

National, Cultural, and Linguistic (In)Securities: Perceptions of the United States in Some Bolivian Films

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Resumen

Este ensayo realiza un acercamiento a la percepción de los Estados Unidos en el cine boliviano. Primeramente trata las percepciones mutuas tanto de los Estados Unidos como de Guatemala en películas como *El Norte* (1984) de Gregory Nava y *The Silence of Neto* (1988) de Luis Argueta, en tanto que éstas ejemplifican la relación entre cultura, lengua y otras marcas de identidad. El ensayo continúa analizando películas bolivianas tales como *Sangre de Cóndor –Blood of the Condor–* (1969), dirigida por Jorge Sanjinés y *Chuquiago* (1977), a cargo de Antonio Eguino; también se discuten películas como *El coraje del pueblo –The Courage of People–* (1971) y *El enemigo principal –The Principal Enemy–* (1973), las cuales destacan la perspectiva del pueblo indígena.

Estas realizaciones cinematográficas se examinan aquí no sólo en términos de su contenido, sino también con relación a su desarrollo y post-producción, la cual tiene lugar fuera de Bolivia –ya sea en los Estados Unidos, en Europa o en Argentina– puesto que el país mismo está enfocado más bien en la exportación de materias primas que en el desarrollo de la industria cinematográfica. En la opinión de Sanjinés, Bolivia se encuentra en esta posición debido a la explotación de los Estados Unidos.

El ensayo busca mostrar las razones por las cuales Bolivia continúa siendo un país en el que las percepciones de los Estados Unidos –visto como un país materialmente rico, pero espiritualmente pobre y emocionalmente vacío– permanecen intactas y cómo estas opiniones aseguran un “sentido de pertenencia” (*sense of place*) para los bolivianos.

The most common and most consistent perception of the United States in Latin American film is of a country materially rich, but spiritually poor, emotionally empty in one way or another. In many films only one of these poles might be represented or elaborated narratively, the other only in a *mise-en-scène* which critiques the dominant discourse. Or the influence of the U.S. might be only peripherally

alluded to; its values, perhaps, overlaid on those with great and opulent wealth in the city where the film is set. Before I move on to my main focus, Bolivia, I'd like to begin with two features which delineate U.S.-Guatemalan relations, both partially funded by Sundance's Latin American program, and both available – as the Bolivian films are, sadly, not – on video or DVD: Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1984), and Luis Argueta's *The Silence of Neto* (1988), Guatemala's first feature film.¹ Although these films are somewhat more recent than the Bolivian examples I discuss later, they illustrate several important, recurring themes as they uncover the relationship between culture, language, and various kinds of security. Like Bolivia, Guatemala experienced a revolution of sorts in the early 1950s and has an especially high indigenous population, largely excluded from power. In both countries, the army has played, periodically, a significant role in government and has acted to repress Indian communities.

This, indeed, is how *El Norte* begins, tracking brother and sister, Enrique's and Rosa's flight from military attacks on their village, their attempts to cross the Mexican border into the United States, and the tenuous life they eventually establish in Los Angeles. The U.S. is known in the indigenous Guatemalan village, through old *Good Housekeeping* magazines, as a place of electric light, flush toilets and sparkling kitchens filled with labor-saving gadgets. We see how the evenly and coldly-lit bright white kitchens of *Good Housekeeping* contrast with the luxuriant, saturated color of warmly-lit rooms, filled with family life, which we encounter at the beginning of the film.² Of course domestic life is threatened in a horrendous way in

¹ The relationship between the United States and Latin America in terms of cinema is, obviously, an unequal one – as would be true of the relationship between Hollywood and almost any regional or national film industry. The recent commercial success of some Korean cinema, challenging Hollywood's grip on sections of the Asian market, is, evidently, highly unusual. In the Americas Hollywood holds sway. Lists of movies screening in La Paz or Cochabamba, Bolivia's biggest cities, often consist of the latest U.S. releases – or, more likely, perhaps, those a few months old Stateside. By contrast, trying to find Latin American films in the U.S., especially with English subtitles, is difficult. Teaching courses in “world cinema” – basically that which is not from Hollywood or Europe – I find tracking down cinema from other parts of the Americas particularly frustrating. Works by Jorge Sanjinés, the extraordinarily innovative Bolivian director, whose films, frequently attacking U.S. Imperialism and its facilitation by the Bolivian elite, were a high-point of radical Latin American cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, are almost absent in the U.S. now. (I discuss his *Blood of the Condor* later in this essay.) In recent years the diversity of South American cinema available through New Yorker Films, one of the primary sources of prints for many university screenings in the U.S., has sadly diminished. Its only Bolivian film print – Antonio Eguino's *Chuquiago* which I discuss below – is now unavailable. Two Chilean films by Miguel Littin – attempts to make the history of his country at least a little more visible – have disappeared. Indeed films from the major industries of Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, and Mexico constitute the only representation of Latin America in the catalogue.

² When Enrique and Rosa finally reach a safe motel in Los Angeles, they are shown into an appallingly dirty kitchen, quite different both from the one at home and the pictures in

war-torn Guatemala where Enrique's and Rosa's father is murdered and their mother taken away by the army.³ Still, the family is also under attack, materially and spiritually, in the U.S. To get there, brother and sister must sacrifice their mother's jewels in Tijuana in order to fund their trip across the border. Once in Los Angeles, Enrique, desperate for work and encouraged to disregard his family ties in favor of his own individual well-being, is almost ready to leave his sister alone to die so as to pursue a green card and the sense of security that has been denied him both at home and in the United States. This replaces his earlier depiction as an idealistic naïf who will earn good money in the U.S. and return with his gains to his village. His loss of values is portrayed – in the words of a motherly Mexican character – as being a sickness worse than his sister's: "Rosa may be dying, but you are already dead."

The second time we see images of the United States in the film, it is the cars, lawns and neat houses of suburban L.A. or San Diego, presented, safe and secure, in contrast to the dereliction of Tijuana. This montage takes place immediately upon Enrique's and Rosa's arrival in Tijuana and is represented as a visualization of the (empty) promises of the *coyotes* who await the buses from the South in order to exploit the desire to move to the North. The activity of lawn-watering for show is perhaps the most prominent image in this montage of the well-kept house and lifestyle. The final shot in the sequence shows a revolving sprinkler, part of a series of circular and circulating motifs which runs through the film, and seems designed primarily to reflect an indigenous sense of community and continuity foreign to the northern neighbor. But where are we to locate these images? Enrique's and Rosa's notions of the north are not so well-formed. The images are conjured up by words that come, indeed, directly from the *coyote*, represented visually by beginning the montage with an extreme close-up of the rapidly talking mouth.

The manipulation of language has already played a role in Enrique's and Rosa's odyssey. They have been instructed by a worldly-wise, U.S.-experienced fellow-villager, to swear like Mexicans, and will, indeed, soon use this tactic with U.S. Immigration (*La Migra*) in order to be returned to Tijuana, rather than Guatemala, after they are caught attempting their first border-crossing. Later, in Los Angeles, Enrique – now Ricky – works in a high-end restaurant, called "The Princess" in contrast to the retired *coyote's* Tijuana eatery named "*La Población*." (The film's reflection of a class-based hierarchy of language – Indigenous-Spanish-English – is here extended by the fact that the menus at The Princess are printed only in French.⁴) In the meantime Enrique and Rosa begin to learn English through the L.A.

Good Housekeeping. Nevertheless they do have both electric light and a flush toilet and, quite problematically, are apparently delighted enough with these conveniences to overlook the dirt. In any case, Rosa soon has their living quarters both shining clean and distinguished by the addition of some brightly-colored cloths, symbolic of their family and village.

³ The Guatemalan military government was, of course, strongly supported financially and logistically by the U.S.

⁴ Cf. Ilan Stavans's work on hybrid languages and on language acquisition by immigrants, for example in his memoir *On Borrowed Words* or in his study of *Spanglish*.

public school system. Scenes of English language classes are common in films which reflect on relations between Latin America and the United States, as new or prospective immigrants or elites learn the language of the dominant hemispheric power. Enrique's improving English gives him the chance to move up at work but also elicits a few words of jealousy from a fellow, Chicano, worker who calls *La Migra* on him.

The control and interpretation of language is equally significant in *The Silence of Neto*, set in 1954, which uses the central presence of the radio to show the war of words that accompanied U.S. threats to Guatemalan democracy on behalf of the United Fruit Company. We hear President Arbenz's resignation speech and are constantly reminded that to stay silent is to acquiesce, yet such silence, we understand, has been deeply ingrained in the culture by history. The film begins with Neto listening to the World Series on the radio – the first thing we learn from it is that 1954 is “the moment of truth for the Cleveland Indians.” Not just the *Cleveland Indians: The Silence of Neto* delineates the same ethnic/linguistic power-structure as *El Norte*, one in which Indians have little stature or security. In response to a casually slung racial slur – “dirty Indian” – a schoolboy is admonished (or instructed): “in this country *everyone* is Indian.” At Neto's swanky school, meanwhile, English is a prominent focus, with the girls being taught ballet in culturally prestigious French. After Arbenz's resignation Neto's father loses his position in the government bureaucracy – while Neto loses his girlfriend, and also his teacher. The latter is replaced by a “stuffed-shirt” instructor whose orientation is distinctly towards the North. Alongside the Guatemalan flag is unfurled a huge, new map of the U.S. so that the students can recite the capitals of the states, pointed out in alphabetical order. Neto remains silent, however, his non-participation signifying a refusal to play this new game. The scene demonstrates amusingly, if somewhat unsubtly, a view of Central America as periphery to the North. The superior significance of the United States and its geography is echoed elsewhere in the film: while we at one point witness an anti-U.S. demonstration which includes placards with such slogans as “Yankees go home,” Neto is frequently seen sporting a New York Yankees baseball cap, a striking reminder of the game we are watching in this film between Yankees and Indians.⁵

Bolivia, too, has been the setting for showdowns between Yankees and Indians in which individual, cultural, and linguistic securities are at stake – as they continue to be today – and this condition has formed the basis for many of the films, as well as the theoretical work, of Bolivia's best-known and most important film-maker, Jorge Sanjinés, who consistently foregrounds Indian experiences. Often defined as the poorest country in South America, Bolivia also has the highest percentage Indian population: although ethnic boundaries are increasingly fuzzy, close to two-thirds of a population of around 8 million are indigenous. The Aymara and Quechua communities of the western highlands or *altiplano* are the most substantial and coherent

⁵ In the 1954 Series the Indians are playing the National League New York Giants rather than American League rivals, the New York Yankees.

ethnic groups and their languages the most spoken other than Spanish. It is in these communities that Sanjinés and his Ukamau group made the films which place him at the heart of “third cinema”: a group of loosely connected films made in many parts of the less industrialized world, but most clearly epitomized by the Latin-American works and accompanying theoretical writings which defined it at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s.

The term “third cinema” is developed by Argentines, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in “Towards a Third Cinema” (1969). The cinema they propose is distinguished both from Hollywood’s “first cinema” and what they term the “second cinema” – of the French New Wave in particular and European auteurism in general. One characteristic of first cinema is the hiding of the labor and technology used in its production. To quote a very slightly later work by Cuban theorist Julio García Espinosa, it is a “perfect cinema.”⁶ Narrative here is king, and distractions from it unwelcome. If this kind of commercial cinema is “the principal enemy,” to quote the title of one of Jorge Sanjinés’s films, then the disadvantage of the second cinema, at least for Solanas and Getino (and for Sanjinés, who talks in similar terms about what he calls bourgeois cinema) is too great a reliance on the director’s vision. “The problems with which he deals are the problems that interest, preoccupy or concern him,” writes Sanjinés (60). He rejects

an individualist art which believes it is based solely on individual ability, on the talent and intuition of the artist, and which feels qualified to apprehend reality and penetrate deeply into it, without realizing ... that the individual is determined in social interaction with others. (65-66)

Sanjinés proposes a popular or revolutionary cinema, more collective in nature, implicitly opposed to Capitalist ideology, and rooted in the concerns of the (Indian) community (65). In John King’s words, Sanjinés’s “film-making would in future deal with the history of the collective, seeking to reactivate the popular memory denied by the hegemonic powers” (194). In line with this thinking, he moves away from the scintillating formal strategies and relative security of authorial control which characterize *Blood of the Condor* (1969) to a cinema which not only responds to but fully incorporates the perspective of his Indian subjects in the films which follow it: *The Courage of the People* (1971) and *The Principal Enemy* (1973).

These, like all Bolivian films, must be sent abroad – to Argentina, or the U.S. or Europe – for developing and printing. Unsurprisingly, Bolivia has developed little in the way of a film industry or facilities for post-production. In many ways the country provides a paradigm of colonial exploitation, mining one resource – first silver, then rubber, then tin – for export as a raw material, while remaining severely underdeveloped. For leftists such as Sanjinés, the exploitation evidently derives primarily from the United States: its wealthy lifestyle directly related to the extraction of surplus value from impoverished nations such as Bolivia. He argues that: “If we were to paralyze all *yanqui* activity in Latin America or set our own prices for

⁶ García Espinosa’s essay, like Solanos’s and Getino’s manifesto, is most readily available today in the first volume of Martin and in Chanan’s collection.

our own products, the monster would be disarmed and perish. They are dependent on us; not the reverse, as they want us to believe. We are poor because the U.S. is rich!” (36).

More recently, Bolivia was in the news in 2000 when the angry citizens of second city Cochabamba – suddenly required to pay twice as much for water – successfully turned back the World Bank-mandated privatization of their water supply by U.S. giant Bechtel, thus landing the Bolivian government in international neo-liberal hot-water. In 2005, similar protests against the abuses of Suez – a French-based multinational and the world’s largest water company, contracted to provide water to El Alto, the poor, sprawling city on the *altiplano* above La Paz – were an important factor in mobilizing indigenous Bolivians to oust presidents Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa respectively. Evo Morales, elected on a platform of opposition to neo-liberal privatization, assumed the presidency and quickly negotiated the end of the agreement with Suez.⁷

U.S. influence may often be apparent in Bolivia; however Bolivia remains, to most U.S. citizens, a country unknown – to quote another of Sanjinés’s films, it is a *clandestine nation*. They might, perhaps, associate it with the production of cocaine, and this is, in fact, one issue over which the U.S. has shown considerable interest in Bolivia of late, intervening in elections on behalf of Sánchez de Lozada, a U.S.-educated millionaire, while threatening to cut off aid should Morales, the Aymara Indian leader of the country’s coca-growers, be elected – as eventually he was.⁸ Following Sánchez de Lozada’s successful 2002 campaign, Eduardo Gamarra, director of the Latin American and Caribbean Center of Florida International University, author of several books on the political economy of South America and of the narcotics trade, and a White House supporter on this issue, wrote that, in terms of national and international security, “Bolivia was going to go [had Morales won the presidency] from being the Nepal of the Andes, a romantic and exotic nation, to being the Afghanistan of the Andes, dominated by narco-traffickers and terrorists” (qtd. in Faiola). Leaving aside the violent political strife then afflicting Nepal, one might note that it is the Indian cultures of the Andes which here earn Bolivia the commendations “romantic” and “exotic,” and the same demographic, presumably, that constitutes the potential “narco-traffickers and terrorists.” Coca, used by the rural Quechua and Aymara for individual purposes – a means of relaxation in an often harsh life – is also used as part of traditional community (romantic and exotic?) cultural and religious rituals. As such, coca plays a significant role in *Blood*

⁷ In *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*, Maude Barlow details the successes and failures of the water justice movement in South America in an attempt to explain its significant mobilizing power against neo-liberal orthodoxy.

⁸ Sánchez de Lozada’s nickname is El Gringo (Luykx 4). (Morales, perhaps helped by the threats from the North, ran Sánchez de Lozada a close second in August 2002, and won the election in December 2005, following the fall of former vice-president, Carlos Mesa’s government.)

of the *Condor* – which remains Sanjinés’s best-known film outside Latin-America partially because of its attack on purported Peace Corps sterilization activities in the Andean communities.⁹ It is the story of a Quechua village’s violent rejection of the Corps after a ceremonial consultation of the coca leaves, but also of Paulina’s journey to the city in order to find blood for her injured husband, Ignácio, and the efforts there of his bother, Sixto, who, unable to get help for Ignácio, finally abandons his life in the city to return to his community.

In *Blood of the Condor*, the U.S. Peace Corps workers are shown as oblivious to indigenous traditions and sense of community. Unable and unwilling to learn Quechua, they impose charity, but expect gratitude. In a sense they are peripheral – we see them largely in relation to the Quechua characters whose story this is. The first time the Americans appear is as they attempt to buy eggs from Paulina when they pass her on a mountain road. She will only give them three because the rest have been collected for sale at the fair – or market. The female corps member, Kathy (presented as still less attuned to her environment than her male colleagues) asserts, in a somewhat transparent reference to the sterilization project: “we need *all* the eggs.” Her colleague Tom’s failure to persuade Paulina to provide them prompts Kathy to disparage his stumbling attempts at the language: “Oh, hell. You are wasting our time.” For the Americans, economics clearly take precedence over custom, individual accomplishment is privileged over social need, and saved time is gained time: “If you sell us the eggs, you don’t have to go to the fair,” they argue.

Because of the complex, non-chronological way in which the narrative is told, a scene in which the Indians are instructed, by a multilingual military officer, to be grateful for the charity of the Peace Corps is intercut with Sixto’s futile efforts to get enough money for blood for his brother. This structure – one which, as Sanjinés himself later suggested, is more characteristic of second cinema than third – accentuates the inappropriateness, even the cruelty, of that charity. The *paisanos* are told that “the gentlemen have come from abroad to help us” and Tom adds that sacrifices have been made in order to build the medical center. The impositional nature of the program is further emphasized by the way in which the Quechuas are regimented – lined up against a wall – before being given clothes “donated by the children of foreigners living in La Paz.” Cut to La Paz, where Paulina’s and Sixto’s foreignness in their own capital city is being fully revealed; unable to communicate with a Spanish-speaking doctor, Paulina must use a sick child as an interpreter, while Sixto’s search takes him to a country-club dinner where doctors are honored – in English – as forward-looking scientists. The next day dawns and the *americanos* awake to find the clothes returned. The discovery is made by Kathy in an extreme-long shot which contrasts with the close-ups and medium shots of the coca ceremony that follows and which determines that the foreigners are “sowing death.” The torch-lit march on their headquarters climaxes in an extreme-long shot of the corps members dancing, by electric light, to loud dance music – contrasting with the traditional pipes used throughout the film – in one upstairs corner of their building.

⁹ Cf. Siekmeier for an analysis of the causes, consequences and validity of such claims.

Captured and interrogated by the Indians, Tom and his colleagues come up with two defenses, two reasons that should offer them security by placing them beyond the reach of the indigenous population. The first is nationality: “my embassy will not allow it,” the second, science – in contrast to the quixotic, exotic affirmations of mother coca, their calling is based on objective criteria, divorced from the local peculiarities of language and custom.¹⁰

Such cultural intricacies are, in many ways, the subject of *Chuquiago*, directed by Ukamau cameraman Antonio Eguino and released in 1977. Eguino had remained in Bolivia after Hugo Banzer’s 1971 coup which led Sanjinés to spend several years in exile, making films in the Quechua communities of Ecuador and Peru. Distinguishing himself from Sanjinés, Eguino avows:

We are not going to be the guerrillas of Latin America all the time. It is very romantic for intellectually oriented Europeans and Americans to applaud the filmmaker with a camera in one hand and a gun in the other. ... I want to reach a greater number of people with my films. (qtd. in Burton 166)

Chuquiago follows this prescription and proved to be an extremely successful film, reaching as large an audience as any film could expect to in Bolivia.¹¹ It consists of four stories, set in the capital, each featuring a protagonist with progressively more social standing and (financial) security. As the choice of title – the Aymara word for La Paz – suggests, language is at issue throughout *Chuquiago*. The first tale is of Isico, an Aymara boy brought to the steeply sloping outer environs of La Paz to apprentice with a street vendor who sells hot drinks. Her first question: “Does he know Spanish?” His parents’ response?: “A little. He runs like a goat.” We get some evidence for their second claim, but none for their first – the inference is, in any case, clear: Isico is in some way more akin to the languageless goats of the *altiplano* than to the wealthy Spanish-speaking citizens of central La Paz.

This opening story also introduces the ideal of the United States, a thread which will run through the film. Isico is picked by a street-hawking shampoo-salesman to have his filthy hair washed. The product is “imported from the United States: pure palm-oil,” and, after the cleansing is completed, the salesman provides the young Aymara boy with a desire apparently befitting his new, clean, Americanized hair as he declares to his audience, of his young helper: “He doesn’t want a *cholita* or a *señorita*; no he wants a blondie [little white girl].” Thus, we leave Isico’s tale well primed for Johnny’s which comes next. Johnny, too, is Aymara, he lives a little further down the side of the hill, closer to the Spanish-speaking center of the city on

¹⁰ Cf. Ricardo Salvatore’s comments on a more academic scientific conquest of Latin America through the accumulation of texts in U.S. libraries in his essay “Libraries and the Legibility of Hispanic America: Early Latin American Collections in the United States.”

¹¹ In an interview with *Cineaste* reprinted in Burton’s *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America*, Eguino contends that “Almost five hundred thousand people saw our film, and no other film in Bolivia has achieved this. We can say that we have finally reached that 5 per cent of our population that, according to statistics, are regular moviegoers” (166).

the valley floor – and his desire for “blondies,” in the sense of ethnically different women, is conscious and consuming.¹² Alienated, and contemptuous of his own culture, which is a hindrance to his success in La Paz, Johnny’s dreams are of the girls, cars and opportunities of the North. We see him first in his bedroom. Outside, his father, brother and a friend prepare their union banner for the city’s annual Great Power Parade and traditional *Cullawa* dance. Johnny, meanwhile, dresses neatly, combs his hair, applies cosmetic cream to his face, and practices his pick-up lines on his pin-up girls. He then attends his English class, where he and others answer questions about the professions and home cities of a series of characters. After the class, a fellow student tells Johnny of an acquaintance of his who has become an agronomist in the United States and gives him the card of a man who supposedly runs a business specializing in finding work for young able-bodied Bolivians there. We next see him walking with Maria, the woman we have seen him sitting by in class. Johnny tries to persuade Maria – who is not of Indian blood – to go to a movie with him, but what little chance of success this scheme may have is abruptly ended when Maria’s uncle, passing by in a car, picks her up so as to deliver her from the racially unsuitable company. The difficulty of Johnny’s situation is immediately confirmed by the film’s attention to the geography of the city. Eguino explains: “we wanted to emphasize the height of the hole of La Paz” (Sánchez-H 119). Whereas Johnny lives somewhat down the hillside rather than at the top of the surrounding ridge of mountains as does Isico, he is still far from the wealth and power of the Spanish-speaking bottom of the valley. Johnny has descended much closer to the center of town for his English lesson and, without a car, he lives too far out of the center – or up from it – for a bus to take him close to home. As he climbs the hill, away, so to speak, from English and Spanish, towards his indigenous roots, he is hit by some waste water, thrown from a doorway and intended for the gutter but evidently symbolic of all he wants to – but cannot – escape. He answers with a racial insult which backfires: as the girl he argues with asserts, he is indeed a *cholo* himself, despite his leather jacket, face cream, and linguistic aspirations.

Next, the threat to family which the desire for linguistic upward mobility engenders is made clear. Johnny argues with his father, refusing to speak Aymara or to eat traditional Indian food just as he has rejected the *Cullawa*. For Johnny the English language is a potential passport away from this life of hard labor with slight security or material reward. In Clifford Geertz’s terms, his outward-looking sense of language is epochalist – a means to connect him to the “external cultural ideal” – rather than essentialist – a way of connecting to local practices (qtd. in Luykx

¹² *Chuquiago* puns throughout on the relationship between beer and women. One source for this lies in the name *paceña*, the Bolivian Pilsner or light beer, which is also the term for a female resident of La Paz. The offer of beer is thus often conflated with the offer of women. In one scene, for example, Johnny, having ordered “blondies” (*paceñas*) for his drinking buddies, immediately calls his *negra* (brunette) girlfriend.

15).¹³ Just attending the class has, in a sense, allowed him to rise socially, and ultimately it could lead him to a secure, rewarding career as an agronomist, perhaps, or a dentist, like the Georges and Jims about whose lives the teacher asks him questions.¹⁴ Following his friend's advice he visits the fraudulent travel agent-cum-work facilitator. He might as well be in the dentist's chair for all the input he has. Entering the office, he is spotted by the charlatan who immediately launches into a non-stop avalanche of language, designed to prove to Johnny how much he deserves a chance in the United States, and how easily, for appropriate financial outlay, he can get it. Alienated from his own culture and seduced by the promise of the North, Johnny is easy prey. Thus, in Bolivia, while the U.S. remains a promise, it is also a threat, a gamble that may not pay off. Johnny sees the former, but *Chuquiago* emphasizes the latter. While well-healed Patricia, in the final story, resists her parents' desire that she go to university outside the country, believing that she should stay home and learn about Bolivia's own system with a view to effecting some change, the less privileged Johnny emphatically wants out. The travel-agent, however, there to receive the money Johnny has stolen, is gone when he returns for the tickets.

Aurolyn Luykx argues that the Bolivian sense of national identity is tied as closely to the "Third World" as that of the United States is to the "First World." The two countries symbolize antithetical visions. She writes that:

the intense patriotism and ethnic pride characterizing so much of Bolivian nationalist feeling is perversely complemented by a self-deprecatory discourse in which speakers speculate on possible internal causes for their country's dependency, poverty, and underdevelopment. From this perspective, all things foreign are superior to anything produced in Bolivia. (35)

Luykx supports this claim by reference to several common jokes which either directly show Bolivian inferiority – for example Bolivian crabs, which, unlike crabs from the U.S., do not have to be enclosed to prevent their escape since it can be assumed that they will pull each other back into captivity – or suggest it more elliptically, as in the following instance:

¹³ In addition to an application of Geertz's terminology to Bolivia, Luykx also notes, writing in 1990, that disdain for the Aymara language has been increasingly replaced by an expression of pride in it (13). This change both prepared the ground for and has been accentuated by the political success of Evo Morales and the foregrounding of Indian concerns.

¹⁴ It does seem to me that dentists get mentioned proportionally more than you would expect in English language class scenes in films and, in the context of my concerns in this essay, I am struck by the fact that one thing you cannot do in the dentist's chair is talk – the dentist is the master of language, while you are reduced to grunting as he or she roots around in your mouth. In any case the profession of dentistry appears to suggest a life of leisure, a symbol of the sweet and secure life. It is in the United States that the promise of such a life exists for Johnny.

A drunk is staggering alongside a pool of water. A big blond foreigner passes by, and the drunk accidentally bumps him into the pool. Not knowing how to swim, the foreigner begins to cry out 'Help, help!'; the drunk observes him gravely and then remarks, '¡Sonso! En vez de aprender inglés ¿por qué no aprendiste a nadar?' (32)¹⁵

Although there is evidently a critique of the powerful *gringo* here, in which the security offered by the English language is suddenly and comically undercut in what Luykx calls a "burlesque fantasy of inverted power," the joke also comments on the Bolivian: why is he drunk? As Luykx suggests, such a detail is not necessary to the punch-line, but it is a part of a somewhat self-disparaging humor which argues not, straightforwardly, "I can be or am better than you," but, "I'm drunk, backward, uncivilized, but can still be better than you." Bolivia can carry such a valence elsewhere in South America too, as in Argentine Adrian Israel Caetano's film, *Bolivia* (2001), set entirely in Buenos Aires, featuring a Bolivian man, hired as cook by a neighborhood bar, who has crossed the border to find work to support his family back home in an unseen, underdeveloped Bolivia. An earlier Argentine film, *A Shadow You Soon Will Be* (Hector Olivera, 1994), features an unnamed protagonist, looking for a place to hide from the world, who plans to leave Argentina, he tells us, for Bolivia, which stands for the remote, a place off-the-beaten-track. This is a road movie, and on his travels, the searcher meets another traveler whose ideal journey ends in Cleveland. Thus the two are headed in opposite directions, psychically as well as literally.

Several years ago, in Montero, Western Bolivia, protesters clashed with police and soldiers and forced an oil pipeline to shut down as they demanded a paved road be built to oil-town Santa Rosa. Bolivia is clearly still in need of infrastructure. Within the country battle has been joined about the best way to achieve this development: traditional Indian ways sometimes come together with the goals of multinational corporations; very often they do not. Private ownership of water supplies achieves occasional improvements in lifestyle, but, in other instances, provokes bitter animosity, as the powerful individual is seen to again exploit the Indian masses in ways a little too akin to the sixteenth-century Spanish overlords of the silver mines and twentieth-century tin barons. Community development may sometimes – as in the case of coca production – clash with U.S.-promoted notions of national and international security. Bolivia remains a country in which perceptions of U.S. intentions remain inextricably bound up with a people's sense of place and of security in the world.

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¹⁵ "Idiot! Instead of learning English why didn't you learn how to swim?"

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