RACE, ETHNICITY AND RELIGION IN NEOLIBERAL AND POST-NEOLIBERAL BOLIVIA: A STUDY OF TWO FILMS

by

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ABSTRACT

BERTHA LORENA FLORES. RACE, ETHNICITY AND RELIGION IN NEOLIBERAL AND POST-NEOLIBERAL BOLIVIA: A STUDY OF TWO FILMS

(Under the direction of DR. DAVID DALTON)

The objective of this thesis is to use two films: Marcos Loayza's *Cuestión de fe* (1995) and Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani's *The Devil's Miner* (2005) to analyze their representations of Indigenous religious practices. I focus on two different perspectives, and I analyze the different identifications of people and the way that they have adapted to centuries of religious oppression. I argue that there are different representations of religiosity within a Bolivian production and US production of a Bolivian film. The choice to analyze these two films allows me to demonstrate the connections between film and religion, proving that films play an important role in the way that people perceive and portray religion; secondly, this comparison allows me to show that Bolivian cinema has produced films and documentaries that identify how Indigenous identity is represented through religion. In making these observations, this thesis contributes to understanding how identity and politics come together to affect the portrayal of religion. In the chapter dedicated to *Cuestión de fe* (1995) I argue that this film analyzes the way in which religion was used as a means of both oppression and resistance. I also focus on the way in which this usage of religion for oppression and resistance was therefore perceived and displayed within Bolivian cinema. In the chapter on *The Devil's Miner* (2005), I argue that this film revolves around the syncretic practices from Indigenous cultures in the Bolivian Andes. This fusion of Indigenous and Christian beliefs creates an avenue for Indigenous resistance, particularly for those people who have to work in the mines.

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Introduction

On November 16, 1532, in the main square of Cajamarca, Peru, the Inca Atahualpa encountered Francisco Pizarro, a Spanish conquistador, along with his crew of Spaniards. Atahualpa, the leader of the Incas, came to the square of Cajamarca carrying a litter that was encrusted with gold. The attendants cleared his path of dirt and grass while others played music. The Spaniards, on the other hand, hid in three buildings that surrounded the square in order to appear weak and scared. At that moment, Vicente de Valverde, a Dominican that was a part of Pizarro's crew, came forward, spoke to Atahualpa and reached out his hand, and offered him a Bible. Atahualpa grabbed the book, inspected it, and then dropped it. When the book fell, Vicente Valverde signaled to Pizarro and his men to attack the Incas. When the men attacked, Atahualpa was dragged from his litter, taken prisoner, and 10 months later was strangled to death. After his death, the conquest of Atahualpa's empire began (MacCormack 1989, 141). The story of Atahualpa and Pizarro illustrates the key role of the Catholic Church in justifying the Spanish conquest of the Americas. So important was the Church in these projects that the Spaniards carried out projects of conquest whose aim was to impose Christianity on Indigenous actors and thus ensure their subservience to Spanish authority.

Nevertheless, Indigenous communities never fully accepted the doctrines that conquerors imposed upon them. As they blended their own religious beliefs, they created syncretic forms of faith. These syncretic practices created the means through which people could create their own religious identities outside of the structures of an organized faith. While the blending of religious practices can occur among people of many social classes, it is especially valuable from an analytical standpoint when we use it to understand how people from Indigenous communities can create their own meanings through religious blending that allows them to resist the dogmas

of colonization. The terms of oppression and resistance relate directly to the Bolivian context. The country's flourishing, pre-Columbian societies had to negotiate their traditional beliefs with the Catholic teachings that conquering forces imposed upon them.

To what extent? For how long? These are questions that should also be addressed. When did the people start combining their traditions with their religion? How does the church play a role within the lives of the main characters and rituals? How have their rituals been combined to benefit their Indigenous religious beliefs as well as their Catholic beliefs? The main question is how do the films represent the religious practices of the people? These are questions that will be addressed throughout the writing of this thesis paper.

Religiosity manifests itself in all sorts of Latin American literary and cultural productions. This thesis focuses specifically on representations of race, ethnicity, and religion in neoliberal and post-neoliberal Bolivia within two films: Marcos Loayza's *Cuestión de fe* (1995) and Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani's *The Devil's Miner* (2005). These works came out during very different moments of social political Bolivian history. Filmed only ten years apart, the films represent very different time periods in Bolivia. As such, this study reflects a microhistory where the visibility and legal standing of Indigenous people shifted significantly in a short time period. When the first film came out in 1995, Indigenous people had barely started to gain a voice. Indigenous voices gained significant prominence during 2005, the year the second film came out and is the same year that Evo Morales was elected president. Given these important shifts in relative power and cultural representation, particularly as it relates to Bolivia's Indigenous population, this thesis aims to compare representations of religion in both time periods. Are there related stereotypical depictions of religious practices? In what ways do these films interpret how people have understood Indigenous appropriations of Christian

imageries into religious identity and religious practices? How has the interpretation of religion changed from the 1900s to the 2000s, and to what extent is this related to political changes in the country? How do the films represent the different religious practices? How do the films represent different stereotypes? What can one learn from the comparison between a documentary about Bolivia and a Bolivian fictional film? Most importantly, how did the political shifts that occurred in Bolivia during the 1990s and 2000s—especially those on Indigenous rights—affect the way in which Indigeneity and religious practices were represented and understood in each movie?

Nancy Postero (2017) argues that Bolivia's native people have endured many centuries of oppression as well as exploitation. During the colonial period, Spaniards prevented Indigenous people from cultural and political participation in colonial administration and national affairs. In 1825, white and mestizo political elites wrote the constitution, which ignored the interests of the Indigenous people who made up the majority of the Bolivian population.

During the 1952 Revolution, what is known as the Bolivian national project was created. The project was responsible for trying to help with the disappearance of Indigenous identity through mestizaje.[1] David Dalton depicts how Indigenous populations were contained through the usage of mestizaje within Mexico. Dalton (2018) argues that the state fetishized hybridity yet at the same time wished for both racial and cultural mixtures that came along from the mixture of Mexicans from different races and social strata (133). Within his work Dalton analyzes the way in which resistance was depicted throughout the usage of religious imagery within film, therefore showcasing another example outside of the Bolivian context in which resistance was used to

[1] Bolivia was not the only Latin American country to attempt to contain its Indigenous populations through mestizaje. For a discussion of how this played out in the Mexican context, see David S. Dalton (2018). Chapter 3 of this book focuses on resistance through religious imagery in film.

resist oppression. Dalton states that within the film *Rio Escondido*, the characters are formulated in a way in which they are made to assimilate to the patriarchal, mestizo order and end up submitting to the state and therefore allow it to heal them. Later on, within the film, the character who had assimilated ends up with "infirmities" which is where they start to resist the imposition place upon them and thus gain redemption for their actions (101-102). This assimilation into mestizaje took place over time in Bolivia based on the movements of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario also known as the MNR (Weston 1968, 87). The goal of the MNR was to create modernization and in doing so national integration. This integration included the erasure of terms such as "Indian" because of its bad connotation. One key event happened in 1952, when the Indigenous people finally achieved a semblance of citizenship after the Revolution (Weston 1968, 98). Carmen Soliz (2021) argues that the agrarian reform actually strengthened peasants' communal ties which led to them being able to secure their property and gave them the means to negotiate with the state (9). [2] The peasants took it upon themselves to move forward. Soliz states that while the government promoted the organization of unions, this actually led to peasants gaining more political control independently of the state's direction (81). This control gained led to the government's recognition of peasants' direct actions taken against the establishment of local authorities and how some had even bypassed the supervision of the state (82). In October of 1952 the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR), started to promote what they called the agrarian revolution, which involved the immediate distribution of lands. Through this "agrarian revolution" the peasants took it upon themselves to sabotage the constructive work of the government, this led to the decline in food production. With these revolutionary acts of resistance, the unions created food shortages for the coming two years and continued even

[2] Carmen Soliz (2021) has written extensively on the agricultural reform of the time period, which was key in extending citizenship rights to Indigenous Bolivians.

further to cause the pause on production, keeping their own goods to themselves, arming themselves and also by confiscating machinery (83-85) This action on their part demonstrated that they had their own political minds and thus led to them gaining more of a voice. Albro states that after the 1952 Revolution took place, it led to a recognition of the Indigenous people as fellow citizens (Albro 2010, 74-75). According to Albro, the Indigenous people acquired citizenship or what he refers to as "cultural citizenship" by gaining new rights due to the identity politics and struggles that occurred because of social movements. This cultural citizenship revolved around the placing of emphasis on recognizing Indigenous practices, thoughts, and contributions to the community. Official documents tended to refer to Indigenous Bolivians as "*campesinos,*" rather than as Amerindians. The revolution also gave the Indigenous people the right to vote, education, and land (Albro 2010, 75). Along with these rights, there was also a project of consolidation for Bolivia's identity that, according to Albro (2010), brought together class, ethnic, and regional distinctions under the umbrella identification of *mestizo.* Thus, the ideology of mestizaje was mixed with the extension of individual citizenship rights of the Indigenous people now known as *campesinos.* The government during this time believed that the *campesinos* or Indigenous people would set aside what Albro (2010) identifies as "collective cultural investments" in order to keep up with modernity's expectations. As such, it took away the people's original identity and gave them a new one (74; see also Albó 1996). What Albro means by this is that the community itself is trying to create a change together or collectively, in order to fit this ideal of modern society.

The era of neoliberal democracy began in 1985. In 1994 the government approved a new constitution that recognized the multicultural and pluriethnic character of Bolivian society. According to Albro (1996), Article 171 of the new constitution formally recognized the cultural,

economic, and social rights of Indigenous people in Bolivia (75). This, while helpful, was only a small step towards the acceptance of Indigenous identity. In the 1990s, Indigenous groups from the lowlands began marching in order to gain territory and dignity. One very important protest occurred in 1990 when 700 men and women from different lowland Indigenous groups walked 400 miles from Trinidad to La Paz. This march took 35 days and shook public opinion within the country. Known as the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, this movement resulted in Indigenous communities from nine regions receiving legal recognition. This march brought awareness about Indigenous concerns to Bolivian elites, and, as a result, Indigenous interests entered national politics. The government ultimately had no choice but to recognize the territorial rights of lowland Indigenous groups (Canessa 2006, 246).

In 1994, the Popular Participation Law was created which led to citizenship changes in the social and cultural landscape. This law allowed Indigenous people to have a greater voice at the local and municipal levels. It opened up doors to run for office or to serve as members of a committee that overlooked the municipal government work. This law recognized Indigenous local associations such as neighborhood committees, or agrarian unions. This law was a change from those that were created in 1952 because it offered legal recognition to different cultural identities, such as Indigenous, rather than classifying people only as *campesinos*. Even so, Indigenous people still lacked territorial rights, thus the marches continued.

These marches continued into the 2000s, when the rights of the Indigenous people started to change even more due to popular protests that went against neoliberal policies. Eduardo Silva and Federico Rossi (2018) define neoliberalism as a form of capitalism and reforms that are used to reorganize economic relations. The price system becomes the sole allocator of capital, labor, and land. Within this form of capitalism, the state and representative institutions, as well as

social policy, demand minimal interference with the market. Neoliberalism has changed Latin America a great deal, and many people have had to learn to adapt to these changes. When Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada first became president in 1993, he tried to use neoliberal reforms by opening up the markets to foreign investment (Postero 2005, 73). Lozada believed that this would make Bolivia more competitive within the global market. One of his reforms was the privatization in which state enterprises sold interests to transnational corporations, a process known as capitalization (Postero 2005, 73). Postero argues that the unpopular economic reforms passed by the Sánchez de Lozada administration were paired along with social reforms such as the Popular Participation Law and the Agrarian Reform Law and were meant to grant higher citizenship rights to the poor. Nevertheless, they usually excluded the Indigenous populations (Postero 2005, 74). Not only were Indigenous populations left out, but also the reforms did nothing to help change the colonial power relations between those considered elites and that 60 percent of Bolivians who considered themselves Indians. This led to a crisis that left the Bolivian people in poverty and desperation (Postero 2005, 74). These new reform policies and the neoliberal restructuring of laws affected the way in which the Indigenous groups within Bolivia were integrated into the state. Neoliberal reforms also led the state to abandon its Indigenous populations by removing material assistance that was previously offered to rural, predominantly Indigenous organizations (Postero 2005, 74- 81). During the reforms, the state also tried to facilitate what Postero (2017) refers to as profitable resource extraction schemes that ended up threatening Indigenous lands (82).

These protests eventually led to the resignation of Sánchez de Lozada. The protest that ended his tenure took place on October 17, 2003, when 500,000 protesters marched in La Paz. Vice president Carlos Mesa took over and announced that he would reconsider neoliberalism and

Washington Consensus policies. Eventually, in 2005, Bolivia elected a new president, Evo Morales, the country's first Indigenous president. Morales believed that there was a need for a new constitution and that this would be a step toward a decolonized Bolivia (Postero 2017, 1). Due to this, he opened up another way, another opportunity for Indigenous people to have a bigger voice and showed that Indigenous identity should be appreciated. The changes that occurred demonstrated that, despite attempts to erase them, Indigenous identities remained as strong as ever in Bolivia. Indigenous people continued to hold onto their beliefs, and they resisted attempts to divide them.

This thesis looks at representations of religion in two films that were produced at different moments of the aforementioned period of social upheaval. In both cases, Indigenous characters use their own personal ties to their faiths to undermine institutional religious dogmas that attempt to relegate them to the periphery. Film provides a valuable means for representing religious beliefs and traditions and showing how they interface with the political referent. Cinema, according to Walles Salles (2003), is the projection of cultural identity which ends up coming to life on the screen. Cinema, both fiction and documentary, portrays different facets of a given nation's history. Therefore, because of film's portrayal of people, cinema becomes a way of better understanding history and of experiencing the past. These films provide a vantage point through which we can see how Indigenous people can resist a type of spiritual conquest that has tried to impose Western culture and notions of Indigenous inferiority onto the masses.

The main contribution of this thesis is to compare strategies of Indigenous resistance in *The Devil's Miner* and *Cuestión de fe*. I mainly focus on the cinematic interpretations of religiosity and identity. The choice to analyze a documentary coming of age film alongside a road movie reflects a desire to look at differing strategies of cinematic representation. The

documentary mode provides an outside viewpoint that can prove invaluable when trying to comprehend national reality (Nichols 2017). We see this clearly in *The Devil's Miner*. The road movie, however, juxtaposes traditional representations alongside new images (Archer 2016). Ignacio M. Sanchez-Prado (2016) argues that typically road movies embody the symptoms of a society that faces conflicts with itself (53). This is especially true of the Indigenous cultures represented within *Cuestión de fe*. According to Verónica Garibotto and Jorge Pérez, the term road movie has been universally used as a metaphor that stands for "the course of life" (as quoted by Laderman, 2). Viewed in this light, while stylistically very different, road movies and documentaries both take great interest in questions of national identity.

Literature Review

This thesis draws on the fields of history, cultural studies, and anthropology to identify a connection between the interpretations of religiosity within Bolivian cinema. Ever since the first film was produced in Latin America in 1896, people have used cinema to negotiate historical and cultural trends in the region (Michael Chanan, 1996). This remains the case into the present, with the films *Cuestión de fe* (Marcos Loayza 1996) and *The Devil's Miner* (Kief Davidson 2005). This project focuses on the role of cinema as a social critique that showcases the tension between authentic, grassroots religious practices and the depersonalized institutional practices of the Church. Although I consult scholarships centered on various countries, the analysis focuses solely on Bolivia.

Not only does religion play a role within the films, but identity also plays a role. Andrew Canessa (2006) argues how the concept of Indigeneity has moved from a marginal political issue to one that became the center of attention. In recent years, Indigenous leaders have spoken of or

identified Indigenous identity as a key component to the Bolivian nation. Canessa finds that individuals express or embrace Indigeneity in different ways. That is to say, the practices and images are all taken differently depending on how a person understands or wishes to acknowledge the meaning behind the items or practices. Indigenous rights have taken on a key role, becoming an international language of sorts that can be used to speak on concerns about policies that affect Indigenous rights. Within Bolivia, Indigeneity is very well known and spoken about because of the fact that, for many years, contemporary Indigenous cultures were represented as anachronistic or out of place and time. Now, after many political changes, Indigenous people are finally seen as being part of the nation. Canessa thus speaks on this term of *Indigenismo* while at the same time focusing on the concept of Indigeneity and how it has changed politically, thus leading to a change in people's mentality or view on the subject (Canessa 2006, 241-263). Thus, this understanding of people's views on themselves helps define how they act within their religion and towards religious symbols.

In the films that will be analyzed, I focus on this aspect of religion. In these films, how do the natives, take what was taught to them by those who invaded their home, and use it as their own? In the case of *Cuestión de fe*, the people develop their own spiritual connections to the Virgin of Copacabana that transcends the institutionalized dogmas of the Catholic Church. They can thus express religious belief without necessarily accepting the idea that Western and mestizo individuals are more important than Amerindians. In the case of *The Devil's Miner*, the Indigenous miners in an Andean community turn to syncretism as a way to resist labor and resource exploitation.

Other important works consulted for this thesis are works by historians, as well as anthropologists that provide the basis to compare Bolivian religiosity as well as the

differentiation between the people and their beliefs. For instance, one work used to identify the term of "cholo" is Guillermo Nugent's *El Laberinto De La Choledad.* This work focuses on explaining cholismo and the role played by the people coming into urban settings. These cholos thus, bring their cultures into urban settings therefore leading to a mixture of beliefs. Another work consulted is the work by Soruco-Sologuren and Silvia Ximena called; *The city of the Cholos. Bolivia in the 19th and 20th centuries.* This work is used to focus on the differentiation of cholos and mestizos. This is necessary in order to better understand how the identification of people within Bolivia affected religious practices.

Methodology

The main sources used in this project are a Bolivian film (*Cuestion de Fé*) and a US documentary production that was filmed and set in Bolivia (*The Devil's Miner*). Analyzing two different cinematic works serves several goals in a multiplicity of ways. Firstly, it demonstrates the connection between the depiction of a domineering spiritual conquest—often represented by the Catholic Church and the clergy who make it up—that Indigenous actors resist through their own, more inclusive religious practices. Secondly, this comparison shows how Bolivian cinema and cinema about Bolivia showcases the role of religion both in oppressing Indigenous communities and in providing these people the tools they need to resist. Finally, and most importantly, it shows how the conquest manifests itself differently in Bolivia based on the different political contexts that took place from the 1900s to the 2000s.

The main connection between these two works is the fact that both show instances of syncretic practices developed by the Indigenous people of the Andes. This thesis shows how different people respond to Catholicism and how the Church plays a role in their everyday lives.

The two films also portray the characters within different stereotypes, and therefore this thesis will address how this affects the way the characters act and feel about religion. Loayza's work addresses how Indigenous people take Catholic religious imageries of the Virgin when Domingo treats his statute like a queen, thus making her the main focus of the film. Loayza shows how the main characters treat the image with care and love and shows other Indigenous people trying to take it as there is a belief of faith or power from it. Similarly, we see numerous cases of resistant religious practices in *The Devil's Miner*, which focuses on the syncretic practices of the miners in Cerro Rico in Bolivia. It shows how the miners and native people over time have combined with traditional Catholicism to produce something new. The Indigenous people create syncretic cosmologies in order to resist the reach of Catholicism and, especially, a dehumanizing capitalism.

This thesis will address the past with the present and spiritual ambivalence represented within the films. The point that the films make such as, the representations of religion and the depiction of them within two different perspectives will be a main focus. All of these factors will explain the relationship between the religion of the people and their cultures. Over the years culture has intertwined itself with the Bolivian people's beliefs and rituals.

Discussion of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I discuss *Cuestión de fe* by Marcos Loayza and argue that within his film he brings about an awareness of religiosity that provides a view of the way that religion was used as a means of both oppression and how this is seen and represented within Bolivian cinema. Veronica Garibotto and Jorge Pérez (2016), states that a road movie, which consists of a traveling narrative, has the main focus of crossing borders such as; physical, metaphorical and

theoretical. Thus, this leads to the reexamining of the ideological grounds of national and regional discourse. Within his film Marcos Loayza, showcases a traveling road movie, in which the characters are considered marginalized individuals. This film focuses on this aspect; of the representation of practices based on how people viewed Indigenous identity and how these views affected the way in which people interacted with religion and religious symbols. During Evo Morales reign, people's way of thinking changed, now someone in power proudly identified as Indigenous, thus this shows how political views also affected the way in which people thought and shows the way this influenced Indigenous views on religion, considering how many before held Western views on not just themselves but religion. This thesis will thus address the way that these mentality changes influenced the way that people occurred along with the different constitutions implemented that affected people's perspectives, and the depiction of these perspectives within cinema.

In Chapter 2, I discuss *The Devil's Miner (2005)* by Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani and I argue that it is based on syncretic practices from Indigenous cultures in Bolivia. The term syncretism is defined by Charles Stewart (1999) as a mixture of religions (41). As Marciano Adilio Spica (2018) notes, the syncretic practices of Latin America are very different from European Catholicism (236-245). This is because the beliefs and practices of native peoples have combined with traditional Catholicism to produce something new. Syncretic practices have become adapted to connect with the original beliefs of the Christian religion and the ways of life of those within the religion and have become a new way for the people of Latin America (236–45). This film focuses on different ways that the spiritual conquest has influenced people throughout Latin America. In countries where the institutional Catholic Church has been used to control Indigenous people, syncretism has been used as a form of resistance. Therefore, this

thesis will address the past, with the present, and the spiritual ambivalence of the miners of Cerro Rico.

The comparison between these two films is necessary in order to come to a better understanding of how religion is portrayed throughout film in Bolivia. By using two different perspectives I analyze the different identifications of people and the way that they adapted to religious oppression. Those within the mines blended their beliefs with older traditions while also adapting to the jobs placed on them. Those represented within the road movie resisted oppression imposed on them not just by Westerners but Westernized mestizos themselves. In analyzing both films, I discover the different ways that people within and outside of Bolivia see these religious practices and am able to identify the different political and mental changes that led to them.

Chapter 1: Representations of Religiosity in *Cuestión de fe* by Marcos Loayza

At the end of Marcos Loayza's *Cuestión de fe* (1995), people from the Indigenous community of the town of Santa Rita storm the house of Franz, a powerful, rich criollo man who has won a sculpture of the Virgin of Copacabana in a game of chance. They seize the figure for themselves, and one of their number confronts Franz, stating that the mob will not let him have the Virgin even if he orders his men to fire on them. Off in the distance, the ringing of bells announces a Mass. The Indigenous man tells Franz that the service will honor his "sensibility towards all the people of that town" if he lets them leave in peace. Franz decides not to stop them, and the people carry the Virgin away. The following scene shows people from the community engaging in a traditional dance to celebrate their success. This scene underscores how Indigenous people can resist through manifestations of faith that run counter to the projects of those in power. Throughout the film, we see a certain tension regarding religion: in some cases, it facilitates the continued oppression of Indigenous people; in other cases, it provides valuable tools for marginalized actors to resist attempts of domination. Certainly, powerful people use religion to control Amerindians throughout the movie. Nevertheless, they are only partially successful because Indigenous characters also appropriate the same religious symbols to a resistant end.

The film uses religion and religiosity to speak about a host of social issues within 1990s Bolivia. Andrés Tapia (2014) views it as the tale of a person keeping his faith within a country whose diverse population makes this difficult (96). As such, he views it as a film not just about religion but as a discussion of national identity more broadly. Carolina Sitnisky (2014) gets at a similar point when she frames the movie as a critique of the neoliberal Bolivia of the 1990s that disproportionately marginalized Indigenous citizens. Marcelo Báez Meza (2016) argues that, in

order to analyze the film, it is necessary to first focus on how it depicts cultural identity (21). The film criticizes the political-economic system of mid-1990s Bolivia that had expanded and led to a cultural homogenization that aimed to ignore or even erase Indigenous cultures (21). According to Haarstad and Andersson (2009), the decentralization reforms opened up for political participation (8). Due to this Andolina et al. (2005) argues that the Bolivian state redefined its national identity during the 1990s as a multicultural state, a fact that gave greater visibility to Indigenous people who had been largely ignored by official statistics that defined them in economic terms or as mestizos (qtd. in Haarstad and Andersson 2009, 8). During these years, Bolivia's neoliberal regime identified specific racial and ethnic categories in which Indigenous people would be represented. Medeiros (2001) states that this way of cultural identity was a way to try and civilize the popular (qtd. in Haarstad and Andersson). Thus, Haarstad and Andersson (2009) state that during the era of neoliberalism, indigenousness became a popular mobilization (8). *Cuestión de fe* speaks precisely to this point by showing Indigenous people who use popular religion to resist neoliberal attempts to define them—and even control them—from above through institutional religion.

A short plot summary will facilitate my discussion. The film centers on a "cholo" sculptor named Domingo, his Indigenous friend and assistant Pedro (Pepelucho), and a mestizo/criollo gambler named Joaquín. The film begins when El Sapo Estívar, a well-known drug lord, commissions Domingo to sculpt a Virgin for his wife's birthday party. The crime boss gives him twelve days to deliver the sculpture at a plaza located in the tropical Yungas region in the northeastern part of La Paz (Fabiola Fernández Salek 2001, 174). Accompanied by Pedro, and later Joaquín—a stranger who offers to drive them after learning that they have been commissioned to transport a Virgin through the jungle—Domingo must first search for a way to

sculpt the best Virgin possible. He asks a priest if he can borrow a sculpture of the Virgin in the local church, but the cleric refuses. Domingo and Pepelucho break in to borrow the Virgin long enough to make a replica; however, they end up being unable to use her and they return her to the chapel without being caught. Domingo later meets a woman on whom to base the Virgin's face and eyes. Joaquín buys a car on credit based on the trio's projected earnings for delivering the sculpture to El Sapo. Domingo asks the priest to bless the group and the Virgin with protection on their journey. Their first stop is at a small town where they meet another priest and a mayor who ask if they can purchase the Virgin to facilitate the mayor's reelection in the community. Domingo refuses because he has to give her to El Sapo. However, Joaquín convinces him to let them pay to use her for one Mass. Later on, when they have finally arrived at their destination of San Mateo, Joaquín loses the Virgin in a bet, and the film ends when the people storm Franz's home and claim the Virgin for themselves.

The Virgin of Copacabana: A Brief History

The film is about how the characters relate to the Virgin of Copacabana, an especially venerated and special saint in Bolivian Catholicism due to her history among the communities surrounding Lake Titicaca. The Spaniards used this region as a place for evangelization even prior to the creation of the Virgin of Copacabana. This was due to the fact that, in 1552, a decree was made by the First Council of Lima that stated that Catholic Churches be built in places that were formerly considered sacred by the Incas (Salles-Reese 1997). This was based on a program put in place to try and rid the Indians of idolatrous beliefs by supplanting them with the Christian faith. The missionaries believed that appropriating the Indian's sacred places was not the only goal but that the biggest goal was to impose upon them the Christian God and fealty to the

institutional Catholic Church. The image of the Virgin would play a central role in such projects. The Christians believed that if they placed Christian deities at those sites this would help the Indians gain a "spiritual" conversion, and this would eventually lead to them creating connections of similarities between the two religions (Salles-Reese 1997). Of course, this also meant that Indigenous people simply came to associate Catholic saints as a new face for their traditional deities. After a short period of time, local Indigenous actors fused her with Pre-Columbian entities.

The Virgin of Copacabana became especially important to the region—and later to the nation—as Indigenous communities came to depend on her for physical and spiritual aid during the drought of 1580. Local inhabitants decided to place their trust in God as they confronted the scarcity of water, sending their petitions to his mother (the Virgin) in hopes that she would get them through their struggles. They decided to choose the Virgin of the Candlemas as their patron saint, and Francisco Tito Yupanqui eventually sculpted her in the town of Copacabana, near Lake Titicaca. The people of Copacabana played a part in the creation of the sculpture by deciding what she would wear, where she was to be placed, and her size (Salles-Reese 1997). Verónica Salles-Reese (1997) argues that the decision by Indigenous peasants to create a patron saint for themselves underscored their need to participate in the religion that had been imposed on them. Indeed, they appropriated the new religion to their own needs and demonstrated their devotion on their own terms. Salles-Reese (1997) explains the devotion to this particular Virgin by observing that she has replaced—or been imposed upon—the ancient deities of the region. As such, she is now a new hierophany, or new divine manifestation, within the region of Lake Titicaca.

After some time, rumors began to emerge of miracles attributed to this saint. These

factors created the conditions under which this particular Virgin would become popular and adored by the people of the Andes, be they Indigenous, mestizo, or European (Hall 2009, 170). While she was originally referred to as the Virgin of Candlemas, this Virgin took on the name of Copacabana as she became explicitly associated with the physical space where she had been sculpted. While the Church did not originally consider her as a holy object, Indigenous Bolivians, and particularly the Yupanqui, fought to secure her place on the church's altar (Salles-Reese 1997, 19). They identified a connection between the two cultures when it came to the statue because of a sacred contact point that brought together Catholic and Pre-Columbian histories.

The Virgins' different representations led the natives to create a religious connection with her and the Pachamama which was an Andean goddess of the earth. This was due to the fact that both shared similar artistic space and were depicted as both being mothers of earth. Salles-Reese states that an exhibit at the Museum of the Moneda, located in Potosí, depicts both the Virgin Mary and the Mountain of Potosí as being one. The association between the two was created due to these underlying similarities and this later led to the image of the Virgin circulating around among the natives, a fact that led to orders being created in her name (Salles-Reese 1997, 30). This association of the Virgin with a goddess eventually led to her becoming a very important religious symbol to the people of the Andes. Linda Hall (2009) notes that the Virgin of Copacabana and the Lake Titicaca region were central figures during a 1781 Indigenous uprising against the Spanish (171-76). After seeing several Spanish men disrespected this Virgin, the local natives attacked and murdered the people who had acted rudely to their venerated saint. This act of violence underscored the subversive potential that the Virgin held to bring Indigenous communities together; many people's allegiances began with her rather than with the

Church, the Crown, or later, the state. For this reason, their devotion to her led to violence against the Crown that ecclesiastical leaders would have almost certainly discouraged. While it does not tell of a violent insurrection against mestizo or criollo oppressors, *Cuestión de fe* reverberates with this history of Indigenous resistance, on the one hand, and a colonialist Church and state that colluded against native populations, on the other.

Indigenous Rights and Religious/Cultural Identity

Loayza uses his film to bring awareness about the use of religion and religious symbols as a means to oppressing and controlling Indigenous people. The statue of the Virgin is the central focus, with Domingo and Pepelucho believing that she will grant them good luck while always protecting them from harm. Throughout the film, Domingo takes very good care of the Virgin, dressing her beautifully and even praying to her. That said, other characters, like Joaquín, who is more associated with whiteness and Western culture, act irreverently toward the Virgin, viewing her as the object of Indigenous superstition rather than as a figure worthy of his veneration. Indeed, Joaquín's attitude underscores one of the film's principal tenets: non-Indigenous characters tend to use religion not as a means to profess sincere belief, but as a way to control and coerce Indigenous people to do their bidding. In this way, characters like Joaquín and others use religious symbols to validate a structurally racist society were white and mestizo political elites have historically written laws and even constitutions meant to sideline Indigenous actors and voices in greater Bolivian society (Canessa 2006; Postero 2017).

In this way, the film enters into dialogue with a reality where, throughout the twentieth century, Bolivian elites tried to resolve the so-called "Indian Question" through *indigenista* projects meant to assimilate Indigenous communities to the state (Ladivar Mosiño 2014). These

led to projects aimed at consolidating a Bolivian national identity that, according to Robert Albro (2010), brought together class, ethnic, and regional distinctions under the umbrella identification of *mestizo*. During much of the early twentieth century, the ideology of mestizaje was mixed with the extension of individual citizenship rights to Indigenous people, whom the state referred to as *campesinos,* or *rural peasants*. In adopting race-neutral terminologies like campesino, state leaders hoped that they could encourage Indigenous people to set aside their "collective cultural investments" in order to keep up with modernity's expectations. As such, it took away the people's original identity and gave them a new one (Albro 2010, 74; see also Albro 1996). Of course, Indigenous people remained very present in Bolivian society, albeit with a different name. In 1994, the Popular Participation Law was created which led to citizenship changes in the social and cultural landscape. This law allowed Indigenous people to have a greater voice within the government. It opened up doors to run for office, or to serve as members of a committee that oversaw the municipal government work. This law recognized Indigenous local associations such as neighborhood committees, or agrarian unions. This law was a change from those created during 1952 because it offered legal recognition to different racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, allowing people to self-identify as Indigenous rather than classifying only as *campesinos*. *Cuestión de fe* forwards a similar belief by asserting an explicitly Indigenous presence in the rural highlands by following the trio on their journey.

At the same time, the film troubles simple distinctions between Indigenous and mestizo. We see this clearly with the cases of Domingo and Pepelucho, both of whose ties to Indigenous identity make sense when we view them through the lens of "cholismo" or "choledad". Writing from the Peruvian context only a few years before *Cuestión de fe* came out, Guillermo Nugent (1992) defined *choledad* as a mindset adopted by and toward people of Indigenous descent who

move to urban areas for work or other reasons. Rather than adapt to city life, cholos bring their supposedly backward, Indigenous culture and mannerisms with them to an urban setting. In the film, the characters most closely associated with cholo identity are Domingo and Pepelucho, while Joaquín more closely resembles a more Westernized mestizo. The ethnic distinction between the first two and Joaquín manifests itself in two ways: firstly, Domingo and Pepelucho endure a great deal of discrimination and infantilization from mestizo characters ranging from the priest to Joaquín himself; secondly, Domingo's relationship with the Virgin is one that eschews cultural and religious domination in favor of a more personal connection that often undermines both state authority and the institutional authority of the Church. Both of these conditions associate him with Indigenous/cholo–rather than mestizo/Western–society and culture.

An early scene from the film highlights how Domingo's association with cholo identity undermines his access to an array of religious–and even social–privileges. Shortly after El Sapo contracts him to sculpt a Virgin for his wife, Domingo approaches the local priest while mildly under the influence of alcohol. When he asks the priest if he can borrow the Virgin in the local Church to create an exact replica that he can take to the festival in San Mateo, the priest flatly refuses and accuses him of being up to no good. These actions clearly speak to attitudes that have long castigated Indigenous Bolivians for supposed immorality that stems from a supposed susceptibility to alcoholism (Burman 2014, 249-50). Because of these supposed spiritual shortcomings, the priest interacts with Domingo in a paternalistic way, giving him a small postcard promising that, even if his sculpture does not look like the Virgin at first, it will after it is blessed. Unhappy with the priest's dismissal of his request—which carries significant ethnic undertones—Domingo ultimately decides to break into the

church and steal the Virgin long enough to make a copy. Interestingly, he puts money in the offerings box even as he takes the Virgin. Clearly, he recognizes that what he is doing could be perceived as wrong by Church officials, and he eases his conscience by making an offering. While this scene shows that he recognizes the Church's legitimacy, particularly as it relates to determining a person's sinfulness, it also emphasizes his agency. In refusing to allow the Church (symbolized by the priest) to withhold him from access to the Virgin, he demonstrates that his personal, spiritual connections to the Virgin trump the demands of any institutionalized religion. In so doing, he establishes a pattern that manifests itself throughout the film: Indigenous people can resist marginalizing discourses from both secular and religious society by reappropriating key religious symbols to their own needs.

Indeed, while Loayza plays the scene where Domingo pays his offerings in part for comic relief, I argue that it also demonstrates his devotion to the Virgin of Copacabana, a feeling that goes much deeper than his commitment to the institutionalized Catholic Church itself. Lynette Yetter (2017) argues that Indigenous people in the Andes have a special devotion to the Virgin of Copacabana that comes from a history where this deity provided them food and rain where other saints, like Saint Ann, had failed them (8). While Domingo is more precisely culturally cholo than highlands Indigenous, he has clearly brought this devotion to that saint with him through either his own memory or through ancestral memory. Viewed in this light, Domingo's decision to pay the Church prior to sculpting his own Virgin of Copacabana could be seen as an investment. His payment justifies his actions, and he believes that the Virgin will bless him by satisfying his material needs after he shows his devotion by sculpting her as beautifully as possible. Certainly, Domingo also believes that spending this money will absolve him of any sins he may have inadvertently committed by attempting to steal her from the Church building.

He holds the priest in high esteem but he resists attempts to limit access to the Virgin by Indigenous people like his friend, Pepelucho, and by so-called cholos like himself.

Cuestión de fe as a Road Movie

After the scene in the Church, Loayza articulates his critiques of the religion-based exercise of power through the devices of the road movie (see Tapia 2014, 96). Road movies focus on a journey—usually in a car—that focuses on how the act of traveling changes the protagonists. That said, the significance of these movies tends to run much deeper because they center on characters who travel throughout their country and interact with locals from all over. In this way, such films frequently reexamine national and/or regional discourses within a specific country (Garibotto and Pérez 2016, 4). Furthermore, because these movies center on people who travel in motor vehicles, they tend to both reflect and negotiate discourses of modernity (Gariboto and Pérez 2016, 18). We see this clearly in *Cuestión de fe*, where access to cars comes to constitute class- and race-based privilege. We see this clearly early on, when, instead of purchasing a car of their own that they can use to deliver the Virgin, Domingo and Pepelucho turn to Joaquín, a shady mestizo whom they have never met before. For whatever reason, they do not consider themselves capable of driving the Virgin on their own, a fact that highlights their subservient position toward Joaquín within society. Indeed, Joaquín lacks the funds to purchase a car as well, and he ultimately buys a truck with credit based on the promise that he will earn money after selling Domingo's Virgin to El Sapo. Viewed in this light, the film suggests that, far from being rooted in reality, Indigenous and cholo inferiority complexes tend to empower non-Indigenous, Westernized actors despite the fact that they depend on the very Indigenous people that they exploit to validate their own power.

Many characters, Domingo included, view religion as a means to ensure that more powerful individuals treat them with greater respect. In one scene, for example, Domingo says, “Ahora sí nos tratarán como personas al vernos con la virgencita.” As the character implies, if they did not have the Virgin, then nobody would pay any attention to them due to the combination of poverty and Indigenous/cholo identity. Meza argues that the film advocates for a new system that respects Indigenous sectors of society by focusing on the characters’ journey. Crucially, its pro-Indigenous discourse goes far beyond simply the dialogue and also includes a validation of handicrafts, folklore, and religious rites (22). Not surprisingly, then, the film shows numerous instances where Domingo’s sculpture of the Virgin of Copacabana interfaces with different mestizo and Indigenous segments of rural Bolivian society in different ways. Beyond simply depicting people from different sectors of society, the film also uses Domingo’s sculpture of the Virgin to highlight the interethnic power dynamics that exist in the country’s highlands. Throughout their journey, the trio meets people who both believe and do not believe in the Virgin of Copacabana. Indeed, more Europeanized, mestizo characters constantly use her to control native populations and take advantage of Indigenous fealty. At the same time, the Indigenous characters of the film show their own autonomy by worshiping her in ways that go against established structures of power.

Once again, we see this clearly with Domingo. His devotion is not explicitly political, but it creates a space for him to build an identity that exists outside of the institutionalized Catholicism associated with state power. At one point, he speaks to the statue and states “Mamita, vas a ver qué linda te voy a dejar. Todas las demás virgencitas te van a envidiar.” For instance, this specific example shows the different ways in which people can take a religious

belief and think differently about it. Domingo truly believes in the *virgencita*, he trusts in her and he believes her to be almost human-like. Domingo cares for her so much, while his friends and companions do not seem to care as much. Despite his clear veneration of the Virgin, Domingo does not reflect the notions of traditional morality that the Catholic Church expects from its adherents. In one scene, for example, he brags about having built the most beautiful Virgin of all while at the same time attempting to seduce his waitress. Clearly, he articulates his faith outside of the confines of organized religion and the institutional Catholic Church, a fact that provides him a great deal of personal satisfaction in his life. Other Indigenous characters express differing degrees of veneration and ambivalence toward the Virgin throughout the film.

The mestizo character, Joaquín, of course, uses the Virgin throughout the film as a source of money and influence. Joaquín represents what Tamayo (1975) refers to as the ideal mestizo (see also Sologuren 2006, 106). Tamayo's ideal mestizo is also his ideal human, whom he states is created in anticipation of life's relentless struggle, which is a struggle that revolves around personal interests, and a struggle in everything. Sanjines (2000) states that Tamayo's ideal mestizo represents a national metaphor in which Western intelligence is intertwined with what he refers to as the energy of the earth. Therefore, Sanjines believes that Tamayo's ideal mestizo had the muscles of the Indian and the head of a white man (see Sologuren 2006, 106). Thus, Joaquín as this ideal mestizo believes himself above the others and uses the Virgin as a tool that can be used to gain money and in doing so he exercises his power as a westernized mestizo over the others. This belief in the ideal mestizo is an imperialistic construct. Edward Said (2014) states that there is a unified discourse created through imperialism and this is due to the crisscrossing of ideas between Westerners and natives (109). Due to this, Loayza critiques this construct by separating Joaquín from his companions as the character that believes himself to be

too good to be Indigenous. The film does this by portraying him as a gambler, avaricious, uncaring and arrogant. The ideal mestizo portrayed within this film does everything for money, even when the Virgin does not belong to him, he invites himself on the trip after hearing money is involved and he is willing to sell and/or gamble the Virgin in order to gain riches. Although Joaquín attempts to deny his heritage with ties to the Indigenous Loayza shows Joaquín indigenous heritage towards the end of the film when he decides to use a dice that has been blessed by a priest in order to win the Virgin back after having gambled her. This depiction of the ideal mestizo has western ideals, tries to hide his heritage but is eventually unable to do so because he is and will always be part of the Indigenous.

According to Burridge (1969), religion has been combined with money and is a signifier of Western domination (as cited in Parry 2000, 238). Sánchez-Albornóz (1978) argues that in the 19th-century Andean republics that formed used liberalism as their doctrine and this doctrine attempted to break up the Indigenous communities (as cited in Parry 2000, 238). Sánchez-Albornóz (1978) states that the goal was not only to break up the communities but to dissolve the communal lands and, in their stead, place a regime of individual private property (as cited in Parry 2000, 238). This explains why the character Joaquín cares only for himself and uses his Westernized views of religion to his own advantage. Various scenes show that Joaquín only cares about his money and that he uses the Virgin for his own selfish gains no matter the beliefs of others. He constantly uses the Virgin as he pleases even though he did not create her nor does she belong to him. On many occasions, he acts deliberately against Domingo's wishes in scenes that bring to mind the racial hierarchies of Bolivia.

One key scene happens shortly after the trio arrives at their first stop, a city in the highlands. The mayor of Santa Clara, Dr. Chávez, and the local priest approach them and request

that they sell them the Virgin. The two together state that they are willing to pay what is needed and inform Domingo and Joaquín that they are trying to establish a popular participation policy. Carmen Medeiros (2001) states that the popular participation law passed in 1993, was meant to help enlarge the powers as well as the autonomy of local governments within municipalities and thus it promoted the participation of the communities (402). Therefore, this law is why the mayor, and the priest are trying to set up this policy. Although this is meant to help the Amerindians be seen and have more of a voice within their governments the priest and the mayor are trying to take advantage for selfish gain. The mayor wants to have more people vote for him and is using the Virgin in order to gain votes, while the priest is in it to gain donations and also have connections within the government. Through this policy they are trying to establish, they also hope to reach sustained development in their region. They offer 15,000 in exchange for the Virgin and hope to use her in order to influence the people of the town. They want to control the Indigenous people with a religious symbol that will lead them to follow not just the Catholic Church but the mayor as he is a political figure. Although they are unable to get the Virgin they do end up "renting" her for one mass. In this example, the priest is the mestizo, and he seems to be working with the mayor of the town to enact this control over the townspeople. Joaquín and Domingo fight over this encounter because based on Loayza's portrayal of the characters, Domingo believes the Virgin to be a sacred symbol, one that needs to be worshiped and Joaquín sees the Virgin as a monetary gain that he can use. This is due to Loayza's representation of the characters as westernized versus more Indigenous. Joaquín is portrayed to have more westernized concepts of religion while Domingo has a more cholo mentality and believes that figures such as the Virgin are sacred and must be respected and adored.

According to Nicole Fabricant (2012), government policies that occurred during the 1950s denied the migrant laborers of the time and access to land that favored the capitalist entrepreneurs, and this was intensified by the racial hierarchy of the time that took place in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Fabricant states that white and mestizo elites, on the other hand, held onto regional, economic, and political power. This caused them to reinforce strict labor codes based on race, class, and geography (3). In another example, Fabricant (2012) tells the story of a young Colla migrant who speaks about the Santa Cruz discourse of autonomy or self-government which she states lead to the promotion of a model of economic development (167). This migrant talks about the differentiation between what in Santa Cruz is considered a "Noble Savage" and a "Nasty Savage." This differentiation causes a divide between the lowlanders and the highlanders, as one is considered good and the other bad. Due to this differentiation between the people, many mestizo youths have started to attack anyone who dresses in a pollera or looks like an Andean Indian (Fabricant 2012, 167). Fabricant calls this a politicization of indigeneity and states that this creates a new open canvas for a new native narrative to be created. This autonomy is similar to that portrayed, of the priest and the mayor in this scene. They are depicted in a manner that shows that they believe themselves above the people and are therefore using the Virgin for their own gain.

By bringing religion to the Indigenous people, the mayor and the priest believe that they will lead the local Indigenous population to be lifted up in the social hierarchy and therefore be more on their level of social status. Ninco Tassi (2010) speaks about the Fiesta del Gran Poder in Bolivia in which the cholos created unorthodox practices to celebrate the festivity. Thus, due to this, the Catholic Church stated that cholo communities had overshadowed the real religious motives behind the celebrations because of these Indigenous practices. Tassi (2010) argues that

due to this the Catholic Church adopted strategies to try and restore the festival back to its original Roman Catholic beliefs. The Catholic priest in this scene thus is trying to use the Virgin in order to bring more to the conversion of the Catholic church. The mayor on the other hand in helping is publicizing himself as a benevolent follower who is trying to help and will therefore gather more people to vote and support him as mayor.

Perhaps the scenes that most clearly show how mestizo characters use the Virgin to further their own financial interests are the ones where Joaquín uses her for financial gain against Domingo's will. In one scene, he uses her as collateral for a cockfight and he almost loses her when his bird starts to lose. Domingo intervenes by killing the other rooster; however, the group has to flee the town when angry gamblers chase them out, even shooting at them and hitting the Virgin with a bullet. Not only does Joaquín not care about risking the lives of his traveling companions (if they lose the Virgin then El Sapo may be angry), but he shows that he is the one who gets to make decisions about how to use Domingo's creation. If he thinks he can make money off of her, then he tries to do so. If this means that he may squander Domingo's work, money, and time, then that is of no concern to him because he feels superior. Joaquín shows this attitude throughout the movie, never learning or admitting his faults. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Joaquín finally loses the Virgin to Franz in a game of poker at the film's end. The consequences for Domingo with El Sapo are never discussed, but they cannot be good for him.

The way that Joaquín interacts with the Virgin is interesting to note because of the fact that religious symbols have been used by many as a means to oppress others as well as a sign of resistance. Lori Beaman (2015) argues that religious symbols, such as the Virgin, for some, may signify comfort and security and for others, it may be a painful reminder of abuses that have been

suffered or been oppressed too (104). Wati Longchar argues that due to the fact that Indigenous people have been subjugated, oppressed, killed, and been unjustly treated therefore Longchar brings up Indigenous theology. This Indigenous theology leads to what he calls a collective Indigenous theology to resist and becomes a method of defense against oppression (113). Joaquín's actions show why a collective Indigenous theology is necessary by emphasizing how his actions hurt Domingo and other native characters throughout.

Joaquín's actions within the film set him apart from Domingo as a more Westernized mestizo. He is characterized in a way that shows that he believes himself to be the one who can do the oppressing by using the Virgin in whatever way he pleases. He believes himself to be above the others because according to Ximena Sologuren (2006) he denies any connection to indigeneity. He believes himself to have become assimilated into the western society and therefore believes himself to be above Domingo who is cholo (15), and Pepelucho, who is cholo or even Indigenous. Sologruen (2006) argues that because of the differentiation mestizos, such as a mestizo who is western and a mestizo who identifies as cholo, the one who identifies as Indigenous, around the western mestizo, will therefore maintain a stigma of inferiority (15). A cholo in this instance would be someone who is also superior to an Indigenous person but lower than a mestizo because of their connection to their Indigenous roots. According to Isabel Scarborough (2019), the oppression of Christian beliefs onto the Indigenous people was a mechanism that was used in Latin America by the Spanish Crown in order to get rid of what they considered to be idolatrous native beliefs (76). These beliefs thus became syncretized with Catholic orthodoxy and continued to survive in a new, modified form for centuries (Scarborough 2019, 76). This modification of religion is what eventually led to people using religion and religious symbols for both oppression and resistance.

Conclusion

Throughout the film it is shown that Marcos Loayza used his film to try and represent the religiosity within Bolivia, he intended to distinguish between the resistance as well as the control of the Bolivian Andeans. He used the Virgin within the film in order to try and depict the symbolic meanings that are held by the people and show that Bolivia is made up of a mix of different cultures, not just one. From there, he shows the similarities and differences within the religious context that are found among these different peoples. While some hold religious symbols such as the Virgin Mary to be sacred, others believe her to be valuable mostly as a way to make money. Thus, his film brings awareness to the ways in which the Bolivian Indigenous people use religion and religious symbols as a means to resist the oppression of Westernized cultures within their own country. The film also shows that not only can religion be a form of resistance, but it can also be a form of oppression. This religious oppression is witnessed throughout this movie in the way that the characters not only view the Virgin but associate her with daily life. The main characters play an important role within this context as each support either oppression or resistance.

His film depicts not just the symbolic practices and connected beliefs of the people of Bolivia but the ways in which the government marginalized them and thus created a differentiation of not just categories but religious beliefs between mestizos. Marcos Loayza brings about a representation of the people's voice by showcasing their beliefs within his film. As such, he shares his vision on the representation of Indigenous religious resistance and control. He shows the influence of the time in which he filmed. Characters like Joaquín, for example, show insights into the minds of many within the mestizo population, who classify themselves as Westerners who are somehow superior to their Amerindian counterparts. This classification and

differentiation are something that I found throughout this film. It leads to many different views that allow us to glimpse into the minds of the Bolivian Andean people, albeit through the lens of representation by Loayza, himself a mestizo filmmaker who is sympathetic to Indigenous peoples and causes. His film portrays the daily struggles faced by Indigenous people and shows the everyday cultural appropriations taken by the different classifications of mestizos.

This work set out to analyze the way in which Loayza showed his portrayal of the mixture of beliefs held by mestizos and Indigenous Bolivian people. This chapter focused on showing how the Church and religion can shed light on power structures within the country. Westernized characters within the film utilize the symbols of the Church, and particularly the Virgin, to control the Indigenous populations of Bolivia. At the same time, Indigenous characters adapt religious symbols and forms to their own culture, thus using it in a way that resists Westernized attempts to control them through faith. Loayza uses three characters: the mestizo Joaquín, the cholo Domingo, and the Indigenous Pepelucho to show these power dynamics. My paper discusses the symbolic power of the Virgin Mary, especially the Virgin of Copacabana, who stands as the main religious symbol for the people throughout the film. This analysis shows more than just the control imposed on the Indigenous people through religion. As mentioned previously, the final scene of the movie–where the Indigenous people of Santa Rita seize the Virgin for themselves–shows that these Indigenous characters can use the religious symbols of the Virgin and the Church to stand against racial and ethnic discrimination. The film thus provides a nuanced take on the role of the Church both in constructing power and providing avenues for resistance in mid-1990s Bolivia. In the next chapter I discuss how U.S.-based directors Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani later identified a similar resistant potential in Indigenous religious practices in their documentary *The Devil's Miner*, which focuses on

discussing religious syncretism in the mines of the Andean highlands. I discuss that case in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Indigenous Syncretism in Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani's *The Devil's Miner*

This chapter will use works by scholars, historians, and anthropologists that have explored religiosity in Bolivia and the connection between Catholicism and the Indigenous religions. I will use an array of sources to analyze how the US documentary *The Devil's Miner* (Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani 2005) depicts syncretic practices from Indigenous cultures in the Bolivian Highlands. As such, this chapter discusses a depiction of syncretism that is shown through the lens of non-indigenous people. Davidson and Ladkani focus primarily on Basilio Vargas, a young boy who works every day in his job in the mines of Cerro Rico. Through these means, the director communicates the story behind the religious and syncretic practices of both the people who work in the mines and those of the people who work on the outside. The documentary uses Basilio as the main protagonist and tells his story from the perspective of the director. The director uses the boy as the main lead because he works within the mines of Cerro Rico, which means that the overall film comes from the viewpoint of an outsider looking in. The audience gets the perspective of someone who does not relate to the indigenous people, but who learns about the syncretic practices that occur within the mines. *The Devil's Miner* depicts syncretic practices from Indigenous cultures in the Bolivian Andes that represent strategies for resistance against a capitalist system that exploits Indigenous labor in the mines for economic gain. The portrayal of religion through the eyes of an outsider but the usage of the story of someone within the community gives a depiction of how the Andean people view religion and have over time adapted their religious practices.

Charles Stewart (1999) defines syncretism as a type of acculturation, a mixture of religions. He argues that syncretism is a term that describes the way in which cultures conduct

themselves throughout time. In simpler terms, Stewart is stating that cultures adapt and hybridize over time (Stewart 1999, 41). In many cases, the resulting belief systems come to look very different from the original sources. As Marciano Adilio Spica (2018) notes, for example, Latin American Catholicism tends to be very different from European forms of that same religion (236-245). This is because the beliefs and practices of the native peoples of the region have combined with traditional Catholicism to produce something new. This holds particularly true in the Bolivian case, where the traditional beliefs of the Indigenous peoples of the Andes have mixed with Catholicism to produce new ideas and cosmologies that speak directly to their local context. When looking at the people of Latin America, specifically those in Bolivia, we notice that native cultures have played a major role in the region for centuries. Passed down from generation to generation are the stories as well as the ritual practices of the ancestors. In the past, many people started to work in the mines. The film depicts the religious practices of miners in Bolivia, juxtaposing native rites with those of more traditional Catholicism. In order to address this film, I will discuss the historiographical and anthropological studies about the region to contextualize the contemporary religious practice in the Andes. Afterward, I focus on the connection between traditional cultures and cosmologies with Catholicism in the present day.

In order to understand *The Devil's Miner*, we must first understand both the concept of spiritual conquest and the strategies that Indigenous people employed to create their own, resistant belief system by combining elements of Catholicism and their own, traditional religious practices. In countries where the institutional Catholic Church has been used to control the Indigenous people, syncretism has emerged as a tool for resistance (Lambropoulos 2001, 221-235). Instead of giving up their own religions in the face of aggressive missionary efforts,

Indigenous people throughout Latin America created religious practices that mixed Catholicism with their traditional religious practices. Religion thus became one of many things that people adapted to both in their cultural practices but in their daily lives. Local religious practices have evolved over time as those who practice them have faced new circumstances. Combining Indigenous or folk religions with Christianity has led to the creation of different religious practices. In *The Devil's Miner*, Indigenous people employ forms of syncretism that date back to earliest days of conversion and the resistance of the Imperial economic order. Viewed in this light, the miners depicted throughout the film participate in a tradition of resistance that dates back nearly five hundred years. Rather than conform to what is demanded and placed upon them, the people intertwine Catholicism with their ancestral beliefs and practices. This in turn creates a version of the religion that belongs to the people themselves. Indigenous communities never fully accepted the doctrines that conquerors imposed upon them. As they blended their own religious beliefs, they created syncretic forms of faith. These syncretic practices created the means through which people could create their own religious identities outside of the structures of an organized faith. While syncretism can occur among people of many social classes, it is especially valuable from an analytical standpoint when we use it to understand how people from Indigenous communities can create their own meanings through religious blending that allows them to resist the dogmas of colonization. The terms of spiritual conquest and syncretism relate directly to the Bolivian context. The country's flourishing, pre-Columbian societies prior to the arrival of the Spaniards had to negotiate their traditional beliefs with the Catholic teachings that conquering forces imposed upon them. Viewed in this light, syncretism is the fusion of two, often-contradictory religious traditions, often connected through supposedly profane ways. Those who believe in this fusion of religions would not see it as being profane but those who are

at the top of the institutional religions may see it as dangerous or as heresy.

The documentary focuses on a community in the Bolivian highlands where the myths, religious practices, and rituals of the local, historically colonized population have intertwined with Catholicism. The film provides a unique perspective of these Indigenous people's lives precisely because Davidson and Ladkani present it through a US lens. Having a director that is not from Bolivia facilitates the production's heavy focus on the syncretic practices and cultures that exist within the region, because of the fact that he has a different perspective of the rituals and practices being used. This outsider's perspective allows the director to see the practices for what they are, that is, that they are different from original Catholic practices and instead a mixture. Catholicism is one of the two pillars of syncretic beliefs in Bolivia, where Christianity arrived along with Spanish conquerors. In the case of the Bolivian Andes the Indigenous worshippers reconciled the demands of Christianity with their traditional religions by incorporating traditional deities into the pantheon of Catholic saints. In this way, they could stay true to their own beliefs while at the same time adhering to the demands of the Catholic Church (Bonilla 2006, 336-342). This happened within the Bolivian Andes, where the people believed in earth-based beings such as the Pachamama (Abercrombie 2016). Cadena (2015, 202) states that this faith, this language of religion, in sacred mountains and spirits, has become a powerful tool that enables cohabitation between worlds. She states that these earth-beings within the Andes emerged not just from Indigenous religious beliefs mixing with Catholic beliefs or from ancestral spirits that inhabited the mountains but from what she refers to as *in-allyu* or clan. Thus, according to Cadena, conversion mixed with opposition to conversion is what led to the creation of these beliefs (2015, 208).

Catholics believed in the saints, which were people that had done miraculous deeds while

alive and were then believed to be holy. Indigenous Bolivians adapted both beliefs into a syncretic combination of Indigenous and Catholic religions. This practice, according to Walsh-Dilley (2019), is what led to the start of the Catholic saint festivals becoming incorporated with the rituals of thanks to the Pachamama (510-512).

Earth Beings and Saints: An Overview

In Bolivia, the combination of earth beings with Catholic saints is a syncretic combination of Indigenous and Catholic religious forms. Thomas Abercrombie discusses these syncretic manifestations at length in his article, "The Iterated Mountain: Things as Signs in Potosi," which focuses on explaining how the Indigenous peoples of the Andes were coerced into wage labor by the Spaniards in order to produce mineral riches for the Crown. He focuses primarily on Potosí because this is where these economic practices first originated. Abercrombie's article thus focuses on showing how the people of Potosí adapted to the practices of the Spaniards by adopting syncretic practices that allowed them to maintain certain elements of their traditional beliefs. This, in turn, sowed the seeds of resistance against the Crown and the economic order that it imposed upon them.

To the Indigenous people of Bolivia, the mountains are known as q'ullu or cerros. They believe that these land formations have bodies consisting of heads, shoulders, and so forth. The mountains become almost human due to the frequency of their interactions with the local inhabitants. Due to these beliefs, the people give the mountains names based on each formation's qualities (or *qualia*). Mountains in Bolivia provided many with property or food and therefore were considered to be almost family. Because they provided these goods for the local inhabitants, the mountains of the Andes get their names from the people. For example, they call

Potosí White Nose. White Nose was the name given by the Mamanis which belonged to a group known as the K'ulta. These were the first inhabitants of this part of the Andes, and they were also the earliest people that we know of to refer to Potosí as an Earth Being. Prior to the arrival of the colonists, the Mamanis herded animals such as alpacas. The Mamanis saw the mountain as a male being. It was a shepherd (*uywiri*), which even for them was rare as they only addressed very few mountains. According to Abercrombie, the mountain was not exactly sacred (90). Rather, it was a provider of life because it provided resources and shared a common space with the people. The mountain thus became known as an earth being because it helped the people with their productive processes, such as death, food, and living. The Mamanis eventually formalized these sacred places by transforming the mountains into a sort of idol. The people believed that White Nose not only nurtured them but that it also provided for them through its immortal body. Abercrombie compares the K'ulta practices with the practices of immaterial spirits such as a Christian God or Catholic saints like the Virgin. The practice of Christianity within the mountains led to an intermingling with Indigenous beliefs; local communicates came to associate the mountain with the saint San Antonio (Abercrombie 2016).

In pre-Columbian times, the Incas used the mines of Porco near Potosí as a means of income. The people labored on and in the mountain to extract silver, which they used to make ornaments and temple decorations. After the conquest, the Spaniards used the mines to enrich the Spanish crown, and they forced the newly conquered Indigenous populations into wage labor to extract the precious metals from the earth. Thus arrived the name "Blood Mountain," which derives from the term "*Willa Q'ullu*" (roughly translated as Money Mountain). Even the Spaniards saw this mountain as an earth being, a provider of wealth and treasures (Abercrombie 2016, 88). After taking power, the Spaniards destroyed the idols that corresponded with local

deities and imposed Catholicism in their stead. In order to carry out their spiritual conquest, the Spaniards placed saints in every colonial town. Syncretism began to take hold as Spanish practices fused with Andean practices. This was especially clear in those instances where the earth beings were transformed into patron saints. The Catholic Church has long held that saints can miraculously appear anywhere, and the Mamanis adapted such beliefs to their own cosmologies (Abercrombie 2016). This practice of replacing the earth beings with saints was a conversion tool used by the Spanish in order to try and convert the Mamanis. Abercrombie (2016) focuses his research on how these conditions led to an intermixture of Spanish and Indigenous beliefs. Instead of abandoning their past beliefs, the Indigenous peoples of the Bolivian highlands have adapted and created their own version of saints that they associate with different Earth Beings.

Horacio Bonilla discusses a similar case: that of El Tío, a being who I discuss in detail in a subsequent section. Bonilla argues that the Indigenous people of the Andes adapted syncretic practices and thus combined the Catholic practices with theirs. In some cases, they even created demons like El Tío, a deity of sorts who, many believe, lives within the Bolivian mines. The people offer him sacrifices in exchange for protection. Bonilla (2006) argues that the concept of the Tio and earth beings reflects the principle of dualism. The Mamani believed in a world consisting of three integrated planes. These planes included the world above, the world below, and the world that all humans inhibit. It was in this world where the earth beings served as divinities. There was also a creator who lived in the heavens. He argues that it is based on a spatial dimension of Andean cosmologies that created these myths that existed from Inca origins. Thus, everything created had an origin and was later adapted by the syncretic practices of the Indigenous people located in the Andes of Bolivia. They took the beliefs and stories and

created these mythical identities that became historical in a way. This connection happened after the Conquest when the Spanish took over the land and used Indigenous deities and belief systems to coerce the newly conquered population to work for the Crown. The Spaniards carried out the spiritual conquest to ensure Indigenous obedience; however, they ended up creating conditions that allowed for the advent of syncretism, which was often resistant. It allowed Indigenous actors to reject Spanish control while at the same time holding onto familiar cultures and beliefs (Bonilla 2006).

Sabine MacCormack (2006) argues that these deities exist as idols. This creation of idols, who are representations of gods, and who can also become manifestations of deities, has existed since the Inca invasion of the region. Indigenous practitioners would give these idols offerings of gold and silver at statues in their chambers. When the Spanish asked about these gods, the natives spoke of the healing powers and other benefits that these gods bestowed upon them. The conquerors believed that the devil spoke to the Mamani through the idols to demand gifts and offerings. As such, they determined that these gods were idolatrous obscenities. Spaniards were given crosses to protect against their seductive evils (MacCormack 2006, 623-627).

The Spanish took it upon themselves to “save” the inhabitants of the Andes and to try to destroy the Andean idols, shrines, and holy places. These locations and deities were to be replaced with Christian, and particularly Catholic, saints, symbols and figures. This was due to the fact that the Spanish believed the Indigenous deities to be demons doing the devil's work. They believed that this demon pretended to be a God in order to sway away and misrepresent to Andean worshippers the God of the Spanish conquerors. MacCormack explains the story of Sairi Tupca who was the son of the great Inca Guayna Capac who decided to leave a retreat he had to

undergo in the forest in order to become a Christian. This was due to the imperial sanctuary of the deity known as the Inca Sun whose temple was turned into a church for Dominican friars. The story goes that people believed that he actually adored the images and devoted himself to the holy sacrament of Christianity, not for the Christian God but simply because that is where previously his deity had been located (MacCormack 2006, 642). This is just one example of how Christianity intermixed with Bolivian beliefs. Another story states that, while many became Christians and the villages observed the Christian holy days, the people still held festivals for Andean deities (MacCormack 2006).

This analysis of different literatures helps better understand the history that revolves around the people of the Andes. It gives an overview of how the syncretic practices first started and developed overtime. The belief in gods and idols led to the creation of syncretic Indigenous religious figures, thus leading to the practices that the miners adapt within the film. The next section will thus analyze the film itself and the practices that are seen within *The Devil's Miner*.

Syncretism and Resistance in *The Devil's Miner*

Many of the Indigenous people of the Andes continue to believe that nature is animate, an idea they have merged with Catholic beliefs and the worship of saints. In Catholicism, saints are believed to intercede between God and the people. This is similar to Indigenous beliefs surrounding the animate aspects of nature, particularly the idea that mountains can be gods or that the ground or the sun could be entities of greatness. Each of the aforementioned forms of nature provides the people with everyday necessities like food, warmth, and a place to live. The Andean Quechua, as described by Marygold Walsh-Dilley (2019), created festivals that celebrated Catholic saints alongside Earth Beings like the Pachamama, a goddess of earth. These

festivals came to produce a type of interculture manifested in religious hybridity that reflects larger portions of cultural hybridity (Walsh-Dilley 2019, 503). While the people of the Andes have a mixture of beliefs, their religious practice largely diverges from the teachings of the institutional Catholic Church, which has different policies and doctrines that are not syncretic with Indigenous teachings.

The Devil's Miner takes place in the silver mines on Cerro Rico, located in the city of Potosí. The mountain plays an important role in the syncretism of the people of the Andes. The mines have long been an important source of income for the people, and they have also become a symbol of nature. As such, the mountains of Potosí became deities for the local population. The film takes place in a mine on Blood Mountain. This mountain has a colorful history that is tied to heavy mining. In 1580, Jesuit priests discovered that the Mamanis had created a temple for a devil in one of the mountain's many caves. In order to stop the worship, the clergy placed a statue of Saint Bartholomew—a saint famous for conquering devils—in the cave. Popular tradition holds that a demonic creature fled the cave at that moment, leaving a burn mark to scar the entrance (Abercrombie 2016, 94**;** Arzans de Orsúa et al. 1965, 40). However, the devil did not leave the mountain entirely; rather, he fled to the mines. Far from resolving the threat of the devil, then, the clergy simply displaced him. Mamani miners continued to take precautions against his wrath as they worked to extract mineral wealth from the mountain. On the anniversary of the Devil's expulsion from the cave, the people march through the city toward the chapel that holds both the saint and the devil within (Abercrombie 2016, 94; Arzans de Orsúa et al. 1965, 40). The film depicts a different devil, El Tío, but this entity is rooted in the original devil mentioned above. Both demons hold important meanings in Andean life.

The Devil and El Tio have many similarities. According to Darren Oldridge (2000) in the

early seventeenth century the Devil was described and depicted as a horned man that had cloven feet who held his arms out in the shape of a bird's wings (232-233). This description is similar to that of El Tio, a fact that suggests that the Devil and El Tio are two mutually constructing symbols within the Pachamama culture. Oldridge (2000) continues on to state that the Devil was described as a liar, one who took delight out of luring men and women with the promise of wealth and pleasure (233). El Tío in the Bolivian story is also described as being the one in charge of the mines, which is where the Indigenous people first went into in order to gain riches. Both versions of this being symbolize the syncretic practices that have occurred in time. These beings in their own way hold great importance to the people who follow these beliefs. The Devil and El Tío both play great roles in the lives of those who believe in them as they help people to gain riches. Although there are more similarities, these two mentioned above are important for my discussion of the syncretic practices in the mines.

At the entrance to the mines sits the sculpture of El Tío, a dark figure with black nostrils and a body adorned with jewelry. Seated on a throne, hands wide open for offerings, his knees bent at an angle and on his feet, he wears mining boots. His erect penis emphasizes his great strength: he rules the mines, after all. Just like the figure of Pachamama who is an earth being, El Tío is also seen by the people of Cerro Rico as a deity. As long as the people give him offerings and venerate him through acts of piety, El Tio will protect them. If they fail to do this, he can bring harm to them by killing them or refusing to protect them from harm during their grueling, dangerous work in the silver mines. Thanks to El Tío, the people of Cerro Rico get riches such as silver and tin. According to their syncretic beliefs, all of this started with their ancestors thanking the gods. The People of the village are Catholic, but they still stick to the ways of their ancestors as over time the two traditions, those of the Spaniards and those of the Indigenous people, have

been melded together into the people's own understanding of Catholicism. On Tuesdays and Fridays, the miners offer coca leaves, cigarettes, and alcohol to El Tío (Bonilla 2006, 336-342). Then, on the evenings of the first of August, the miners hold a toast known as k'araku, where they sacrifice a lamb or an alpaca and smear its blood on the mine walls. This is a great example of the syncretic practices and the similarities between Catholicism and the Indigenous beliefs. The sacrifice calls to mind the biblical account of the Passover, where the Lord told Moses that on the tenth day of the first month of the year, every family should get a one-year-old fully healthy male lamb, keep it until the 14th day of the month and then slaughter it in the twilight of evening. After slaughtering the lamb, they would mark the doorposts of their homes. If they followed this ritual properly, then they would be spared when the Angel of Death stormed across the land, taking the firstborn from every household (Exodus 12:1-20). In *The Devils Miner*, a similar practice is done especially when workers complete their work in a particular mine. Similar to the Israelites in the Bible, they do this to ensure their physical safety. Of course, in sacrificing an alpaca, the people sacrifice an animal that is native to Bolivia

In order to face the devil of the mines, the workers believe they must first go and pray to God and ask for his intervention so that they can receive the strength necessary to face El Tío. This drive to attend mass is especially interesting given the pagan nature of El Tío; why would Bolivian miners feel the need to turn to the Christian God to protect themselves against a monster that should not even exist according to Catholic doctrines? The answer lies in the syncretic nature of Indigenous spirituality in the country that ties these religious traditions together in fascinating, contradictory ways. The syncretic nature of the practices lies within the incorporation of the Christian saints and these earth beings. The need to turn to the devil in the mines stems more from the fear of dying and being hurt while working inside of the mountain.

The Christian God protects them from everything outside the mines, but he seems to have no jurisdiction within their workplace. In orthodox Catholicism, people attend mass and pray to saints to request intercession, help, safety, or protection; the saints do not supplant God, nor are they seen as deities themselves. In the folk Catholicism of the people in *The Devil's Miner*, the practice of praying to saints has been incorporated into the earth beings. The saints take on a more godly nature as the people pray directly to them and, crucially, the earth beings whom they represent. That said, the people still maintain certain boundary lines. For example, although offerings are given to El Tío, some believe that kneeling to him is sacrilegious (Nash 1972, 221-33).

The film talks about two young miners: 14-year-old Basilio Vargas and his 12-year-old brother, Bernardino Vargas. They work in the mines of Cerro Rico. The two children live with their mother and little sister at the bottom of the mines with no father to provide for them. The documentary tells the story of the boys and the life of the miners within Cerro Rico as well as the happenings within the mines. Some 8 million workers have perished in the mines of Bolivia since the sixteenth century. The film is thus, a coming-of-age film, which is defined by Alistair Fox as a film genre that revolves around a character that goes on a journey of self-discovery (2017, 5). According to Fox (2017) a coming-of-age film has typical situations such as the one present within *The Devil's Miner*, which is the experience of growing up within an Indigenous culture (5). This type of genre typically explores a type of growth that includes mature awareness and that is exactly what Basilio Vargas goes through in the telling of his story. Basilio throughout the documentary explains his work, his life and his religious practices, which in turn showcases his self-discovery and awareness of his religiosity. The documentary focuses on the Indigenous practices within the mines as well as the children's daily lives. In each mine, the

children see statues of El Tío, who guards the mines and the workers. Although the people of Cerro Rico are Catholic, they believe that, within the mines, God has no reign; they have entered the underworld domain of El Tío (Davidson and Ladkhani 2005). Because of this, only El Tío can protect them from harm when they enter his territory. The film explains these traditions and the audience is introduced to the customs by Basilio who explains that, in order to live another day, the devil/El Tío must be honored. A miner states, "When we leave our house, we cross ourselves, and ask God that nothing happens to us. Outside we believe in God who is our only savior. But when we enter the mines, things change." Clearly, the act of working in the mines changes the cosmological conditions that miners face.

Similar to how the Mamani conflated Earth Beings with Catholic saints, they also fused the underground, demonic creatures of their Indigenous cosmologies with the devil of Catholicism. There have been various incarnations of this figure over five hundred years of contact. El Tío and supaicha huacin are only two of the various Indigenous versions of the devil. The people of the mines have known of this creature as a God or a spirit since the time of their ancestors. The legend states that the miners were the first to encounter the devil as the people were digging into its home, an act that angered him. The people believed him to be a god who decided if they found riches or if they died in a mine collapse. As such, they began to appease the supaicha huacin by giving offerings and treating him with respect. For example, they began to refer to themselves as his *sobrinos* (nephews), a fact that led them to eventually call him their uncle–hence the name El Tío (Lecount 1999, 238-39). As time has passed, the stories have changed. Nevertheless, the core elements remain the same: the mines are ruled by El Tío; the Devil will harm the mines—and the livelihood of the people—if they decide not to appease him. El Tío has every right to be angry because miners have invaded his home. In order to ask for his

forgiveness—and earn the right to work in his mines without incident—they will honor him as a God when they enter his domain. In order to do this, the miners must fulfill all of El Tío's demands.

The film shows how the miners participate in the old customs of honoring El Tío. One interesting part of the film is how it depicts children attending Catholic services in the morning and then killing an animal as a sacrifice for El Tío/the devil later on. The priest is shown in the film explaining how and why the miners don't just stop coming to church. He says that the miners fear the God of the Spaniards and that is why they go to church even if the Catholic Church believes that it is wrong to worship El Tío. I believe that the priest is wrong in this perspective as the miners do not simply attend mass out of fear; rather, they have syncretic religious views that permit the Christian God and El Tío to coexist. The priest, after working with the people of the Andes for so long has come to understand their syncretic practices, thus, he has come to realize that the reasoning behind their combined beliefs comes from their own history. Therefore, he tries to explain how and why they disregard orthodox Catholic rules. Certainly, the people engage in a type of worship that runs counter to many of the most sacred tenets of Catholicism. In sacrificing the animal, for example, they ignore the idea that Christ represents the final sacrifice. In acknowledging the power of El Tío, and especially in striving to appease him, they seem to break the first and second of the ten commandments, both of which forbid people from worshiping or making offerings to any other gods (Exodus 20:3-5). Nevertheless, these divergences from institutional Catholicism have their roots in the contact between Christian and Indigenous cosmologies that dates back to the earliest days of the contact period. While the actions of the people may appear contradictory to the priest, they are the result of a complex cultural process that came about as two very different, often incompatible,

worldviews collide, thus forcing people to make sense of both.

We see this especially clearly regarding the ancestral custom of giving offerings to the God of the mines. The miners interconnect Catholicism and traditional beliefs through Catholic and native rituals as they honor those non-Christian deities. The people of Cerro Rico believe that this way they are protected by each of the gods. According to Taussig (2010), the transformation of Christian mythology in the Indigenous culture happened as a result of spiritual conquest. While European Christians viewed the devil as a symbol of evil, Indigenous people used that same figure to focalize their suffering as people oppressed by the Spaniards (180-181). Indigenous people thus subverted Christian symbols and used them to decry their subservience to the Church and Spain. In so doing, they created a syncretic set of beliefs. Taussig (2010) also states that the miners created the cult to El Tío in order to promote an identification of sorts and to represent what is good and what is evil (176). Unlike the Church, which viewed good and evil as black and white, miners were more concerned with whether divine actors would hurt them or protect them. El Tío, for example, could protect the locals from outsiders. The Mamani worried less about whether or not El Tío was good, and instead focused on the fact that he could do favors for them if they pleased him. El Tío's help would have been especially useful during the Conquest, when Indigenous people were forced into hard, manual labor—generally in the mines—by the Spaniards. Of course, the interconnection of religions was also a way for the people to come to terms with the imposition of a new belief system while still rebelling against their oppressors. In this way, syncretism provided a way to connect the new order to the old (176-179).

While this chapter has primarily focused on the differences between Catholic and Mamani religious beliefs and practices, there are certain areas where institutional Catholicism

and traditional beliefs coincide. For example, at least five hundred years out from the original point of contact, both religious traditions uphold strict demands regarding gender roles in society. We see this clearly in the case of El Tío, who does not like women. He hates to have them in his presence, and he refuses to have them in his home. This belief contributes to a context that allows only men to work in extractivism; the male miners forbid women from ever entering the mines because they fear the wrath of El Tío. The people believe that if a woman were ever to enter El Tío's home, the miners would be punished by losing the precious silver and tin veins that provide them with subsistence (Lecount 1999, 239). In the film, this is something brought up by the children. As the men of the house, they are expected to work in order to help feed their mother and younger sister, neither of whom has access to the mines and the riches it produces. As the mother is unable to work in the mines the two children must take it upon themselves to do so even though they still have to go to school. Viewed in this light, current religious beliefs about gender have played a key role in the continued exclusion of women from the workplace. Equally problematic, it has laid the foundation for a system that pulls young boys out of school and forces them to work in the mines at a young age, something that happens with some frequency when a father dies in the mines at a relatively young age. Given the scholarship that tends to equate syncretic practices with resistance, it is important to note that syncretic beliefs can also have negative effects on their believers.

According to Lambropoulos (2001), syncretism entails resistance and protest towards not just outside forces but local authorities (230). Lambropoulous argues that due to this, syncretic combinations are open-ended, thus the practices can go either way. What he means by this is that practices can either be adapted, fused or altogether dropped. He states that syncretism in this aspect can remain in what he calls a hostile symbiosis state or a creative state, thus it can either

be integrated, assimilated or acculturated, that is unless the people choose to dissolve it.

For many years the Andes have been full of the beliefs of the ancestors, the traditions and cultures of those who came before the people of Bolivia now. These traditions have been passed down to those who are still living. Over the centuries, these traditions have morphed and changed into present-day practices. Prior to the conquest, the beliefs of the Andean people were based around traditional cosmologies. After being forced to accept Christianity, the people did what they could to preserve their beliefs and create their own version of Christianity that respected and incorporated the cosmologies of the people who had lived in the region for milenia. These actors did not deny their traditional beliefs but incorporated them into the new ones that were imposed upon them. Whether out of belief, fear, or protest, the people of the Andes held onto their ancestral beliefs even as they converted to Catholicism. As they remember traditional deities like El Tío, the people of Cerro Rico continue the practices of those who came before. In order to stay alive and do whatever it takes to live and see another day they will honor all the Gods as their ancestors did and stick through to their own beliefs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani's *The Devil's Miner*, showcases how syncretism was used in the Bolivian Andes as a form of resistance by the Indigenous people. *The Devil's Miner* itself represents the depiction of syncretism from the perspective of a non-Indigenous individual. The film shows how religion was used to keep Indigenous people in the mines. After analyzing the various literatures as well as the film itself, I found that the imposition of religion on the Indigenous people is overt in *The Devil's Miners*, and the documentary displays the various ways in which the Indigenous people of Bolivia have taken Christianity and

adapted it into their everyday lives. Made by the Spaniards to work in the mines, by the usage of spiritual conquest, the Mamanis created a version of Christianity that mixed with their own beliefs. This paper finds that the people of the Andes, while trying to resist the dogmas of conquest created their own intermixture of religions. This is shown within the film, and the way that the directors take their outsiders perspective and input it into their work is visible. As it is a film created with a different perspective, it appeals to a US audience as well. The visibility of this is shown in the way that the directors focus on not only children the most but also their education. The main focus, while it is religion, has other factors, such as education, living conditions etc. and these affect the syncretic practices. This effect in turn creates a film that pulls at the heartstrings while also attracting the attention to the focus of syncretism. Syncretism, thus, is seen to be the connection between the practices and the cultures.

Conclusion

Ever since Contact Period, Indigenous people have fused the figures of Pachamama and supaicha huacin with Catholic figures and practices. As seen in Chapter 1, these figures played an important role in the construction of the Virgin of Copacabana, while Chapter 2 showed syncretic practices and beliefs as they related to El Tio. Clearly, the Indigenous peoples of Bolivia have taken the religion imposed upon them and created a unique set of religious practices that allows them to express their needs. Directed during different moments of social upheaval, these films represent how different political referents affect the way others portray race, religion, and ethnicity, this thesis has extended the scholarship of religiosity by showcasing how the directors of both films depicted religious practices among Indigenous and Indigenous-descended populations. Despite the fact that the two films are different, both converge in their understanding of religion and indigenous identity. The people of Bolivia took the religion that was imposed upon them and in order to resist created their own mixture of practices. They learned to adapt to the new conditions given to them in order to survive. *Cuestión de fe* and *The Devil's Miner* point toward the relationship created between Indigenous and Spanish practices. Together, they consider how the different peoples of Bolivia learned to adapt and why they adapted the religious practices that they did. For example, both films show how two very distinct religious symbols were taken and connected through Indigenous religious practices. *The Devil's Miner* and *Cuestión de fe* focus on telling the story of the Indigenous people and the role that religion played within their lives. This thesis argued that religion was used as a means to both resist and control the people and that this resistance and control can be seen within films. I therefore analyzed how the practices of the people were depicted by the directors within the films. To prove my argument, I focused on the different representations of stereotypes and how

these affected the way in which people interacted with religion and religious symbols. I also analyzed the important shifts in relative power and cultural representation, within Bolivia's Indigenous population, and therefore compared the representations of religion within the time periods of the films. The politics of the times influenced the way that people not only saw religion but ethnicity and race, and this gave way to the stereotypes that were witnessed and depicted within the films. The different time periods paved the way for Indigenous voices. From having no voice to gaining more rights when Evo Morales came to power in 2006. This rise for Indigenous voices, is seen within the portrayal of the characters within the two films.

This first occurrence of the Indigenous Bolivian adaptation of both beliefs into a syncretic combination of Indigenous and Catholic religions was seen within the coercion of the Indigenous people of the Andes into wage labor by the Spaniards in order to produce riches for Spain. Over time, the people evolved. Originally oppressed by the Spanish, they adopted syncretic practices as a form of resistance to the spiritual paradigms that their colonizers imposed upon them. As we have seen, Horacio Bonilla (2006) has argued that idols, gods, and other figures from Andean cosmologies represented the principle of dualism. Christine Beaule (2016) defined dualism as a type of worldview that divides cultural phenomena into two parts. Dualism usually involves simple conceptual divisions such as corporeal and spiritual worlds or elites and commoners. Within some cultures, dualism may involve the division of communities, geographic space, or realms of activity into two differentiating halves (Beaule 2016, 605–06). For Bonilla, this dualism was based on the world appearing in three different planes that were integrated. The planes were based on the world above, the world below, and this world, in which the Pachamama or earth beings were the divinities of the land and then there existed the god above or the creator. Bonilla argues that a spatial dimension of Andean cosmologies had created these Incan myths.

Thus, everything created had an origin and was later adapted by the syncretic practices of the Indigenous people located in the Andes. The Indigenous people took the beliefs and stories and created these mythical identities that became key components of their imagined history.

The fusion of Indigenous and Spanish beliefs happened after the Conquest. The Spanish often used native deities or beliefs to coerce the Indigenous people into working and obeying the Crown. This, of course, led to oppression. In order to fight back, people from Indigenous communities created syncretic practices that resisted the imposition of the new religion and, more importantly, the systems and beliefs that justified Indigenous servitude. The Spaniards used religion as a form of oppression in order to get the Pachamama to listen, but syncretic practices were instead created that turned into adaptation and resistance. Syncretic practices in this example are religious practices that have adapted to create a blend between Western and Indigenous practices. Therefore, these practices used over time were adapted in order to survive, resist, and oppose discriminatory authorities. Taken together, this led to a blend of cultures and beliefs (Bonilla 2006). Each of the films discussed in this thesis wrestle with the legacy of the aforementioned history.

In the US documentary *The Devil's Miner* (Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani 2005) I found that Davidson and Ladkani depicted syncretic practices that the native population had adopted in order to resist the capitalist system put in place to exploit Indigenous miners by forcing them to work within the mines, thus risking their lives for the gain of foreigners. The film revolved around the portrayal of religion through the eyes of an outsider. I analyzed *The Devil's Miner* because it provided a new perspective into a story told by a child who worked in the Bolivian mines. This Indigenous child, who was a member of the Andean community, was able to tell his own story in a way that seemed to transcend the nationality of the director. By

using the child miner as their protagonist Davidson and Ladkani imparted on the audience the ability to see the character's story while being told from their perspective. This unique perspective allows the viewers to witness the syncretic practices and learn from Basilio Vargas about how people have adapted throughout time.

Through the analysis of *Cuestión de fe* (1995) by Marcos Loayza, I analyzed the tension that revolves around religion. The film both facilitates the continued oppression of Indigenous people yet also provides marginalized actors with valuable tools necessary in order to resist attempts of oppression. Throughout the film people of power or higher status use religion to control Amerindians. Through the analysis of this film, I bring awareness to the ineffectiveness of oppression. The futile attempts of the Spaniards to impose religion on the Indigenous people is due to the fact that Indigenous characters appropriated the same religious symbols imposed upon them as a form of resistance. This resistance is witnessed throughout the film within the character's journey. Their journey portrays the characters' interactions, beliefs, and emotions that revolve around the Virgin of Copacabana. The role that the Virgin plays in the character's journey is what is used in order to analyze the film's portrayal of religiosity. By offering a close reading of these two films I have shown that so much can be learned about religion through film.

Future research on the subject of religiosity within Bolivian films needs to look at the role that people have in creating, interpreting, and (re)fashioning religious symbols. This work focused on the impact that religious symbols have on people, but future researchers could analyze the role that people play in creating these religious symbols. Clearly, people are, themselves, important players in creating, sharing, exporting and internalizing religious discourse. Syncretism is the terminology that was created to interpret the mixture of cultures and practices. Yet what needs to be looked into is how do the people themselves help to create these

practices. While oppression helped lead to the creation of these practices, how did people themselves push for these creations? Just like in the Bible, in Exodus 23, the people asked Aaron to create a Golden calf to appease their need for a god. The people wanted someone to lead them, therefore they chose to create a god out of gold. This creation of a god is similar to that witnessed within Indigenous religions and syncretic practices; the people themselves choose to create these adaptations of religious practices not always doing it because of resistance but for need or want. Future research needs to look into this practice of creating idols simply for the want.

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