vivid colors, in the longer film, but his explanation ignores the fact that some colors could not otherwise be made from the plants used. Though merely tools that help the weavers continue using local plants while still meeting imposed quality requirements, I worried that showing these mordents would negatively affect the advertising impact of the films, causing viewers to question the authenticity of AAA textiles. My discomfort with this aspect of the “natural dyeing” process indicates a bias in my own cultural background that expects pristine, unchanged cultural practices. However, it was important to consider this bias since the intended audience of the film is likely to have similar expectations.

One very important aspect of the Asociación highlighted in the films is the weavers’ extremely high standards for quality. “Throughout the twentieth century, weavings for sale locally and regionally have been geared toward consumer preferences and a perception of quality that is influenced by market forces” (Green 1999:131), which expect *artesanos* to create exquisite work if they hope to be recognized in the international cultural art market. Quality is determined at various stages in the production process, including during an in-store quality-control check performed by Carmen and the *directorio*.³¹ All five look for tightness and uniformity of the weave, neat edges, uniform colors that are combined well and do not change shade part-way through the piece, stains, loose threads, or any other minor errors that detract from a textile’s perfection. Patricio explained that “A bad weaving is, in places you see the weave, or if not, there is a stain. Or it could be poorly dyed [so that the color is not uniform throughout]. ... Or the ending could be bad. There are various mistakes” that affect quality to a greater or lesser degree.

³¹ Multiple people check each textile, which controls for errors and favoritism, promoting fairness in review.

High quality goods receive a grade of “A” and weavers are paid immediately for their work from the *fondo rotatorio*.³² Passing work that needs to be touched up by the *directorio* and does not completely meet the high standards gets a “B”, which means the weavers are not paid for their labor until the product is sold. Anything that is not passable or acceptable is marked “C”, and is returned to the weaver, who then has to pay for the weight of the yarn used³³ and either keep the weaving or attempt to sell it independently to cover the cost. Very few “C” weavings arrive at Arte Andino because most active weavers produce at high quality levels. *Socios* understand that new weavers will not immediately produce “A” quality work, and those not meeting the goals are mentored by *directorio* members. Additionally, each *centro* does a preliminary quality control screening so that the “bad” weavings do not affect the perception of each community’s skill at the level of the *asociación grande*. It is to the economic benefit of weavers to produce good work and be paid immediately for their labor. Quality is emphasized in this way because AAA sees it as the only route to export markets, an area they need to penetrate if they hope to become self-sustaining.

Conclusions

The process and products of the Asociación have not only been shaped by the history and structure of the organization that allow for contact and collaboration, but also by the tensions these interactions create. Understanding of outside markets leads to a drive for quality and new product designs. Differences among the villages result in varying interpretations and manifestations of the group’s overarching goals, changing the future trajectory of the project within each village. In the chapters to come, I address the two major goals of the Asociación,

³² See Figure 3: Rotations of Funds. Pp. 36.

³³ Product prices are determined by weight because yarn is purchased in grams. Tighter, finer weaves use more thread, making them heavier. In this way, weavers are monetarily rewarded for higher quality work.

both of which aim toward a level of empowerment, independence, and agency on the part of the weavers, and discuss their impacts on the future of the organization.

CHAPTER TWO

Lo Cultural

Across the wooden table, Doña Ana watched me with a mixture of impatience and indifference as I flipped open my notebook and pressed Play. Settling in for a much-anticipated interview I asked Doña Ana about her leadership position in the Asociación. “First, I’m going to answer in Quechua,” she said, sending a rock to the pit of my stomach, “I can’t do it in Spanish because sometimes I get confused. First,” and she set off in her rhythmic language. I had been living in Doña Ana’s hometown of Aramasí for nearly a week and after many discussions about the organization, I was hoping to probe deeper in a more formal, recorded interview. But Doña Ana had thwarted me: follow-up questions are a challenge when you do not understand the responses. It was only later, as I read through the Spanish translation of her Quechua words, that I realized the wisdom of letting Doña Ana express her opinions on weaving in the language that most closely reflected her way of thinking. Though I’m sure some of the original sentiment was lost in translation, the translator assured me that Doña Ana had made a lyrical case for reviving weaving. “[We] have known how to weave for a long time. Since the time of our grandmothers,” she said, referring to generations past. She spoke of local plants and insects that had previously been used to dye wool with a glint of nostalgia, “They say that they [the grandmothers] dyed with tree bark, with the leaves from trees, with flowers. There is an ant and they dyed with its soap [crushed up body].” In her circling Quechua, Doña Ana described weaving in her home village in recent years:

The women were losing their culture; they didn’t use the *aguayos* they wove, only the *aguayos* they bought in the city. Later, when these weavings appeared again, the culture reappeared too, from the ancient textiles, the weavings of their grandmothers, of their mothers, they remembered. ... A long time ago the ancestors wove. Later, the girls no longer knew how to weave. The culture was

disappearing. And now, recently they are rescuing the weavings of their grandmothers. They are making the figures and designs. They are working on that. This is because the Asociación decided to save (*rescatar*) everything from before. We have to weave in the ancient way. ... Now the women weave exactly like the grandmothers wove before. But little by little they are weaving differences. Sometimes, when they just weave the same figure over and over, the figure that the tourists buy, they get tired of it. For this reason they change the figures. Just a little.

Doña Ana's words show her desire for a continued connection with the past, a past she associates with her cultural roots. In attempting to recreate and preserve high quality textiles that copy the "culturally significant" weavings of previous generations, as AAA aims to do, Doña Ana sees a way to prevent the loss of the weaving techniques and designs she sees as integral to her culture. Indeed as Néstor García Canclini (1993) notes, social and cultural reproduction is manifested in material production, meaning that the goods produced by and for a culture ensure its continuation.

Though Doña Ana asks others what they remember from their grandmother's weaving practices in hopes of rediscovering some of the secrets that she thinks have been lost, she recognizes that change does occur. In stating that weavers get bored and alter designs, she moves toward a more active understanding of tradition (Shanklin 1981). Despite her acceptance of change, Doña Ana and others in the Asociación strive for what they call "cultural preservation," a goal that implies a lack of cultural modification over time.

This chapter will challenge the goal of "cultural preservation" by discussing "traditional" and "authentic" aspects of cloth and examining simplified cultural representation in a global context. Through my analysis I argue that weavers have taken on "preservation" as a term of rhetoric that appeals to an outside world and do not seek the kind of pristine maintenance demanded by museums. Instead, *artesanos* see weaving as a cultural act, regardless of the resulting textile. Additionally, I examine how using culture as a marketing tool essentializes the

lives of weavers. This simplification could be problematic but is used strategically in this case to unify the weavers as a group defined in contrast to others. To accomplish this aim, I look at shifts in weaving through time, the significance of weaving in relation to identity, the formation of varying product lines, and the benefits of the solidarity formed in this indigenous group.

The Nuances of ‘Cultural Preservation’

Keeping the organization connected to the cultural background of weavers is important for a number of reasons. It promotes solidarity among weavers, creating ties between villages that would not otherwise communicate. It also attracts the attention of potential consumers and ultimately creates effective marketing opportunities. However, the idea of preserving culture is problematic due to the implications of the terms and their phrasing.

First, the word “culture” is used in a variety of ways both within and outside of academic literature. The vast scope and complexity of the term is exemplified by the fact that many anthropologists feel the need to define “culture” at the beginning of scholarly works. In anthropology, a definition of culture tends to focus on the beliefs, values, behaviors, ways of thinking and expression, and symbols employed by a specific group of people, what James Spradley and David McCurdy refer to as “learned and shared knowledge” (2006:2). This largely tacit knowledge emerges from group responses to environmental and social problems and affects every part of life from the formation of political and economic systems to how individuals perceive and think about the world. Each particular cultural group resolves issues differently and coping mechanisms transform with changing societal demands. Culture, then, is by nature a transient entity that creates and addresses change by dispersing constantly changing forms of learned and shared knowledge through a population. This knowledge often retains aspects of old

ways even in a transition to the new, creating a thread of continuity rather than a discrete system of cultural reinvention.

In contrast to this movement and change, preservation implies stagnancy. Museums preserve, putting artifacts on display in cases that protect them from deterioration. This “removes crafts from their native context and emphasizes their aesthetic value” (García Canclini 1993:79) rather than allowing them to continue to change to fit societal needs. As a result, what is “preserved” by the Asociación does not carry the same meaning as it did in the past – even when products look nearly identical – because the textiles were not produced in the same cultural climate with the same purposes in mind. As Peruvian weaver Nilda Callañaupa Alvarez put it, “the process of weaving is a reflection of the weaver’s daily life. Each of her weavings contains her own history, from the saddest to the happiest moments. Each is a manifestation of the unique experiences of her life, of her family, and of her community” (2007:56) signifying the importance of context and intention in weaving.

Combining these two terms into one goal creates tension in itself. Preservation is often associated with the prevention of change, an ideal that does not allow for the transient patterns of culture. Doña Ana’s narrative calls for maintenance of cultural continuity even during times of change, a request common standards of preservation do not allow. Additionally, it is presumed that culture is a fixed entity that can be defined and classified. What results is an objectification of culture that reduces it to a list of practices and material goods. Assumptions are made about the possibility of delineating cultural boundaries in space and time, which global hybridity and cultural mixing show to be nearly impossible.

One way to avoid these contradictions is through a change in terminology. In her work with native art of the Northwest coast, anthropologist Alexis Bunten found it more productive to

talk about cultural perpetuation, which promotes continuity of certain cultural practices but recognizes the necessity of cultural adaptations.³⁴ However, the Asociación frames its goals using the above terminology for very practical reasons. Preservation appeals to an idealized past where the ways of the ancestors have remained untouched by outsiders. Some consumers seek this connection to past practices in their search for “traditional” and “culturally authentic” products. Living in the old way also gives weavers a strong sense of cultural awareness and helps them define themselves as a group that differs from others, a challenging task in a globalizing world.

Many who appreciate cultural products view preservation as necessary against forces outside the culture that influence, and in some minds corrupt, cultural decisions. Miroslava expressed her support of this goal in the following way:

They [the weavers] want to preserve their culture. They don't want to lose what their ancestors did because it was taught from mother to daughter, and the daughter, when she had children, also passed it on. They don't want to lose [their weaving]; they want to save it because they already have begun to lose it. I think that what they are doing is very good because time passes – the years pass and they don't forget what our ancestors did. It is not good to forget.

Just as interactions between individuals result in shared knowledge, the interaction between two or more cultures at a contact zone alters each group's perspective on the world. The number of handmade Bolivian textiles has decreased significantly in the past few decades due to the ease and affordability of purchasing machine-made alternatives that provide the same warmth and utility at a fraction of the cost (Zorn 2004). Development initiatives seek to slow or alter this change and therefore use preservation as the foil to assimilation. In the attempt to “preserve,” “save,” or “rescue” culture, development projects create a dialogue that conveys their hopes of continued connections with the past being carried into the future. This discourse objectifies

³⁴ From a personal phone interview conducted on September 12, 2009.

“culture” by defining it with set characteristics and products that can be preserved and compared to previous physical manifestations of culture. In spite of its problems, preservation has become an integral part of the discourse surrounding cultural artifacts because of its appeal to consumers.

The Transience of Weaving

One question inspired by this goal is what, exactly, is being preserved? An essentially boundless and ever-changing culture is challenging to define let alone maintain. “Crafts offer an exceptional vantage point from which to observe the speed and multiplicity of changes brought upon traditional cultures by capitalist modernization” (García Canclini 1993:68) with weaving particularly providing an excellent medium to manifest culture. Though long a part of Andean cultures, the significance and utility of weaving has fluctuated over the centuries.

Anthropologist John Murra was one of the first Andeanists to look at craft production in the Inca Empire. He demonstrated the existence of woven textiles in the Andean region long before the arrival of the conquistadors, noting that they were highly valued under Inca rule for currency in trading, social prestige, and ceremonial uses. Inca nobles recognized the importance of cloth as an identifying characteristic and required the peoples they conquered to maintain their traditional form of dress. Through clothing, Inca soldiers could distinguish any ethnic group of the empire, which gave them information about how to deal with people they encountered and allowed them to more easily control the diverse population. Textiles were also prized in trade and were a required portion of annual tithes to the state. Ownership and exchange of fine cloth demonstrated power, political favor, and important social relationships. Weavers and their products remained essential to the functioning of the Inca State until the fall of the empire when European conquistadores changed weaving traditions forever. (Costin 1998; Murra 1962)

“The Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century greatly altered every aspect of native life, including native garment forms and textile techniques” (Heckman 2003:25), shaping what is considered today to be “traditional” clothing. The Spanish introduced weavers to sheep’s wool and the treadle loom. European gender norms were also transmitted to native cultures, resulting in a stigmatization of using a horizontal loom. Weaving in the old way was thought of as “women’s work,” while men were encouraged to use the more “complex” and “physically demanding” treadle loom, which contributed to differing levels of integration in colonial society:

Both men and women were involved in Mesoamerican and Andean textile systems. Pre-Columbian weavers were predominantly women. ... under Spanish domination, treadle-loom weaving became men’s work. ... Women... continued to weave clothing and cloth on their back-strap looms in the home environment and did not learn Spanish. Women became the conservators of weaving lore and continued to wear *traje* [traditional dress], while men, dressed in western-style clothing, interacted with the Spanish and other foreigners. (Schevill 1991:11)

This was the beginning of centuries of conformity to Western norms that continues today. In 1995, Marisol de la Cadena wrote that women were “more indigenous” than men, their traditional gender role keeping them at home, limiting their contact with the outside world, and making them stewards of cultural traditions. Weaving for the Asociación is still dominated by women, with men representing roughly three percent of weavers.³⁵ These men are concentrated in Chuñu Chuñuni, with only a handful of male weavers in Totorá Pampa and none in Aramasí. In discussions about younger generations leaving AAA’s weaving villages, young women leaving the area were of greater concern to Asociación leaders. This confirms de la Cadena’s point that women are valued as conduits of cultural preservation while also contradicting her belief that women are less likely to migrate away from villages.

³⁵ Yves Van Damme. Personal interview in Spanish. Cochabamba: November 29, 2008.

Even though she argues that women are more traditional, de la Cadena readily recognizes that these women were also greatly influenced by the Spanish. During colonization Andeans adopted Spanish fashion, weaving metallic threads into their designs and donning modified suit vests and *polleras*, or pleated skirts and petticoats. They claimed to convert to Christianity, but still wove traditional religious symbols into their pieces. When the Spanish realized the communicative power and subversive nature of cloth and clothing, where messages could be passed essentially in code, they quickly implemented restrictive edicts that limited the number of designs.

Since independence from Spain in the early 1800s, Andeans have felt little pressure to alter weaving styles. Despite massive conversion to syncretic forms of Christianity, pre-Hispanic cultural symbolism is still highly integrated into Andean weavings. Structure, color, and design continue to play an important role in creative expression. For example, one male weaver in Chuñu Chuñuni cited the frequent appearance of bird, rabbit, and llama images in local textiles saying, “we weave what we see.”³⁶ Two women from the same village mentioned that designs for their work come from their thoughts and that they “weave memories.”³⁷

Traditions Today

The historically symbolic value of cloth and its long-term persistence in the Andean region help to explain why PRODEVAT chose to focus on weaving as a means of cultural perpetuation. Development workers noted the decreasing number of variations and increasing simplicity of textiles woven in poorer regions of the country. They hypothesized that lack of sufficient food was forcing families to find new ways to generate income that often left no time

³⁶ Fernando. Personal interview in Spanish. Chuñu Chuñuni. November 16, 2008.

³⁷ Artesana H. Personal interview in Spanish. Chuñu Chuñuni. November 17, 2008.

for weaving. Textiles continue to mean different things to each individual, but the opportunity to sell weavings in a capitalist market has added an additional layer of significance, that of monetary value. While cloth played an important role in trade under Inca rule, it was exchanged for food, shelter, or social significance rather than money. Thinking about weavings as a means rather than an end shapes the way some textiles are produced. Instead of designing a complex, extravagant piece for an important festival or ceremony, weavers simplify their work so that it can be completed more quickly. Some spend more time weaving than they used to, though others claim that daily schedules are unchanged. *Aguayos* and *chuspas* (small bags used to carry coca leaves) have given way to products that adhere to Asociación size specifications because “to serve the needs of both makers and buyers, the product must have the right balance of traditional technique and contemporary function” (MacHenry 2000:40).

These changes are yet another transformation in the utility of textiles, which continue to serve social, ceremonial, and functional daily purposes in addition to their use as income generating products. The weavings produced by AAA weavers retain their designation as traditional because they are tied by the thread of continuity to generations of previous textiles. Keeping in mind an active sense of tradition, where tradition is renegotiated by changing situations and can be created through the endurance of new cultural practices, AAA does not stray far from weaving’s roots. Most tellingly, many weavers describe weavings and their designs by simply saying, “it’s our culture,” a phrase indicating that it is the act of weaving that embodies culture, not the textile that comes of it.

Producing Culture

Within the active weaving tradition there is room for growth and change. AAA weavers take full advantage of this leeway both when weaving for the store and for the home. The two kinds of textiles I observed in Doña Delia's house at the beginning of this thesis represent two different forms of active weaving tradition with distinct purpose and significance. As Grimes and Milgram state in their introduction, "simple commodity production rooted in family and community ties may indeed 'persist indefinitely' along side capitalist practices without being swallowed by them" (2000:5). Textiles made for the home, family, or local community embody local aesthetics by using bright colors and designs the weavers find attractive. "We don't use those [naturally dyed yarns]," said one weaver, "That's only for selling. For us it makes the weavings look old. It's been a long time since the grandmothers used those colors."³⁸ The warm woven blankets found on many rural beds are made with acrylic dyes that light up a shadowy room.

In contrast, weavings made for Arte Andino, AAA's store, respond to perceived consumer preferences with weavers attempting to design products that serve a function in a Western understanding of aesthetics and utility. Just like any other business, production responds to the demand and desire of the market and "they have adapted and transformed many of the traditional products they produce to appeal to the international market" (Loker 1999:98). Historically, weavers made clothing, *aguayos* for warmth and cargo, blankets, *chulus* (hats with ear flaps), ceremonial pieces, wide belts called *fajas*, and *chuspas* for carrying coca. However, due to fashion trends, clothing is not particularly marketable, and the time and resources required to make large pieces like *aguayos* and blankets that meet AAA standards is prohibitive. Other

³⁸ Artesana. Personal interview in Quechua. Totorá Pampa. November 13, 2008.

products have subsequently been streamlined to resemble Western goods: *chuspas* are made in many sizes that range from small purses to school book satchels; belts have gained a buckle and become more slender to fit through belt loops. To increase variety, the weavers collaborate with professional designers and foreigners connected to the Asociación to develop a line of products that apply natural tones and traditional designs found in older weavings to smaller, utilitarian goods. The results include table runners, placemats, pillow covers, small bracelets, elastic headbands, scarves, and shawls. The *directorio* has also contracted a seamstress and a leather worker in Cochabamba to alter textiles into fashion handbags with leather sides, coin purses, and glasses cases. Despite their differences from the past, all of these products can be considered traditional in the active sense of the word: they all retain connections to historical weaving techniques and designs while also adapting to fit cultural needs.

The influence of Westerners on new products was exemplified by one of my first interactions with Yves. On my second or third day in the store Yves asked me to take a look around and tell him what I liked and did not like, what I thought would sell and why, and if I had any ideas of other products that would sell better. As a U.S. American, I represented a different demographic than the one that generally trickled through the store, as U.S. tourists are relatively rare in Bolivia. Yves' questions sought to capitalize on my cultural knowledge and we formed a micro-contact zone where I shared my perceptions of my own culture with the weavers in the hopes of helping them market their products more successfully. Months later, I saw the result of a comment I made that smaller items might sell better because they are less expensive to consumers, they are easily transportable, and they usually serve a function such as holding coins, making them ideal for travelers looking for relatively inexpensive gifts or souvenirs. As an added

bonus, small items are more profitable because AAA can charge more per gram of wool.³⁹ By the time I met Doña Ana, Patricio, and Carmen for a sale they did in St. Paul, MN in the summer of 2009, AAA had branched out into various sized zipper pouches appropriate for writing utensils, a camera, or the few items one might need for a night on the town. This specific instance of product alteration illustrates the importance of the contact zone for the weavers.

Cultural Representations

Any time peoples from different cultural groups interact they leave an impression on those they meet. In the case of the contact zone, individuals often serve as representatives for an entire cultural group, their actions and descriptions creating an image of their group in the minds of outsiders. For example, the way weavers act around tourists shapes the way tourists imagine rural Bolivian culture, while tourist questions and purchases inspire weavers to alter their marketing and production. In social exchange situations, each party chooses to present itself in a certain way. This presentation generally reflects what one party feels the other expects or will accept. Groups may highlight certain traits or characteristics in order to charm new acquaintances and ignore or hide others that might ruin their good favor. The Asociación de Artesanos Andinos also participates in this reflexive censoring to further its goals. Which characteristics are highlighted may change depending on the audience, for example talking to potential consumers, NGOs, or political authorities requires a different discourse than intra-community discussion of the project. This section addresses the discourse weavers used when speaking to the camera and presenting themselves to the outside world. Outside perceptions and

³⁹ For example, a 200-gram table runner could sell for \$50 or twenty 10-gram coin purses could sell for \$5 each, resulting in \$100. Yarn is purchased pre-spun by weight from COPROCA Fiber, a Bolivian company that uses only 100% wool from sheep and alpaca.

expectations of the group are reflected in their message because there are political and economic benefits to presenting a unified front to others.

Soon after I began filming, it became apparent that many of the people I spoke with were not talking to me, but through me. Some, like Patricio very consciously addressed future viewers of my film, systematically highlighting the aspects of the organization they found important. Others did this in a slightly less conscious manner; while they were talking to me as an individual, they were also projecting their assumptions about my home and my culture onto me and addressing my person as the embodiment of their imagined idea of a U.S. American. This was especially true in cases where I interviewed weavers briefly after cursory introductions from a community leader; the women did not know or trust me and tailored their responses to an outsider who should not be told anything personal. For the weavers I was the living representative of foreign consumers and they treated my presence with caution while simultaneously trying to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. For example, when asked, “what do you do with the money you earn from weaving?” one weaver replied, “It’s to buy things for my children.” Variations on this theme recurred frequently – “To buy clothes for my daughter,” “For school supplies” – generally vague answers that were both accurate and playing to values weavers thought a university student might hold.

Patricio’s formal interview provided the most obvious evidence of how the camera influenced weavers’ behavior and responses. Though I had never seen him without his blue baseball cap and hooded sweatshirt in the three months I had known him, Patricio arrived at the Chuñu Chuñuni *centro* for his formal interview dressed in a poncho and a felt hat he had borrowed from a cousin. Patricio has lived in Chuñu Chuñuni his entire life and has no need to prove his inclusion in the community to any of his family, friends, or neighbors; however, his

visual representation of self for the camera sought to indicate his authentic Andean roots to an outside audience. By playing on an image of indigenous Andean people that is widely understood outside of Bolivia, Patricio took a simplified aspect of his culture and used it to market himself broadly, employing what Spivak (1993) calls strategic essentialism.

Each weaver found some way to connect individual identity to the villages and products, a connection AAA sees as vital to their ability to sell its textiles. I sensed a fear that if the weavers came off as “less indigenous” or “less rural” they may become “less authentically Andean” resulting in a loss of funding or a decline in sales. Images of weavers plowing fields with their cows and sitting at their horizontal looms dotted promotional materials. This visual rhetoric seeks to attract a certain audience. Advertising was not concerned with marketing an artful expression of experience, but rather assuring that the handmade characteristics of the textiles mirrored weavings of old and carried on the style of the ancestors.

Representation of the indigenous and traditional is not exclusively visual. Weavers also emphasize their marketing rhetoric when given the opportunity to speak about their work. Fernando told me countless times that “everything is made by hand, with natural dyes,” three of those times on tape. He wanted to be sure that these qualities were mentioned in the film because he sees the handmade quality of the products and the origin of the dyes as traits that give the textiles more authentic, rural, and traditional value. While some of these repeated proclamations are internalized from a set of marketing strategies AAA has found to be successful, others address concerns weavers feel their audience may have. For example, in our interview, Fernando also spontaneously assured me that “We work hard, we understand,” and “bring our work to the store, not to other places. If we brought [our products] to other places we would lose our raw materials [the wool],” which would mean that weavers were not dedicated to the success of the

group. A lack of dedication makes the organization more vulnerable to the corruption that runs rampant through Latin American non-profits. In these quotes, Fernando combats a stereotype and assures potential investors of the legitimacy and work ethic of the group.

Patricio chose a different emphasis, preferring to focus on the benefits of the organization, such as the democratic structure that gave all weavers an equal voice, the importance of an indigenous body of leadership, increased income, and declining emigration from the community. In a fifteen-minute monologue that responded to the question “Do you want to start by talking a bit about the history?” he discussed the organizational structure, demonstrating his knowledge and proving to any potential NGO evaluator that this group was having a positive impact on the lives of individuals, was well managed, and was on course to self-sufficiency. “Another thing we have achieved,” he said, “is that we have rescued weaving and all of this from before. It was being forgotten. Even in me a little, although I had woven a few times before, but only for my own use, and like this [with the Asociación] I now dedicate myself to weaving on a [treadle] loom.” Like the weavers who referenced their ancestors, Patricio validates his participation in the Asociación by remarking that he had woven for his personal use prior to PRODEVAT’s entrance in the community. The constant need to connect with the past and a labor-intensive rural lifestyle was very present in the interviews, showing just how important the weavers felt these aspects were to their financial success.

Fernando went so far as to reflexively note that his comments were directed at certain groups saying, “we always think about the outside market. Perhaps you can cooperate with us on what you’re filming ... in the United States. You’re going to show it [the film] in your country, right? Maybe they’ll like it, our brothers from the United States.” Fernando knows exactly to whom he is talking when he says, “we all have to work on quality ... and become

professionals... so that all of you foreigners want more,” and exactly what he wants from them. The way he uses his words shows his ability to understand and manipulate the discourse that determines his success in the cultural art market.

Weavers often choose to emphasize similar aspects of their culture and their products when presenting them to an outside audience, an action that serves to distill complexities inherent in an organization of this type. Short descriptions are more rapidly conveyed and more easily digested by potential consumers, which leads to a perpetuation of simplification. Similar circumstances formed Andeanist perceptions of culture in the first place, with scholars such as John Murra synthesizing their observations to make them more understandable for themselves and for their home audience. The result is an ingrained idea of the *cosmovisión andina*, or Andean worldview, which is based in a structuralist classification of Andean beliefs that subsequent studies reiterate.⁴⁰

Despite its utility, a generalized view of Andean society is problematic largely because it promotes a homogenization of culture, one of the things that “cultural preservation” seeks to prevent. In this case, rather than encouraging weavers to assimilate to a modernizing Bolivian society, indigenous people are grouped into a separate category:

The consequences that this reduction of the ethnic to the typical has for political and cultural consciousness [are great]. If we consider that tourism, besides its recreational value, is one of the major vehicles to make us comprehend our sociocultural place within an increasingly interrelated world, the existence of a general policy intended to neglect the plurality of customs, beliefs, and representations is disturbing. (García Canclini 1993:66)

Instead of celebrating regional or symbolic differences like living in the valley versus the *altiplano* or weaving geometric figures versus more literal symbols, similarities are emphasized to avoid the potentially overwhelming nature of eclecticism within the group of weavers.

⁴⁰ *Cosmovisión andina*, or Andean worldview, is said to be made up of complementary parts that are opposite, but both necessary for a complete whole. This reading of beliefs is based in the structuralist tradition.

Even though Andeanism simplifies the experience of Andean textiles, weavers use this Western understanding of their culture in describing their work because it validates their marketing perspective. Understanding that complementarity (the necessity of two equal halves) is symmetry, weavers create pieces filled with opposites. When Yves encouraged weavers to consider asymmetrical products, they resisted, only agreeing once they were convinced that this change would not affect the authenticity of their textiles:

The structure of the designs, the form they are in in a specific textile [is significant]. For example, a little while ago we tried to make some textiles with the designs a bit asymmetrical – so they weren't in the middle but a bit off to the right, or a bit off to the left, but this created a lot of reserve on the part of them [the weavers] precisely because that they are in the center has significance for them in their worldview. There are things you can do and things you can't do. In all of the textiles there are opposites; the opposites, however, are in a single vision, which has a lot of significance.⁴¹

In describing this attempted change, Yves assumes that the weavers were opposed to the alteration because of their adherence to complementarity, an idea he himself has taken from Western Andeanists. While this may indeed be the reason behind their protestations, Yves does not allow for other possibilities based on his previous understanding of the culture.

Weavers use these assumptions and generalizations to their advantage in both the market and the political sphere. In the 2001 census over 66 percent of the Bolivian population was classified as indigenous (Georgetown 2006). The solidarity formed out of shared exclusion from national policies allows indigenous Bolivians to relate over a much broader region. The weavers have used a simplified understanding of culture to form an imagined community that mentally draws boundaries around a set of people who would not otherwise be grouped together (Anderson 1991). Confirmation of shared cultural identity is often a very important part of traditions, which serve as a medium to tie people together. In part of Robert Redfield's definition

⁴¹ Yves Van Damme.

of tradition he states that “tradition promotes internal solidarity,” (Shanklin 1981:74) because it creates a shared understanding of what it means to be part of a culture. The presentation of internal cohesion also allows for “increasing self-esteem through external recognition” (Marcus and Myers 1995:65) where cultures take pride in their origins when others laud their value. Yves commented on how challenging it is for weavers to see this value:

[We’ve seen] an important strengthening of self-esteem, on the level of who we are as people, what we are capable of doing, and they [the weavers] have improved significantly, both women and men. ... This was the most difficult part of the whole project: to try to convince the female weavers that their products were beautiful. If you pay attention, when they arrive in the city, they change into a more “Quechua” outfit, right? I mean the blouse and *pollera* [instead of what they might wear at home] when what they make is much prettier. It has facets of culture, hand-craftedness, significance, [and] beauty, which is absolutely amazing, but for them it is shameful to show this outside of their community. So, the first job is to get the women to understand that what they make is pretty and valuable – not just that it’s worth money if it sells, but that it’s culturally valuable.

This task is more successful when larger groups are recognized for their work. Sales reinforce solidarity because they confirm the validity of the unified cultural message presented. Though essentialized, the image distinguishes weavers from other groups. It is not that differences are not recognized internally, nor that they would prove overly complex to interested outsiders, but rather that a strong sense of social group is necessary to present oneself to an outside audience.

Speaking for Others

The uniformity of presented messages shines through in cultural translations provided by intermediaries. These people aid in communication between two cultures, usually because they participate in both. Because they do not share a common language with most of their intended consumer base, weavers must rely on the understanding, interpretation, and translation performed by a number of these friends and business associates. Transmission of information can

potentially lead to the presentation of a different message than the one originally given, just like rumors are often embellished as they are passed along. In contrast to self-reflexivity, the cultural representation touted by cultural intermediaries is based in observation and a belief that one can effectively convey the message of a particular group to others. Anthropologists often fill this role and my films epitomize this practice. My position as producer allowed me to decide which clips were used, giving me the power to interpret footage as I chose. Though limited by what I was shown and told, I highlighted what I thought was important based both on conversations with the weavers and my own knowledge of the intended audience. The films have gone on to influence the understanding of visitors to the store, anthropology students at Macalester, and weavers in the Twin Cities area. However, even in this thesis I do not pretend to have captured the full complexity of the weavers' lives; I can only offer my own interpretation of its communication to me.

Other foreigners who have had an important impact on the AAA's image abroad as well as internal discourse are Yves Van Damme, former Co-Director of PRODEVAT and unofficial advisor to AAA, and Melissa Draper, a friend of the organization from the United States. These two use their social networks to make contacts, translate for weavers, promote products, and advise the *directorio* based on reactions they receive from consumers. They are the navigators of the contact zone, acting as ambassadors across cultural divides. After his official role as European Union liaison ended, Yves worked with the *directorio* to solicit funds from IAF, a group he became familiar with during his work in Bolivia, and SOS Faim, an organization from his home country of Belgium. He constantly seeks to improve products and gain recognition for the group and has brought various textiles experts to the store to evaluate the goods. The reviews have always been positive:

We see a lot of interest for the Asociación's products on the part of people who know textiles, the textile specialists. There are many, among others from your country, who have visited us and who have told us, 'This is the best quality in all of Latin America.' There is no production that comes close to the level of quality we have here.⁴²

With the feedback he has received in mind, Yves advises the *directorio*, who pay him special attention because they first knew him as a Co-Director of PRODEVAT. However, more and more they consider his ideas carefully before choosing not to implement them, rather than following his suggestions in every situation. This is encouraging to Yves because it means that "they themselves are managing absolutely every aspect of the Asociación. The Asociación belongs to them. The store belongs to them. The products belong to them." This ownership indicates the kind of empowerment Yves has been seeking all along where weavers take charge of their own future. Though he has begun to fade into the background, he still supports the Asociación by validating the decisions of this autonomous group and translating the outside world for the Bolivians.

On the other side of the spectrum, Melissa Drapers's main role has been to translate the lives of weavers for the outside world. Beginning with a chapter in a book she co-edited with Jim Schultz, *Dignity and Defiance*, Melissa attempts to discuss the great impact this organization has had on weavers' lives. She focuses on the stability provided by an income that does not require weavers to leave the comfort of their homes and emphasizes how this has empowered women to be economically responsible for their families while staying true to their traditional culture. Additionally she discusses "gatekeepers" who act as the sole link between certain groups of producers and their markets. "The business owner's central role in bridging local production and foreign clients illustrates just how dependent a local work force can be on a single access point,"

⁴² Yves Van Damme.

(Draper 2006:229) which deprives producers of self-determination and agency. This is something Melissa tries to avoid in her own relations with Bolivian *artesanos*: “I’ve tried hard not to be a gatekeeper, but rather a facilitator,” she said.⁴³

Within her facilitating role, Melissa has used her connections in the U.S. to help the weavers apply to a traditional art fair hosted in Santa Fe, New Mexico and arranged a visit to the Textile Center of Minnesota in July of 2009. In addition to a sale and presentation at the Textile Center, weavers had the chance to meet with a representative from Ten Thousand Villages, a boutique for international crafts. Melissa hoped that the meeting would give the *directorio* information about what is required to become a major exporting cooperative as well as provide a contact AAA could connect with independently. Patricio left the meeting with ideas, optimistically saying, “Our weavings are better than those Peruvian ones.”⁴⁴

At the Textile Center presentation itself, Melissa acted as a literal translator, a task that gave her the flexibility to integrate her own message into what she thought Patricio and Doña Ana, the two weavers in attendance, were trying to convey. She provided an introduction in English that spoke of the economic and empowerment benefits of the organization as well as its work in preventing migration and fostering community. Carmen, the third of the Bolivian representatives, used her knowledge of English to thank the Minnesota Weavers’ Guild for their invitation, a tactic that sought to build personal connections with potential consumers. Patricio and Doña Ana were the speakers of honor, but everything they said was translated through Melissa, who occasionally embellished, explained a phrase, or altered sentences to fit her own way of speaking. These additions turned to guesswork as she “translated” a narrative in Quechua that she and Doña Ana had decided on prior to the talk. Carmen quickly noticed the

⁴³ Personal Communication with the author, March 15, 2010.

⁴⁴ Casual conversation from July 15, 2009.

discrepancies and began a chain of translation, from Quechua to Spanish, so that Melissa might more accurately pass on Doña Ana's message. The simultaneous translation was an example of how challenging it can be for the weavers to communicate with consumers and confirmed the necessity of interpreters who attempt to be as accurate as possible.

The points driven home by this presentation mirror the traits weavers emphasize when talking about their work and their products. Attention was paid to the handmade quality of the weavings, with Patricio explaining technical aspects of weaving and dyeing with natural plants; Melissa and Carmen discussed the economic and social benefits of the organization; and Doña Ana's speech in Quechua helped solidify the rural, *campesino* roots of the weavers. The continued use of Quechua also indicated that the weavers still think about and express themselves using the same cultural structures as their Quechua-speaking ancestors. Thus, the language barriers simultaneously validate the project's goals of cultural preservation and of helping the underprivileged and undereducated while also altering the cultural message. However, without the presence of a cultural intermediary the weavers' full message would be lost.

Conclusions

Through this chapter I have shown that cultural preservation is a goal that carries with it a number of negative connotations, including an idea that outside values of the pristine can determine what defines a culture. In striving to connect with a Western understanding of Andeans, weavers band together and simplify their cultural complexities to present a unified front. However, the goal of cultural preservation has had many benefits for the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos, such as providing a space where culture is allowed to continue more fluidly

regardless of group rhetoric. Global society values high quality products of unique origin and humanistic philanthropy, which indicates morality and social status. Emphasizing the cultural connections of weavers has created a group of people that as individuals might have disappeared through assimilation.

While there are drawbacks, striving toward cultural preservation will help prevent Bolivian society from homogenizing entirely and will allow for the continuation of some cultural diversity. The solidarity the weavers have found in this organization has given them the ability to use their indigenous roots to their advantage as they strategically essentialize themselves. These roots were once the cause of discrimination in urban areas, yet now they form a source of pride. Though the concept of cultural preservation may have been born of the imperialist nostalgia of the development industry, this project would not have succeeded had members not supported the goal. Collaborative participation allowed PRODEVAT to solidify ties between weavers and active weaving traditions. Without the ability to capitalize on cultural unity and traditional aspect of weavings, AAA's marketing rhetoric would be left impotent, quenching any possibility at sustainability. As the next chapter addresses, this sustainability is key in promoting a long-term continuation of tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

Lo Económico

“It’s made by hand, all of it. Manually. And we also make it with natural dyes,” Fernando said, slipping an advertising plug into the middle of our interview. I smiled; he was not the first to tell me this. In fact, most of the weavers at the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos mentioned or demonstrated the handmade quality of their goods to me at some point during our interactions, a reflection of their ingrained marketing strategy. In describing his reasons for staying in the Asociación, Fernando continued to cite benefits promoted by AAA:

We work in agriculture, right? But you have to do a bit more to make more money... to support your family, for the kids. Sometimes the money is for buying food because what we grow is insufficient. ... [In the past] if we weren’t making enough we migrated to the city, or the Chaparé or somewhere else to earn some money. Now no one who works in the Asociación migrates anymore because there isn’t time. We have to work and complete our weavings.

In their advertising, the cooperative emphasizes weavers’ rural lifestyle, their manual, time-consuming production techniques, and their use of colors and designs, supposedly passed down essentially unchanged for generations; in a phrase they advertise *lo tradicional*, a strategy they believe will help them increase sales, which translates into increased individual income.

For better or for worse, participants in capitalist markets require monetary incentives for providing goods and services and AAA’s non-profit status does not exempt it from this requirement. Weavers are encouraged to participate to earn money for their families:

Given the impoverished and seasonal nature of agricultural production, crafts emerge as a suitable additional resource, and in some villages they become the major source of income. ... they increase the earnings of rural families through the employment of women, children, and the men during periods of agricultural inactivity. (García Canclini 1993:39)

The Asociación must sell products in order to pay operating costs, buy necessary materials, and compensate labor.⁴⁵ Two large themes associated with the economic sustainability of the Asociación are marketing and migration. Marketing is obviously tied to increasing sales and therefore income. On the other hand, economic incentives seek to decrease migration, thereby decreasing the temptation to participate in illicit cocaine production. García Canclini additionally observes that “[f]rom the state’s point of view, crafts represent an economic and ideological option to limit peasant migration ... into urban areas ... that would aggravate already worrisome housing, sanitary, and educational deficiencies” (1993:39). Finally, AAA hopes that reductions in migration will result in higher cultural continuity and solidarity formed through a stationary concentration of weavers within their villages.

Economics play a varied role in the management of the organization. This chapter addresses some of the reasons weavers want to improve their economic condition and why the Asociación wants to help them in this endeavor. Financial sustainability is imperative to the continued functioning of the organization broadly, but it also provides incentives to individual participants. Subsequently, other important themes in *lo económico* include marketing strategies, financially motivated migration, and the potential hazards of focusing solely on economic aspects of the organization. Though it is central to the commodification of culture, I argue that the goal of economic improvement plays an essential role in sustaining the Asociación and creating a space where traditional weaving practices can be continued.

⁴⁵ See Figure 3: Rotation of Funds. Pp. 36.

Defining ‘Lo Económico’

As a business, AAA needs to be economically stable and much effort goes into acquiring, managing, and distributing funds. *Lo económico*, or the economic side of the project, encompasses “*mejoras económicas*” (economic improvement) for weavers and their families and for the Asociación as a whole. This vague goal is not easily quantifiable because “improvement” can mean many things to individual actors. Even speaking in quantitative terms, standards of living are not uniform across regions and do not always correlate with formal monetary wealth, especially when the informal and subsistence economies are taken into consideration. In questioning a number of weavers about their reasons for staying with the organization, I discovered, not surprisingly due to the fact that “globalization brings new standards and wants” (Loker 1999:4), that money to buy other products or opportunities was the number one incentive. My qualitative understanding of “improvement” follows common definitions of capitalistic accumulation, that is, an increase in material wealth or monetary capital. This definition arose through talking with weavers about the advantages of working with AAA.

In nearly every interview I asked, “What are some benefits of being part of the Asociación?” or “How do you use the money you earn from weaving?” Despite the differences in communities and socioeconomic status amongst weavers, these questions drew three main responses: (1) “With the money I make I buy [school] materials for my children and clothes,”⁴⁶ “It’s for school,”⁴⁷; (2) “I buy *polleras* [skirts] for my daughter,”⁴⁸, “It’s to buy clothes for myself,”⁴⁹; and (3) “It’s also for eating,”⁵⁰, “It’s to make money, because there is no money here

⁴⁶ Artesana. Married, pregnant mother with at least two children in school. Interview in Quechua. Aramasí. November 22, 2008.

⁴⁷ Dirigente. Male elder community leader. Quechua. Vaquería. November 15, 2008.

⁴⁸ Artesana. Young single mother of one living with her parents. Spanish. Chuñu Chuñuni. November 17, 2008.

⁴⁹ Mariana. Single young woman living with her parents. Quechua. Vaquería. November 15, 2008.

⁵⁰ Mariana. Quechua. Vaquería. November 15, 2008.

in the campo,”⁵¹ “We only harvest one time [per year] and we do not have enough. When we weave, we have [more]. But if we have a large family, it doesn’t fit well. We live a difficult life here in the *campo*.”⁵² These general responses were universally applicable across villages, but how each use was manifested varied in different communities. For example, weavers in all three villages mentioned purchasing clothing as a benefit of working for the Asociación; however, fashions vary greatly and a woman in Totora Pampa is likely to buy a thick black tunic with sequined embellishments at a regional market while a woman in Aramasí may go to a store in Cochabamba in search of a new blouse. Material gain is a form of empowerment for the weavers in all of these circumstances. Indigenous people have long been disregarded by society broadly because of their inability to participate in the cash economy. Purchasing power and business experience seems to bring confidence among weavers who are then more assertive in their urban interactions.

The majority of women weave to benefit their children, using income for school materials, clothes, or supplements to their regular diet. One younger weaver was primarily interested in buying new clothes for herself, showing her different stage in life. Carmen, the manager of AAA, summarized what she heard from the weavers in our interview:

This income permits them [the weavers] to at least support themselves, especially in improving their diet, helping them send their children to school, for example buying school materials, some other things that they do not have, some clothes. This varies depending on who it is. For example, the young women (*jovencitas*) – the older women (*señoras mayores*) normally use this resource for their children. Diet, health, education. On the other hand, the young women dedicate this money to buying something new, to buy themselves, I don’t know, clothes, or something to put away for later, right? There are many that are saving a little bit each time for when they need it, they can have some money saved. Sometimes it is like that in the *campo*, each year there is a new fashion, or something like that, so they buy

⁵¹ Artesana. Married mother with several children, all under school age. Quechua. Aramasí. November 20, 2008.

⁵² Diregente. Quechua. Vaquería. November 15, 2008.

fashionable clothes or things like that. So there are distinct uses depending on the people and their age.

Looking over Carmen's quote, it takes on a list-like quality, as if she has discussed this topic so many times her response is honed to the bare minimum required to answer. She employs succinct one-word summaries that are meant to distill entire complex ideas but actually leave ambiguity, yet another example of how the lives of weavers have been essentialized for market consumption. Putting money toward education seems like it should have a positive effect on the families of weavers, but what Carmen does not detail is how exactly funds are used and how much of an impact they make. Even using terms like "better education" or "higher education" is not particularly descriptive; it is not the same as saying, 'I'd like my children to graduate from high school, fluent and literate in Spanish and Quechua, with the mathematical skills to run a small business,' or 'we need a school that goes through 8th grade in the village and a program where our children can attend high school somewhere nearby.' This lack of specificity makes measuring compliance with the goal difficult, as vague responses are not easily presented as quantifiable results.

Answers to questions regarding the benefits of participation, combined with the commonly simplified aspects of culture outlined in the previous chapter, collectively demonstrate AAA's main marketing rhetoric. As mentioned earlier, interactions with non-profit or NGO personnel, discussions with the *directorio*, and the experience of putting their pieces up for sale help individual weavers construct ideas of who purchases their weavings and to which qualities they are attracted. With their understanding of a consumer base in mind, many weavers I interviewed chose to emphasize their rural, subsistence lifestyle, citing a need for money without which they would not survive. They appealed to the humanity of others who desire to aid

the “less fortunate” and also to nostalgic consumers who hoped to see a continuation of historical lifestyles.

The Economics of Movement

The lifestyles outsiders imagine for weavers do not often include migration of community members despite the fact that the movement of people has historically sustained Andean livelihoods. John Murra’s christening of the *vertical archipelago* model confirms that members of different villages have banded together to trade products and diversify their diets for hundreds of years (Bigenho 2006:674). More recently, families have moved to urban or commercial agricultural areas in search of additional family income, pushed by what Loker calls the “double squeeze” of the rural poor, a phenomenon where “rural incomes need to be subsidized,” while land and employment opportunities simultaneously decrease (1999:29-31). Many take up seasonal work like harvesting in the Chaparé, while others move to the city to become taxi drivers, household employees, or street vendors. Remittances have become an important part of familial incomes, just as exchange across ecological zones used to improve quality of life (Goldring 2003:9). This economically motivated migration geographically separates community members, something PRODEVAT claimed could lead to strained family relations and the cessation of cultural traditions.

One important aspect of maintaining a culture is encouraging the sharing of cultural experiences and knowledge among members of the cultural group. For example, “*fiestas* fall between the few spaces where they [indigenous people] can continue to reassert their communal solidarity” (García Canclini 1993:90). To learn the techniques of weaving one needs to spend time with an experienced weaver, while to learn their meanings one needs to see their use and

connect them to experience of the geographical area and the community itself. This is why each community has a different set of designs. Passing cultural concepts from one generation to the next hinges on the coexistence of several generations in the same village and communication between them. Anthropologist Linda Green studied a group of Mayan weavers who found the demands of production too time consuming to allow for teaching skills:

Marta [a weaver] worries that she does not have time to teach Rosa, her daughter, the designs her mother taught her. Nor does Rosa have time to experiment on her own. A generational thread of life and memory has been frayed between mother and daughter and at the same time the dialogue of the *antepasados* [ancestors] has been ruptured, replaced by a new dialogue with the market. (Green 1999:140-1)

This is why one of PRODEVAT's methods in attempting to preserve culture was eliminating migration by convincing potential participants that weaving would bring them the same economic benefits as migratory labor with the added luxury of being able to enjoy said benefits at home.

It is true that switching from remittances to weaving has proven beneficial for some of the weavers, or the weavers would not continue participating in the project. Though various interviewees mentioned that migration has declined since the beginning of the project, I found Mariana's message to be most compelling. With the help of Martín, my driver and translator, I asked Mariana, a young woman from near Totora Pampa, about how her life had changed since she joined the organization. She replied, "Of course there are always changes. Before we went to the city to make money, but now we earn our money here. If we want money, we see ourselves as obligated to weave and now we don't go to the city."⁵³ For Mariana there has been a change in the way people think about earning money, a change that is not particularly out of the ordinary. Mariana's air of indifference to staying at home probably stems from the fact that she

⁵³ All quotes pertaining to Mariana come from a personal interview in Quechua conducted in Vaquería, near Totora Pampa, on November 15, 2008.

has not yet settled down to start a family of her own. Older women in her village frequently mentioned the positives of keeping their families together by weaving in their homes. Women could be with their children while they worked and the supplemental income meant that husbands did not need to migrate in search of funds. These sentiments were largely expressed in and around Totorá Pampa, with two weavers in smaller villages near Aramasí making similar comments. Within Aramasí proper, women were supportive of migratory husbands and themselves looked for opportunities to move. This difference is perhaps reflective of the integration of urban values in the different villages; people in Aramasí seemed more connected to and more eager to participate in urban society, while those in Totorá Pampa and smaller villages were often content to keep their families together in a close-knit community.

Despite what some see as the benefits of working out of the home, migration from the villages is still common, especially among youth. One factor that plays into these decisions is a desire to see a world beyond the village. This desire mirrors consumers' curiosity about weavers' lifestyle and traditions. Doña Barbara lives in a small village outside of Aramasí with her husband and two daughters. All three women are skilled weavers with the Asociación and their high-quality work has funded an expansion on their home. However, Doña Barbara's younger daughter still decided to spend a season working as a cook in the Chaparé, serving food to migrant workers. She returned to her family laden with new clothes, a radio and batteries, cooking equipment for her mother, jewelry, and various other possessions that seemed luxurious in comparison to the possessions of her neighbors. She seemed happy with her decision and, though she enjoyed seeing her family, she said she missed the green warmth of the Chaparé region and planned to return.

Local attitudes toward hybrid culture were more positive in Aramasí than in other villages where urban society was less understood and therefore more intimidating. It is possible that Aramasí's proximity to Cochabamba and the number of outsiders working in the village – at the clinic and the church – make villagers feel they are connected to a broader understanding of indigenous Bolivian society. If this is the case, it would follow that moving to work with other indigenous people in the Chaparé or the city would not imply leaving one's cultural comfort zone, making seasonal migration a less displacing activity.

The daughter's exploration of unknown territory and the new life experiences she gained from it were a sort of informal education that exposed her to a world beyond her home. After directly seeking employment, higher education is one of the primary pull-factors that inspires migration. None of the three villages I visited offered any sort of secondary education, meaning that children had to move to other towns if they wanted to continue learning beyond an eighth grade level.⁵⁴ The lack of educational opportunities presents a hurdle AAA has not yet addressed. Both teens with the potential to become members of the Asociación and mothers who want a better life for their children leave in search of greater prospects. As Patricio said, "the members, especially their daughters – their children have to study and as there is no secondary school here [in Chuñu Chuñuni] ... they go to other cities like Cochabamba, Quillacoyo, Sipe Sipe. ... Talking about the migration of youth, it hasn't stopped much." Doña Ana also noted that many people leave Aramasí in search of better education. I asked her if there was much migration in the area, to which she responded:

Yes, there is. For schooling. There aren't upper level courses, so they go, they head down [to the city] so their children can study. Enough do it that there are very few left here. ... They go to Cochabamba, to Quillacollo, because there is nowhere to study here. It's there. They are graduating, and here they are not. For

⁵⁴ Eighth grade is the highest level of education offered in any of the villages with most satellite villages having no school or schools that only go to fourth grade.

this they are going. ... [The women that are part of the Asociación] are also there, but there are some who weave. Some others don't, they have found other jobs. But some continue weaving.

This drive for more advanced education is likely tied to employment opportunities that are only available to high school graduates. In thinking about long-term income of the family, parents see the potential for their children to earn more should they get more schooling. Ironically, funds generated by AAA are used to pay for this movement and training despite the fact that AAA wants to impede migration. As Stephen Castles and Mark Miller point out, migration does not happen in the poorest classes of society, but rather somewhere just above them where people have earned enough money to fund their way to better opportunities (2009:73).

Boundaries of Participation

The migration of children for higher education plays a large role in weaver decisions to participate or not, especially in Aramasí, which is geographically closest to institutions of higher learning. Sometimes families move permanently, which excludes weavers from Asociación membership. According to AAA bylaws, all Asociación members must live in one of the associated villages in order to sell their weavings in the store. One of PRODEVAT's tactics to prevent urban migration and promote geographical and cultural solidarity, this rule draws arbitrary spatial boundaries around a cultural group of people who have long embraced the benefits of mobility. In a conversation about Andean worldview and changes in the Andes, spiritualist Teresa Alem⁵⁵ discussed how migratory labor and remittances have become a part of

⁵⁵ All quote pertaining to Teresa Alem come from a personal interview in Spanish conducted in Cochabamba on December 4, 2008.

the “traditional” *ayllu* system, with remittances becoming an expected addition to familial income.⁵⁶

Because of their less spatially fixed understanding of community, members of AAA have found ways around bylaws. Some weavers in Aramasí, as Doña Ana mentioned above, live a translocal lifestyle where they maintain residence in two places. Doña Ana’s children attend school in Sipe Sipe and live in their own house, but her home remains in Aramasí. She splits her time between the two towns and Cochabamba, where she frequently goes for AAA business. In more informal conversations, Doña Ana seemed resigned to the fact that her children were unlikely to return to Aramasí, but she said she would never be able to leave her roots and did not foresee a move. Rather than migrate permanently or move temporarily for employment, Doña Ana has chosen to consistently and simultaneously participate in two cultural spaces at once, a process aided by the similarities between the places. This would be harder for a weaver in Totorá Pampa where daily lifestyle in the village presents greater differences from urban culture.

Participation in more than one cultural space is not uncommon in an increasingly hybridized world. Appadurai (1996) discusses how most people live as full-fledged members of two or more cultures. How they present themselves and what shared knowledge they employ is situationally based. However, the code switching or internal synthesis that occurs can be stressful for individuals, forcing them to choose one path or another. Returning to Aramasí from the city for monthly meetings is a tiring lifestyle, one many weavers voluntarily abandon when they find alternative sources of income closer to their new homes. Thus, spatial limitations that stem from

⁵⁶ While families do continue to aid one another and share resources, reciprocity generally is on the decline as the Western individualism embedded in a free-market economy becomes more valued by many Bolivians. Alem’s vision of a transnational *ayllu*, where communities span geographic boundaries, has only partially come true as younger generations become more protective of their own monetary reserves.

PRODEVAT's valuation of local pride and criticism of hybridization account for waning interest in AAA, especially in Aramasí.

One way to encourage people to stay in their villages and continue weaving would be to build resources and infrastructure such as higher-level schools and health care facilities that many seek as they migrate. Ironically, bringing educational institutions to the communities might also lead to an exodus of younger generations, as it is the knowledge of the outside world provided by education that allows young villagers to dream of moving away. Aramasí has already lost a number of families to the draw of the city with very few of the younger generation staying home, putting the future of the cooperative in peril. At some point only the oldest generation will remain, and as they begin to die, their culturally lived experience in the village will go with them. The opportunity costs of education, namely decreased possibility to remain connected with family and traditional cultural practices, are outweighed in some cases by a drive for economic improvement; higher future earning potentials and the allure of modernity trumps desires to remain in a labor-intensive lifestyle that is more connected to "culture." AAA is only one organization and cannot be expected to address all of these issues, but if individuals choose to only follow the goal of increased monetary income, it is likely they will find opportunities outside of the Asociación that are more efficient, a possibility AAA needs to consider.

Funding a Future

Weavers see economic gain as individually profitable, while the Asociación finds it a secondary endeavor and uses it toward sustaining its own cultural initiatives. Though some relegate economics to a secondary position, leading to tension with those who privilege capital gain over cultural perpetuation, income from sales is vital in keeping the organization functional.

Even if all participants in AAA were focused on an idea of cultural preservation with no intentions of gaining economically, funds would still be necessary to pay for inputs, training, and employees. Though NGOs and development agencies have been supportive of the project throughout its history, as a business AAA is expected to work toward a day when it can support itself. These external funds may not always be available and if weavers began to make financially detrimental decisions, funding agencies might back out. Grants cover fixed costs that current sales cannot meet, making AAA dependent on the aid it receives.

Though AAA would love to be financially sustainable, their limited access to international markets makes it impossible. Miroslava's job as Sales Manager makes her aware of AAA's income, the kind of products sold, and the consumers who purchase them. Not only does she code and catalogue all new textiles, she helps customers, records each sale in detail, is in charge of the cash box, and creates a monthly sales report. Her knowledge led her to make the following assessment:

Our largest consumer is the foreigner. The "*gringos*," as we say. They are the ones who come the most. The Americans. From other areas, there are very few people: Americans, Swedes, Belgians – how do I know? But very few or none from South America. There are enough Spaniards who come as well, they come to do business in Bolivia, and there are [local] people who appreciate [the weavers' work]. They [locals] buy some, but not very much because these products are of first-rate quality and the price seems high for them. So our biggest market is foreigners, especially Americans. These are export products, more than anything. ... Here in Bolivia people look but we sell very little. So, we are trying to open markets abroad.

Knowing this, very little effort is put into advertising in country. Though mentioned in the popular travel guide *Lonely Planet: Bolivia* (Armstrong et al. 2007) and potentially spotlighted in tourist information in Cochabamba, the only product advertising for AAA I ever saw in writing was in the store, on the internet, and in the United States. The store is not even on a main

thoroughfare, making word of mouth and the visual rural presence of weavers at *ferias* the most common marketing tools used on the local audience.

Carmen, who knows the most detailed information about administrative functioning of the organization, agreed that the foreign market is the most important to sustainability, noting her hopes to soon shift to an export based model. She sees U.S. Americans and Europeans as the most profitable consumer bases and thinks that with the right outlets AAA can sell enough products to pay for itself:

We are in the process of [becoming sustainable] ... We have worked over the past four years from 2004 to 2008 very intensely on quality control. If we want to export, we have to have all the necessary conditions to do it. We have worked hard on this. I think that now we have a very good finished product with the required characteristics [to sell it abroad] and now the problem is finding markets. So that's what we're doing this year and next year, looking for markets – possible markets in various countries – to try to make the Asociación sustainable. It's the only thing we're missing. We have good products but we lack markets, so once we have a higher level of sales we will have the possibility of being self-sustainable. So this is the projection for the future, hopefully in three of four years maximum.

This hope is what drives AAA organizing staff to seek out new contacts and solidify its position as a business. Miroslava noted that “this year, the sales had increased. ... If the sales had continued as they were going, perhaps already, or in a little time,” the organization could have covered all of its own costs. Unfortunately, the global economic crisis of late 2008 and strained U.S./Bolivian relations following the ousting of ambassadors saw a rapid decrease in the number of foreigners in the country and textiles sales suffered, making Carmen's time frame more optimistic than realistic. Miroslava, however, remains confident that “it will be possible [to be self-sustainable], but I don't know in how long.” What is certain is that AAA will continue striving toward this end.

Selling an Image

Beyond finding and establishing foreign markets, AAA's largest challenge is appealing to clients with whom weavers do not directly have contact. As Carmen pointed out, having high quality goods that are durable and beautiful is important if weavers hope to stand out in an export market. However, the simplified, unified image of rural, Andean culture developed in the previous chapter is the weavers' strongest marketing tool with its ethnic and humanitarian appeal stretching across borders. This easily digested image allows potential consumers to feel a connection with the weavers, making them more likely to purchase their products. Consumers "idealized those they took to be noble savages," said David Brooks (2000:68) and bought crafts "primarily for their design, for their suitability to enhance a corner of the house, or as a present with a similar purpose in mind" (García Canclini 1993:76). The unique identity of "Andean weaver" encompasses a large, more easily recognizable group that differs from other global artisans. In many ways, this essentialized distinctiveness is calculated to help AAA textiles stand out and encourage consumption.

In an attempt to increase sales, AAA is extremely conscious of its potential consumer base. The development of different kinds of products depends on AAA's perception of their target market. The assumption, which I contributed to as both a consumer and an advisor to AAA, is that tourists in Bolivia are looking for gifts or personal souvenirs that are easy to transport, reasonably priced, and serve some sort of decorative or functional purpose.⁵⁷ Alpaca shawls with their warm, soft wool, compact size, and classy appearance are the biggest sellers with belts and coin purses rounding out the products that sell most consistently. Dyes and color combinations are also carefully considered in an attempt to appeal to fashion and a Western trend

⁵⁷ See García Canclini (1993:76) above.

toward organic and natural products. In the paragraphs that follow I outline how weavers communicated and emphasized different traits of their work to a variety of audiences.

In-Store Marketing

One of the projects I completed as an intern for AAA was the creation of informational posters to put around the store. The idea, crafted by Yves and myself, was that if customers could see images of the weaving process, get a sense for who the weavers are, and understand textiles in their larger context, they would be more willing to pay AAA prices, which greatly exceed those of the nearby street market. The five finished posters, pictured in **Figure 4**, each incorporated a faceless photograph I selected and one line in Spanish highlighting an important marketing point. The anonymity of weavers served to protect individual identity and implied an “everyman” kind of unity within the organization. Distilled themes touched on management by the weavers, the handmade quality of products, the subsistence farming in the communities, the use of real wool from sheep and alpacas, and the use of natural dyes from plants. The posters conveyed main ideas in bold with descriptors like “traditional,” “quality,” and “unique” elaborating on the sparse information. Looking back at this project I realized that my internalization of Asociación rhetoric was nearly complete after less than a month. Through the posters I shared with others the same image the weavers had created for me after only minimal reflection on the simplification my advertising campaign epitomized.

The short films played a similar role in synthesizing information considered vital to AAA’s marketing strategy into a visual, understandable medium, though they were completed after significantly more debate regarding how I was representing the organization and its weavers. The shorter piece made specifically for the store only outlines the process of creating a

Figure 4: Posters Made for Arte Andino



textile, but in so doing presents images of the communities, their connection to the land and animals, their subsistence lifestyle, the laborious process of making a textile, and the quality standards demanded in every step.⁵⁸ Again, the essentialized image of culture was used in hopes of drawing awe, sympathy, respect, interest, and more purchases.

An Internet Presence

To move beyond the local market toward idealized foreign outlets, AAA took to the internet, at first attempting to maintain a website of their own and progressing to contract with Sephari.com, an online craft market, when internet payment transactions and shipping costs proved to be prohibitive. Sephari is “a place where marginalized producers find opportunity and customers feel that warm glow from being helpful to another human being” (Sephari.com 2009). The site emphasizes the exotic and the rare, appealing to those who value “fair-trade and eco-creativity.” (Sephari.com)

As a native English speaker, another of my tasks at AAA was describing products, selecting pictures, and creating a chart of prices and measurements to submit to the site. The discourse of my descriptions not only reiterated the points made in the posters, it mirrored the discourse of the site itself. Still early in my work for AAA, my words are a reflection of my initial assumptions about weaving traditions, which were formed primarily through discussion with Yves and Carmen. In reference to a *chuspa* I wrote the following:

These handmade handbags represent an art form that is all but lost: the weaving of the Quechua people of Bolivia. Sheep's wool is painstakingly dyed with organic tints extracted from local plants. Then women in the local pueblos weave them in traditional patterns that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Seams and handles are also hand-woven to create a tighter, longer lasting edge that will not

⁵⁸ Van Etten, Sarah. 2008 *La vida de tejidos*. 7 min. School for International Training, Bolivia. Cochabamba. (See Appendix: Synopsis of Films.)

rip or fray. This is truly a one-of-a-kind high-quality product that will last a lifetime. (Sephari.com)

This advertisement reiterates early Andeanist scholarship that neglected complexities entirely, but at the time I wrote them, the words seemed the most appropriate for attracting the attention of the kinds of consumers who would frequent a site such as Sephari.

Despite Sephari's good intentions, the rhetoric of this particular site is condescending and exoticizing, traits that conjure up the work of Edward Said, who likely would have criticized the essentialization in this paragraph. Even more problematic is the social responsibility aspect of the site where Sephari donates a certain percentage of each purchase to non-profit organizations; donations are built into prices, making products more expensive. Prices also include the cost of shipping directly from the producing country to the customer because Sephari has no warehouses to store goods and each item must be shipped individually. This amounts to an excessive mark-up, often totaling nearly four times what weavers would charge in the store. Higher prices decrease the likelihood of a sale, especially when bags that normally run 25 US\$ are advertised at 111.82 US\$ (Sephari.com).⁵⁹

While the internet is an important frontier for AAA in gaining product recognition outside of Cochabamba, the *directorio* has not yet found a system that works for them. International shipping costs suggest that weavers would be better off filling large orders for intermediaries; savings from shipping in bulk could make up for fees charged by middlemen. A deficiency of technically savvy employees makes managing a personal website a challenge.⁶⁰ This is yet another issue that must be addressed as AAA looks to the future.

⁵⁹ Sade. Sephari.com employee. Personal Communication. September 7-October 3, 2008.

⁶⁰ During my internship AAA did have a website at www.artesanosandios.com. However, when I searched for the site several months after returning to the United States it no longer existed and is still not accessible.

Trials of an International Market

Plays on the traditional, the natural, and the handmade are nothing new to consumers of “exotic” or “traditional” products. As evidenced by Sephari, most ethnic cooperatives use their cultural ties to create symbolic meaning for their products and appeal to the intrigue of exoticism, the conscience of imperialist nostalgia, and the “warmth” of purchasing from the less-fortunate. Literature on tourism and other cooperatives indicates that most rural artisans market the handmade quality of their products and any connections these products have to their geographical region of origin or local cultural traditions. Interestingly, Warner Wood’s 2008 work on the Zapotec weavers of Oaxaca talks about how one group now largely copies Navajo patterns commissioned by U.S. decorative companies. In catalogues, these companies advertise traditional Navajo designs (which the company has altered) as hand-woven by Native Americans (the Zapotec and Maya in Mexico).

Two weavers experienced this market fully for this first time in the summer of 2009 when Doña Ana and Patricio traveled with Carmen to the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, where artisans are expected to “actively create folk art that is consistent with the traditions of their native country,” (Santa Fe International Folk Art Market), and then on to St. Paul, Minnesota. The Folk Art Market provided a space where weavers could exchange ideas with other artisans from around the world as well as see what consumers looked for as they browsed through the stalls. Organizers of the market determined what was “traditional,” using a passive definition of the word, by limiting the kinds of products AAA weavers could sell. In St. Paul weavers received more direct feedback from a potential consumer, the product manager of the local Ten Thousand Villages store. Similar to Sephari, Ten Thousand Villages is a non-profit that purchases fair trade crafts and resells them to high-end customers. The manager shared the

process of evaluating cooperatives and their products. She also talked about contract expectations; for example, organizations are expected to be able to produce at a certain level in order to stock stores nationwide. While the weavers left the meeting with hope, the demands of the export market were obviously daunting. Beyond the rigorous application and review process, selection to participate with Ten Thousand Villages was dependent on available spots and the subjective whim of one regional product assessor. In under a week the weavers had run up against a number of other products that were being marketed in the same way as their own – as natural, handmade, one-of-a-kind cultural goods – and they were at a loss as to how they should compete in this, the market they deemed necessary for economic sustainability.

Conclusions

Just as focusing on cultural preservation with little thought for marketing could destroy the organization financially, should AAA choose to focus solely on increasing funds there could be negative consequences. For example, endlessly altering products to fit market demand would slowly change the kinds of weavings produced and would continually move them away from their cultural roots. With motives like these AAA could eventually follow the path taken by the Zapotec weavers who do commission work copying the “traditional” designs of Navajos that have been modified by non-native U.S. Americans (Wood 2008). In such a case only the technical aspects of weaving are maintained, with symbolism, artistic expression, and connection to the weavers and their culture falling to the wayside. The hybridization of products, where “forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices,” causes “symbols [to] become detached from their previous contexts” (Rowe and Schelling 1993:231). This sort of capitalistic pursuit would weaken the imagined community

formed by AAA's cultural identity and encourage individualism that would mark the end of the Asociación. Should monetary income increase sufficiently, pursuit of economic improvement would likely result in more movement toward towns with better education systems and higher-paying jobs for the next generation. All of these outcomes contradict the ideal of cultural preservation, which at its extreme, confines weavers to a labor-intensive subsistence-based lifestyle.

This chapter has shown some individual benefits of weaving, how AAA uses economic incentives to increase participation and combat migration, marketing strategies, and the outcomes of interacting with a global cultural art market. *Lo económico* is obviously integral to AAA's mission; without monetary income the project would cease to exist. However, other personal benefits, such as the ability to remain in villages filled with family members and the joy of continuing weaving traditions, are also central to AAA's mission. Though tensions arise between factions of the group that value economic improvement over cultural perpetuation and those who believe the reverse, AAA is structured such that both goals must be addressed. The final chapter examines how the collaboration of both factions potentially strengthens the organization.

Conclusion

November 20, 2008 was another warm day in Aramasí and, though it was only 4:30, one of our fullest yet. Doña Ana and her sister-in-law had left me alone again, telling me to “rest,” after they finished preparing a new textile. Drowsy from the heat, I pulled out my journal and sat down to reflect on the day. The morning began with a walk to Huaykampara, a nearby village, to visit a weaver, her seven children, and several backyard animals, who all took turns screeching at each other as we talked about the income from weaving versus that from this weaver’s employment at a local preschool. Along the way we met another *artesana* who was tending sheep with her mother. I waited in confusion as the woman disappeared, returning with a plastic sack of textiles, ready for Doña Ana to transport to Cochabamba, in hand. Back in Aramasí, Doña Ana introduced me to Doña Rubi, a sizable woman who offered us *papas y fideos*, potatoes and noodles, and some shade from the noontime sun. Doña Ana sat gossiping with Doña Rubi in Quechua as the latter happily assembled her current project, a long thin strip of threads she was making into several bracelets. The bracelets were taken from a bag filled with completed textiles, their bright, vibrant colors indicating their difference from those Doña Rubi produced for the Asociación. I marveled at the work as Doña Rubi proudly told me they were to sell to the tourists who visit the local Catholic medical facility.

Sitting at the wooden table that had become my kitchen and office at the Centro Artesanal de Aramasí, I could not get the image out of my head: Doña Rubi, sifting through a bag of textiles, where completed personal projects mingled with half-finished work for AAA. The level of termination was not problematic; once an AAA textile was done Doña Rubi would bring it to a meeting so it could be put up for sale in the store. It was the differences between the products, their colors, their style, and the frequency and simplicity of their designs that conflicted

in my mind. Staring at the faded poster for a long since passed Festival Folklórico, waves of doubt and guilt washed over me. Who were these people? Was I accurately representing them? Were they betraying their culture in an attempt to make money? Was the development world asking them to be something they were not? With these thoughts plaguing my mind, I sat down to write:

I have some internal conflicts about “cultural preservation.” It’s obvious that the weavers use the colors that come from natural dyes solely for sale purposes, because they think the “gringos” [foreigners] like the subdued tones. They [the weavers] like the brighter colors of acrylic dyes and even the designs are modernizing. ... In Totorá Pampa people ... make *aguayos* for themselves. It’s fashion clothing, and the colors and designs are whatever is fashionable. The weavings they make for AAA aren’t like the bags the women here [Aramasí] make from the wool of their own sheep to sell to tourists so their kids can go to school – it’s not like a blanket for their beds. ... Watching part of the film about mordents I began to think about the ethics of what I’m doing. What happens if I omit some things that I know, or some steps in the process, from the video for the store? Is that lying (to a public that thinks everything is natural or that this [project] is preserving culture and stopping migration)? It’s like statistics; I’m warping the data for my own purpose – in this case to sell a product. ... What effect would it have if I included these things? ... If I don’t present perceived negative aspects am I being naïve? Looking at AAA through rose-colored glasses?

This paragraph marks the beginning of my thesis in all its multilayered dimensions. In questioning the place of mordents within the rhetoric of “natural” and “traditional” dyes, I channeled nostalgic ideals of pristine culture. While problematic, considering how mordents fit into Andeanist assumptions was important in creating a promotional film because others from my cultural background would likely have similar initial reactions to mordent use. Advertising seeks to persuade consumers using only the most essential information and examining what I found to be contradictions between rhetoric and practice would have required more space than this streamlined genre allowed.

Through closer examination of the data I gathered during my time with the Asociación, I discovered that these “contradictions” were in fact just one example of the tensions prevalent in AAA. Beyond the seemingly polar objectives of cultural preservation and economic improvement, diversity among the villages brings differing perspectives and opinions to the organization. The way goals have been appropriated and used differently in each unique *centro* has affected the overall mission and image of AAA, simplified as that image may be. In this final chapter, I argue that these tensions exist as a result of the collaborative grassroots development process and that their combined use strengthens the organization on a macro-level. However, this does not necessarily mean that continued participation in AAA is the right choice for everyone, and tensions greatly affect possible futures of the organization and its *centros*.

Localizing Goals

Sweeping generalizations characterize marketing rhetoric that both unifies and divides the Asociación. The imagined community (Anderson 1991) of AAA that attempts to encompass all Asociación weavers is tenuous at best, with weavers alternately subscribing to its essentialized characteristics for strategic purposes (Spivak 1993; Morton 2003) and rejecting the rhetoric as unrepresentative of their culture. Weavers in each *centro* understand AAA goals in a variety of ways, as marked by their reactions to the project.

“Preserving” Culture

When PRODEVAT came to Totorá Pampa in search of participants for its project, weaving was still very much a part of local culture. “The only thing from before [the time of the grandfathers] we had forgotten was dyeing,” said Don Juan, “We have maintained more from our

grandfathers [than the other *centros*].”⁶¹ Little had to be taught to weavers in these areas about weaving techniques, and the only workshops that were necessary were those to teach natural dyeing, which had fallen out of use in favor of the easier acrylic process, and use of the treadle loom. Because weavers in Totora Pampa still feel a connection to the designs they employ saying, “the designs are our culture,”⁶² their understanding of cultural preservation differs from that of other communities.

For the weavers of Chuñu Chuñuni, tradition dictates that designs be more of a response to modern conditions than a continuation and adaptation of symbolic representation. Fernando spoke of weaving “what we see,” one *artesana* said that she weaves “memories,”⁶³ and Sandra takes designs from her thoughts.⁶⁴ Active tradition in Chuñu Chuñuni manifests itself in the expression of the individual through weaving, taking on a different form than that of Totora Pampa where designs followed fashion and creativity was intended for community-wide consumption. As a result, in Chuñu Chuñuni cultural preservation means continuing the act of weaving itself, rather than maintaining particular designs. While weaving was still present in the village when PRODEVAT arrived, quality had deteriorated from previous levels. Patricio and others in his community are excited that their quality is now up to marketable standards and see weaving as a way of gaining recognition for the village in urban areas. I got the impression that these weavers are not interested in assimilating to broader Bolivian norms, but hope to integrate more modern amenities into their rural lives. These desires make weaving a good compromise that allows for economic growth while retaining connections to the local environment and historical culture.

⁶¹ All quotes pertaining to Don Juan, Treasurer of AAA and president of the Centro Artesanal de Totora Pampa, come from a personal interview in Spanish conducted in Cochabamba on November 12, 2008.

⁶² Artesanas A-C. Personal interview in Quechua. Totora Pampa. November 13, 2008.

⁶³ Artesana. Personal interview in Spanish. Chuñu Chuñuni. November 17, 2008.

⁶⁴ Sandra. Personal interview in Spanish. Chuñu Chuñuni. November 18, 2008.

Weavers in Aramasí had a different relationship with weaving at the beginning of the project and have subsequently interpreted AAA goals differently than weavers in Totorá Pampa or Chuñu Chuñuni. This is evident in the discourses of the communities: whereas weavers in Totorá Pampa and Chuñu Chuñuni talk about “preserving culture,” Doña Ana speaks of “saving culture... that was disappearing.” Instead of continuing an already existing practice, *artesanías* in Aramasí have had to restart weaving after a period of dormancy. One result of returning to a no longer active part of cultural history is a loss of connection to weaving and its symbolism. In discussing designs, Doña Ana had names for all of the patterns, but did not know what they meant. “For example, this design is called “baby star,” and this other one is called *pakapita*. This one is *isilink’u*... and then there’s *patakita*. They have their names... [but] even I don’t know anymore [what the names stand for]. They’ve been called this since the time of the grandmothers,” said Doña Ana, noting that some of the labels, like “baby star,” were words still commonly used in Quechua, while many had not been used in regular speech for generations. This disconnect between weavers and the historical significance of their products may explain why *artesanías* in Aramasí more readily borrow designs from other communities. It seems that for many weavers in Aramasí AAA exists solely to facilitate economic gain. Preserving weaving culture is still important, but only in so far as it is an effective marketing hook because community solidarity is promoted in other ways. Local unions support village-wide projects and Doña Ana attended two meetings and one volunteer workday during the week I spent in Aramasí.

Cultural preservation is more widely accepted in communities where it does not entail drastic cultural change. However, all three *centros* recognize its importance and utility within the

Asociación as it is the cultural aspect of the project that distinguishes AAA from other groups. This is particularly useful as a marketing tool and is used to increase weaver income.

Material Gains

Just as interpretations of cultural preservation depend upon the level of weaving practice and symbolism prior to the beginning of the project, the aims and meanings of economic improvement vary among villages. As mentioned previously, distance from the city affected integration of communities in urban Bolivian society, with Aramasí exhibiting the most hybridization of urban and rural values. While “it is no longer accurate to make sharp or fixed distinctions between rural and urban cultures in Latin America” (Rowe and Schelling 1993:97), each community embodies various values associated with these two spaces to a greater or lesser degree. People in Totora Pampa seem more content to stay in their communities if their monetary needs are being met. In contrast, many in Aramasí appear poised to leave the Asociación the moment that finances permit them to migrate to regions of greater prosperity and comfort. Rowe and Schelling note that “products and practices increasingly move between rural and urban areas” (1993:97), but the kinds of products consumed in different villages demonstrate varying degrees of rural and urban integration.

Every aspect of life in Aramasí is more greatly supplemented by purchased products than in any other village. Most villagers’ clothes, utensils, and food come from the market. Their dependency on capitalistic merchandise results in a greater desire for monetary income because they cannot attain these goods through a barter system. Rather than farming for sustenance like many people in Totora Pampa, these villagers farm to sell their crops. While people in Totora Pampa can eat regardless of the market price of potatoes, those in Aramasí cannot ignore these

prices. This greater dependency on purchased goods is another indicator that the emphasis on economic improvement is stronger in Aramasí than in any other village.

Chuñu Chuñuni is once again torn between two desires: many weavers hope to gain material comforts but also want to continue living near their families. Some choose to leave the village, though conversations suggested that residents of Chuñu Chuñuni were more likely to go to the Chaparé than Cochabamba, whereas emigrants from Aramasí and Totorá Pampa seemed to generally be city-bound. Others were content with their lifestyle and the comfort that their income from weaving added to their lives. Certain urban benefits were already integrated into Chuñu Chuñuni society. The cars of a few well-to-do community members allowed for greater mobility and the regional soccer league encouraged both sport and intra-village interactions. Patricio specifically feels more connected to urban life than his counterpart in Totorá Pampa. He mentioned that he could go into Cochabamba for meetings and be home the next day, an impossible feat for Don Juan. Should transportation from the village to the main road improve, this would become even easier. Still, the fact that young women and men are leaving the village for education indicates that Chuñu Chuñuni has the potential to follow in Aramasí's footsteps. It is possible that future generations will not be as interested in family connections as Patricio. His parents, siblings, and cousins, are all still in the village and he enjoys being close to them. "My village is Chuñu Chuñuni... I was born here. I won't say that I'll die here, but I like the village (*pueblo*⁶⁵)," he said. If weavers do not feel this strong connection to local people, this village might lose some of its appeal, which could lead to a declining population as young people leave in search of other opportunities.

⁶⁵ Note that in Spanish the word *pueblo* means both "village" and a community of people, or "population."

Almost all AAA weavers are more concerned with economic improvement than cultural preservation because it has a more direct, tangible impact on their daily lives. The concern of the organization is that economic desires will lead weavers to move to more affluent areas with more employment opportunities as soon as they have accumulated the savings necessary to do so. This fear stems from obvious trends of integration with urban life, which brings weavers closer to the world outside of their traditional villages.

Hybridizing AAA

What appears to have happened over the last ten years is the creation of many distinct hybridized cultures. In integrating AAA goals and values into already mixed societies, each village has formed its own micro-understanding of the Asociación. Because AAA is composed of four *centros* that wrote local constitutions independent of the larger group, each village is given the freedom to organize its participation in accordance with the political structure and cultural background of the community. The examples above show how this independence has grown and changed with the villages that assert it. Mixing these already hybrid cultures at the level of the *asociación grande* results in a conglomeration of cultures, creating a fusion Appadurai (1996) calls “deterritorialized.” Blurred boundaries make defining culture more difficult, one reason cultural representation has become so simplified.

While useful as a marketing tool, the essentialized image put forth by the Asociación does not equally represent the different lived experiences of all weavers. Differences in communities make it difficult to formulate an overarching summary of the group without conforming to Andeanist assumptions about the cultural heritage of weavers. Generalizations are inescapable; even in avoiding sweeping statements about all members of the Asociación, this

paper highlights trends from the different villages that again imply certain cultural patterns. Limitations of research and space make it impossible to look at the affects of individual opinions on the essentialized presentation of the whole. Nevertheless, when weavers choose to stop participating in the Asociación the importance of the interaction between the individual and AAA rhetoric is emphasized. If weavers do not feel that they are gaining from the Asociación, they will not stay with the group; one potential reason for leaving is a lack of connection to the cultural solidarity AAA attempts to foster through the creation of a unified imagined community.

Simplified representation of a diverse group of weavers has generally allowed for individuals to consider themselves part of this broader imagined community; however, minimizing differences could result in disconnect between individuals and an identity that no longer seems to apply to them. Many weavers understand that representation must be simplified when marketing a diverse group of people as a cohesive unit of “Andean Artisans.” This understanding could inspire *artesanos* to reappropriate the simplified image and claim it as their own, a phenomenon that has occurred in other regions.⁶⁶ Alternately, people may reject the essentialized identity if they feel that they do not fit the profile. In this case generalizing causes individual isolation, rather than group solidarity. Aramasí seems the most likely to breed these sentiments of disconnect. People in Aramasí have already been trying to leave their subsistence-based lifestyle and feel little reverence for the historically symbolic patterns of the region. In attempting to urbanize and leave behind rural life and its stigmas, they are actively disconnecting and redefining themselves as different from constructed notions of “AAA weaver.”

⁶⁶ See Said (1978). *Orientalism* outlines a historical process in which the West appropriated the Orient by exoticizing and simplifying it. After hearing Western discourse on their own region, people of the Orient reappropriated this representation and began to act as Western conceptions predicted that they should. If Andeans live according to a simplified understanding of their culture they will fall into this same situation where culture has been shaped by an outside group rather than internally.

Another indicator that weavers in Aramasí may feel detached from AAA marketing rhetoric is the intense commodification of local culture. The poster of the Festival Folklórico mentioned at the beginning of this chapter advertised a day of typical food, regional music, and weaving demonstrations. Transportation from the city was provided to draw urbanites closer to the indigenous roots of the country.⁶⁷ However, I suggest that another aim of the event may have been to remind the people of Aramasí of certain practices associated with their culture. If this is the case, it is probable that weavers of Aramasí have a weak concept of historical rootedness, again making them less likely to remain a part of the Asociación should greater economic opportunity present itself. However, for the time being the connection to tradition represented at the Festival is proving useful, at least for women in older generations who continue to weave and make extra income for their families.

Because all three villages are connected to urban life to a greater or lesser extent, they all experience hybridization. In addition, AAA values and opinions from other *centros* have influenced how the project has been manifested in the different communities. However, each community has retained its own perspective on the Asociación because of the freedom to assert a unique voice provided by the process of collaboration.

The Voice of Diversity: Collaboration and Empowerment

Overarching commonalities bring weavers together, but it is diversity that gives the organization strength. As psychological anthropologist Anthony F.C. Wallace notes, cultures are not merely a replication of uniformity, where all cultural actors are expected to “behave in the

⁶⁷ Exposition of folklore is one major aim of current nationalistic discourse, as outlined by Rowe and Schelling (1993) and confirmed by personal in-country experience.

same way under the same circumstances” (1961:26), but rather complex organizations that house people of different specialties and opinions:

Culture shifts in policy from generation to generation with kaleidoscopic variety, and is characterized internally not by uniformity, but by diversity of both individuals and groups, many of whom are in continuous and overt conflict in one sub-system and in active cooperation in another. (Wallace 1961:28)

The differences among AAA villages encourage the Asociación to look at issues from different perspectives. When members of the *directorio* meet, they combine the opinions of three or four⁶⁸ distinct areas in making decisions that affect hundreds of their peers. Disagreement or varied perspectives on issues facilitate creative problem solving that helps the *directorio* make the best possible choices for the group as a whole.

The valuing of these differing opinions is part of the collaboration and empowerment facilitated by PRODEVAT and the project’s original mandate. Much of the sustained functionality of AAA can be attributed to the internal management and self-governance structures of the organization, connecting continuation of the Asociación to its grassroots development origins. Collaboration gives weavers responsibility and the agency to take control of their own lives by taking ownership in the project. By requiring local voices in decision making processes and forming democratic systems of representation, PRODEVAT hoped to impart an idea to *artesanos* that this was “their project.” “Ideally, members of grassroots groups *participate* fully in identifying problems, setting priorities, designing strategies and programs, and carrying them out” said Kley Meyer (1994:4), discussing the basic tenants of grassroots development strategy. Historically, this has been implemented to a greater or lesser degree in

⁶⁸ The three *centros* I visited were represented at every meeting of the *directorio*. The fourth *centro*, Villa Perilla, is less involved in the organization and its president, Doña Judith, only attended two meetings during my four months working with the group. Through conversation I learned that Villa Perilla is a small *centro* with only a few remaining weavers.

various projects, but in general, local ownership of plans produces a greater likelihood for project sustainability and benefits for community members. Anthropologist Elayne Zorn's work in Taquile, Peru shows one great example of how projects motivated by local community needs and desires can grow exponentially. Facing competition from mainland *artesanos*, the weavers of Taquile found ways to fund daily ferries to their island village and cultivated a broader base of cultural tourism to attract foreigners. Such investment would not have been sustainable if people in the village were not willing to work for and take advantage of this new resource. (Zorn 2004)

Through realizing community inspired plans, weavers begin to see their own influence on the overall project. Cognizance of influence empowers weavers to mold the organization so that it fulfills local and personal needs. As Yves said, "at the level of self esteem [weavers learn] who they are as people and what they are capable of doing." He illustrated this by recounting the transformation of Doña Ana:

If you focus on the evolution of Doña Ana in the last three years, she was a person who didn't speak and was very shy, but now Doña Ana is a person who carries the Asociación forward, who puts the men in the *directorio* in their place if they say things that don't make sense. So, I would say that she is a person who has learned to be a strong, Quechua woman, the mother of her family, who has rights and abilities, and for me this is the most important: that these people, over time, understand that what they do is valuable, not only that it is worth money, but that this has consequences in their way of being, their way of acting, and the case of Doña Ana is a typical example. ... They [the weavers] bit by bit appropriate what they do, and in this moment I believe the Asociación is really in their own hands and there is no one, except me, who is trying to influence them or hold them up to some criteria.

Textile sales indicate to weavers that what they produce is valued, giving them a new sense of cultural pride. Yves has watched as weaving, which was once stigmatized as rural and backward, has become a symbol of Bolivian national identity. He noted that before women were especially ashamed to show their handmade weavings outside of their communities and donned the *pollera*

and blouse when in the city. This is now changing as weavers become more comfortable wearing local clothes when representing the group at *ferias*.

Both cultural preservation and economic improvement seek to empower weavers by instilling pride about their culture of origin and encouraging leadership, especially in women. Historically, women have been excluded from the cash economy, relegated by their familial responsibilities to the confines of the home and the village (de la Cadena 1995). Only men brought money into the family, which often meant that they were the ones who made decisions about how funds were spent. This pattern has altered since the inception of the Asociación in the three communities. Limber, a young man from outside Totora Pampa whose mother weaves for AAA told me “because we are poor... we support the women who work in *artesanía*. From it, some benefit for their children... so we always support them. When a woman [works]... her husband helps with a few little things that have to be done.” Melissa Draper’s work in Chuñu Chuñuni also showed that “men often care for the house and children when women cannot” (2006:221). Sharing of tasks once rooted in gender has recently moved beyond the household:

Before men did not want women to go to meetings or to do business. Women needed to be in the home, they needed to take care of the sheep and the children. Now this is changing. Now women go to meetings, they go where they want, to classes, and they participate and they speak. And the men listen and value their opinions. They speak as equals saying “this is good” or “this still needs to be different,” they say it now. They correct [the men].⁶⁹

Giving women a voice through weaving rather than another endeavor is culturally sensitive because weaving in these villages is largely done by women. Men’s position as agriculturalists are not threatened and most were appreciative of the income the weaving of their wives and sisters brought to the community. There is still a long way to go in terms of gender equality, as

⁶⁹ Doña Ana. Personal interview in Spanish. Aramasí. November 23, 2008.

Patricio's more advanced education and Don Juan's leadership role in a predominantly female *centro* show, but the villages are slowly integrating female voices into local discourse.

Empowerment of local people is not a sure-fire method to success. Taking time to debate issues has sometimes delayed decisions that could have had greater impact if made earlier. For example, the *directorio* waited two years to attend the Santa Fe Art Festival because of travel costs. Had the weavers made contacts in the international cultural art market during a different economic climate, they may have already developed a stronger export market. Another major issue that threatened the future of AAA was a corruption scandal resulting in the loss of a charismatic leader and a participating *centro*. In 2007, the *directorio* discovered that its president had been using AAA money and other resources, such as an Asociación vehicle and his *centro*'s building, as personal property. Because so many of the *centro*'s weavers were involved in the fraud, AAA decided the damage was irreconcilable. Rather than taint their reputation, the *directorio* had to make the difficult decision to cut the *centro* loose, even though it had been vital to the founding of the organization. However, this trying time in AAA history has led to a strengthening of the Asociación. Moving from five *centros* to four forced the *directorio* to reevaluate their constitution as well as the safeguards put in place to prevent fraud. Throughout 2008 weavers were actively involved in rewriting AAA's constitution, fitting the rules to their needs and adding to the sense of ownership they felt in regards to the Asociación. Not unfamiliar with failure, Yves took the setbacks in stride, noting how the *directorio* used what it had learned to create a stronger base for the organization:

We have to accept the errors. We have to accept this as a learning process. If they make mistakes, it's not bad – I mean, the act of making a mistake itself isn't bad, one simply must learn and correct the mistake after. In the last few years they have made many errors, involuntarily, but from this they have been able to construct a rich base of experience for themselves, and I believe that this is going to carry them forward.

Giving weavers the opportunity to make mistakes not only teaches them how to better run their organization, it shows them they are capable of overcoming obstacles and inspires them to continue investing in the project.

Clash or Compromise?

Just as varied voices and differences in opinion have forced AAA to carefully evaluate decisions, competing objectives have helped the Asociación avoid some of the less appealing potential outcomes of single-mindedly pursuing one goal to its extreme. At the beginning of this thesis I eluded to the fact that cultural preservation and economic improvement initially seemed to be incompatible goals. Commodifying culture is commonly critiqued for its potential to strip once important symbolic artifacts of their meaning and cultural connections. In her study of Mayan widows in Guatemala, Linda Green illustrates how weaving for monetary gain consumed the lives of weavers:

Many Mayan widows can now no longer spare the time and money needed to weave only for themselves and their families or the local market. Without ready access or alternatives for earning much cash, they are forced by the exigencies of survival to invest their time in weaving cloth to sell to development projects. (Green 1999:130)

Wood's look at Zapotec weavers paints an even more extreme picture, where weaving is no longer related to culture. Zapotecs do not weave for their families or for ceremonial purposes, but instead copy Navajo designs for a paycheck. (Wood 2008)

Looking back at the ethnographic data and theoretical perspectives presented in this thesis, it becomes apparent that the two goals do not exist in such isolation. Striving for economic improvement is not likely to cause AAA to turn to commercial piecework because that would contradict the goal of cultural preservation. Additionally, because marketing relies so

heavily on an indigenous Andean image, transitioning away from cultural preservation would radically reduce the viability of the Asociación. Currently, the two goals work to support each other, with financial inputs creating a space for producing cultural products and perpetuated cultural traditions serving as a marketing tool to bring economic improvement to the region. While not problem-free, the mutually beneficial interaction between these goals is what has made this particular project appealing to both weavers and external funders.

Toward Particular Evaluation

The complexities inherent in this case study are in no way unique. Case studies from Mexico (García Canclini 1993; Grimes and Milgram 2000; Wood 2008) to Nepal (MacHenry 2000) and Taquile (Zorn 2004) to Cochabamba show that all development projects are racked with nuances, no matter how straightforward or honest the rhetoric, meaning that they cannot be rated based on cursory inspection. This paper has provided a nuanced reading of one particular case that does not even fully encompass potential influences on the Asociación's limits and possibilities. Similar attention to detail should be a part of evaluating any development program and sweeping arguments for or against the entire development industry should be avoided. For example, Escobar's (1995) argument that power differentials negate the potential for local benefits in all cases ignores the varied approaches to development and how they play out in practice. Little and Painter critique Escobar's critique saying that he focused on the discourse of power and that "his factual presentation regarding the role of anthropologists working in or with development agencies is incomplete and, as a result, inaccurate" (1995:602). There assuredly are specific projects that should be disbanded, but perhaps others are positively impacting the communities where they work. Each development project should be tailor-made to the specific

location and cultural group it intends to aid, taking into account local perspectives. In the same way, each should be evaluated within its own context.

What the Future May Hold

The fact that AAA is functioning under indigenous Bolivian direction and even has prospects of becoming a self-sustaining business is commendable. It provides an example of an attempt at grassroots collaboration that has brought some benefit to the people it set out to help. As they rewrite their constitution, weavers take even more ownership of the Asociación, making it “our vision.”⁷⁰ This ownership gives weavers the power to alter AAA as they negotiate challenges presented by integrating into global society. Teresa Alem suggested that this might cause the eventual end of the group saying, “if they continue weaving in some places it is because it still means something. ... Cultures move at their own rhythm and they preserve themselves when they want to. And they preserve what they need. That which makes them importantly vital and present.” It is entirely possible that within the next generation people in Aramasí will decide that weaving is not something relevant to their culture. Many factors highlighted in this thesis suggest that Aramasí exhibits the least commitment to achieving both goals of the project, with the economic far outweighing the cultural for a number of contextual reasons. I imagine that as long as Doña Ana and her contemporaries are able to participate, Aramasí will continue as a *centro*, but after that the future is quite unclear. Perhaps those of the younger generation who choose *not* to migrate will feel stronger ties to the village and want to connect with its historical roots, or perhaps the village will bring in resources that help it transform into something more like nearby suburban towns. The other *centros* have similarly

⁷⁰ Fernando. Personal interview in Spanish. Chuñu Chuñuni. November 16, 2008.

uncertain trajectories. Economic improvement in Chuñu Chuñuni may encourage migration rather than prevent it because weavers may use new income to move for more education. If the education and resources come to the village, Chuñu Chuñuni seems more likely to continue connections to weaving than Aramasí, though I imagine that weaving would become a more commercial endeavor. Finally, its distance from the city and strong familial interdependence suggest that Totorá Pampa will remain connected to weaving traditions longer than either of the other two communities.

Regardless of what happens in the future, it will come as a result of decisions made by weavers. The trajectory of the Asociación “should clearly depend on the decision of the producers themselves as to how far traditional forms, techniques and materials should be preserved or varied, since it is their own livelihood” and their personal connection to culture and history that “is at stake” (Rowe and Schelling 1993:66). This is perhaps the best gift a culturally oriented grassroots development project can give to a community: allowing members to determine what culture means to them. Within the framework of active tradition, people can adapt cultural practices to meet new needs. Beyond making production decisions, this means leaving it up to the cultural group as a whole to decide what should be perpetuated and when it is time to let something go.

Patricio gazed out over the Mississippi river dejectedly, his body slouched next to the fence post he leaned against, but his mind lost in thought. Looking at him from the picnic table where Doña Ana, Carmen, two local women, and I sat finishing our sandwiches, I could see a heaviness about his figure. “It’s his son’s fourth birthday today,” Carmen explained, “he’s feeling a little homesick.” Patricio had been in the United States for over a week, his first venture

outside the Andes and the longest he had been away from home since the birth of his son. I thought back to Chuñu Chuñuni and how proud Patricio had been to introduce me to the little boy, announcing that Carlos would soon be starting school, even though he was younger than most students. Carlos had stared up at me and blinked before attaching himself to his father's leg. As we stood talking in Patricio's small house, Carlos wandered over to the shelves where his mother kept the makings of her in-home store, an assortment of cooking oil, pastas, cookies, crackers, toilet paper, soap, and small candies. Pointing to a package of wafer cookies, he beseeched his father in Quechua. Patricio gladly obliged him by opening the package and handing over two small cookies, before tousling his little hat. In that instant, I knew why Patricio had started weaving.

Watching Patricio stare at the water without seeing it, I wondered if he too remembered that day. His week had been permeated by unfamiliar cultures and he obviously longed to be back in the comfort of Chuñu Chuñuni. The visit to the United States marked the creation of new contact zones between the Asociación and potential consumers, but for Patricio it seemed to confirm his love for his home. Perhaps Carlos will never become a weaver, but as he sat on the banks of the Mississippi, it seemed clear that Patricio's actions were aimed at securing a future for his culture and for his son.

APPENDIX

Synopsis of Films

La vida de tejidos (7 min)

This short film relies entirely on visual clips and their accompanying sounds to convey the process of weaving in the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos. The film begins with images of the villages, the weavers, and their daily lives before moving into preparing and dyeing wool. Then, weavers warp the looms by wrapping yarn around two poles in a crisscrossed pattern. Weavers next pick out various designs, change the direction of crossed threads, and beat the weave into place using a few helpful utensils. Borders are woven, bags are assembled, and textiles are examined for minor errors. Finally, weavings are washed, priced, and put up for sale in the store. Based in visual anthropology, the film does not require skills in a specific language, increasing its appeal to a broader audience and allowing viewers to experience and analyze the process of weaving from their own perspectives.

La memoria que tejimos (15 min)

A documentary that outlines major aspects of the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos, this film uses the voices of weavers, their employees, and outside friends to discuss the history and structure of the organization. Additionally, weavers describe what they see as benefits of the cooperative. Their views are compared to the opinion of Yves Van Damme, a development worker and friend of the organization. The piece concludes with a discussion of sustainability and predictions for the future of AAA. Targeted at potential funders, academics, and others with an interest in more in-depth descriptive knowledge of the Asociación, this film attempts to encompass a variety of information in as concise a manner as possible.

Glossary

AAA – see *Asociación de Artesanos Andinos*

aguayo – a large woven rectangular cloth used for warmth when wrapped around the shoulders like a shawl and for utility when wrapped around cargo and tied around the shoulders as a makeshift backpack. Decorative *aguayos* are also used in festivals to express personal identity, regional affiliation, and/or to recount historical events.

Arte Andino – a small store in Cochabamba owned and operated by the Asociación de Artesanos Andinos.

artesanía – literally handicrafts; *artesanía* generally refers to cultural art made by hand and does not carry negative (or positive) connotations with regards to Western standards of art.

artesano – literally craftsman, someone who makes *artesanía*; in this thesis *artesano* generally refers to weaving members of AAA, though it is occasionally used more broadly to talk about anyone producing cultural products for sale.

Asociación de Artesanos Andinos (AAA) – literally the Association of Andean Artisans; a group of weavers headquartered in Cochabamba, Bolivia, who come from rural villages in the nearby provinces of Arque and Tapacarí. The Asociación is technically comprised of four member associations, each of which pertains to a different geographical area. Weavers are members of these smaller associations and elect representatives to speak for them at the level of AAA.

asociación grande – a term used to distinguish AAA from the local associations, for example from the Centro Artesanal de Aramasí.

ayllu – an Andean political structure that encompass a number of smaller villages based in a variety of ecological zones. The *ayllu* is founded on ideas of reciprocal exchange to diversify access to crops. Each village serves a specific function that benefits the whole group.

campesino – literally peasant; generally a rural farmer with little formal education.

campo – countryside; rural area.

Cancha – the largest permanent marketplace in Bolivia. The Cancha is located in the center of Cochabamba.

caseta – kiosk where goods are sold; generally a fold out stand parked at a permanent place on a sidewalk.

centros artesanales (centro) – Artisanal Center; an association of artisans located in a specific geographical location; a building where this group of artisans meets; the town or village that houses this group's headquarters.

chulu – a woven stocking cap with a pointed top and triangular ear flaps, often brightly colored.

chuño – Quechua for “freeze-dried potato”; a kind of dehydrated potato made in colder regions of the Andes. Chuño Chuñuni gets its name from this food.

chuspa – a small woven bag generally used to carry leaves of coca. *Chuspa* can now refer to other sizes of woven bags that may be used for different purposes.

compañera – comrade, companion, sister by virtue of membership in the same association.

departamento – a political division just below the national level, equivalent to states in the United States or provinces in Canada. There are nine *departamentos* in Bolivia, each of which is subdivided into provinces and municipalities.

directorio – literally board of directors. In this case study the *directorio* refers specifically to the four indigenous Bolivians who meet in Cochabamba monthly to manage the organization. Each member is also the president of his or her respective *centro*.

Don – historically a formal title given to males to show respect. In the colonial context it was used to refer to landholders and translates to “my lord.” Now, this title is used more broadly to show respect and is often associated with indigenous people.

Doña – the female version of *Don*.

feria – craft fair, usually involving stalls where various artisans can sell their wares.

flota – a large truck; in the context of the story from Aramasí, a truck that carries people and their goods for/from the market in its large bed.

folklórico – folkloric; pertaining to, representing, or manifesting folklore, folklore being an assumed set of traditional beliefs, customs and stories pertaining to a particular culture.

fondo rotatorio (rotating fund) – the main bank account for AAA. Funds come from the sale of products and from grant money. The fund buys inputs, pays weavers for their labor, and pays for fixed costs of running the business. It is called the rotating fund because of the way money circulates through, with weavers being paid for labor before products are sold to cover the costs. See Figure 3: Rotation of Funds on page 31 for a visual representation.

gerenta – manager/administrator; Carmen in AAA.

gringo – usually a U.S. American in a Spanish speaking country, but sometimes any foreigner.

horizontal (loom) – a loom used almost exclusively by women to weave sheep’s wool, a *horizontal* is comprised of two long beams (laid flat on the ground or propped up against a wall) where the shafts that hold warp threads are lashed. Weavings made on a horizontal can be easily rolled up for transportation.

InterAmerican Foundation (IAF) – an independent agency of the United States government that offers grant funding to grassroots development projects in Latin America and the Caribbean. IAF provides monetary resources necessary to AAA’s continuation. The Bolivian division is headed by Kevin Healy. More information at www.iaf.gov

k’ari – notches on a *horizontal loom* that are carved out at a regular interval to make lashing shafts to the loom easier. This allows versatility in the size of weavings created on a *horizontal*.

mordent (mordiente) – a chemical used in dyeing to “fix color.” Mordents include copper sulfate, citric acid, iron sulfate, and cream of tatar, which also alter colors and shades.

pollera – a pleated skirt worn by indigenous women, usually with several petticoats. The style was imposed under Spanish rule but has been reappropriated by indigenous women.

PRODEVAT – the Program for the Development of the Arque and Tapacari Valleys was a European Union initiative through their Europaïd program that lasted from 1999 until the end of 2004. The program sought to bring sustainable income to two of Bolivia’s poorest provinces and prevent migration to areas of cocaine production in the Chaparé and the Yungas. PRODEVAT was co-directed by a Belgian, Yves Van Damme, and his Bolivian counterpart, Dr. Jorge Quiroga, who successfully started AAA after recruiting weavers in the two provinces.

socio – member.

SOS Faim – a Belgian NGO that gives grant money to AAA. The name, roughly translated, means Help Against Hunger. Thanks to co-financing systems in Belgium and the European Union, funds raised by *SOS Faim* are tripled by state funds, with *SOS Faim* overseeing investment in various development projects. According to Yves, between 2006 and 2011, AAA is scheduled to receive 65,000 US\$ from *SOS Faim*. More information at www.sosfaim.be

trama – the weave; the thread that passes between crossed warp threads. After the warp is switched, the weave is held in place, effectively adding to the length of the weaving.

treadle loom – a foot-pedal loom introduced by the Spanish. In AAA, men use a four-pedal loom to weave alpaca wool into scarves and shawls.

urdir/urdiendo – warping a loom is wrapping threads around two fixed ends of the weaving in a crossed pattern. This figure eight or cross can be switched to bring threads that are on top of the weave underneath it and vice versa, creating an over-under effect that holds trama threads in place.

warp/warping – see *urdir/urdiendo*

weave – see *trama*; also, the act of creating a textile by crossing threads

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