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## The Coloniality of Taste

### A political ecology of middle class food practices in a Bolivian city

Kollnig, Sarah

2018

*Document Version:*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Kollnig, S. (2018). *The Coloniality of Taste: A political ecology of middle class food practices in a Bolivian city*. [Doctoral Thesis (compilation), Department of Human Geography]. Lund University.

*Total number of authors:*

1

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# The Coloniality of Taste

A political ecology of middle class food practices  
in a Bolivian city

Sarah Kollnig



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by due permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University, Sweden.  
To be defended at lecture hall “Ostrom”, Josephson, Biskopsgatan 5, Lund,  
on 16 November 2018, at 13:00

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Organization LUND UNIVERSITY	Document name	
Human Ecology Division	Date of issue 2018-10-24	
Author Sarah Kollnig	Sponsoring organization	
Title and subtitle: The Coloniality of Taste. A political ecology of middle class food practices in a Bolivian city.		
<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Cochabamba city, also referred to as the “gastronomic capital of Bolivia”, is a place where different cultures and tastes meet. Indulging in rich culinary traditions is a part of everyday life, but so are social differentiations reproducing long-standing inequalities between the indigenous and the non-indigenous population. In this thesis, the practices and politics surrounding food are used as a lens on social inequalities in Cochabamba city and Bolivia in general. The thesis consists of an introduction and three articles.</p> <p>Conceptualizing food as having symbolic as well as material aspects, I investigate food from production to consumption, bringing out the inequalities inherent in the food system. A particular focus is linking social inequalities with their biophysical (i.e. corporeal and ecological) implications. The research follows a critical realist approach, looking into mechanisms and structures underlying the surface experiences of everyday life.</p> <p>The analysis of the production end focuses on one product, industrially produced chicken meat. The production and consumption of poultry have been soaring in Bolivia. Factory-farmed chicken has replaced subsistence and small-scale chicken rearing. The economic accessibility of chicken meat, but also the seductive nature of Western food practices, have made chicken a popular fast food. I show that these developments have ecological consequences as well as impacts on human health. My research also reveals that it is mostly the well-established Bolivian elites that have benefitted from the popularity of chicken meat.</p> <p>The more symbolic aspects of food are revealed in my analysis of the “distinctions” expressed in the food habits of the privileged middle class of Cochabamba city. While indulging in traditional Cochabamba meals, the privileged often feel the need to distinguish themselves from the urban population characterized as “indigenous”. In high-end restaurants and supermarkets, traditions are “sanitized”, symbolically cleared from any contact with indigenous producers and food vendors. The notion that markets and market women need to be “controlled” by the local authorities prevails, without any improvements in actual working conditions.</p> <p>Both the introduction of chicken meat as a cheap protein source as well as the more “distinguished” food practices of the privileged population of Cochabamba are expressions of what I call the <i>coloniality of taste</i>. Through judgments of “good” and “bad” taste, people in Cochabamba and elsewhere contribute to keeping up patterns of exploitation with deep colonial roots. The success of chicken meat provides benefits for the elites while reproducing the position of the less privileged as providers of cheap labor and recipients of charity. The taste of the more privileged population reproduces the symbolic and material exclusion and exploitation of the population conceptualized as “indigenous”.</p> <p>I propose that a critical re-appreciation of the food practices of Cochabamba city may provide a way to address and go beyond social divisions.</p>		
Key words: Cochabamba, middle class, whiteness, chicken meat, coloniality, taste		
Classification system and/or index terms (if any)		
Supplementary bibliographical information		Language
ISSN and key title 1650-206X Lund Dissertations in Human Ecology 4		ISBN 978-91-7753-877-6 (Print) 978-91-7753-878-3 (Pdf)
Recipient's notes	Number of pages 188	Price
	Security classification	

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Sarah Kollnig



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Cover photo: Mural painting in Cochabamba, showing a market woman handing out skulls. Artist: El Marsh, painted at the Bienal de Arte Urbano 2015. Photo by the author.

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Faculty of Social Sciences  
Human Ecology Division

ISBN 978-91-7753-877-6 (Print)

ISBN 978-91-7753-878-3 (Pdf)

ISSN 1650-206X Lund Dissertations in Human Ecology 4

Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University  
Lund 2018



*Para tí, César*



*Y le digo a Boaventura de Sousa Santos: “Ecología de saberes? Deberíamos hacer una ecología de sabores!”*

*And I said to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “An ecology of knowledges? We should have an ecology of tastes!”*

*Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Bolivian sociologist, speech at the NOLAN conference Gothenburg 2017*





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# Abstract

Cochabamba city, also referred to as the “gastronomic capital of Bolivia”, is a place where different cultures and tastes meet. Indulging in rich culinary traditions is a part of everyday life, but so are social differentiations reproducing long-standing social inequalities. In this thesis, I use the practices and politics surrounding food as a lens on social inequalities in Cochabamba city and Bolivia in general. The thesis consists of an introduction and three articles.

Conceptualizing food as having symbolic as well as material aspects, I investigate food from production to consumption, bringing out the inequalities inherent in the food system. A particular focus is linking social inequalities with their biophysical (i.e. corporeal and ecological) implications. The research follows a critical realist approach, looking into mechanisms and structures underlying the surface experiences of everyday life.

The analysis of the production end focuses on one product, industrially produced chicken meat. The production and consumption of poultry have been soaring in Bolivia. Factory-farmed chicken has replaced subsistence and small-scale chicken rearing. The economic accessibility of chicken meat, but also the seductive nature of Western food practices, have made chicken a popular fast food. I show that these developments have ecological consequences as well as impacts on human health.

The more symbolic aspects of food are revealed in my analysis of the “distinctions” expressed in the food habits of the privileged middle class of Cochabamba city. While indulging in traditional Cochabamba meals, the privileged often feel the need to distinguish themselves from the urban population characterized as “indigenous”. In high-end restaurants and supermarkets, traditions are “sanitized”, symbolically cleared from any contact with indigenous producers and food vendors. The notion that markets and market women need to be “controlled” prevails, without any improvements in actual working conditions.

Both the introduction of chicken meat as a cheap protein source as well as the more “distinguished” food practices of the privileged population of Cochabamba are expressions of what I call the *coloniality of taste*. Through judgments of “good” and “bad” taste, people in Cochabamba and elsewhere contribute to keeping up patterns of exploitation with deep colonial roots. The success of chicken meat provides benefits for the elites while reproducing the position of the less privileged as providers of cheap labor and recipients of charity. The taste of the more privileged population reproduces the symbolic and material exclusion and exploitation of the population conceptualized as “indigenous”.

I propose that a critical re-appreciation of the food practices of Cochabamba city may provide a way to address and go beyond social divisions.



## Resumen

La ciudad de Cochabamba, la "capital gastronómica de Bolivia", es un lugar de encuentro para diferentes sabores y culturas. Además de tener una cultura culinaria muy variada, la ciudad se caracteriza también por desigualdades sociales profundas. Este estudio trata de enfocar estas desigualdades, usando como herramienta el análisis de la cultura de la alimentación cotidiana. La tesis está presentada en tres artículos y una introducción.

La investigación de la alimentación desde la producción hasta el consumo abre la posibilidad de juntar aspectos materiales y simbólicos de este tema. La comida no solo nos aproxima o separa socialmente si no que también tiene efectos concretos en los organismos y en el medio ambiente. La perspectiva teórica que utilizo para la investigación es el "realismo crítico" de Roy Bhaskar. Esta perspectiva implica que las experiencias de cada día son solo como un barniz delgado debajo del cual funcionan mecanismos más profundos.

La investigación empírica empieza con un alimento muy popular y genérico: el pollo. Demuestro los efectos socio-ecológicos del rápido ascenso del consumo de pollo industrial en las últimas décadas. Los efectos negativos, como la contaminación del agua y del suelo, afectan sobre todo los alrededores de las ciudades. Los beneficiarios del negocio del pollo son familias de las viejas élites de Bolivia quienes controlan la producción de este alimento. El pollo es económicamente accesible para muchos, y el éxito de este producto también se basa en su representación como parte de una alimentación moderna e occidental.

Continuo mi investigación con un análisis de los hábitos de alimentación de la clase media privilegiada de Cochabamba. Estos hábitos demuestran el deseo de mantenerse alejados de la población caracterizada como "indígena", sobre todo de la clase media emergente. La construcción de espacios separados de consumo para las diferentes clases medias sigue esta lógica. Muchos aspectos de la provisión de comida todavía dependen de vendedores de otras clases sociales, y el contacto con ellos está controlado mediante reglas sociales. Normas de higiene y de "buena educación" juegan un rol clave en estas situaciones.

Termino mi tesis proponiendo el concepto de la "colonialidad del sabor", juntando teorías de Aníbal Quijano y Pierre Bourdieu. Sugiero que expresar juzgamientos de "buen" o "mal" gusto implica relaciones de poder modeladas sobre patrones coloniales. Tener un "buen gusto" considerado legítimo por la fracción dominante de una sociedad implica imponer hábitos alimenticios, apropiar productos indígenas, e esforzarse para vivir según un modelo occidental.

Concluyendo, propongo una re-apreciación de la cultura alimenticia Cochabambina con enfoque en la igualdad entre todos los habitantes de la ciudad.



# Zusammenfassung

Cochabamba, auch die “kulinarische Hauptstadt Boliviens” genannt, ist ein Treffpunkt für verschiedene Kulturen, Speisen und Geschmäcker. Die Stadt hat eine reiche kulinarische Tradition, ist aber auch gekennzeichnet durch tiefe soziale Ungleichheiten, vor allem zwischen der westlichen und der indigenen Bevölkerung. Diese Dissertation beschäftigt sich mit diesen Ungleichheiten, betrachtet durch das Prisma der alltäglichen Ernährungskultur. Die Arbeit besteht aus drei wissenschaftlichen Artikeln und einem einleitenden Teil.

Ernährung ist symbolisch und sozial bedeutend, da sie Menschen verbindet und gegeneinander abgrenzt. Was wir essen ist aber auch ökologisch und körperlich verankert. Das bedeutet, dass soziale Ungleichheiten sowohl symbolisch als auch materiell – ökologisch und körperlich – wichtig sind. Die theoretische Verankerung dieser Arbeit ist der „Kritische Realismus“ von Roy Bhaskar, der besagt, dass hinter Alltagserfahrungen historisch bedingte Mechanismen und Strukturen am Werk sind.

Meine empirische Erforschung der Ernährungskultur Cochabambas beginnt mit dem enormen Zuwachs des Konsums von industriell produziertem Hühnerfleisch. Die negativen ökologischen Effekte dieser Entwicklung sind vor allem im Hinterland der Städte spürbar. Die alteingesessenen Eliten des Landes kontrollieren und profitieren vom Wachstum der Hühnerproduktion. Hühnerfleisch ist billig und für die meisten Menschen in Bolivien erschwinglich. Diese neue Ernährungsgewohnheit wird aber auch als Teil eines westlichen und modernen Lebensstils beworben.

Ich analysiere daraufhin die Konsumgewohnheiten der privilegierten Mittelschicht von Cochabamba. Viele Menschen, die sich als westlich identifizieren, wollen sich von der indigenen Bevölkerung und vor allem von einer wachsenden indigenen Mittelschicht abgrenzen. Ein wichtiger Aspekt ist die räumliche Segregation verschiedener Bevölkerungsgruppen, die zum Beispiel in unterschiedlichen Lokalen essen. Der unvermeidliche Kontakt mit Straßenverkäuferinnen und Marktfrauen wird durch scheinbar universelle hygienische Normen reguliert.

Ich argumentiere, dass die Ernährungsgewohnheiten vieler Menschen einer „Kolonialität des Geschmacks“ folgen. Das bedeutet, dass alltägliche Urteile „guten“ und „schlechten“ Geschmacks einem Muster folgen, das auf kolonialen Machtstrukturen aufbaut. Gesellschaftlich angesehene „gute Ernährung“ beinhaltet oft das Auferlegen von Gewohnheiten, die selektive Aneignung indigener Praktiken und Produkte, und das Anpassen an dominante Muster.

Abschließend schlage ich eine neue Wertschätzung der Ernährungskultur(en) der Stadt Cochabamba vor, die soziale Ungleichheiten zumindest teilweise überbrücken kann.

## Acknowledgments

The book you hold in your hands is the end point of a long journey. And it is this journey and the people I have met along the way that have made writing this PhD thesis worthwhile. The person I could not have done this without is my husband, Cesar. He has been my guide into Cochabamba society and my sparring partner in long debates about Bolivia.

My Bolivian family and friends have created a second home for me, and I want to thank you for welcoming me into your lives and being patient with my sometimes challenging questions. My family in Austria has given me the roots that I need. I want to thank you for helping me keep my feet on the ground. Particularly my father always encouraged me to think critically about social problems, and I am eternally grateful for this.

At work, the community of PhD students at Lund University, particularly at the Human Geography Department, the Human Ecology Division, the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies and the Sociology Department, has made this journey a positive experience. I want to thank all the people I have met along the way for joining me in critical reflections about academia and fun field trips. You give me hope that academia can be a place of critical and respectful dialogue. I also want to thank the senior staff at Human Geography and Human Ecology for being respectful and encouraging.

Last, but not least, I thank my dream-team of supervisors, Anders and Alf. You have provided me with a lot of freedom to explore what I am interested in, trusting me to find my way. You have taught me what it means to be an academic with personal and professional integrity.



## List of articles

**Paper 1:** Industrial Chicken Meat and the Good Life in Bolivia. Forthcoming in J. Gibson & S. Alexander (Eds.), *In Defense of Farmers: The Future of Agriculture in the Shadow of Corporate Power*, Nebraska University Press.

**Paper 2:** Chicken for Everyone? A critical cultural political economy of the popularity of chicken meat in Bolivia. Submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

**Paper 3:** The Good People of Cochabamba City. Ethnicity and race in Bolivian middle class food culture. Forthcoming in the *Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Ethnic Studies*

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# 1 The Red Thread of this Thesis

Departure, this time, shall happen through something else than a change of place. It has already happened with the first sentence of this story.

Peter Handke, *Mein Jahr in der Niemandsbucht*, translated by the author from the German original

Imagine a yellow, time-worn plastic plate sitting on a red plastic table which has, of course, *Coca Cola* written in white letters on the surface. On the plate, there is a small mountain of food. The bottom layers: white rice, French fries, and pasta, with a touch of soy sauce mixed into it. At the top of the pile: A piece of fried chicken with a golden brown crust. Next to the plate you see a small plastic dish with a red-greenish sauce in it: *Llajwa*, the Bolivian signature sauce. If you taste it, you will feel an explosion of tomato, sweet and bitter herbs, and the local chili variant *locoto* in your mouth. Now that you have tried *llajwa* – welcome to Bolivia. Why don't you fetch a plastic chair and join us at the table, which stands on a cement floor in a drafty garage. There they are, my Bolivian family, chatting, laughing, and eating chicken with *llajwa*. The head of the family, my mother-in-law, would welcome you and, soon, proudly tell you about her relatives living all over the world, from Australia to Sweden. We would find so many things we have in common – maybe we like the same music or movies or authors. And you would ask me, maybe: What does it feel like to be a part of here and there, to be European *and* Bolivian? And I would say: Ask my family. They are, as many persons I have met in the privileged middle class of Bolivia, caught between identifying with their European roots and their attachment to the Bolivian context.

This thesis brings together two essential aspects of everyday life in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba: food and social inequalities. In the “gastronomic capital of Bolivia”, food and eating are as important as breathing. However, the availability of cheap, abundant, and tasty food entails complex social relations, from the exploitation of small-scale farmers to the display of social superiority through the consumption of luxury goods.

Food and social inequalities are often discussed in terms of nutrition and food security. In Bolivia, many people practicing subsistence agriculture are threatened by food insecurity and malnutrition (Castañón Ballivián, 2014). At the same time, many inhabitants of urban areas are consuming unhealthy food and, in consequence,

developing diabetes and becoming obese (Lanza Lobo, 2017). This situation connects to political and economic mechanisms driving the exploitation of small-scale farmers and the political support for industrial food production.

I argue that, in order to understand the social inequalities inherent in the production, distribution, and consumption of food, we need to link the material and the symbolic aspects of food. Apart from understanding the biophysical (i.e. nutritional and ecological) implications of food production and consumption, we need to take into account underlying political and economic mechanisms. And above and beyond that, we need to understand that social conceptualizations of food also play an important part in the reproduction and negotiation of social inequalities through food.

Food connects and divides communities. To eat means to consume what somebody else has produced and prepared for us, and it, thus, amounts to consuming part of somebody else (Meigs, 1997). We consume a part of who someone else is, as a farmer, a market vendor, or a chef. Food constitutes us not only biophysically, but also socially. Every social group has rules about what to eat and how to eat. This constitutes the social group and also distinguishes it from those who have produced their food (Fischler, 1988). Eating creates community, also through avoiding “pollution” from other social groups (Douglas, 1966). I argue, thus, that the symbolic aspects of eating are part of the reproduction and negotiation of social inequalities through food.

As my research on industrial chicken meat shows, producing and consuming this “food for the masses” is not only a matter of political economy. It is also the representation of chicken as part of a modern, Western lifestyle that plays a part in the popularity of industrially produced chicken meat in Bolivia. I also show that the need of the Bolivian elites to distinguish themselves from the indigenous “Other” has gone hand in hand with the commercialization of traditional food items and meals, creating “sanitized” versions of food traditions. To me, the symbolic and the material are not hierarchically organized as superstructure and base, but they are both fundamentally important and interrelated in many complex ways.

This underlying notion borrows from one of the forefathers of cultural Marxism, Raymond Williams. Williams proposes that culture is “the signifying system through which necessarily [...] a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored” (Williams, 1981, p. 13). Thus, culture is not only a reflection of social structure, but also contributes to its reproduction.

Taking a critical realist stance, I see everyday practices, from the consumption of cheap chicken meat to the indulgence in imported food, as *surface* experiences. Below this surface, a range of mechanisms and unobserved events are at work. I see it as the task of the researcher to dig down below the surface and work to understand

some of these underlying mechanisms. In my work, critical realism directs the research from the everyday to the larger context and connects symbolic actions to their historical and biophysical underpinnings.

I argue that an important underlying logic of the reproduction and negotiation of social inequalities through food is the *coloniality of taste*<sup>1</sup>. In a society divided particularly by racial distinctions, food becomes another axis of *coloniality*, reproducing and renegotiating power relations with colonial roots. Taste, in a Bourdieusian (Bourdieu, 1982) sense, is the judgement of what is considered “good” or “bad” from the perspective of a specific social group. I argue that practices informed by such judgements reproduce and negotiate unequal social relationships through several maneuvers: The *coloniality of taste* works through the selective appropriation of indigenous culture, the imposition of foreign culture, and the selective and conditioned inclusion into the dominant culture. Coloniality works both symbolically and materially in molding both people’s mindsets and political-economic structures (Quijano, 2007).

I have carried out intensive qualitative research into food production, distribution, and consumption in Bolivia. While the formal part of fieldwork took place between mid 2015 and mid 2016, I have now been part of a middle class family in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba for many years and have, thus, firsthand experience of everyday urban life. I look at food in an urban context, and at two apparently distinct phenomena: the startling increase in the consumption of chicken meat all over Bolivia, and the display of social distinction in the eating habits of the Bolivian middle class. I show that both the consumption of a generic everyday food, such as chicken, as well as the consumption of high-status food follow the logic of *coloniality*. This is more than a cultural game. The imposition and appropriation of cultural habits entails the reproduction and negotiation of century-old social inequalities. As a human ecologist, I am particularly interested in the biophysical implications of this reproduction of social inequalities. Throughout my research, my two research questions have reminded me of the importance of these underlying issues:

How do practices and politics of food production, distribution, and consumption reproduce and negotiate social inequalities?

And: How do these social inequalities relate to the unequal distribution of resources and risks?

Alf Hornborg defines power as a social relation built upon an unequal distribution of resources and risks (2001, p.1) and bases, thus, his conceptualization of power upon biophysical reality. Following this line of thought, I link the unequal

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<sup>1</sup> Anders Burman coined this concept in a conversation about my work. I then developed it and employed it in my analysis.

distribution of *social* resources with the unequal distribution of *biophysical* resources and risks. I see social inequalities, drawing on Bourdieu's work, as involving differentiations in the access to economic capital, but also to social relations and to legitimate cultural expressions and educational achievements. Power, in this Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1990), is the power to keep up social divisions, and the power to appropriate the above mentioned economic, cultural, and social capital. With the help of Peruvian sociologist Quijano (2007), I can establish that the configuration of inequalities and power relations plays out in a context of relations of exploitation with deep historical roots.

Through my investigation of the Bolivian food system, I aim at contributing to a better understanding of the interrelationships between social inequalities and biophysical processes. For instance, these interrelationships might come to light through diseases developed by inadequate nutrition, through impacts on ecosystems that affect certain populations more than others, or through genetic manipulations of plants or animals that benefit certain actors. This knowledge should serve as the basis for discussing how a more sustainable and equitable food system can be developed in Bolivia.

With this ambition, this research joins the debate about food justice, which originated in the United States as a specific form of the environmental justice movement. The food justice movement points out the racial and economic inequalities that the food system is built upon (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). It works towards ecologically sustainable and socially just ways of producing, distributing, and consuming food. My work is a contribution to this debate based on the Bolivian context.

The theoretical approach to investigating inequalities in the food system is inspired by political ecology. This field provides a wide range of theoretical tools for analyzing the interrelationships between social and biophysical processes, with a special focus on injustices produced and reproduced by these interrelationships. Thus, political ecology allows for gaining insights into the cultural, political, and economic processes that generate the unequal outcomes in the food system that the food justice movement is interested in (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014). I believe that this approach linking culture, political economy, and ecology also contributes to the fields this thesis is thematically situated in: it contributes to food studies, where production and consumption are oftentimes considered separately, and to Latin American studies, where food is usually also seen as either symbolic or structured by political economy and more privileged groups are rarely studied.

This thesis expresses the relationships between different people and places, but the place where it all begins is the city of Cochabamba, located in the fertile valleys between the highlands and the tropical lowlands of Bolivia. The city lies at an altitude of 2500m above sea level. It has been growing constantly, particularly since



the 1950s and due to migration from rural areas and mining centers (Ledo Garcia, 2002). The majority of migrants to Cochabamba city have come from the Bolivian highlands. Nowadays, about 70% of the population in the entire department of Cochabamba was born in a different region of Bolivia (PNUD, 2011, p. 28). Many migrants live in the urban area of Cochabamba city. The population of the city amounted to just under one million in 2012, but the city is closely connected to smaller surrounding towns, altogether forming a metropolitan area of 1.5 million inhabitants (CEPLAG, 2013).

Taking one of the battered minibuses around town, buses used for public transport that have been banned from circulation in Europe, North America, or Japan decades ago, one sees the diversity of the city. With the monotonous beat of the latest *reggaeton* song in ear, clinging on to the dirty metal bar amidst the swaying movements of the bus, the spectator passes by big, two-story villas with gardens hidden behind high walls. This is the north of the city. On the sidewalk, ambulant vendors offer everything from freshly pressed orange juice to nail clippers. Then, in the center, high rise buildings, and just behind them begins the central market of the city, *La Cancha*. Women in *polleras*, colorful many-layered skirts, reign over their market stalls where they sell fruits of the season, potatoes, or meat. The further one advances into the south of the city, the simpler the housing. Brick houses with small windows, no plants, and the wind elevates a swirl of dust and dirt from the unpaved roads. This is Cochabamba city. At least, this is the first impression.

At a later point in the journey, one starts to realize that Cochabamba is really much more. It is, first and foremost, the *gastronomic capital* of Bolivia. “In Cochabamba”, the interlocutor of the popular morning show on *radio centro* says, “we don’t eat in order to live. We live in order to eat.” At any given time of the day, one finds an ample variety of food in the thousands of food stands and restaurants all over the city. The day may start with *salteñas*, pastries filled with a stew that contains beef or chicken with vegetables and always one black olive. This delicacy is available in all price classes and in all social settings, from food stands on the boardwalk to a restaurant with orange plastic chairs and a fully-fledged marketing strategy. And the day may end with a *trancapecho*, a sandwich filled with rice, fried potatoes, fried beef, fried egg, tomatoes, and *locoto*, bought late at night from the woman who sets up her food stand around the corner every evening.

On the streets of this bustling city, one encounters an overwhelming diversity of people, from the woman carrying her child in a colorful cloth wrapped around her back to the woman walking in high heels, business skirt and expensive silk blouse to her office job. Out of this multiplicity, I chose to focus on a specific group of people: The *mestizo* middle class. They identify themselves as being “just in the middle, not high, not low”, and they are, objectively speaking, economically neither poor nor extremely rich. Many of them have a university education, and all of them



have lived in the city for generations. Many of them are descendants of *hacienda* owners, and they identify as being ethnically different from the indigenous population. They identify as *mestizos*, with *mestizo* referring to the mixing of European and indigenous cultures that has occurred since colonial times.

This identity of “being in the middle” – economically, socially, and culturally, is very complex. Discussing the social positioning and the identity of the middle class means delving deeply into the conflicts that characterize Bolivian society. The people I have lived with and done fieldwork amongst reaffirm their difference from the indigenous population, but also from the white economic elites, on an everyday basis. They are, however, if not for their economic capital but for their cultural and social capital, also part of the Bolivian elite themselves: they descend from the landholding elite, and they have access to an elitist Western education. Yet, they do not have the financial means to become part of the jet-setting elite with summerhouses in Miami.

Social inequalities are relational, and I focus on how members of the privileged middle class of Cochabamba city relate to people that have been marginalized historically. The systematic privileges enjoyed by many people I have met in Bolivia become particularly visible when challenged by the practices of an emerging middle class. This emerging counterpart to the established middle class is often met with disdain and perceived as having the “wrong”, indigenous and rural, provenience. Food is an important focal point for investigating these unequal social relations.

One of the theorists I have drawn upon for bringing together middle class identity and social inequalities is Bourdieu. Following in the footsteps of Bourdieu, I am able to conceptualize identity as “the sense of position one occupies in social space” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 70). This means that social identity is both objectively defined through one’s social position assigned by historical forces, but also filled with subjective meaning. I bring Bourdieusian theory into a dialogue with Latin American post- and decolonial theory, particularly Quijano’s notion of *coloniality*. Bringing Eurocentric Bourdieusian theory together with theories from the Global South amounts to an attempt at *decolonizing* Bourdieu. Quijano and colleagues help to stress the embeddedness of the *habitus* and constellations of capital in power relations of *coloniality*. Furthermore, decolonial theory brings out that the reproduction of social structures in everyday practices is being challenged by less privileged social groups.

Oftentimes, Bolivia has been referred to as a “laboratory” for researchers, based on its cultural and ecological diversity, with a wide range of ecological zones, with about half of the population identifying as indigenous and a president, Evo Morales, who identifies as indigenous as well. All these properties have attracted many researchers to the country, from biochemists looking for new components to cure cancer to anthropologists searching for “the Other”. I have my reservations against

this inherently colonial view on Bolivia as an exotic place where adventures can be found. I came, certainly, many years ago for the first time to Bolivia with this mixture of fear and attraction that Bolivia evokes. But since then, I have become so attached to the country and its people, even married a Bolivian man, that the question “Why Bolivia?” is not so much a scientific one to me. It is, to me, an imperative to study the complexities and particularly the deep inequalities that characterize the country that has become my second home. I am, in my ethnographic fieldwork, in the position of stranger-yet-local, which means that I am still puzzled by many things, but at the same time know the context well enough in order to make sense of what is happening.

Although social inequalities are structurally and, thus, historically determined, one can observe them at work in the small practices of everyday life. Who prepares the food for whom? Who is worthy of being a “clean” supplier of food products? Who explains? Who listens? Who gets sick with diabetes? Everyday life is structured by inequalities, and the trained eye can link even small gestures and acts to larger issues. Sometimes, what meets the eye also conceals underlying mechanisms at work: My case of the popularity of chicken meat shows that the Bolivian government has discursively supported small-scale farmers while, in practice, sacrificing their livelihoods in order to provide cheap food for the masses.

Food, as Goodman and DuPuis (2002) state so eloquently, can be conceptualized as either *concealing* or *revealing* social relationships. What we eat, who we eat with, who prepares the food, may mask the exploitative relations of the food system. But it may also express cultural identities, such as an attachment to a certain region or the differentiation between social strata. I believe that my Bourdieusian framework helps me to grasp both aspects: food is an expression of identity, but of an identity which has been shaped in a concrete historical context. Food serves, thus, as the starting point of my investigation into social and biophysical inequalities in Bolivia.

This is a compilation thesis, and in all of my papers I address social inequalities through the lens of food. In the **first paper**, “Industrial chicken meat and the Good Life in Bolivia”, I present detailed insights into chicken rearing and distribution in Bolivia. I use these insights “from the ground” in order to provide an empirical counterpoint to the popular discourse of Vivir Bien / the Good Life as it has been put forward by the government of Evo Morales. This paper connects, thus, the political economy and ecology of chicken meat production with discursive aspects of government politics. This paper has been accepted as a chapter in the volume “*In Defense of Farmers: The Future of Agriculture in the Shadow of Corporate Power*”, edited by Jane Gibson and Sara Alexander, to be published by Nebraska University Press.

The **second paper** remains with the case of chicken, asking: “Chicken for Everyone?” In this paper, I present an analysis of the Bolivian poultry sector

inspired by Sayer's (2001) critical re-conceptualization of a cultural political economy framework. The paper links the emergence of industrial poultry rearing in Bolivia with changes in food consumption practices. With this analysis, I uncover some of the workings behind the success of industrially produced chicken meat in Bolivia. I bring out the unequal distribution of the benefits and drawbacks of this new way of doing agriculture. This paper is currently under review at a peer-reviewed journal.

The **third paper** presents a critical analysis of my ethnographic research amongst the Cochabamba middle class and brings out the racist undertones of the distinctions made in everyday food consumption. I point at the historical roots of these distinctions and claim that the whiteness of the people who I have done fieldwork with serves as a smokescreen for historically gained privileges. The paper shows how the need for "distinction" is an inherent part of the coloniality of taste. This paper has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Latin American & Caribbean Ethnic Studies*.

In the *kappa* at hand, I give an account of my theoretical framework, particularly of its critical realist roots and the connections I have made between the works of Bourdieu and Quijano. The chapter that follows this introduction provides a background to the unequal foundations of Bolivian society, but also to the relevance of inequalities in the food sector and when striving to achieve sustainability. The *kappa* also contains an ethnographic chapter on the "middle class" of Cochabamba and the way I related to friends and family in the field. In chapter 6, I bring the threads of my research together to discuss the social inequalities inherent in the *coloniality of taste* and their biophysical implications. I end with some thoughts on how to move on from my analysis of the current situation. What can be done to overcome the social divisions of the country? And can food play a mediating role in this situation?

Finally, I hope that this thesis will not only nourish your academic spirit but also your understanding of Bolivian society and your empathy with people from different walks of life – *¡que aproveche!*

## 2 Unequal Matters

Nostalgia, as always, had wiped away bad memories and magnified the good ones. No one was safe from its onslaught. Through the train window you could see men sitting in the doorways of their houses, and you only had to look at their faces to know what they were waiting for. Women washing clothes on the gravel beaches watched the train go by with the same hope. They thought every stranger who arrived carrying a briefcase was the man from the United Fruit Company coming back to reestablish the past. At every encounter, on every visit, in every letter, sooner or later the sacramental sentence would make its appearance: “They say the company’s coming back.” Nobody knew who said it, or when, or why, but nobody doubted it was true.

Gabriel García Márquez, *Living to Tell the Tale*

### 2.1 The agrarian society of Cochabamba

As I walk with my husband Cesar through the city of Cochabamba, I wonder about the ditches cutting across the entire city, running through parks, between the two lanes of a main street, surfacing next to houses and then disappearing again, only to come up again after a few meters. Lined with grey cement, these ditches often accumulate waste, mostly plastic that has been thrown away and blown by the wind into the canal. “These are irrigation canals”, Cesar explains. Nowadays mostly running dry, the canals were the centerpiece of agriculture in the Cochabamba valley, distributing water to the different landholdings and parcels. As we walk through a park that is, nowadays, seen as quite central in the city, Cesar tells me: “When we were kids, there was maize growing here. We would run around in the fields and play here. This was far away from everything for us.” Nowadays, the city of Cochabamba has extended into the entire valley, the *Valle Bajo*, and is climbing up the sides of the surrounding mountains. Food is brought from faraway places to the central market of the city. But once upon a time, the Cochabamba valley was the granary that supplied a vast region with staple foods.

Already the Incas had turned the region into the center of maize production for their empire. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Incas arrived in the Cochabamba region. Given the potential of the region for the production of maize, which had ritual uses and



was an important staple crop, Cochabamba was subject to fundamental restructuration. The small ethnic groups that had lived in the region were resettled to guard the eastern borders of the empire, and *Quechua*-speaking groups from other regions were brought to the area in order to cultivate maize for the empire (Larson, 2017, p. 82). The valleys of Cochabamba became the granary of the Inca empire, which was directly managed by the Incas. Nowadays, the remnants of round Inca storage houses, *colcas*, made of stone used to store maize can still be found in the region. The picture below shows the ruins of *Incallajta*, situated east of Cochabamba city, an Inca city that was only finished around the time of the arrival of the Spaniards to the region.



Image 1: Ruins of Incallajta, located near Pocona east of Cochabamba city (photo by the author)

After conquering Central America, the Spaniards arrived in what is now Peru in the 1530s (Mesa Gisbert, 2012, p. 85). In the southern part of the Inca empire, the Collasuyo, Aymara and Quechua people fought hard against the intruders, but lost the confrontation in 1539 (Larson, 2017, p. 86). The Europeans soon saw the economic potential of the region, with the *Altiplano* being rich in minerals and the eastern valleys offering good conditions for agriculture. The colonizers established tributary units, *encomiendas*, which owed their Spanish administrator tribute

(Larson, 2017, p. 89). The *encomiendas* were established without regard to ethnic and ecological patterns of settlements, so that communities were separated arbitrarily. In its early time, the incipient colonial administration depended on collaboration with former Incaic authorities, which the Spaniards called *caciques*, who were to help with controlling the *encomiendas*. The Cochabamba valleys were restructured profoundly already during the first decades of colonial rule. The end of Inca rule had left a power vacuum in the region that made it easier for the Spaniards to appropriate the fertile land. Agricultural activities were already becoming concentrated in the hands of the colonizers by the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century (Larson, 2017, p. 373). Agriculture was to serve particularly as a support for the mining activities in the highlands, notably the silver mines of Potosí. Concerns with the lack of control over the mining revenues led the Spaniards to install a tighter colonial rule in the region (Larson, 2017).

In 1569, Viceroy Toledo was installed as the representative of the Spanish crown in Peru, which at that time included the Bolivian territory (referred to as “High Peru”) (Mesa Gisbert, 2012, p. 102). He was to impose a colonial government that gave more power to the state and would benefit the Spanish elites more directly. In order to rationalize taxation, Toledo sent year-long expeditions across the region in order to account for indigenous communities and their resources. Under his rule, “Indian towns” were established, to which indigenous communities were forcibly relocated. This was to facilitate the administration of the region. The relocation created many conflicts around land, since land was taken away from the host community and redistributed amongst the newcomers (Larson, 2017, p. 125). In the new settlements, the white elite and some indigenous nobles who had been granted special rights by the Spaniards were in charge. These local rulers were also tasked with converting the population to Christianity (Mesa Gisbert, 2012, p. 117).

All indigenous communities were subject to taxation, depending on the number of men in the community. Taxes could be delivered in products, but were increasingly demanded in money (Mesa Gisbert, 2012, p. 117; Larson, 2017, p. 89). The *mita*, a system of forced labor, was adopted from the Inca empire. It was organized in a way that each community had to send their men for several months every year to work in the mines of Potosí (Mesa Gisbert, 2012, p. 117). The small remuneration received for *mita* labor was not enough for survival, making additional support from the communities necessary (Larson, 2017, p. 120).

It is hard to establish the subjective meanings of the emerging indigenous identities at that time, but in administrative terms being “indigenous” meant being connected to a community confined to a certain geographical area that was forced to pay taxes and deliver forced labor. The indigenous population was not allowed to move from their new communities, and the ones who did escape were referred to as *forasteros*, indigenous people without a fixed settlement. These *forasteros* offered their work

on different landholdings and were also referred to as *yanaconas*. Larson views the labor of these *yanaconas* as essential for maintaining the large landholdings which the Spaniards had established in the Cochabamba valleys (Larson, 2017, p. 158). The Cochabamba valley increasingly attracted *forasteros*, and by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they outnumbered the population accounted for as indigenous (Larson, 2017, p. 159). The *forasteros* lived in Spanish towns, on haciendas or in Indian towns. They started to join the lower ranks of Spanish society and formed a category that came to be regarded as similar to the *mestizos* (Larson, 2017, p. 161).

Nowadays, many people in Cochabamba consider themselves *mestizos*, and Larson describes that this identity formation has its roots in the early colonial era, where being *mestizo* meant being able to escape taxation. But the meaning of the term *mestizo* is rather complex. In general terms, it refers to the mixture of Spanish and indigenous provenience and culture. Throughout Latin American history, as Marisol De la Cadena elaborates in her genealogy of *mestizaje*, being *mestizo* has had a *moral* connotation (De la Cadena, 2005). A *mestizo* was a transgressor of the colonial order, particularly through marriage or sexual relations. This transgression was against moral decency, it was *indecente*. The colonial system of differentiation was based upon moral considerations, and only later on, in the Enlightenment period, these classifications would be rationalized as racial distinctions. Through theories of evolution and “civilization”, *mestizaje* became to be conceptualized as superior to the category Indian, based on being at least partly of European descent. This had not been the case before. Being a *mestizo* used to mean, first and foremost, being free of tax burdens and being able to move freely in the colonial territory. But being *mestizo* came at the price of moral contempt. I will expand upon the contemporary notion of *mestizaje* in Bolivia in chapter 4.

Towards the end of colonial rule, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the conditions had deteriorated for both the elite and the indigenous population. In Cochabamba, the declining importance of Potosí as a market for agricultural products had led landowners to the decision to rent out land to peasants. This resulted in a complex system of liabilities and types of landholdings, with subsistence agriculture existing on hacienda lands. The Spaniards, in a last attempt to hold on to their colonies, intensified the system of direct rule and worked towards reinforcing *mita* duties and tribute payments. But the colonies were at the edge of bankruptcy. The reforms left peasants impoverished and reinforced class inequalities, but they also created a common ground for resistance against the Spanish crown. From creole settlers with a Spanish heritage to Andean peasants, all social classes in Cochabamba rose up against the colonial powers starting in the period between 1810 and 1812. By 1825, Bolivia had gained its independence. Although the new republic installed a neo-colonial rule that was modeled upon the previous system, the independence struggle had created pockets of resistance particularly amongst the indigenous peasants (Larson, 2017, pp. 341-367).



By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the structure of landholdings had become increasingly fragmented. In the highlands, communal landholdings had been dissolved, while in the Cochabamba region, this process had already taken place in colonial times (Larson, 2017, p. 386). Cochabamba experienced a decline in importance as an agricultural region: trade agreements with Chile and the introduction of a new railroad system presented the opportunity to import staple foods such as wheat at a higher quality and for a lower price. Cochabamba could not compete with the imported goods. Many small peasants migrated from the region to the highland mines (Rodríguez & Solares, 2011, p. 26).

Agriculture in the Cochabamba valleys turned from being the “granary” of the country to producing for a more regional market. With transport to other regions of Bolivia being too costly, Cochabamba agriculture mainly supplied products for the city of Cochabamba. The *feria*, or market, of Cochabamba city started to grow continuously from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century on (Rodríguez & Solares, 2011, p. 27). At the same time, the elites developed a taste for the foreign and controlled the importation of luxury goods. As Rodríguez and Solares express it:

The fashion from Paris, the English cashmere from Manchester and Birmingham, the silk from the Orient and an endless number of manufactured goods from Europe and the U.S. changed the patterns of consumption and organized the respectable commerce of the city; but of this “other city” that began to live more closely to new values and distanced itself from the worldly noise of the *ferias*. (2011, p. 29)

Despite this desire to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population, the elites were still dependent on staple foods supplied by regional, small- and medium-scale agriculture. The fact that agricultural activity was confined to the region of Cochabamba as a market maintained it technologically rather rudimentary, with tractors only being introduced after WWI and, even then, only being used scarcely (Rodríguez & Solares, 2011, p. 27).

The agricultural census of 1950 shows that at that time, about 40 % of the land used for agriculture all over Bolivia was owned by landlords, yet worked by peasants dependent on them. A further 21 % of the agricultural land was rented out by landlords to peasants. Only 7 % of the land was held by indigenous communities (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 20). There was, thus, little land ownership in Bolivia that was independent from landlords. Most of the land was still concentrated in the hands of few landlords. The nature of the peasant-landlord relationships varied from region to region. While in the highlands, landholdings were organized following the *ayllu* structure and the communities working the land owed personal labor to the landlord, in Cochabamba, the peasants paid rent to the landlord or owed him a part of their harvest. In the Santa Cruz lowlands, the people working the land were paid a low salary, but were also forced into laboring for the landlord (Paz Ballivián, 2009, pp. 21 – 31). According to Ballivián, this pre-capitalist form of labor relations was



the basis for the development of mining capitalism in Bolivia. It provided, on the one hand, capital for the elites to invest in the mines, but also staple foods for the mining towns.

In the 1940s, political forces which called for doing away with the mining oligarchy and the de-facto feudal agricultural system gained momentum (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 50). Together with the workers' and peasants' movements, these forces conjured up an armed conflict, which culminated in the National Revolutionary Movement being elected into government and taking power in 1952 (Mesa Gisbert et al, 2012, p. 509). The new government would nationalize mines and implement the Agricultural Reform of 1953. The National Revolutionary Movement also implemented the universal right to vote, which had previously been negated to women and those working in conditions of servitude, i.e. indigenous peoples. The threefold aims of the Agricultural Reform were to, firstly, abolish servitude and agricultural feudalism, secondly, increase the productivity of the land, and thirdly, create a bigger internal market and industrialize the country (Urquidi, quoted by Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 55). Thus, it was a reform that was geared towards capitalist development. As Ballivián puts it, it was a Bourgeois reform since it challenged the old elites and gave rise to a new middle class preoccupied with industrializing the country (2009, p. 55). The changes implemented by the National Revolutionary Movement intensified power struggles between radical and conservative political actors (Klein, 2011, p. 209).

The areas where the Agricultural Reform was most successful were those characterised by a strong peasants' movement: the valleys (particularly Cochabamba) and the highlands. The distribution of agricultural land to the peasants led to a marked fragmentation of land, which has increased continuously based on the custom of dividing the land amongst the children as a heritage (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 59). The reform cut off the access of small-scale farmers to the market, given that the landowner used to be the one to commercialize the produce. The market was eventually reorganised by intermediaries from urban areas, travelling to the rural areas to buy the farmers' produce and setting up new markets where the farmers would sell their products to intermediaries. With time, some farmers became intermediaries themselves (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 60). Up to today, these intermediaries buy products at extremely low prices.

The adverse conditions for small-scale farmers have led to a process of *descampesinación*, emigration from the countryside (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 66). Due to the weak development of Bolivian industry, the migration within national borders has, however, not lead to a complete abandonment of the agricultural activities but serves, rather, to complement these activities with short-term jobs. This phenomenon includes the temporary or permanent migration to scarcely populated rural areas in order to work new agricultural land (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p.

70). The direction of the movement is usually from the highlands towards the tropical or semi-tropical areas.

The Agricultural Reform also affected the construction of indigenous identities: While before the reform, those who worked the land would be conceptualized as indigenous, they were re-labeled as peasants during and after the reform. This was to emphasize their class position rather than their ethnic identity. Bolivia had become a *mestizo* nation, according to the ruling powers, and supposedly done away with the division between the indigenous population and the people of European descent. Those who were still referred to as indigenous were the communities of the lowlands, which did not fit well within the discourse of a *mestizo* nation (Burman, 2014, p. 250).

These very lowlands were designated by the country's elites to become the center of industrial agriculture. With the Agricultural Reform, the state was also aiming at an industrialisation of Bolivian agriculture, and so there was not much interest in splitting up the landholdings in the lowlands. Instead, the areas remained almost intact, with "agricultural enterprises" (the former landlords) declared as the rightful owners. The state also donated land, expropriated from indigenous communities, to individuals (Paz Ballivián, 2009, p. 79). These agricultural enterprises received, and continue to receive, a large part of the state support for agricultural production.

Between 1952 and 1985, agricultural politics followed what could be called the "national statist model" (AIPE, 2011). During this period, state intervention was an important measure to work towards import substitution and the modernization of agriculture. Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, Bolivia was mostly controlled by military dictatorships. During this time, the privileged position of the eastern lowlands was strengthened by the donation of land to entrepreneurs with close ties to various dictators (Albarracín Dekker, 2015).

In 1985, inflation reached an all-time high in Bolivia, and in order to facilitate financial support from international organisms such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the government passed a decree that marks the beginning of the neoliberal period in Bolivia. The main measures of the decree were the downsizing of state administration, the liberalization of the market, and the fostering of exports (Mesa Gisbert et al., 2012, p. 628).

During the neoliberal era, industrial agricultural products (particularly soy and sugar cane) gained importance and have remained the most important crops until today. At the same time, the production of most other crops has stagnated (AIPE, 2011). Despite the "backing out" of the state in the neoliberal era, the financial support for agribusinesses continued (Albarracín Dekker, 2015). The situation of large-scale agriculture in the east was also improved by the strategy of the Camara Agropecuaria del Oriente (CAO; eastern agricultural chamber) to get their members

into key positions in the ministries related to agriculture (Albarracín Deker, 2015). On the other hand, as Deker notes, small-scale agriculture lost any support from the state and became dependent on support from NGOs and international organizations that followed the logic of a “surrogate state”. In addition, small-scale farmers had to compete with cheap imported goods (AIPE, 2011).

During this time, the city of Cochabamba became an important destination for migrants, who were leaving the countryside or had been laid off by the mines. The state-owned mining corporation COMIBOL had to let go of 23,000 miners alone after the world market price of tin had collapsed in 1985 (Mesa Gisbert et al., 2012, p. 636). Since the times of economic crisis followed by the “structural adjustment” program, the main cities of Bolivia (La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Cochabamba) have received a steady flow of migrants. About 70% of the population of the department of Cochabamba has migrated to the region (PNUD, 2011, p. 101).

The turn of the millennium saw the rise of indigenous and anti-neoliberal politics in Bolivia, with massive protests such as the “water war” (2000) and the “gas war” (2003) unsettling the governments of the time (Klein, 2011, p. 262). Protesting in the “water war” against the privatization of their water resources, the population of Cochabamba successfully fought for the control over their water supply. Following this period of unrest, Evo Morales and his *Movimiento Al Socialismo* (MAS; Movement Towards Socialism) won the 2005 elections.

The MAS positions itself as anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist and pro-indigenous. The aim of its agricultural politics is “food security with sovereignty”, through a fostering of small-scale community agriculture. The government talks about the model of a “plural economy”, with the state, private enterprises, and communities participating in the economy. The MAS government practices increased state participation in agriculture and has founded EMAPA, a state enterprise supporting agriculture and food security, as well as the BDP, the Bank for Productive Development that channels state funding for producers. Debt relief and the high prices of raw materials (until 2014/15) left the Morales government in a favorable economic situation that allowed for large-scale investments.

The MAS government, still in power today, has received widespread criticism for falling short of its plans. In the current struggle for the fourth re-election of president Morales, the government expertly plays on century-old social divisions in order to prevent the emergence of a strong and unified opposition. Morales has declared that “whoever is against me, is against the indigenous population”. And the vice-president García Linera has belittled public protests as arising out of the vanities of the middle class.

From the Incas up to the Agricultural Reform and beyond, those in power have always controlled land and agricultural production in Bolivia. Many who cannot

make their living any more from small-scale agriculture have migrated to cities such as Cochabamba. In the next section, I discuss the current state of social inequalities in the country as well as how these inequalities are being contested.

## 2.2 Intersecting inequalities in Bolivia

In 2011, the UN Development Program in Bolivia published a detailed report regarding the state of social inequalities in the country. Titled “*Los cambios detrás del cambio*” (*The changes behind “the change”*), it alluded to the political ambitions of the MAS government to lead a “process of change”/“*proceso de cambio*” in Bolivia (PNUD, 2011). With a wealth of statistical data, the report brought out that social inequalities are persistent in the country. The richest 20% of Bolivians held 60% of household income in 2007, while the poorest 20% earned 2% of total household income (PNUD, 2011, p. 27). Statistically, a non-indigenous man was likely to have a four times higher income than an indigenous woman (PNUD, 2011, p. 35). This reveals that the historically developed divisions of gender, race, ethnicity, and class are still important and reinforce each other. In terms of education, indigenous women living in rural areas receive 2 school years (in 2007) while a non-indigenous man living in an urban area could count over 14 school years on average (PNUD, 2011, p. 98).

In this section, I want to go beyond these numbers and show how gender, race, ethnicity, and class come together in an intersectional manner to reinforce social inequalities – but also challenge them. Intersectionality, coined by the black feminist movement, refers to the coming together of different kinds of exclusion. I side with Paulson (2016), who argues that this concept can be used to talk about social stratification in general rather than focusing on particularly excluded groups. Thus, one may analyze the situation of dominant as well as marginalized social groups through the lens of intersectionality. When different logics of stratification come together, it is hard to find an analytical starting point. I take racial inequalities as the issue to start with, since my fieldwork experience has revealed the importance of this axis of exclusion. I then go on to explain how race intersects with gender and class in the context of Bolivia.

Aníbal Quijano (1992) argues that the colonization of Latin America was the foundation for establishing material relations of exploitation, which were closely intermeshed with the imposition of new categories of social distinction. He maintains that relationships of exploitation all over the world, colonial and post-colonial, are modelled upon *racist* distinctions, particularly between Europeans and non-Europeans (1992, p. 1).

The early debates about the differences between the Spanish colonizers and the civilizations they met were led in religious and moral terms. The Spaniards saw the indigenous population as pagans and found it necessary to discuss whether they had souls (Quijano, 1992, p. 2). As Marisol de la Cadena remarks, with reference to Walter Mignolo, “Enlightenment came second”, in that ideas about progress and civilization served to reify previous moral categories (De la Cadena p. 267). In the previous section, I showed how the category *mestizo* was re-signified in this way. The term “race” can be seen as a product of modernity, first used to denote blood lineage (Wade, 2010, ch. 1., par. 14). It became a concept that presented certain cultural and personal traits as “natural”, thus arguing that certain populations could be legitimately exploited because they were “naturally inferior” to the European colonizers (Wade, 2010, ch. 1). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scientific studies backing up racial justifications for ruling over other people emerged. Race was seen as based on innate and fixed biological traits. Racist distinctions became arguments for ruling over the “less evolved” (Wade, 2010, ch. 1, par. 15).

Nowadays, races are scientifically regarded as social constructs, and the term “ethnicity” is often used to denote the cultural nature of social differences. But Wade argues that race should be called by its name when it is used in social interaction (Wade, 2010, ch. 1, par. 37). Several other writers versed in the issue of race and ethnicity in Latin America make a similar argument: Weismantel argues that, in fact, racial distinctions are very alive in the region, with social distinctions being based on claims of “natural superiority” of white over indigenous populations (Weismantel, 2001, p. xxix). De la Cadena goes on to explain that race in Latin America has a cultural meaning: Cultural traits are an inherent part of making racial distinctions, and “cultural progress”, such as education, is seen as a way to improve the traits of those who are supposedly inferior (De la Cadena, 2001).

In colonial times, the indigenous population of Bolivia was seen as a source of tax contribution and forced labor to be exploited as the backbone of the colonial economy. After the country’s independence, particularly the elites began expressing their frustration with the heterogeneity of Bolivian society. Resentments over the lack of progress, particularly in comparison to countries like Argentina or Chile, were linked to “the Indian problem” (Stefanoni, 2010, p. 39). The indigenous population, varyingly seen by the country’s elites as either dangerously aggressive or docile and innocent, was to be educated and become “civilized”. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, “indigenous schools” were established, which provided a rudimentary education to the population living in indigenous communities (Stefanoni, 2010, p. 42).

Around the same time, the book *Pueblo enfermo* (The sick people) was published, and it has remained until today a classic in Bolivian literature read by every student. The author Alcides Arguedas paints a bleak picture of the indigenous population,



blaming the state of the Bolivian nation on the lack of European influence (Stefanoni, 2010, p. 45). To him, even the *mestizos* could not contribute to improving the situation, since they brought together the worst traits of both Europeans and the indigenous population (Stefanoni, 2010, p. 46). He was contradicted by another thinker of the time, Franz Tamayo, who claimed that the seeds of progress lay in the identification with the nation's indigenous roots. What was wrong with the *cholo* and the *mestizo* (with the *cholo* being regarded as more indigenous than the *mestizo*) was that they had been seduced by European culture. This was, however, not to say that Tamayo and others thinking in similar terms despised everything European. To them, the white population of Latin America was a deviant copy of European culture:

Which white are you talking of? Of the one who is making the future great Germany, the one who has made today's great England? Or are you talking of the South American white, poor, vicious, degenerated, lazy, joking around and unsubstantial? (Tamayo, quoted in Stefanoni, 2010, p. 48)

Only later on, constructing a *mestizo* nation, more specifically a *white mestizo* nation, became a desirable political goal. Many scholars have argued that the projects of creating a homogeneous *mestizo* nation were aimed at whitening national culture, be it through immigration from European countries or through various education projects (Wade, 2003, p. 277).

The notion of indigeneity, as Burman (2014) brings out in his work, has always been subject to re-definition by hegemonic forces. As I mentioned in the previous section, during the times of the Agrarian Reform, indigenous peoples were redefined as *campesinos*, peasants. During the 1990s, a period of neoliberal reforms, multiculturalism had its heyday in Bolivia. As the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui remarks, the harsh reality of structural reforms needed to be "humanized" (2012, p. 98). Responding to indigenous social movements, the Bolivian elites symbolically recognized the rights of indigenous peoples, including territorial rights. But this surface recognition reified the notion of indigeneity as fixed and defined by the past, rather than complex, changing, and contemporary (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). As a way of going beyond neoliberal multiculturalism, Rivera Cusicanqui suggests a decolonial *mestizaje*, which is based upon the mixing of indigenous and European traditions *as equals*. A new, more flexible modernity could be established (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, pp. 105 – 107).

Superficially, it seems like indigenous cultures are being revalued in Bolivia with the ascent of the Morales government. But in fact, many indigenous organizations are positioning themselves against Morales. An important turning point was the conflict around the construction of a highway cutting through the indigenous territory and nature reserve TIPNIS (Burman, 2014). The Morales government has

constructed a hegemonic version of indigeneity that is an inherent part of the modern Bolivian state and its power. As Burman (2014) argues, the TIPNIS conflict served as the foundation for bringing indigenous peoples from all over the country together as a counter-hegemonic force that practices an indigeneity which is critical towards the Bolivian state.

Maria Lugones (2007) has expanded Quijano's notion of coloniality to include a more thorough account of gender. She argues that the gender distinctions imposed in colonial times can only be understood in contrast to what existed before them. In general terms, the colonizing powers imposed gender distinctions as they saw fit. Colonized women, initially seen as animal-like objects without gender, could be either raped or held as concubines. If they ascended to a higher social category, they could never reach the status of a white woman. The colonies were exotic and sexualized places, with adventures waiting for the colonizers. Colonized women were (and are) seen as stronger and more sexually aggressive than white women. Later on, ideas of purity entered the picture, with the exotic traits that women in colonial territories were ascribed with being judged as morally disagreeable (Lugones, 2007).

This minefield of moralities is also part of *mestizaje*. The often forced sexual relations between the white colonizers and indigenous women left the man without moral contempt and responsibilities. If, on the other hand, a woman got involved in sexual relations across social boundaries, she was morally condemned (Wade, 2003, p. 277). A recent study (Barriga Dávalos, 2016) shows that the high society of the Bolivian city of Sucre still has very strict patterns of who to enter a formal relationship with. Both men and woman are supposed to marry somebody from their own social circle or with a higher social status, and they hardly ever establish legitimate relationships with persons with indigenous roots. Relationships are supposed to "improve the race" (Barriga Dávalos, 2016, pp. 55 – 61).

In the Andes, the often stereotypically portrayed indigenous woman is known as the *chola*. Actually, the *chola* is an in-between figure, negotiating indigeneity in a white urban space. According to Weismantel's (2001) account of Andean femininity, the *chola* evokes feelings of desire and fear at the same time. This concurs with Lugones' account of the coloniality of gender. But most of all, the popular image of the *chola* is a myth, as Weismantel argues, which represents an idyllic past when social boundaries were still unchallenged: Andean postcard images and paintings represent the *chola* as passive and with a maternal force that provides the urban area with its basic food supply. It is not by accident that the typical image of the *chola* is the market woman.

Women, and particularly indigenous women, are silenced, subject to violence, and exploited as cheap labor in the Andes and elsewhere. Burman (2011) discusses that Andean *Aymara* activists are reviving the concept of *chachawarmi*, the

complementarity of man and woman, as an emancipatory concept. Some more privileged feminists argue that this concept may serve to conceal the reality of gender inequalities. Still, evoking alternatives to the colonial imposition of binary gender norms serves as a ground for resistance.

I remember once talking to a neighbor about racial stereotypes, and I asked him, “What would you do if an indigenous man turned up at your door just like this?” He said, jokingly, “Well, I would put him to work as a gardener!” In many encounters I have had in Cochabamba, the perception that people with indigenous roots are mostly workers prevails. And it is, indeed, like this that inequalities of race, class, and gender come together objectively and subjectively. From a classical Marxist perspective, race and gender serve to *justify* underlying economic exploitation.

Such a perspective is provided by Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) in his account of the role of culture in the world system. I believe he has some valid points to make. He argues that racist accounts stating that some countries and social groups are “naturally” more advanced than others serve to justify inequalities in economic development. This naturalization of a global hierarchy is also gendered: The dominant countries and social groups are conceptualized as more masculine than the dominated ones. Furthermore, “modernization” has come to mean an apparently universal process of “Westernization”. Still, there is some room for diversity – in the name of the division of labor, social groups with a different ethnic identity are “naturally” assigned tasks that are needed in the economy. In this capitalist world system, economic success is presented as the merit of the hard working. Whoever does not buy into this work ethic is left behind and “undeserving” of success.

Still, those left out by the formal economy can find a way to a more prosperous life. In Bolivia, a new middle class has been emerging with family networks, many of them with indigenous roots, making their way into independent commercial activities. Some of these entrepreneurs have made it into the economic elite of the country, showcasing extravagant homes and *fiestas*. The PNUD report quoted at the beginning of this section includes the story of an indigenous woman who became, through decades of hard work, the owner of several stores in the city of La Paz (PNUD, 2011, pp. 248 - 250). She moved with her family to a wealthier neighbourhood in the city, and in passing, the report mentions that moving to a different area of the city precluded her from receiving social appreciation for her success. This short sentence unpacks a cruel truth in Bolivia: social recognition by the established elites is almost impossible to achieve for the indigenous population that has ascended economically. In the case of the indigenous woman mentioned in the report, the new, “elite” neighbors would not accept her as an equal. This is proof for the fact that, in Bolivia and elsewhere, high economic capital does not necessarily go hand in hand with a high social status. In Bolivia, this is due to interconnectedness of race, ethnicity, class, and gender.



## 2.3 Inequalities and sustainability

A central concern of my thesis is how social inequalities interplay with the prospects of moving towards a more sustainable society. Addressing this concern entails, in my view, linking social inequalities to the unequal distribution of biophysical resources and risks. As the texts collected in this thesis show, social inequalities have biophysical implications. Therefore, I argue that addressing social inequalities is essential for reaching sustainability. The younger sibling of sustainability, sustainable development, has been presented as a question of justice within and between generations. As the Brundtland report states, sustainable development is about “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987b, ch2., par. 1). If we, as Langhelle (1999, p. 141) states, do not address the problem of social inequalities, all we will be handing over to future generations is “massive poverty and miserable living conditions for the majority of the world’s population”.

The way social inequalities have been addressed in the debate on sustainable development has changed over time. In the 1980s, the commission coining the term sustainable development referred to poverty as the main cause of environmental problems (WCED, 1987a, par. 8). According to them, it was the poor who, out of desperation, used up the resources around them. Broad awareness that industrialized nations caused much more serious environmental problems only developed afterwards (Langhelle, 1999). Similarly, the issue of conspicuous consumption only entered the political sphere in the 1990s through Agenda 21 (Carter, 2007).

It is no wonder that sustainable development has been criticized as neo-colonial, aiming at expanding the control of the “advanced” industrialized countries over the Global South. As Escobar (1996, p. 329) expresses it, sustainable development suggests that “it is up to the benevolent hand of the West to save the earth.” The expansion of the “management” of ecosystems and the appropriation of indigenous knowledge have been widely criticized as intrusions of capitalist management and bureaucracy into all cultural contexts (see Banerjee, 2003; Leff, 2002; Boehmer-Christiansen, 2002).

Rather than following the line of argument of mainstream sustainable development, I situate my work within the debates of environmental justice, political ecology, and more specifically food justice, which address the interrelationships between sustainability and social inequalities much more critically.

Concerns with environmental justice were taken up by a movement that emerged in the 1980s in the United States. The movement formed around struggles of local communities against environmental hazards (Carter, 2007). Today, the

environmental justice movement has become global, connecting initiatives and problems around the world (EJOLT, 2014).

The links between environmental justice and sustainability are taken up in the book “Just Sustainabilities”, edited by Agyeman, Bullard and Evans (2003). There are, first of all, links between inequalities and *unsustainability*. Around the world, the poor are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and degradation. At the same time, they are not the ones causing these problems. The dividing lines along which environmental hazards affect social groups are many.

One such dividing line is between the Global North and South. As McLaren (2003) discusses, global inequalities lead to over-exploitation of resources as poorer countries are driven into exploitative management practices by debt and multinational investors. The exploitation of resources in the Global South is not new; it has been practiced since colonial times. The progress of industrialized nations is built on resources from the Global South (or the “periphery” in World System Theory terms). Thus, as McLaren (2003) argues, industrialized countries hold an *ecological debt* towards the Global South.

Similarly, Hornborg (2003) develops the notion of *ecologically unequal exchange* in a “zero-sum world” stating that the economic and political centers of the world accumulate energy and matter at the expense of the periphery. At the same time, through what Faber and McCarthy (2003) term *ecological imperialism*, dangerous production processes and wastes are exported to poorer countries and communities. This phenomenon is also known as *environmental load displacement* (see Hornborg, 2009). This points to the problem that it is, as also Carvalho (2001) argues, the very structure of the world capitalist system that hampers a sustainable development.

Race and gender are other fault lines of social inequality affecting the distribution of environmental impacts. An analysis of the location of chemical factories in Louisiana, for instance, produced the result that most factories are located close to African-American communities, which carry the effects of pollution and accidents (Wright, 2003). Women, particularly in developing countries, depend on land as a source of their livelihood and are therefore particularly affected by the deterioration of land due to external forces (Wickramasinghe, 2003).

Unequal power relations also determine which kind of knowledge is taken seriously in the process of creating “sustainable development”. As Peña (2003) shows, management knowledge is often more highly valued than traditional knowledge. It is women’s knowledge in particular that is often neglected (Wickramasinghe, 2003).

Inequalities are also relevant in terms of the impact of measures imposed in the name of sustainability. Environmental taxation, for instance, is a heavier burden for the poorer strata of society if questions of social justice are not taken into account

(Dobson, 1999). Also, positive incentives such as the option to consume “ethically” are only available for those who can afford it (Redclift & Hinton, 2008).

Inequalities do not only matter in terms of differentiated impacts upon social groups and nations, but also in the *process* of going towards sustainability, which is in many cases exclusive and elitist (Glasmeier & Farrigan, 2003; Blowers, 2003).

Out of the environmental justice movement, a more specific concern with inequalities related to food has emerged. The field of *food justice* interrogates how the food system is permeated by inequalities of class, race, ethnicity, and gender, and how to go beyond them (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). The scholars and activists working for food justice criticize exclusionary practices of buying one’s way into an “alternative” food system. They call for a revival of more egalitarian food practices. Related to the food justice movement is the struggle for *food sovereignty*, lead by the movement *La Via Campesina*. Working for food sovereignty means working for the right of people all over the world to take control over their food supply (La Via Campesina, 2011).

Many of the theoretical questions underlying the struggle of the movements for food and environmental justice are taken up by the field of *political ecology*. Political ecology, as Robbins (2011, p. 5) puts it, is a *community of practice* ranging from activists to academics. For political ecologists, environmental change and ecological problems go beyond the biophysical: they are the product of political processes.

Inequalities are central to political ecology analysis. There is a focus on “factors that shape relations of power among human groups and link local biosocial landscapes to global processes” (Paulson & Gezon, 2005, p. 2). “Political ecology stories”, so Robbins claims (2011, p. 87), “are stories of justice and injustice”.

It is, however, not enough to state that there are winners and losers in socio-natural processes. Political ecology wants to understand the logic, the structure behind the persistence of unequal outcomes. Therefore, the field is interested in “the historical processes, legal and institutional infrastructures, and socially implicated assumptions and discourses that typically make unjust outcomes the rule” (Robbins, 2011, p. 87). Political ecologists construct critical chains of explanation that often challenge dominant explanations of causes of environmental degradation and prescriptions for solutions (Paulson & Gezon, 2005; Robbins, 2011). Such work must at least partly be driven by theory (Robbins, 2011).

The theoretical perspectives applied in political ecology are very diverse; what they have in common is that they are *critical* theories, i.e. theories critical of the pitfalls of modernity. Some of the more prominent theoretical frameworks used are: Marxist political economy, feminism, critical environmental history, postcolonial studies, and Foucauldian notions of power/knowledge and governmentality (Robbins, 2011).

The critical analysis of unequal power relations, including how they have developed over time, is, however, not the sole purpose of political ecology. This community of practice is also driven by the conviction that there are “better, less coercive, less exploitative, and more sustainable ways of doing things” (Robbins, 2011, p. 20). Political ecology analysis is instrumental to pointing out “the inequities of such [political and economic] relationships precisely to suggest ways in which sustainable and equitable development may then take place” (Bryant, 1991, p. 166). Practitioners can also have the ambition to *redefine* sustainable development “to encompass questions of power over one’s body and one’s labor; power to control one’s resources and territory; and the relative balance of power necessary to engage in equitable and just exchanges of labor, produce, resources, and money” (Paulson, 2005, p. 190).

My research constructs a political ecology argument focusing on food practices and their biophysical implications. The argument starts with the little and apparently trivial actions of everyday life and links them to underlying social inequalities as well as the biophysical implications of these inequalities.



# 3 Conceptualizing Inequalities

The things duplicate in Tlön; they similarly have a propensity to delete themselves and lose detail when the people forget them. There is the classic example of a doorway that persisted while a beggar was visiting it and vanished out of sight after his death. Sometimes, a few birds, a horse, have saved the ruins of an amphitheater.

Jorge Luis Borges; Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius; translated by the author from the Spanish original

## 3.1 An ethnography in dialogue with theory

The methodology underlying this dissertation is ethnography. I draw, thus, on material collected during extended periods of time spent in the field in Bolivia. It is my aim to discuss general problems in Bolivian society, particularly social inequalities, as well as the issue of sustainability based on this rich data. In order to do so, it is essential to engage with social theory.

In many accounts of ethnographic work, the process of developing more abstract theoretical insights remains vague. Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, for instance, cites Lienhardt (1985), who describes the relationship between data and theory as an “elephant-and-rabbit stew”. What is required, says Lienhardt, is one elephant of ethnography and one rabbit of theory. The art, as he sees it, consists in bringing out the flavor of the rabbit” (Hylland Eriksen, 2010, p. 29). While this is an interesting, and actually quite true, metaphor, I have used Karen O’Reilly’s (2012) account of ethnographic method as a guideline for the relationship between ethnography and theory. She describes the ethnographic research process as “iterative-inductive”: The ethnographer approaches, in an inductive manner, the field without too stringent theoretical preconceptions and then goes on to iteratively move between data collected in the field and theoretical conceptualization, progressing through several analytical feedback loops.

In this “sophisticated inductivism” (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 30), theory plays an important role throughout the research process. Theory is important from the beginning on, since ethnographic research starts out with a research problem informed by theoretical ideas. There is no research without preconceived ideas, even if they are



not expressed explicitly in theoretical terms. O'Reilly calls this a “guiding theoretical problem” (2012, p. 32) – a theoretically informed problem or interest that guides the research. During the research process, theories help to make sense of the data collected and point towards further directions for data collection. It is specific to ethnography that the theories used can also be *emic*, i.e. based on the research participants’ concepts and worldviews (Hylland Eriksen, 2010).

Often, ethnography connects to social theory in order to make sense of a situation. This process, I believe, is particularly well-conceptualized in Burawoy’s *extended case method* (Burawoy, 1998). The role of theory in this method is to help the ethnographer “extend out” from the field – from specific details to general explanations, from the “micro” to the “macro”, from the present to the past (and the future) (Burawoy, 1998, p. 5). The goal of this approach to ethnographic research goes beyond analyzing reality – it is, following Burawoy, also geared towards expanding existing theory through the dialogue between data and theoretical conceptualizations. As will become clear in the sections below, the central theories used in my work have gone through this process of being molded by insights from the field: these insights have brought epistemological doubts to my account of critical realism and inspired a decolonial account of Bourdieu’s theory of social practice.

The importance of going beyond the singularity of the fieldwork site is also underlined by Bourdieu’s disciple Loic Wacquant (2002, p. 1524):

Every microcosm presupposes a macrocosm that assigns it its place and boundaries and implies a dense web of social relations beyond the local site; every synchronic slice of reality observed has built into it a double “sedimentation” of historical forces in the form of institutions and embodied agents endowed with particular capacities, desires, and dispositions; every property selected for depiction is predicated on hunches or unstated hypotheses, which orient the cutting up of discrete data out of the infinity of the empirical manifold.

It is, thus, essential to connect to processes beyond and before the practices observed in ethnographic fieldwork – and it is also important to look inwards, towards one’s own pre-conceptualizations.

My research process has followed very much the “iterative-inductive” logic described by O'Reilly. It has not been my aim to prove or disprove a theory, or to develop theories at the micro-level without any wider relevance. Instead, I have aimed to use social theory, pragmatically but consistently, in order to shed light on my ethnographic data. The data has also spoken back to the theory and made it necessary to extend the theoretical framework. The underlying logic of my work has been influenced by Bhaskar’s critical realism.

## 3.2 A reflexive approach to critical realism

### 3.2.1 A critical realist research logic

The philosophy of science known as critical realism was developed by Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s. It was conceptualized as an alternative to both positivism and idealism (Bhaskar, 1975). Bhaskar argues that both these approaches to science are fundamentally flawed since they confuse appearances with reality (and, from this perspective, the introductory quote by Borges represents the idealist opposite of critical realism). Positivists take experimental observations and regularities as real phenomena, while actually, they are just observations under laboratory conditions and thus independent from what happens outside the laboratory (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 14). Idealists, with contemporary constructivists standing in the same tradition, take reality or *realities* as constructed conceptually through human interpretations. Bhaskar argues that they commit the same fallacy of taking knowledge constructions for real phenomena (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 15).

In contrast to these philosophies of science, Bhaskar's critical realism is what Collier calls a "depth realism" (Collier, 1994, p. 42). This means that critical realists see reality as *stratified*, with social and natural structures, mechanisms, and events underlying surface experiences. Accordingly, Bhaskar outlines three *domains* of reality (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 2): the *empirical*, where everyday experience is situated; the *actual* consisting of events that happen but cannot be immediately experienced; and the *real*, where the mechanisms generating events are at work. These mechanisms are driven by relatively stable structures, from bureaucratic systems to the cellular structures of plants (Bhaskar, 1972; Collier, 1994). It is the task of the researcher to arrive at an analysis of underlying structures and mechanisms, moving from surface phenomena to causal forces by asking the *transcendental* question: "What must be true in order for x to be possible?" (Bhaskar, 1972, p. 13)

My research process has followed such a critical realist logic where the starting point of the investigation has been empirical experience, particularly two apparently contrasting experiences. First, I observed that many people were consuming industrially produced chicken meat on an everyday basis. At the same time, I noticed the way members of the privileged middle class of Cochabamba city distinguish themselves through their eating habits. Both starting points are surface experiences in everyday life, and I took them up in order to dig deeper into the matter of structural inequalities in Bolivia.

The different stages of this process are visible in the papers presented in the second part of this thesis. My first paper, "Industrial Chicken Meat and the Good Life in Bolivia", presents an ethnographic description of the *events* underlying the

increasing poultry production and consumption in Bolivia, which only become apparent after some investigation. I go into how the production and distribution of chicken meat have changed and argue that the governmental discourse of the Good Life/ *Vivir Bien* has served to mask these unsustainable developments. It is, however, the second paper, “Chicken for Everyone?” that delves deeper into the mechanisms and structures underlying the chicken meat boom. I analyze how industrial production driven by the country’s elites and their desire to be part of a Western consumer culture have reinforced each other. In my third paper, I take up the issue of food consumption as distinction. I analyze situations I have experienced during my fieldwork and bring out their racist undertones. I look into the historically developed structures of inequality that are being reproduced through the “distinctions” expressed in food culture.

My work has been a process of going from the everyday to its underlying logic. I have, in Burawoy’s sense, “extended out” from the field: From everyday consumption of fast food chicken to the system of production and distribution of chicken meat. I have also extended my analysis to the discourse and practice of the current Bolivian government supporting the popularity of cheap chicken meat. I have moved from everyday food practices to the distinctions of race and ethnicity expressed through them and further on to the historical, material and symbolic, foundations of social inequalities. I have gone from the concrete to the abstract with the help of theory, which I have adapted, as I describe in greater detail below, to the context studied.

### **3.2.2 Inequalities through a critical realist lens**

I analyze inequalities as having social and biophysical aspects, as connecting unequal power relations to unequal biophysical impacts on human health and ecosystems. I conceptualize *social inequalities*, with the help of Bourdieu and Quijano (as described further below), as an unequal distribution of resources (i.e. cultural, social, economic and overall symbolic capital) and power to determine the legitimacy and distribution of these resources. What makes up the biophysical aspect of social inequalities is, drawing on Hornborg (2001), the “unequal distribution of resources and risks” (p. 1). In this section, I outline how critical realism is useful to, firstly, relate the social and the biophysical and, secondly, to see inequalities as having structural as well as agential aspects.

Bhaskar insists on the point that critical realism researches open systems with real-world complexities (Bhaskar, 2010 and 1972). This, of course, comes with the difficulty of how to conceptualize these open systems. In order to overcome this problem, I draw on what Bhaskar calls *Synchronic Emergent Powers Materialism* (Collier, 1994, p. 156). This rather complicated term can be broken down to the

principle that, in open systems, a multiplicity of mechanisms is at work at the same time, i.e. synchronically, in order to form an outcome. This outcome is emergent and can thus not be reduced to its underlying mechanisms. Language, for instance, certainly emerges from neurological processes, but is, with the meaning it conveys and the social interaction it is embedded in, much more than neurology can describe (see also Collier, 1994, ch. 4).

The acknowledgment of a multiplicity of mechanisms at work at the same time supports the importance of *interdisciplinary* research (Bhaskar, 2010). Bhaskar argues for the necessity of such a perspective particularly when it comes to complex socio-ecological problems such as climate change (Bhaskar, 2010). In a different field, disability research, Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) call for taking into account “(i) physical, (ii) biological, and more specifically physiological, medical or clinical, (iii) psychological, (iv) psycho-social, (v) socio-economic, (vi) cultural and (vii) normative kinds of mechanisms” (p. 288). When carrying out research, one needs to decide to focus on some of these aspects, of course, but what I find most interesting about Bhaskar’s call for interdisciplinarity is how he *conceptualizes* the relationship between the different kinds of mechanisms.

As Collier (1994, ch. 4) explains, the mechanisms at work in the realm of the real are seen as hierarchically ordered. From lower level mechanisms, such as interactions at the atomic level, emerge higher level mechanisms, such as psychological patterns. We humans are biophysical beings, out of which emerges our ability to act in social settings. However, these higher level social mechanisms cannot be explained away through lower level analysis. The symbolic nature of social interactions, as also Hornborg (2017) argues, goes beyond the biophysical basis of human life. But there certainly are feedbacks between the different levels, such as humans interfering with biophysical processes in their bodies when taking medication, or at a larger scale affecting ecological mechanisms through social practices. Image 2 below illustrates the hierarchical ordering of mechanisms, which operate *simultaneously* in order to form *events* as outcomes.

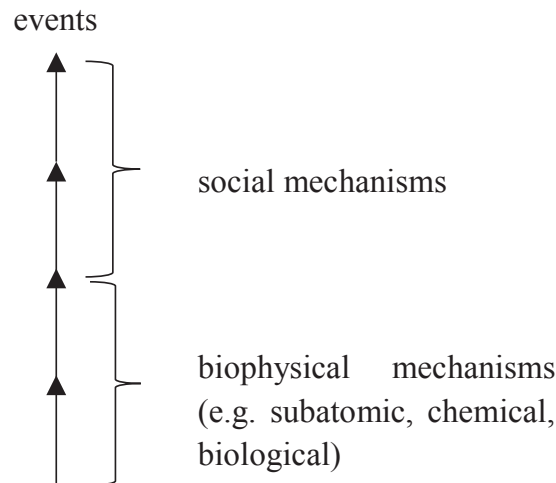


Image 2: Schematic representation of stratification and emergence

Following Bhaskar's argument, I see social inequalities as having rather permanent, structural, foundations *and* as, at the same time, an inherent part of everyday practices. This can be explained theoretically by the conceptualization of the structure-agency relationship in critical realism. In contrast to structuralist approaches, which see agency as determined by social structures, and approaches focusing on individuals as the primary agents of history, Bhaskar develops a model to take account of *both* agency and structure. Structure is, from a critical realist perspective, the *precondition* for agency, and agency *reproduces* social structure (mostly unconsciously so; see Collier, 1994, p. 146). But social structure is also the *outcome* of agency, which means that agency also *produces* structure. In specific circumstances, agency may, in producing structure, also *change* structure (Collier, 1994, p. 146). Structure and agency are, although ontologically different, interdependent and connected. This conceptualization resembles Giddens' structuration theory, but critical realists argue that there is an essential difference: Critical realism sees structure and agency as ontologically separate, and there is a historicity to structure, in that it was constructed in historical conditions predating contemporary agency (Clegg, 2016, p. 500).

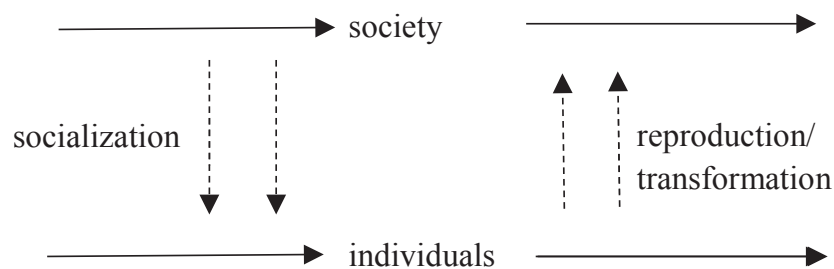


Image 3: Schematic representation of the interrelationships between agency and structure in critical realism (drawn based on Collier, 1994, p. 145)



If we relate this model to the three domains of reality, I see agency as situated at the level of everyday experience in a rather unreflected manner. This agency is, however, linked to underlying events and mechanisms, and it is through these linkages that social structure is being reproduced. This also means that in order to arrive at agency that challenges existing social structures, one needs to become aware of underlying events and mechanisms. As Collier (1994) argues, it is an essential task of critical realist research to expose the workings of underlying mechanisms. This kind of *explanatory critique* provides the basis for human emancipation (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xvii).

Further on in this chapter, I introduce a Bourdieusian framework for the conceptualization of social inequalities, and the *habitus* as conceptualized by Bourdieu bears some resemblances to the critical realist model of structure and agency. The *habitus* is the unconscious basis for our everyday actions, structured by our embeddedness in historical circumstances. It, thus, reproduces social structure. For Bourdieu, there is little potential for change – how can one ever become conscious of patterns of behavior instilled through symbolic mechanisms? Critical realism, and this is where its Marxist roots show, is slightly more positive about social change, arguing that certain historical constellations (which are not named) may allow for agency to change social structures. Another important critical realist, Margaret Archer, has argued for the importance of reflexivity in changing society (Archer, 1998).

As my papers show, my account of social inequalities is quite broad, relating also to gender, race and ethnicity beyond class distinctions. This speaks of an *intersectional* approach to inequality, and the open-endedness of critical realism in terms of the nature of underlying social structures allows, in my view, for such an approach. Recently, feminist scholars have taken up critical realism as an analytical lens on gender as well as on the interrelationships between gender, race, ethnicity, and class (see the special issue of the *Journal of Critical Realism*, Vol. 15, No. 5; see also Gunnarsson, 2011). Clegg (2016) argues that a critical realist account of intersectionality avoids the poststructuralist fallacy of conflating experience with structural conditions. Instead, critical realism offers an analysis of the concrete historical circumstances out of which inequalities emerge.

I find it useful and necessary to take account of the symbolic aspects involved in the production and reproduction of social inequalities. Bourdieu and Quijano help greatly with this ambition, but also approaches within a critical realist tradition can provide insights into the relationships between social structure and the symbolic aspects of social life. I refer here particularly to my first and second papers, which include accounts of *discourse* and *culture* within their analytical frameworks.

In critically analyzing the discourse of *Vivir Bien* put forward by the current Bolivian government, I take inspiration from Fairclough's *Critical Discourse*



*Analysis* (Fairclough, 1992) in my first paper. Fairclough is well known for developing a *realist* approach to discourse analysis, which sees discourse as a form of social practice. From this perspective, discourse and thus meaning-making function just like agency in a critical realist conceptualization: discourse reproduces and, over time, produces social structure. The process of conveying meaning through language is always embedded in a historically developed context. In my first paper, I take inspiration from Fairclough by focusing particularly on the discourse of *Vivir Bien* as part of the *practice* of governing Bolivia.

My second paper follows in the footsteps of Sayer's suggestions for a *critical* cultural political economy (Sayer, 2001). Drawing on Habermas, he argues for the mutual interdependence of the political and economic *system* and social interactions in the *lifeworld*. Sayer develops the Habermasian notion of the colonization of the lifeworld through the system further and argues that the system also *depends* on the lifeworld (Sayer, 2001, p. 688). Both system and lifeworld contain agency as well as more durable structural properties. This echoes the critical realist conceptualization of the interrelationships between agency and structure as outlined by Bhaskar. Everyday life and the political-economic system influence each other, and durable structural properties are reproduced through individuals' actions. In my second paper, I use these insights in order to connect the production and the consumption of chicken meat in Bolivia.

Critical realist ontology has, all in all, provided a solid basis for conceptualizing social and biophysical inequalities. In terms of epistemology, critical realism claims to have a relativist stance (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xi). In what follows, I argue that epistemological relativism and reflexivity are central for doing research that is critical towards power relations of coloniality, and for research that is also very personal.

### **3.2.3 What about epistemological relativism?**

Doing fieldwork in Bolivia and writing about the people I have met in the field, I have been accompanied by many doubts. To what extent am I imposing my views on their reality? Am I appropriating their lifeworlds to my own academic gain? What theoretical framework can do justice to what is going on in Bolivia? In the chapter "Field and Family", I talk about how I have grappled with such questions. At this point, I want to bring out that these questions are also a matter of *epistemology* – the study of how knowledge is constructed.

Bhaskar states that three principles of critical realism are *ontological realism*, *epistemological relativism*, and *judgmental rationality* (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xi). In the section above, I have shown some central aspects of ontological realism, the insistence that there is a real world outside of our knowledge of it. At the same time,

critical realism acknowledges that knowledge in itself is a social construct and fallible, i.e. there is a degree of relativity to it. Still, in the end, one can come up with objective criteria to judge which explanation gives the best account of reality. Sayer (2000, ch. 2), for instance, introduces the idea of *practical adequacy* in order to judge which knowledge is best fit for a situation. This essentially means to judge whether an explanation creates expectations about the real world that hold true in the end. So, the account I give here of Bolivian society is practically adequate if the reader were to travel to the country, or to read about the country, and find that the explanations I offer here make sense in some situations they might encounter.

My situation as a European researcher in a postcolonial context has fueled my epistemological doubts, and so I find it necessary to discuss epistemological relativism to a greater extent than it is usually done in critical realist research. Authors working from a post- and decolonial perspective, particularly Aníbal Quijano (2007), have argued that a Eurocentric hierarchy of knowledges has been in place since colonial times. Colonial rule established the indigenous population as the inferior “Other”, as the object of colonial power and the object of knowledge (Quijano, 2007, p. 172). This subject – object relationship to the “Other” allowed for the installation of European knowledge and rationality as universal. The notion of universal European rationality was accompanied by what de Sousa Santos calls *epistemicide*, the subduing and eradication of different knowledges in other parts of the world (and in some cases also within Europe) (De Sousa Santos et al., 2007). This epistemological strategy has been an integral part of western domination over the Global South (De Sousa Santos et al., 2007; Quijano, 2007).

Many critical realists have reservations against postcolonialism, as they have reservations against many things “post”, i.e. theories with a postmodern influence. Particularly those with a closer connection to the Marxist tradition claim that postcolonial thinkers do not recognize the temporal and spatial limits of colonialism. The critics also refer to the privileged position of postcolonial thinkers in the global capitalist system as limiting the credibility of postcolonialism (Mannathukkaren, 2010, p. 301). Mannathukkaren (2010, p. 302) adds the critique that many postcolonial thinkers give more attention to discourses than to material realities, and that postcolonialism wants to go beyond modernity without entering into a dialogue with it.

D’Souza (2010) argues, on the other hand, that all postcolonial critique has material grounds, and that it therefore cannot be dismissed completely by critical realists. He also argues that all theorists, including critical realists, should acknowledge the role of the “Other” in their work. All social theory has developed in relationship to more or less visible “native informants” (D’Souza, 2010, p. 264): Western philosophy has extracted information and concepts from non-Western societies since its beginnings, while, on the other hand, suppressing non-Eurocentric knowledge. Some critical

realists and some postcolonialists underline the dialogic nature of their position – the inherent ambition to engage with other knowledges. Mannathukkaren (2010) argues for a critical realist dialogue between tradition and modernity. Similarly, De Sousa Santos and colleagues (2007, p. li) put forward the idea of an *ecology of knowledges*, consisting of a dialogue between knowledges without falling into a relativism that does not allow for the possibility of proving knowledge right or wrong.

Apart from the necessity to enter into a dialogue between postcolonialism and critical realism, and into a dialogue with other knowledges in the research process itself, I believe that there are some post- and decolonial writers who are more compatible with critical realism than others. Many Latin American post- and decolonial thinkers (such as Ramón Grosfoguel, Aníbal Quijano, or Walter Mignolo) have developed in dialogue with dependency theory and World Systems Theory, which put emphasis on the exploitative political and economic structures that Latin America has fallen victim to. Aníbal Quijano, for instance, adheres to the material basis of the continuation of colonial exploitation.

Quijano does not see colonialism and coloniality as discourse, but as a “relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination” that was established by the Europeans (2007, p. 168). I draw a distinction between post- and *decolonial* thinkers, following the critique by Grosfoguel (2011), who states that postcolonial theory, while articulating a critique of Eurocentrism from the Global South, largely draws upon Eurocentric (postmodern) critical theory. Decolonial theory, on the other hand, is a critique of Eurocentrism voiced from the standpoint of subalternized knowledges, i.e. knowledges which have been excluded by Eurocentric thinking. I regard Quijano as a decolonial thinker since he draws on concrete experiences from Latin America.

Insights from post- and decolonial studies are important for my work in allowing me to critically reflect upon the relationship between myself and the research participants in Bolivia as well as on the knowledge constructed on the basis of this interaction. Post- and decolonial thought also helps to understand Bolivian society better. Thus, it can be said that this group of theories helps me to go from epistemological doubts to epistemological *reflexivity*, as described by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009): For them, reflexive research means paying serious attention “to the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written” (p. 9).

Reflexivity can play an important role in critical realist research. In this respect, some poststructuralist theories of science can be instructive: Sayer (2000) reaches out to Donna Haraway’s account of the partiality and situatedness of perspective. Haraway claims that all perspectives are shaped by their context, including the

gender and ethnicity of the author, and that, therefore, no knowledge is absolute (Haraway, 1988). Sayer takes up this concern, concluding that “realist social science requires reflexivity” (Sayer, 2000, p. 53) – about the context in which knowledge is constructed and the power relations implicit in that context. My approach to critical realism is, thus, reflexive and in constant dialogue with critical perspectives on the construction and legitimacy of knowledge.

### 3.3 The coloniality of social practice

Social inequalities are at the heart of this thesis. My conceptualization of social inequalities follows the general insight that these inequalities are the result of the unfolding of historically developed structures, rather than, as in liberal accounts, the responsibility of each individual. In addition to the ontological foundations provided by critical realism, I draw upon French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano in my account of social inequalities. As I explain in greater detail below, I bring the insights of these two theorists together in order to give a critical account of social practice in the context of coloniality. While Bourdieu has produced one of the most detailed accounts of the workings of social practice, Quijano has provided, with his concept of *coloniality*, the basis for much of contemporary Latin American post- and decolonial scholarship. Bringing Bourdieu together with Quijano and colleagues is also an attempt at *decolonizing* Eurocentric Bourdieusian theory. The dialogue between these authors and the empirical data is particularly visible in my third paper, and it is a central aspect of the introductory *kappa* at hand.

Struggles between social groups and their strategies to gain a favorable position in a social context, or a *field*, are the central concern of Bourdieu’s work. He is particularly insistent on the point that these struggles cannot be fully grasped through either an *objectivist* or a *subjectivist* stance (Bourdieu, 1990). While the former conceptualizes society in almost mechanistic, objectively defined terms, the latter focuses on subjective experience. Bourdieu claims that social phenomena, such as class, are *both* objective and subjective. Class, for instance, exists as an objective relation of exploitation, but is also a socially constructed phenomenon filled with subjective meaning (Bourdieu, 1987). Social groups are constituted symbolically and materially, and the greatest power in society is wielded by those groups who have the power to impose these social divisions (Bourdieu, 1987).

For Bourdieu, power over others has two aspects: Firstly, the power to appropriate scarce resources, and secondly, the power to impose social divisions. In his words, social struggle is

“inextricably a struggle to appropriate rare goods and a struggle to impose the legitimate way of perceiving power relations manifested by the[se] distributions, a representation which, through its own efficacy, can help to perpetuate or subvert these power relations” (1990, p. 141).

From this perspective, social inequalities are the result of material and symbolic relations of power, with the symbolic justifying, or challenging, material inequalities. The “material” circumstances, in a Bourdieusan sense, do not simply refer to economic structures. His conceptualization of different kinds of *capital* clarifies what is at stake in the struggle over “rare goods”.

Bourdieu distinguishes between four types of capital: Economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Jenkins, 1992). Economic capital is related to wealth, but it does not consist in wealth alone: what makes up capital is the position within economic relations that allows for the control over economic mechanisms and the appropriation of profits (Bourdieu, 1977). Social capital is determined by the valued relationships with other agents, and cultural capital is knowledge, particularly knowledge legitimized through an educational system (Bourdieu, 1977; Jenkins, 1992). Symbolic capital is related to an actor’s prestige in society (Bourdieu, 1977). In turn, prestige is closely linked to an agent’s economic capital that helps to gain social “credit”— this can be achieved through gift giving, festivities, and so on. Economic capital is generally the form of capital that can most easily be converted into other forms of capital (Walther, 2014). Symbolic capital is a combination of all the other forms of capital. That is, any capital recognized as *legitimate* becomes symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1987).

Agents strategize in order to increase their overall symbolic capital, but this is done rather unconsciously, through an acquired “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 1990). An essential component of this innate sense for the field one moves in is the *habitus*. Bourdieu defines the *habitus* as follows:

“The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations [...]” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

*Habitus* is, thus, the mediating principle between social structure and agency. It is the product of history; it is “history turned into nature” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). Collectively, people’s practices carry history forward, in adaptation to the constraints of the social world (Jenkins, 1992). Action tends to reproduce structural conditions, since the *habitus* has been shaped in line with the objective historical possibilities. The most likely opportunity for change within a Bourdieusian framework is a reaction to a change in external circumstances (Jenkins, 1992).



Bourdieu's perspective is in general terms consistent with Bhaskar's account of the ontology of society as the interplay between structures and actors who reproduce these structures. In comparison to Bhaskar, the Bourdieusian perspective is more pessimistic about the possibility of structural change emerging from these dialectics. Still, Bourdieu's account of practice provides a mediating concept of the kind that Bhaskar asks for:

“It is clear that the mediating system we need is that of the positions (places, functions, rules, tasks, duties, rights, etc.) occupied (filled, assumed, enacted, etc.) by individuals, and of the practices (activities etc.) in which, in virtue of their occupancy of these positions (and vice versa) they engage.” (Bhaskar, in Collier, 1994, p. 149)

The *habitus* is individual, but also social. It guides the behavior of social groups and, thus, the behavior of persons belonging to the same social group is similar (Jenkins, 1992). For Bourdieu, as he argues in *Distinction*, cultural practices are related primarily to the level of education and secondarily to social provenience (Bourdieu, 1982). Tastes are adapted to one's provenience – individuals want what is within their reach, they “make a virtue out of necessity” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54). I argue that this perspective has to be adapted to the Bolivian postcolonial context, where mechanisms introduced in colonial times play an important role in the constitution of social hierarchies.

Bourdieu became a sociologist through his work in Algeria, where he was sent as a soldier during the Algerian war of independence. He studied the Kabyle society, and his general social theory is based on insights drawn from observing their rituals and everyday practices. Although Bourdieu's earliest writings take up colonialism as an important historical force (Go, 2013), his main works do not grapple with the colonial context that the society he studied is embedded in. As Connell rightly critiques in her book *Southern Theory* (Connell, 2007), the lifeworld of the indigenous society that originally inspired Bourdieu's work was appropriated and turned into abstract social theory (Connell, 2007, p. 39). In standard works such as *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990), the “subject” that Bourdieu refers to is European and male, despite his inspiration originating in Algeria (Connell, 2007, p. 44).

This is a considerable drawback when applying Bourdieu's work to the context of Bolivia. I bring in Aníbal Quijano, a heavyweight in Latin American post- and decolonial studies, in order to be able to make sense of the complexities involved in the Bolivian context. Quijano's colonality of power has been referred to as a “Global South perspective on the world system” (Grosfoguel, 2011). Bringing such a perspective, rooted in the experience of the Global South, together with Bourdieu's Eurocentric theorization is an attempt at *decolonizing Bourdieu*. In the manner of an “ecology of knowledges” envisioned by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007),



bringing an important European sociologist into a dialogue with Latin American post- and decolonial theory, may well lead to interesting results.

Quijano is best known for his concept of the *coloniality of power*, with which he expresses that despite the abolition of formal colonialism, the power relations imposed in colonial times are still at work (Quijano, 1992). To Quijano, these power relations, and particularly the racial hierarchies developed during colonialism, are the basis for all contemporary relations of exploitation. He states:

“In fact, if we observe the main lines of exploitation and social domination on a global scale, the main lines of world power today, and the distribution of resources and work among the world population, it is very clear that the large majority of the exploited, the dominated, the discriminated against, are precisely the members of the ‘races’, ‘ethnies’, or ‘nations’ into which the colonized populations, were categorized in the formative process of that world power, from the conquest of America and onward” (Quijano, 2007, p. 168)

As a scholar with a Marxist background, Quijano does not, however, conceptualize *coloniality* as a discursive formation. It is, rather, based upon concrete material *and cultural* relations of dependence: Materially, the world’s resources have been concentrated in the hands of “a small European minority” (Quijano, 2007, p. 168). Culturally, the *minds* of the dominated have been colonized – what Quijano refers to as the *colonization of the imagination* – in order to make them complicit with the dominant system.

The colonization of the imagination involved, and continues to do so, several maneuvers (Quijano, 2007): indigenous beliefs, symbols, and knowledges are on the one hand repressed, while at the same time those aspects of indigenous knowledge that seem useful to the dominant are appropriated. The colonizers’ worldview and knowledge are imposed upon the indigenous population and presented as inherently superior. While, at first, this knowledge is presented as unattainable, it is at a later stage taught selectively and made seductive, since acquiring the knowledge of the colonizer opens the path towards holding powerful social positions.

The conceptualization of the coloniality of power challenges the Eurocentric, particularly Leftist, distinction between economy and culture, asserting that the theoretical division between “base” and “superstructure” neglects the entanglements between different mechanisms at work (Grosfoguel, 2011). The workings of coloniality involve, following Grosfoguel (2011), an *intersectional* combination of hierarchies, from sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, and linguistic to racial inequalities. These inequalities have been organized around the European/non-European divide.

The notion of coloniality has been developed further by many other authors, and Maldonado-Torres (2016) writes that coloniality is not only manifested in *power* relations (as in Quijano's initial argument), but also in notions of *being* and *knowledge*. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, Maldonado-Torres argues that an essential component of the coloniality of power is the constitution of the colonial subject: "[...] the subject is a field of struggle and a site that must be controlled and dominated for the coherence of a given worldview and order to continue undisturbed" (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 19). As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Maria Lugones has added to these manifestations of coloniality the *coloniality of gender*: The colonial powers introduced a binary and heteronormative gender system, which has a "light", privileged, side and a "dark" side which is exposed to violence. On the light side, there stand white bourgeois men and women, conceptualized as "pure", and on the dark side stands the colonial "Other", which has to be dominated and controlled (Lugones, 2007).

I believe that there is some compatibility between the works of Bourdieu and Quijano: both see social life as embedded in historically developed structures, which reach as far as into the minds and bodies of people, thus also shaping cultural practices. Both authors link, thus, material and cultural aspects of society. Quijano's coloniality of power brings a decolonial perspective (i.e. a perspective drawing on concrete experiences in the Global South) to the rather Eurocentric Bourdieusian theory.

Power, to Bourdieu, is wielded through the appropriation of scarce resources as well as the imposition of social divisions. A similar thought lies at the heart of the concept of *coloniality*: the colonizers and their successors have appropriated natural resources, and also more intangible goods such as knowledge, from the dominated. And they have justified and covered up the violence of these acts through hierarchies imposed by themselves, particularly *racial* hierarchies.

The *colonization of the imagination* put forward by Quijano is quite compatible with the Bourdieusian *habitus*. In both cases, objective social structures and institutions structure the thinking and the actions of individuals. Quijano makes the argument that the colonial powers shaped people's minds in a way that, in the end, the only legitimate way of expressing oneself was through European concepts. This is, in other words, the process of shaping a *habitus* – as I call it, a *habitus of coloniality*.

The people I worked with in Bolivia tend to unconsciously reproduce colonial power relations in everyday practices (such as preparing and eating food). It could, thus, be argued that their *habitus* is fundamentally colonial, since it guides their propensity to act on colonial terms. The privileged middle class of Cochabamba city sits, in a national context, at the dominant side of *coloniality*, oftentimes benefitting from the continued domination particularly over the population categorized as indigenous. Many of the people I have met in the field have fully bought into a

Eurocentric worldview, as later chapters in this *kappa* and also my third paper show in greater detail. I consider, based on work done amongst the indigenous population, that many people in Bolivia and elsewhere could be seen as having a *habitus of coloniality*, even if this *habitus* works as an oppression against themselves. The constitution of this *habitus* could be, as Burman (2016) suggests based on his work with Aymara people, seen as an illness that grips everybody. In that sense, both the dominant and the oppressed have become caught up in *coloniality*.

*Symbolic power* is an important dimension of keeping up and negotiating colonial power relations. It makes, as Bourdieu (1992) would say, the dominant believe they deserve to reign and the dominated think that they are rightly excluded. Hand in hand with this argument goes that, with the beginning of colonial rule, a new conceptualization of what counted as, in Bourdieusian terms, *symbolic capital* and, thus, *legitimate capital* was imposed. Quijano expresses this particularly clearly when it comes to knowledge – or legitimate cultural capital: the cultural capital of the indigenous population was made worthless. A new way of seeing the world was imposed, and cultural capital that was considered valuable was taken from the indigenous population. This certainly amounted to a traumatic experience – and it is, as Anders Burman (2016) shows, a trauma carried on into the present.

This new ordering of constellations of legitimate capital can be conceptualized as a *coloniality of taste*. Taste, in a Bourdieusian sense the negotiation of the distinction between good and bad, superior and inferior, has coloniality at its heart. What is considered legitimately “good” in a society is the result of imposition, repression, appropriation and seduction, as I explain in greater detail in chapter 6.

Both Bourdieu and Quijano have argued for the importance of taking account of multiple dimensions of inequality. Bourdieu underlines that social practice is not only linked to class position, but to socially interpreted bodily properties (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 79). Gender, race, and ethnicity are, thus, as important as class position, and many later interpretations of Bourdieu’s work have taken this into account (see for instance Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Horvat, 2004; Wallace, 2017). While Quijano sees, as quoted above, race as the central organizing principle of unequal power relations, I argue that different inequalities converge in the *habitus*. However, my conceptualization of the *habitus* as inherently *colonial* shows that I, based on my empirical insights, do give a certain analytical precedence to racial inequalities.

I have already mentioned that Bourdieu’s notion of social practice is quite deterministic and leaves little potential for change. Following Jenkins’ (1992, ch. 4.2, par. 26) critical account of Bourdieu, a change in practice would be possible due to external change, such as a reordering of historical circumstances, or an “awakening of consciousness”. Such an awakening is quite a vague notion, but it might have something to do with being able to be reflexive about one’s practices

and social position. If we look, on the other hand, at the work on coloniality, there is a wealth of theories about changing colonial power relations. A particularly important branch is *decolonial* scholarship, which Maldonado-Torres outlines as follows:

If coloniality refers to a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a matrix of power that can continue existing after formal independence and desegregation, decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world (2016, p. 10).

Decolonial scholars and activists have lifted the knowledge of indigenous communities, called for a concrete decolonization and demythologization of whiteness (Mbembe, 2015), and theorized about the possibility of an *ecology of knowledges* (De Sousa Santos et al., 2007) that would allow for a dialogue between different traditions of knowledge. Towards the end of this kappa, I will take up Silvia Rivera's question to De Sousa Santos – why not an “ecology of tastes”? – and think about how a *decoloniality* of taste could look like – and taste.

The theoretical framework that has helped me to make sense of what I have encountered in the field is rooted in an ontology that acknowledges the existence of a mind-independent reality. I do, however, have epistemological doubts, which bring me to connect with post-, decolonial and feminist theories. In terms of social theory, I have brought together Bourdieu and Quijano in order to take account of the *colonial* elements of the *habitus* I have seen expressed in people's food practices.



## 4 Field and Family

Already thousands of years ago, authors tried to illustrate conflicts between and within individuals; you have to do this in order to depict the validity of a human's personality.

Henning Mankell, Quicksand

### 4.1 From ethnography to auto-ethnography

Browsing through my field notes, I find an entry titled “The pride of being Bolivians”. It reads like this:

While I characterized the identity of my friends and family as largely mestizo, I have forgotten about their national identity. They are Bolivians. They feel Bolivian. And they are hurt as Bolivians. They know that Bolivia is portrayed as a dark, chaotic place where mobsters and fugitives of all kinds can disappear. A recently published computer game portrays Bolivia as a narco-state. Once, when the family was gathered in the home, we were talking about what Bolivians can pride themselves in. They talked about some athletes that had gotten famous internationally. They talked about some internationally renowned singers. When I talked about the rich indigenous culture, there was silence in response. It seemed like they were looking desperately for people who could represent a positive image of Bolivia to the world. Emblematic figures. I made a mistake. When they asked me to contribute, “as a half Bolivian”, I replied that I would never become Bolivian. Some people were shocked.

This field note shows that this research is as much about how my friends and family struggle with being Bolivian as about my struggle with *becoming* “half Bolivian”. It is sometimes challenging to navigate an identity that is attached to places and people in different cultural contexts. The more I have moved on in thinking about the data I collected during my fieldwork, the more I have become aware of the relevance of my personal involvement in this research.

The research on chicken production and distribution reflects upon my meetings with people who I am not very close to – chicken farmers, civil servants, and so on. But the closer I have gotten to the question of consuming food, and the social



inequalities involved at that end of the food system, the more I have been forced to reflect upon close family, friends, and my personal relationship to them.

During my fieldwork, it turned out that I developed the best understanding of food consumption practices in relationship to the people I lived with: my Bolivian family and their friends and neighbors. Cooking together, going to the market, and talking about food and life was a natural part of our everyday interaction. But my fieldwork was not planned like this. I did have the intention of building upon the contacts of friends and family in Cochabamba city, but I wanted to do so in order to *compare* food habits in different neighborhoods. Through the people I already knew, I wanted to get to know people in the less privileged areas of Cochabamba. But this plan did not work out. Few people I know have contacts outside their white ethno-racial “bubble”.

Drawing on a few contacts, I did interviews with about ten families living in the periphery of the city. I never felt, however, that I reached an understanding deep enough of life in these neighborhoods in order to provide an informed ethnographic account of everyday practices. I was a stranger there, and so was César. Although he was the one who made most of the interviews possible, we were received as outsiders. This might have been due to the fact that my research did not take up the everyday concerns of the people I met, but I also felt that our encounters reflected the mutual mistrust between people living in different areas of Cochabamba city. In the end, I decided to focus my energies on trying to understand the lifeworld of the people immediately surrounding me, a process that I had actually been personally struggling with for years.

But how does one write about people who are so close? As I read through the first drafts of my paper on middle class food culture (my third paper), there was something odd about them. The tone was awkwardly distanced, as if I had nothing to do with “these people” who were so “racist” in their everyday practices. I realized that the problem was that I was trying to keep myself and my personal relationship to the people I was writing about out of the equation. I came to the conclusion that the only way to avoid the pitfall of pointing my finger at them, saying that *their* minds were colonized was to also write about myself and my relationship to them and thus, to reflect upon my role in the power relations of coloniality. Thus, as it developed further, some parts of my work became an auto-ethnography.

In writing my autoethnography, I have been particularly inspired by Ruth Behar and Carolyn Ellis. Autoethnography can be defined as a way of writing and doing research that draws upon personal experience in order to understand a culture (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). This research practice developed as a counter-movement to objectifying and colonial accounts of people’s lives. Autoethnography makes it possible to critically reflect upon the researcher’s role in research by acknowledging the researcher’s *subjectivity* (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). It

challenges, as Denshire (2013) argues, the notion of “silent authorship”. An autoethnography can range from an autobiographic account to interviews reflecting on the interaction between the parties involved to narratives presented alongside data and theory.

Autoethnography is not just about the self, it is relational. The autoethnographer reflects upon how she relates to her social environment, and often, a degree of resistance against this environment motivates this process (Denshire, 2013). It is important to note that composing an autoethnography is not about self-revelation at any price – it is about analysis. The personal has to be lifted to a more abstract level in order to be analytically relevant. As Behar (1996) notes: “The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise go” (p. 14).

In my writing, I draw upon years of experience of living with a “middle class” family in Cochabamba city. I want to understand who they are, but I also want to understand who I am in relationship to them. *Becoming* part of a Bolivian family has changed me, and sometimes I am afraid of these changes. I am particularly afraid of being socialized into certain naturalized notions of the racialized “Other” I have observed in my social environment. I believe that writing this autoethnography is part of my struggle to understand the underlying logics of racism, and of trying to find a way out of it, for my family and for myself. Being a foreigner and “half Bolivian”, I have experienced how my friends and family look at outsiders (on the more privileged end as well as the less privileged end). I have also learned what it takes to become part of the privileged “middle class” of Cochabamba city. It is the reflection upon these personal experiences that makes the part of my work concerned with the identity of the Cochabamba middle class an autoethnography.

While staying within a realist research agenda, writing an autoethnography means taking up some poststructuralist influences when it comes to *epistemology*. In addition to the post- and decolonial critiques mentioned in the theoretical framework, I also draw on feminist perspectives. Feminists have been calling for a new, *strong* objectivity. Sandra Harding has argued that the context in which research is conducted should be scrutinized. This means that not only the scientists’ personal beliefs are under scrutiny, but the social and political environment in which knowledge is constructed (Harding, 1991). According to Harding (1991, p. 143), conventional notions of science result in weak objectivity, since they produce distorted images of reality that do not take into account the biases and power relations inherent in research. A strong, feminist objectivity does not buy into this “god trick” (Haraway, 1988). In Donna Haraway’s words, “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

Working with feminist notions of objectivity closes the circle to what I mentioned in the theory chapter: my research is based on ontological certainty *and* epistemological doubt. I agree with Andrew Sayer (2000) who, in a section aptly titled *Realism for Sceptics*, engages with feminist conceptualizations of objectivity, and arrives at the conclusion that it is necessary for realist research to engage with the way knowledge is produced:

Realism does not require some kind of denial of ‘subjective’ influences or standpoints and researchers’ social context. On the contrary, it requires us to examine those standpoints so as to guard against forms of projection and selection which misrepresent our objects. (Sayer, 2000, p. 53)

The ethnography I have practiced and written uses, as most ethnographies do, personal experience as a starting point for analysis. Taking feminist and postcolonial influences seriously, the analysis involves being reflexive about these experiences and my personal involvement in the research context.

The close ties to the people I do research with allow for insights into the intimate details of everyday life. But this close connection may also create “blind spots” in my analysis. There is a danger of me mistaking a point of view taken over from my family for an analytical thought, for instance when it comes to the perspective on “the indigenous population”. It could also happen that I, consciously or not, leave out or change details that might be unfavorable for my Bolivian family and friends. One precaution against such pitfalls is my emphasis on reflexivity and my perspective on the process of doing auto-ethnography as an emancipation from the views put forward by my Bolivian friends. But most importantly, doing research is not a monologue but a conversation with other scholars.

In the analytical process, I entered into a conversation with the existing literature on social inequalities in Latin America, and most scholarly work, from Weismantel’s *Cholas and Pishtacos* to Susan Paulson’s work in Cochabamba to my supervisor Anders Burman’s work, is very critical towards the role of the more privileged, “white” population in maintaining social inequalities. These critical perspectives have been very valuable contributions to my analysis. Furthermore, I deliberately wrote my ethnography in the format of articles, since this allowed me to take into account the critique from external reviewers.

As Ruth Behar describes in her book *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), acknowledging personal involvement in research has to do with vulnerability: the vulnerable observer steps out of her detached role and gets engaged in a social situation, and this getting engaged comes with a whole package of ethical and emotional dilemmas. What do I record? What not? And how do I write about it? Putting forward personal experience makes the author vulnerable – as Behar notes, a boring self-revelation is not just embarrassing, but humiliating. As mentioned

above, working with personal experience in ethnography only makes sense if this experience is used in order to shed light on aspects of reality that could not have been accessed in any other way.

It is very important to note that the author is not the only vulnerable person in this venture. “We anthropologists [...] leave behind our own trail of longings, desires, and unfulfilled expectations in those upon whom we descend” (Behar 1996, p. 25). Autoethnography usually emerges from a situation where the researcher is continuously involved with the research participants (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). This means that the way the ethnography is written will have an impact on these personal relationships. The basic tenets of ethnography, not doing harm to research participants, being open and honest about the research, and obtaining participants’ consent (see for instance the guidelines of the American Anthropological Association, 1 November 2012), become more difficult to fulfill in autoethnography. The deep involvement of the researcher in a context makes it necessary to continuously negotiate what consent means in a certain situation, or to decide step by step what kind of possible harm to the research participants is involved. There is no one set of rules, Ellis (2007) states, and the best thing is to take ethical decisions not from the perspective of the researcher but from the perspective of the friend, the partner, the family member. What is best for us? What helps the community? Consent has to be obtained also in the writing process, where the people involved in the research should, to the extent possible, be consulted about the product.

The closeness between the research participants makes it easier to identify the persons involved, such as when a researcher writes about her own family. In that case, it is important to carefully anonymize the data and sometimes change personal traits so that the persons involved cannot be recognized from the text (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). I have anonymized the identities of the persons referred to in my research, apart from my husband, who is mentioned with his actual name, since it would be rather easy to find out who he is anyways. In many situations I refer to, the personal traits of the person involved and my relationship to them (friend, family member etc.) have been changed. The situation could have happened as described, but it won’t be possible to link it to one specific person. This is because the people involved could get into trouble for some comments made.

All in all, the reliability and validity of an autoethnography are, following Ellis and colleagues, to be judged in terms of the quality of the narrative produced. Could the situations described have happened in reality? Is the narrative coherent? Does the story speak to the readers, and can it maybe bring about change?

Making oneself vulnerable as an observer means getting involved in a situation, but not forgetting about the analytical lens on a situation. It is, as Behar (1996, p. 6) so eloquently formulates it, about cultivating a “tenderminded toughmindedness”. This

is what is needed particularly when writing about people one is close to, but does not necessarily agree with in all aspects. As Ellis (2009) mentions in her account of meeting racist neighbors in her holiday village, one needs to weigh the risk of open confrontation with being or becoming part of a community. In my own context, I did not speak up against racist comments most of the time. I see writing this thesis as part of the process of breaking this silence. I cannot, as also Ellis (2009) argues, remain in the seemingly naïve and open-minded position of the outside ethnographer. I have a responsibility to contribute to changing my social environment for the better.

The section below on the identity of the middle class as well as my third paper are the most “autoethnographic” texts in this dissertation. They have emerged from years of personal experience, and one year (from mid-2015 to mid-2016) of concrete fieldwork, during which I actively made field notes and interviewed friends and family members. Apart from scheduled interviews, I engaged in many informal conversations with the people I met within my social circle. I made many key observations in the small interactions of everyday life. My friends and family were aware of my research activity, joking that I would write in my “captain’s notebook” at night, noting that I still had not found any intelligent life on this foreign planet. At a stage when I had already done most of the analysis, I brought up some of the issues I had found with some people who I trusted to understand my point of view. Some reactions to my analysis of everyday racism were rather defensive, as I describe towards the end of this chapter.

## 4.2 Being “middle class” in Cochabamba

When one only has a few images of a society to send to the interested outsider, it is hard to make the right selection. This is, literally, a problem whenever I want to send a postcard from Bolivia to my family in Austria. There we stand, Cesar and I, in one of the few *librerías* where postcards are still sold, and we have to pick which out of the yellowed images on paper to send to our European family. Many postcards play with the standard image of Bolivia, a rural girl, in dirty clothes and with a dusty face, looking shyly into the camera, maybe embracing a llama. In the background the harsh, brown, yellow, vastness of the *Altiplano*. “This is not us,” Cesar always tells me. “This is how the *gringos* want to see us.” I pick, just to tease him, a postcard that has Chapare written on it, which shows a group of men drying coca leaves in front of a wooden hut. This, we agree, can be sent as a tongue-in-cheek message to my siblings, who will understand the irony: the coca leaf as ancestral and as the basis for drug production. Still, Cesar is not happy. He picks a postcard for my



parents: An image of the center of his natal city of Cochabamba, with high-rise buildings and ample streets. “This is us,” he says.

Postcards cannot represent the nuances of a situation. Only by taking a closer look, one sees: the green between the high-rise buildings; the indigenous woman from the highlands walking the streets with her *aguayo*, the colorful woven cloth folded to a bundle on her back; the abundant food served on every street corner; the families uniting for lunch in their houses. It is, to me, the task of the ethnographer to reflect these nuances, not to objectify, not to present a postcard caricature of who the people one has worked and lived with are.

Therefore, the first question I want to ask is: When Cesar says, “This is us”, who is “us”? Who are these people that I have been becoming a part of?

When I think of Cochabamba city, I imagine houses in earth colors: brown, beige, grey. My husband’s *barrio* is connected by narrow, asphalted streets that run against the logic of the top-down engineered streets meeting in right angles that characterize the big Bolivian cities. My family’s street in *Villa Bosnia* forms a long curve, and I have often walked this street, avoiding the dogs lying on the boardwalk in front of the houses. There is a *colegio*, a public elementary school and kindergarden, and I have often heard neighbors say to their kids: “If you don’t behave, we will send you to the public school.” On the other side of the street, there are several individual houses. All the houses are shielded by high walls, painted in white or beige, no openings, just a metal door. Behind the doors, dogs guard the house night and day, and their barking follows me as I approach my family’s two-story house, with a small front garden where my mother-in-law’s roses grow.

A high metal fence separates the house from the boardwalk. As I open the creaking door, I remember the anxiety that the family expresses whenever a child comes close to the opened door. “Don’t go out there!” In the big living room with the ample sofas, Andreita is watching TV, in shorts, lips painted red. She studies at a private university. Her siblings are playing on the floor. Carlos is working in his office. The hardwood ceilings are creaking. The deceased grandparents are tiptoeing around the upper floor, according to Cesar. In the kitchen, Maria is cooking lunch for us all. *Picante de pollo*. I smell the spicy *aji*, red *aji* in Cochabamba, not yellow, like in La Paz. I greet everyone with a kiss on both cheeks, and then I help to set the small table in the kitchen. “We have a good life,” I think.





Images 4 and 5: Streets in Villa Bosnia (pictures taken by the author)

The most common way of identifying one's social belonging in my Bolivian social environment is: "We are in the middle, not high, not low." And: "We are *mestizos*." It is an identity somewhere in the middle, economically, culturally, racially and ethnically.

In numbers, this "middle" seems to have grown slightly in Bolivia. In 2007, as the United Nations Development Program reported, 36% of the Bolivian population was in the middle income range (PNUD, 2011, p. 113). This means that they earned between 463 Bs. (67 USD) and 2041 Bs. (295 USD) per person per month. In 1999, 30% of Bolivians were *economically* part of the middle class (PNUD, 2011, p. 113). Looking more closely, one realizes that more than half of this middle-class (64% in 2007; PNUD, 2011, p. 116) is part of the so-called *vulnerable* middle class, in constant danger of falling back into poverty. In terms of ethnicity, about half of this vulnerable middle class identifies as indigenous (PNUD, 2011). The richer part of the middle class, the non-vulnerable middle class, is composed of slightly more non-indigenous Bolivians than indigenous Bolivians, about 58% (PNUD, 2011, p. 119). This "vulnerability" only looks at economic reasons for being or not being "properly" middle class. I will discuss below that culture and ethnicity play an important role for the exclusion of new actors from the Bolivian middle class. The people I have lived with are part of the well-established, non-indigenous middle class.

"Class" has become a folk category. From a concept that was developed in theory (most notably by Marx and Weber), it turned into the basis for real-world struggles. But is class, then, just a theoretical invention? Or does it have grounding in real life? I like the answer that Bourdieu (1987) gives: it is both. This answer is typical for the theorist's trajectory of mediating between objectivism and subjectivism, between structuralism and constructivism.

As an objective category, class is, from a Bourdieusian perspective, constituted in a relational social space (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 4). The relations of social differentiation are determined by the relative social, economic, and cultural capital that actors hold. It is not only important how much overall capital a person holds, but also the weight of the different types of capital in the overall capital counts, and how a person arrived at this social position. The last issue is a person's social trajectory, which expresses how a person has developed socially from the situation they were born into. Has, for instance, somebody become middle-class through working their way up, or by being born into a well-established family?

Bourdieu (1987, p. 5) states that those who occupy a similar position in the social field share a habitus, provided that their social trajectories are closely related. Class, Bourdieu goes on to explain, is an analytical construct, but one well founded in reality. Social reality, however, is much more complex than social theory can conceptualize, and so there are many factors beyond class, such as gender, ethnicity,

nationality, occupation, that influence the formation of social groups in practice. I argue that, in Bolivia, race and ethnicity are important factors in the division of social, cultural, and economic capital, and, importantly, also in the definition of legitimate symbolic capital.

Social groups are historically constructed, even, as Bourdieu states, the family or the elderly. In addition to objective conditions, there is the symbolic work of group-making, and this is the subjective side of the equation. Representations can, to a certain extent, make groups. Words and symbolic action bring into existence what was present only in its potentiality. The construction of boundaries between social groups, the work of defining social groups, is an important stake in social struggle. The aim of the actors involved in this struggle is: to make their vision of the social world into an objective truth. This is, following Bourdieu (1987, p. 13), the ultimate form of power.

The middle, as Bourdieu says (1987, p. 12), is the fuzziest of all the class categories. Social differentiation is better at defining the extreme ends of the class continuum than at categorizing the middle. This leaves room for individuals to play with the symbolic representation of their social position.

In social theory, Max Weber critiqued the lack of attention to cultural phenomena and to the middle strata of society in the writings of Karl Marx (Liechtly, 2003, ch. 1). The middle class, according to Weber, has a different relationship to economic processes. They are neither proletarians nor in control of production; they are *consumers* (Liechtly, 2003, ch. 1). Members of the middle class are very conscious of their social status and eager to differentiate themselves from the classes below and above them, and from other groups within the middle of society. Consumption is an important manner of differentiation.

A poem, varyingly attributed to the Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti and the Argentinean writer Daniel Cézare, captures, in my view, some aspects of middle-class identity in the context I have studied. Here is the beginning of the poem:

<i>Clase media</i>	Middle class
<i>medio rica</i>	half rich
<i>medio culta</i>	half educated
<i>entre lo que cree ser y lo que es</i>	between what they believe they are and
<i>media una distancia medio grande</i>	what they are
<i>Desde el medio</i>	quite a distance, quite big
<i>mira medio mal</i>	From the middle
<i>a los negritos</i>	they look suspiciously
<i>a los ricos</i>	at black people
<i>a los sabios</i>	at the rich
<i>a los locos</i>	at the wise
<i>a los pobres</i>	at the crazy
<i>[...]</i>	at the poor [...]



I have never shared this poem with my Bolivian family. But I am sure that if I did, it would generate protest. “Half rich”? We can live with that. But “half educated”? No, not us. Being well educated, or as my family calls it *culto*, is very highly valued by the people I have lived with.

In Cochabamba, those who identify as “middle class” speak highly of being *culto*, “cultured” or “educated”. An education following a European or North American model has always been highly valued in Bolivia. Actually, most schools follow a Western model of education, but those who boast most about it are expensive private schools. The higher the prestige of the school one went to, the more legitimate one’s cultural capital. In Cochabamba city, the most prestigious schools are German and US-American. School education eats up a big part of the middle-class family budget, with enrolment fees in the best schools being up to over 70 USD per month. The education that many members of the established middle class receive translates into what Bourdieu (1982) would call *legitimate* cultural capital. Apart from a good education in all subjects important from a Western standpoint, the educated person also has a taste that reflects this Western education. As my paper on middle class food culture shows, knowledge of and a taste for foreign food is, for instance, part of being *culto*.

Given that the most renowned schools in Bolivia are private schools, it would not be possible to achieve this legitimate cultural capital without the necessary economic capital. School education has also been a privilege linked to racial conceptualizations. Throughout Bolivian history, the elites have only allowed for a rudimentary education, in Western terms, of the indigenous population (Stefanoni, 2010). This is in line with Quijano’s (2007) argument that the colonizers (and their descendants) first excluded the indigenous population from their knowledge and, then, taught it selectively to them. As De la Cadena (2001) notes, race and racism in Latin America have a “culturalist” tone, in the sense that racial distinctions are linked to cultural expressions, one of them being education. Along this line of thinking, having a Western education is supposed to “redeem” indigeneity.

I have spent many hours discussing with my friends and family about the differences between Bolivia and Europe. I have also participated in long sessions of quizzing each other about general school knowledge. My impression after these long talks, which is supported by my husband’s point of view, is that, to my family, being “Western” means striving for technological progress and efficiency, and having access to the amenities of a consumer society. It also means, beyond having a good general knowledge following a standard school curriculum, valuing punctuality and a certain degree of self-restraint. This might be connected to the strong influence of central European philosophy over the Bolivian education system (see Stefanoni, 2010). In a colonial fashion, as Quijano (2007) would say, the Bolivian elites have always looked for inspiration from outside, even after the independence of the

republic, which in some sectors, such as education and gastronomy, only meant replacing Spanish influence with other European influences.

In order for a settlement to be ranked as a city in Bolivia, it needed to be a “cultured” place (Cabrera, 2017), and this is echoed even nowadays, such as when a friend told me, “Well, we learned at school about *reglas urbanas* (urban rules), so as to know how to behave ourselves in the city.” In a culturalist-racist fashion (see De la Cadena, 2001), this argument is used against the migrant newcomers to the city. They do not seem to have the same right to take up urban space – because they, supposedly, do not know how to live in the city. This is related to century-old efforts of “sanitizing” Latin American cities from any indigenous presence (Zulawski, 2000), and be it only the presence of indigenous beverages such as *chicha* in Cochabamba, the production and consumption of which was forced gradually towards the outskirts of the city (Rodríguez & Solares, 2011).

In the city, many people from the established middle class equal behavior they consider deviant with indigeneity. As also Barriga Davalos (2016, p. 97) notes, someone may be called *indio* when they do not follow the rules, independently of their outward appearance and actual cultural background. *Sacar el indio*, “bringing out the indian”, may be used by many white Bolivians in such circumstances. This expression equals indigeneity with being unrefined, unpolished by education. It also points at indigeneity as something that is usually hidden and only brought out in certain situations. It is almost like the Western saying to “bring out the worst in oneself”. While this expression is derogatory against the indigenous population, it may also say something about the relationship of the more privileged population to their own roots: It seems that they despise the fact that they, too, have indigenous roots, and that they literally hate the *indio* within themselves. I have witnessed such insults particularly in traffic behavior. For instance, a truck driver who passes a red traffic light or a person walking in the middle of the street may be referred to as an *indio*. Thus, the judgement of being “well-behaved” has a racial undertone.

More than economic capital, it is the cultural capital, together with high social capital, that is decisive for qualifying as middle class. *Gente bien* (“good people”) is an expression I often hear in Cochabamba. My friends explained to me that *gente bien* is about “having a good family name and social status”. When I said, “but everyone has a family name,” they replied, “but some family names are invisible.” Interpreting this in the Bolivian context, it would mean that family names that are not of European descent are grounds for social exclusion. A case in point is the Bolivian military, whose ranks are still segregated according to “Spanish” and “indigenous” family names (see Mamani Ramírez, 2014). One has to have been part of the elite, in order to stay within the elite. You can lose your money, but not your good family name. Indeed, I would argue that the legitimate social and cultural

capital my friends and family possess makes them resemble the Bolivian elite, but do not make them members of the elite chiefly due to their lack of economic capital.

The well-connected middle class of Cochabamba harnesses its social capital from its past as the landholding elite. Many of my friends and family reminisce about the times before the Agricultural Reform in the early 1950s when their families used to control large landholdings and live in the small towns surrounding Cochabamba city. Having to leave the towns and fleeing to the city was a traumatic experience for these families, but they brought with them the means to establish a well-respected life even in this new environment.

Anxiously, the *gente bien* of Cochabamba city hold on to their social respectability, particularly when it comes to accepting new family members through marriage. As Barriga Davalos (2016) observes amongst the elites of Sucre, marriage strategies are designed to keep up the social status of the family. I have made this experience in my own social circle, with a friend who married a man with a humble, working class background having to face resistance from her entire family.

Being *gente bien* is taken as a matter-of-fact, as I realized when meeting a friend who is a sociologist. He is himself from a socially well-established family. When I asked him about the attribute “good people”, he said: “Well, if they are called *gente bien*, then there must be some truth to it. They must be, really, good and educated people.” This same day, we had lunch together at an Italian restaurant, a fine restaurant situated on a third floor high above the streets of the city. As the waitress, a young woman, brought us the main course, she did not serve our friend at the same time as us. As he saw that she had served somebody else before bringing the missing plate for our table, he barked at her: “What are you doing? Don’t you know that all the main courses are served at the same time for everybody at the table? This is discrimination! I want you to apologize to me.” The woman tried to calm him down, explaining that it took longer to prepare his main course, and that she would bring his plate right now. In the end, only an intervention by the owner of the restaurant (the waitress’s husband) resolved the situation.

To me, witnessing my friend’s behavior clearly contradicted what he had told me before about being *gente bien*. His behavior revealed to me a notion of inherent superiority derived from calling oneself *gente bien*. I had the impression that he wanted to show off to the waitress and to us that he was the one who possessed the education to know how food was supposed to be served correctly. I think that the notion of an “inherent superiority” is also at play in the disdain which the well-established middle class of Cochabamba (and elsewhere) shows towards the upwardly mobile middle class.

Over the last decade, a new middle class has formed itself in Bolivia, working their way up from economically, socially, and culturally excluded and racially



stigmatized groups. This new middle class has developed distinct forms of exhibiting its increasing wealth, such as the construction of multi-story houses with spectacular designs and colors, known as “Andean architecture”. Throughout the city of Cochabamba, there is a spatial division between the newcomers and the established middle class, with the latter claiming the northern neighborhoods and the former settling in the south. But recently, I have heard complaints about what people call a “reverse gentrification” happening in the affluent northern neighborhoods. Attracted by better infrastructure, wealthy families from the new middle class have moved north. My family and neighbors feel threatened by these “new rich” people, reminiscing about the times when everybody knew each other in the *barrio*. Certainly, also long-established fears against intruders with indigenous roots into urban space play a role in this hostile attitude.

It is quite telling that the newly acquired economic wealth of the rising middle class is largely considered illegitimate by many members of the established middle class. It is said that the wealth of the newcomers is based on illegal activities – and the support of the “indigenous” government. Likewise, the social and cultural capital held by the new middle class are considered illegitimate. They might work hard, but they have the “wrong” social provenience, be it rural, working class, indigenous, or a combination of the three. They might also know how to speak an indigenous language and dominate Spanish perfectly, but if they do not have the “right” (Western) education, they have no chance of legitimately entering the middle class.

In the eyes of the established middle class, the overall symbolic capital of the indigenous middle class is low: “They have a lot of money, but they don’t know how to live,” I often heard from my interviewees. It happened several times that I saw a person with physical traits stereotypically referred to as “indigenous” passing by in a pick-up truck, and I already heard my friends’ comment: “Well, who does *he* think he is? I wonder where he’s got the money from to buy such a car.” Oftentimes, seeing *cholitas* (women wearing the traditional layered skirt denoting indigeneity) walking in the neighborhood park would be a small sensation: “Look at these *cholitas*! They are taking their *city day*!” The notion that the rise of the new middle class is somehow illegitimate, and that this new social group represents a threat to the established Cochabamba society (when they live permanently in the affluent neighborhoods and are not just “taking a city day”) has, of course, a racial and racist component to them.

I was surprised at first that my friends and family would admit to a common heritage amongst the city dwellers of Cochabamba: “We are all *mestizos*,” they would say. Many of my friends would readily tell me that, of course, they also had an *abuelita de pollera* in their family – an indigenous grandmother (who would in most cases not literally be the grandmother but an ancestor some generations before the grandmother). I have not inquired about to what extent this acknowledgement

comes with consciousness that sexual relationships between the indigenous population and the Spanish-heritage *criollos* were often not voluntary. But if there is this common “genetic pool”, where do racist distinctions stem from?

“Well, there are different categories of mestizos”, a friend says. She illustrates this with the example of her family’s housekeeper, who had gone to live in the countryside for a while and then returned to the city, changed. My friend perceived that she had changed her style of clothing and seemed more confident. “She had ascended to a higher category, living in the city, and her brother being mayor in her village.” In the eyes of my friend, moving to the city and being related to people with a high social status had changed her into a different kind of *mestizo*: she had taken on Western habits and was linked to people in “legitimate” power positions. Together with the importance of being *culto* discussed above, I would argue that there seems to be a kind of “Westernized” *mestizaje*; a *mestizo* who has proudly taken on Western symbolic capital.

Following De la Cadena’s (2001) notion that race in Latin America also has a cultural connotation, being a *mestizo* who holds on to their indigenous identity can be a reason for discrimination by other *mestizos*. According to Stefanoni (2010, p. 22), in Bolivia there are “indigenous mestizos” and “white mestizos”. As a friend of mine says: “Of course I am a *mestizo*, but culturally I feel more Western, European.” This is a notion of *mestizaje* as moving towards whiteness that has been held up in many Latin American nations.

As Wade (2003, p. 277) quotes Stutzman (1981), *mestizaje* is the “all inclusive ideology of exclusion” (my translation). That is, national elites have seen the construction of a “mestizo nation” as a process of whitening and doing away with indigenous culture – and the indigenous population. The notion that one can move on to a superior, “white” version of *mestizaje* is linked to this line of thinking. This is the *habitus of coloniality* at work: One becomes a “superior” mestizo by following a Western ideal. I include here the attribute “white” alongside “Western”, since indeed, through the Western cultural capital they hold, my friends and family hold a position of power that can be seen as racially white. The racial construct of whiteness and the power to impose and appropriate that comes with it is an inherent part of their *habitus of coloniality*.

From a critical indigenous perspective, these “white mestizos” may be pitied for being separated from both their European and their indigenous heritage, as for instance the denotation *q’ara* (literally “peeled”) expresses (Burman, 2009, p. 7). Conversely, some people would call indigenous mestizos who have taken on Western habits “alienated”. This means that not everybody can become a “white mestizo”. While culture and education play a big role, ascending to a different category of *mestizaje* is also limited by outward appearance and *habitus*. From early childhood on, it is ingrained in people’s minds what one is supposed to look and

behave like in order to be a “white mestizo”. Barriga Davalos (2016, p. 42) writes that, among the Sucre elite, already kindergarten children are told who they may play with, and parents foster “desirable” personality traits and clothing styles.

The distinction between race and ethnicity is fluid, and following Peter Wade’s (1997, ch. 1, par. 44) argument that ethnicity is a cultural expression linked to place, there is another dimension to the *mestizaje* of my friends and family: that of the *mestizo valluno* as an ethnic identity. As can be seen even in historical accounts (see Larson, 2017), the valleys of Cochabamba have long been places where people identify proudly as *mestizos*. The rich food culture, described in detail in my third paper, is very telling in this respect. My friends may enjoy eating out in a fancy restaurant, but they may as well eat boiled potatoes with traditional *llajwa* sauce. In the idyllic image of the *mestizo valluno*, people from all over the city are united around common traditions. But more often than not, food and other local customs are also a way of excluding others. It often transpires that many of my friends feel that they are the ones who are most “legitimately” from Cochabamba and have little understanding for the different culture of the migrant newcomers from the highlands. Thus, indigenous migrants are faced with exclusion according to supposedly “inherent” racial traits *as well as* their cultural and geographical outsider status.

My friends and family from the well-established middle class in Cochabamba hold a rather privileged social position: Their attachment to Western cultural capital is advantageous in Bolivian society, which has been built around racist distinctions, and thus has allowed them to prosper economically and socially. With this privilege comes the notion of an “inherent superiority”, which reinforces the high self-confidence valued in these social circles. This “aura” of confidence (Barriga Davalos, 2016) is contrasted to shy and insecure behavior ascribed to the indigenous population. Together with the “desirable” outward appearance of a lighter skin tone and Western clothing style, the privileged middle class can move ahead in a world constructed around a fetish of whiteness. Combined with this is a rootedness in local Cochabamba culture, which adds, indeed, a layer of complexity to the quest for demonstrating superiority. The privileged middle class does not only adhere to Western values, but also values “their” local customs.

The privileged position of the Cochabamba middle class and elite is perceived to be threatened by indigenous migrants to the city – who are, often, not actually newcomers but have lived here for a long time. Fear and mistrust are part of the everyday life in the city. All houses are surrounded by high walls, and many people I know are constantly afraid of social unrest and violence. Wieviorka (2014) argues that racism may arise out of untenable circumstances that people feel helpless against. But I would argue that it is, actually, the other way around, that my friends

would not have to feel constantly afraid if they lived in a society that was less divided.

Indeed, Cochabamba and Bolivian society is not always divided. When it comes to important issues, such as the Water War in Cochabamba in 2000, the population often comes together against those in power. A friend of mine reminisces about the time when she stood united with “humble people”, fighting against the privatization of water resources in the city. She and her husband tell me that, nowadays, the Morales government has increased the degree of social division. “They are ruthless and want to take vengeance on the white population. Nowadays, it is *us* they are racist against.” While the mistrust amongst the Bolivian population is oftentimes mutual, it is the racism against the indigenous population which is *structurally* anchored, from the educational system to military ranks. Even under an indigenous government, the white population is still structurally favored.

### 4.3 Bolivian identities in a global context

Trying to understand the social position of my friends and family has made me realize that we are, in some ways, in a similar situation. My Bolivian family and I share a rather privileged life reinforced through the fiction of whiteness. This fiction makes us believe that we have earned our privileges rather than that we just happened to be socialized into cultural norms that sit at the more powerful end of colonial exploitation. From this perspective, there is little difference between the racism against the indigenous population in Bolivia and the anti-migrant movements in Europe, or the exclusion of Samis from mainstream Swedish society. There is also little difference between the consumerism of my Bolivian middle class friends and the drive for consumption in Europe. In this way, my experiences in Bolivia have made my own whiteness “strange”, to be recognized as such in my friends’ behaviour. I have been able to see what is hidden from sight in my usual surroundings.

With the increasing homogenization of global cultures, it has been argued that a “global middle class” has emerged (Parker, 2014, p. 13). But are we, in fact, “just the same”? Bolivia as a nation is still in an unfavourable economic and political position, being exploited for its natural resources and being excluded from important international fora. If we go back to Wallerstein’s (1992) argument that racism is a cover-up for exploitation, we can understand that the political and economic marginalization of Bolivia goes hand in hand with the representation of the country as inferior to other, more powerful countries.

The assumption that Bolivia is a place where adventures can be found, chaos reigns, and one can escape from Western “civilization” is still commonplace. My Bolivian friends are aware of these assumptions, painfully so. A friend who works in a language school for mostly European tourists has often complained to me about the students seeing Bolivia as “dirty and backwards”. On another occasion, my mother-in-law told me about an experience she had when travelling to Brazil and the bus she was travelling in had stopped off at a roadside restaurant. She got off to have breakfast, but the payment chip she had been handed had not been charged with the amount. At the cash desk, she insisted on paying what she had eaten. As she left the restaurant, the alarm went off because she had left the payment chip in her handbag. She said to me, “I was so happy I had insisted on paying. Imagine if I had wanted to pass for not having consumed anything – and even worse being Bolivian!” To me, this shows her acute awareness of negative stereotypes against Bolivians.

Given these racist assumptions about “the Bolivians”, I understand my friends’ insistence on being more Western than the rest of the population. To them, hopping on the train of “Westernness” promises a way out of being the stereotypical Bolivian. The economic and political elites of Bolivia are busy signing agreements with international investors, from supermarket chains to the Hard Rock Café, in order to provide the illusion of social and economic progress to Bolivians. Consumerism creates a way for the more privileged population to distinguish itself from the less fortunate Bolivians. The vicious circle of exploiting Bolivia and justifying this exploitation through racist stereotypes is only seemingly interrupted this way. In fact, consumerism is just another dependency created along the way.

As Mignolo (2011, p. 275) notes, choosing to “play the game of the dominant” serves, in actuality, as a reaffirmation of colonial dependencies. It means accepting the terms that have been imposed by relationships of coloniality. Maybe I am more acutely aware of the pitfalls of consumerism when in Bolivia, because I am confronted with the downside of this development, misery for the less privileged population, very concretely on an everyday basis. Although shopping malls and cinemas create “private spaces” for more privileged Bolivians, one just needs to step out of these palaces in order to see the other side of the coin. In Europe, we have the privilege of being able to shut ourselves off from seeing the consequences of the exploitative relations which our prosperity has been built upon.

Situating the identity shared by many members of the privileged middle class in a global context comes with an important realization about *coloniality*; namely that while within Bolivia this social group may sit on the dominant end of power relations and the “light side” (Lugones, 2007, p. 206) of *coloniality*, they are still excluded from fully taking part in Eurocentric modernity. This leads me to the assertion that they do, in fact, stand on the border between subalternity and western modernity, as also the (themselves oftentimes rather privileged) proponents of post-



and decolonial theory claim. They are marginalized by global power relations of coloniality, but have bought into the dominant culture.

There is, thus, still a *colonial difference*, as Mignolo (2008) would say, that separates us. This colonial difference is a difference in being and thinking, with the two different sides linked through relationships of dependence (Mignolo, 2008, p. 236). And even though global consumerism is an attempt at doing away with any “difference” at the surface, there still exists the reality of underlying unequal and exploitative relationships. Even though my friends and family enjoy many privileges, they are at the same time outsiders in the global game of *coloniality*. Through everyday and fieldwork interactions, this colonial difference became visible to me.

In her book “Decolonizing Methodologies”, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) underlines that “research” is a negative word for many indigenous peoples around the world who have been exposed to the intrusion of researchers. The people I lived with in Bolivia have a relatively more positive view of research and Western knowledge. They have been socialized into the colonial faith in the superiority of Western research, and they also have relatively little experience with being researched themselves. This situated me as the European researcher in a relatively powerful position, as was visible in many situations.

Talking about food implies talking about tastes, what people like and what they don’t like, and I sometimes had the impression that my interviewees were trying to adapt their answers to a certain image of being Western. Some interviewees, for instance, told me that they liked vegetarian food and light food, which did not concur with their practices. For the privileged strata of the Bolivian population, eating vegetarian is a foreign food habit to be imitated. I found that the people I talked to were sometimes seeking my approval of their food habits, as if I, as a foreigner, was standing on a “moral high ground” from which to judge what was right and wrong. The image of the foreign “expert” who knows best is omnipresent in Bolivia and has, of course, colonial roots: The knowledge of the conqueror is seen as the only legitimate knowledge. Sometimes, this supposedly high ground of the foreigner was put to test, particularly by my family. We would spend hours talking about general knowledge subjects, from geography to history, and my family always found a certain satisfaction in showing me the limits of my knowledge.

Without doubt I am the privileged one in fieldwork and family relationships. My Austrian passport opens doors for me, and my diploma from a Swedish university is acknowledged worldwide. I have knowledge about scholarships and exchange programs that can provide access to a more privileged social position. Many times, the people I met in the field had the expectation that I could help them to improve their social situation. A chicken farmer, for instance, told me after a visit to his farm



that he had invited me because he hoped I could organize a scholarship for his son to study in Europe.

I am acutely aware of the colonial roots of this relationship in which I as the foreigner am seen as the one who can “save” the locals. This is how foreigners, from the colonial priest to the contemporary development aid professional, have been portrayed. The discourse of development, analyzed for instance by Arturo Escobar, has established the population of developing countries as inferior subjects: In mainstream development literature, “there exists a veritable underdeveloped subjectivity endowed with features such as powerlessness, passivity, poverty, and ignorance, usually dark and lacking in historical agency, as if waiting for the (white) Western hand to help subjects along [...]” (Escobar, 1995, p. 39). Even my relatively privileged friends and family have been trapped by this line of thinking.

There has also been a gendered aspect to my fieldwork and family relationships. I have been enmeshed in the *coloniality of gender* (Lugones, 2007) – the construction of gender differences through colonial relationships. This has meant that, on the one hand, I have been restricted in my movement in the city, being constantly warned about the dangers lurking around the corner for women. As a result, César would accompany me to many interviews, and it was seen as appropriate for me to be quiet and listen in these situations. I felt like the “docile white woman” accompanying the dominant man (Lugones, 2010, p. 202).

I have been wondering how this situation of me as the woman being the listener relates to the image of the “silent Andean woman” (Burman, 2011, p. 71). It has often been argued that women in the Andes are condemned to muteness. On the other hand, I stand, as a European woman, clearly on the, as Lugones (2007, p. 206) would say, *light side* of coloniality, being very privileged. I could still move more freely than other women in my family, for instance leaving the house at any hour I pleased. I was granted other freedoms, such as addressing my mother-in-law with her first name, while her Bolivian daughters-in-law would refer to her more formally. I made active use of these freedoms, breaking rules pretending that I was not aware of them. At family meetings, I would sit with the men in the living room, chatting about politics, escaping from helping the women in the kitchen. I have been wondering if my whiteness results in me being, in some aspects, conceptualized as the “dominant gender” in Bolivia.

It is hard to voice critique from the privileged side of coloniality. Who am I to hold a mirror to my friends and family? I have been trying to discuss my critique with some friends, and my sociologist friend, who is of course also familiar with Quijano’s theories, says: “For somebody like me, of European descent, what do I do? Commit suicide?” To him, postcolonial critique does not make sense – it only leads to a dead end. I also think that his comment brings out how painful engaging with postcolonial critique and calls for decolonization can be from the standpoint of

the privileged. How does one react to one's social position and identity being called into question? Another friend sees my analysis of racism as a "useless macro-critique". She prefers a perspective on the individual, where she personally can work towards improving her own life – what else can one do? Improving one's own life without hurting others is best, she says.

In other occasions, I discussed stereotypes held by some of my friends, and my suggestion to look into the underlying historically grown mechanisms brought up interesting results. Together with my friends' knowledge of the Bolivian context, we came up with explanations that could prove racial stereotypes wrong. At the same time, my friends' faith in the "superiority" of the insights suggested by me, the Western researcher, made me uneasy. While one may use this power attributed to the foreign researcher as an avenue for working towards changes in Bolivian society, I think that this position also provides a starting point for critical reflection. After all, the notion that the foreigner is the one to change Bolivia for the better is an outdated developmentalist idea. It is much more intriguing to look into why this supremacy of Western science was established in the first place – and thus circle back to post- and decolonial and feminist arguments in order to challenge the status quo.



## 5 Summary of the Papers

### 5.1 How the papers connect

The empirical material presented in my papers ranges from the production and distribution of chicken meat in Bolivia to the distinctions expressed in middle class food culture. My analysis of this material aims to link the symbolic and material aspects of social inequalities as they are reproduced and negotiated in everyday food culture. The logic underlying the reproduction of social inequalities is, as I argue, the *coloniality of taste*.

I decided to focus on chicken meat based on my observation that many people consume this white meat on an everyday basis. My decision was strengthened by the methodological notion that focusing on one commodity might provide more detailed insights into food production, distribution, and consumption in Bolivia. About half a year into my investigation of the chicken meat sector, during which I had interviewed civil servants, visited chicken farms, attended the meetings of farmers' associations, and read up on the topic, I drafted my first paper: *Industrial Chicken Meat and the Good Life in Bolivia*. In this paper, I follow my intention of looking at social inequalities through a holistic lens linking the material and symbolic aspects of food. I provide a political economy and ecology of poultry production and look at how the inequalities inherent in this sector are reinforced and negotiated by the government discourse of *Vivir Bien*.

It is in the second paper that I take more account of the consumption end. I analyze how changes in the production of chicken meat have been linked to how chicken meat has been marketed and conceptualized. I bring out how the production and consumption of chicken meat have particularly favored the well-established Bolivian elites and still left the less privileged population with food of doubtful quality. Again, I show that the symbolic and the material come together in reproducing social inequalities.

With my interest in everyday life, I soon realized that even the consumption of a generic food item such as chicken involved a great deal of social differentiation. Certainly, many people do consume chicken regularly, but there are great differences as to where and in what quality and type of preparation the meat is available to the people of Cochabamba city. This led me to think about food and

social distinctions more deeply and analyze the food practices of the people in my social environment more critically. In this process, my third paper started to emerge. It became an ethnography of social distinctions expressed in the everyday food practices of the privileged middle class of Cochabamba city. My analysis brings out that seemingly purely symbolic distinctions are linked to underlying historical inequalities.

## 5.2 Paper 1: Industrial Chicken Meat and the Good Life in Bolivia

The first paper analyzes the political economy and ecology of the industrialization of poultry rearing in Bolivia. The guiding questions for this paper are: What are the socio-ecological effects of industrial poultry production in Bolivia? And how do these effects relate to the discourse of *Vivir Bien* brought forward by the Morales government?

The Bolivian government has become internationally known for its discourse of *Vivir Bien*, which could be translated as the Good Life. The analysis of my ethnographic data on the production and distribution of chicken meat serves, at a more abstract level, to debate the effects of this governmental discourse. In line with my critical realist ontology, I conceptualize discourse as a form of social practice, drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. Thus, I see the discourse of *Vivir Bien* as emerging from a historically developed structural context as well as reproducing and negotiating these contextual conditions.

My analysis shows that, despite promises of the Morales government to support small-scale farming, subsistence chicken rearing and small-scale chicken producers are systematically disadvantaged by government policies. I show how this apparent contradiction to the discourse of *Vivir Bien* stems from the structural power of the Bolivian elites. It is, unsurprisingly, these elites who control industrial poultry production as well as the production of animal feed. The effects of large-scale poultry production on ecosystems and animals stand in clear contradiction to the environmentalist stance of the Morales government. When it comes to the distribution of chicken meat, traditional market vendors are losing out against new, modern sales outlets, calling into question government support for the "community economy". To conclude, I argue that *Vivir Bien* has become a smokescreen for the continuation of the status quo in Bolivia – and I suggest that one underlying problem may be the re-interpretation of an indigenous concept through a Western ontology.

### 5.3 Paper 2: Chicken for Everyone?

My second paper provides a short history of the industrialization of the Bolivian poultry sector, asking: What has led to the success of chicken meat in Bolivia? I also look at who has gained and lost out in this process, and thus, question whether cheap chicken meat is really “for everyone”.

Inspired by Sayer’s critical account of “cultural political economy”, I link developments in the political-economic sphere to cultural developments in order to answer the leading question. My analysis shows that producers used to struggle to convince Bolivians of the advantages of the everyday consumption of chicken meat. Combined efforts, from Christmas baskets that included a “family chicken” to municipal ordinances against backyard chicken rearing, have turned chicken from a food consumed at special occasions into an everyday food. Marketing campaigns play on chicken as an essential part of Western consumer culture, while the producers fine-tune their factory farms following technological developments in Western countries. Chicken seems to be the perfect food item, appealing to many with its neutral taste and mediating desires for care as well as convenience. The production, distribution, and consumption of this food item are changing Bolivian food culture while at the same time reproducing historically engrained social inequalities. After all, it is the elites who benefit from “feeding the poor”.

### 5.4 Paper 3: The Good People of Cochabamba City

How do everyday food practices reproduce and negotiate social inequalities? This is the leading question of my third paper. It is the most personal of all papers, since it builds upon the experience of living with my Bolivian friends and family for many years.

The paper starts with a situation in which I observed that a Cochabamba mother would not let her daughter eat sugar cane sold by a food vendor. To the mother, there was an inherent uncleanness about the vendor. This is one of many observations which reveal how the privileged middle class of Cochabamba city builds its identity upon the differentiation from others, particularly the indigenous “Other”. While claiming that the inhabitants of Cochabamba city share a common *mestizo* identity, racist distinctions are part of everyday life. It is nostalgia, I argue, that guides the appreciation of traditional meals by privileged *Cochabambinos*. Eating at the market means indulging in a fantasy about times long past, rather than appreciating indigenous culture. The global commercialization of food items has led to a renewed appreciation of food previously stigmatized as “indigenous food”. The



global success has given these products a touch of Western-ness, which is also what Cochabamba gastronomy is aiming at with restaurants in the image of fast food chains. The newly emerging middle class is not welcome in these emerging “private spaces”. These developments have deeply colonial roots, which leads me to discuss the concept of the *coloniality of taste* – the continuation of colonial power relations through judgments of taste.

## 6 The Coloniality of Taste

“There it is! That is the Garden of Eden I have longed for years to see,” the old man shouted; he was burning with fever from the arrow that neither Catalina’s herbs and spells nor the chaplain’s own prayers had been able to subdue. We had descended into a lovely valley filled with oaks and other trees unknown in Spain: *quillayes*, *peumos*, *coigúes*, and *canelos*. It was the middle of summer, but the towering mountains on the horizon were crowned with snow. Hills and more hills encircled the gentle, golden valley. Pedro needed only one look to realize that Don Benito was right: intensely blue sky, luminous air, exuberant forest, and fecund earth bathed by streams and a bountiful river, the Mapocho. That was the site God had assigned for our first settlement, for in addition to its beauty and plenty, it met the wise guidelines issued by Emperor Charles V for founding cities in the Indies: [...] Apparently the Indians of this land were in total accord with Charles V, because we had seen large numbers of them, along with their villages, crops, irrigation channels, and roads. We were not the first to discover the advantages of this valley.

Isabel Allende, *Inés of My Soul*

### 6.1 Weaving the threads together

Our journey is coming to an end. You have followed me to the city of Cochabamba, gotten to know its food culture, and met my family. You have learned about the struggles that the people of Cochabamba face on an everyday basis, and about the complexities of doing fieldwork in a cultural context where I am an insider-yet-outsider. I hope that you have found the time to read the papers, which contain my analysis of the empirical data condensed in the format of articles.

What I have written down cannot exhaust the subtleties of life in Bolivia, many of which are still beyond my academic understanding. I side with John Law, who, in his book “After Method”, states:

Parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not, or if they are then this is because they have been distorted into clarity. [...] Perhaps we will need to know them through ‘private’ emotions that open us to worlds of sensibilities, passions, intuitions, fears and betrayals. (Law, 2004, pp. 2-3)

My private, emotional, and my academic understanding of Bolivian society have certainly evolved hand in hand, and this chapter is an attempt at expressing this understanding under the common organizing concept of the “coloniality of taste”. This notion brings together Bourdieu’s work on taste (particularly in his book “Distinction”) and Quijano’s work on the coloniality of power, asserting that “legitimate” food tastes serve to reinforce power relations of coloniality.

Coming to an end means circling back to the research questions. In what follows, I will discuss my first research question – How do practices of food production, distribution, and consumption reproduce and negotiate social inequalities? – drawing together the insights from the material presented in the papers and the kappa. I will show how this discussion feeds into the conceptualization of a “coloniality of taste”. Then, I will take up my second research question, linking the social inequalities inherent in food practices to the unequal distribution of biophysical resources and risks. Expanding upon the notion of stratification and emergence discussed by critical realism, I will show that the “coloniality of taste” has social as well as biophysical aspects.

## 6.2 Reproducing and negotiating social inequalities

My research has been concerned with practices of food consumption, but also with food distribution and production. The notion of practice applied here is Bourdieusian, suggesting that what people do in their everyday lives and who they aspire to be is conditioned by the socialization into a *habitus*. This socialization into a predisposition to act in a certain way happens in a historically embedded context. Thus, practices do not exist in a vacuum but interact with historical circumstances. Practices reproduce historical conditions, but we humans also improvise based on the social situation we are in, navigate this situation to “play the game” of social relations. Sometimes, historically developed structures are openly negotiated and challenged.

From this perspective, practices of food consumption are closely linked to the organization of food production and distribution. This has been hard for the field of food studies to acknowledge (Goodman & Du Puis, 2002), with production and consumption oftentimes still regarded separately. However, the food we consume does not only express our social identity, but also speaks to the way that food is produced and distributed. This is why my research spans from food production to consumption, from the conditions under which industrial chicken meat is produced to the exclusionary practices of food consumption.

Following chicken meat from production to consumption brings out how the idea that Bolivia needs “cheap food for the masses” has benefitted the elites and still leaves the less privileged population with food of doubtful quality. The large-scale industrial production of chicken meat has severe ecological impacts and has done away with sovereign backyard chicken rearing. A commodity as versatile as chicken can be tailored to the demands of the privileged population, from frozen ready-made meals, a luxury in Bolivia, to gourmet dinners. Thus, even a product geared towards the masses is part of the reproduction of social inequalities – by marginalizing small-scale farmers and traditional market vendors, and by reserving high quality food for those who can pay the price. This situation has been challenged particularly strongly by associations of small-scale chicken farmers and by an emerging interest in traditionally reared chickens.

In Cochabamba city and anywhere else, social inequalities play out along the lines of ethnicity, race, gender, and class. My ethnography of the privileged middle class of Cochabamba shows that this is also true for food practices. While holding on to a common *mestizo* identity, the people I have done fieldwork with see themselves as *white mestizos* who have the most *legitimate* claim to indulging in traditional Cochabamba cuisine. Many food businesses have taken note of this and found a well-paying clientele in the privileged middle class. *Mestizo* food traditions have been “sanitized” and their cultural meanings, as well as their function as meeting places, have been re-interpreted through a commercial lens. The same is true for “superfoods” such as quinoa (or lately stevia and chia seeds), which have been marketed internationally and are now also locally seen as markers of a distinguished taste.

With the increasing commercialization of food, old inequalities are taking on new forms, such as the exploitation of workers in supermarkets and fast food chains as well as the accentuation of status differences through the differentiated access to consumer goods. Those who benefit from this development are mostly the well-established elites, although occasionally there is room made for entrepreneurs from different backgrounds, such as the restaurant chain *Panchita*’s being founded by a market woman, who has established a family empire selling broasted chicken. This economic success does however not necessarily go with a change in social status, since the “gente bien” of Cochabamba do not readily accept newcomers to their ranks.

I argue that coloniality, the continuation of colonial power relations into the present, is an important logic underlying the reproduction and negotiation of social inequalities in practices of food production, distribution, and consumption.

Taste, following Bourdieu, is the judgement over what is good or bad, ordinary or refined, which reveals the objective social position of a person. By classifying, we classify ourselves (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 25). Bringing this insight together with the

coloniality of power means that the expression and imposition of food tastes serves to reinforce (but potentially also as a challenge to) the continuation of colonial power relations. The coloniality of taste reinforces the dominance of the elites and reproduces social divisions, through several maneuvers (see Quijano, 2007), including: the repression of indigenous tastes and knowledges; the selective appropriation of indigenous products and knowledges by the dominant culture; the imposition of dominant tastes; and the seduction into these dominant, “legitimate” tastes.

The Bolivian chicken meat boom is a case in point for the imposition of a cheap protein source supposed to “feed the masses”. This imposition is not achieved through brute force, but through symbolic and political-economic mechanisms. Since the beginnings of industrial poultry production in Bolivia, the biggest industries have received support from high-ranking politicians, allowing for prices to remain low. Government after government has, together with international aid agencies, followed the notion that Bolivians, particularly indigenous Bolivians, are in need of assistance. It is the Western “helping hand” that knows better and may tell Bolivians what they need – such as cheap animal protein.

Even the current Morales government has put the indigenous and less privileged population in the situation of receivers of government charities, such as bonus payments, rather than independent actors. The colonial notion of the inherent inferiority of the indigenous population has been reiterated many times, without acknowledging that the “need for assistance” is rooted in political-economic conditions of exploitation and dispossession. In the case of chicken meat, subsistence chicken rearing has been explicitly banned in urban areas and replaced by cheap industrial produce. Cheap food is the basis for continued exploitation of labor when considering that chicken meat fuels the working poor. This idea reinforces the illusion that cheap food, and not the creation of better working conditions, will do away with social inequalities. Additionally, the production and distribution of chicken meat is itself based upon the exploitation of cheap labor.

Many of the pioneers of industrial poultry production in Bolivia were inspired by the US poultry market. “We should try this in Bolivia!” This echoes the notion that Western culture is “universal”, rather than just another regional culture. The apparent universality of the culture of those who dominate politically and economically lies at the heart of coloniality. With the rise of the poultry industry, the patterns of exploitation characteristic of the modern food system, turning animals and workers into machines, have been successfully implemented in Bolivia. From the point of view of the consumers, buying fried chicken around the corner after rushing home from work makes one apparently part of a universal, global culture. Taking on such new food practices is influenced by the seductive force of a globally dominant culture. An inherent part of this is the felt desire to be Western,

imparted by cultural institutions from the education system to television. The less privileged population may only partly participate in this Western food system, being left with food of less guaranteed quality.

While even privileged families have held on to traditional *mestizo* ways of preparing chicken, these traditions are being appropriated by the food system and turned into new products. In the case of chicken, several chain restaurants, locally owned, have emerged, offering “traditional” chicken preparations alongside roasted and fried chicken. For the supermarket clientele, frozen ready-made versions of *mestizo* meals have been introduced. This strategy promises the participation in global, “universal” food practices, while holding on to one’s “local roots”.

The beloved *mestizo* cuisine of Cochabamba is the result of a process of imposition and appropriation – the imposition of European ingredients and cooking techniques, and the appropriation of indigenous ingredients and techniques. Apart from some high-level culinary experiments, this *mestizo* cuisine has preserved its colonial roots and has not taken on many contemporary influences from global fusion cuisine. In terms of ingredients and techniques, not much has changed, but many successful restaurants are presenting the traditional *mestizo* food in new ways. The privileged middle and upper classes of Bolivia enjoy *mestizo* foodways in a “sanitized” version, turned into fast food, served on plastic plates, or, conversely, presented as gourmet food.

The marketing of traditional food to an exclusive clientele promises higher quality and better hygienic standards following “universal” Western norms. This notion is reinforced by municipal regulations of urban markets and small-scale food businesses, which often offer food in precarious conditions. Market stalls and food stands are subject to strict controls and regulations, receiving little support for improving conditions under which food is prepared and offered. Many markets do not have access to potable water, a waste management system, or even functioning toilets. Under these circumstances, the offer of food that appears to be prepared following Western hygienic norms becomes seductive.

Many members of an emerging middle class have been claiming their participation in new spaces of consumption such as supermarkets and fast food restaurants. This unsettling of class and race barriers is oftentimes met with disdain by the privileged clientele of these spaces. This reaction reinforces the coloniality of taste, excluding newcomers from spaces of consumption regarded as “private”.

In a globally connected food system, food that has been used traditionally for curative purposes is being “discovered” as “superfood”. International marketing and increasing market prices have made these superfoods more appealing to many well-off Bolivians. Products which have been appropriated from local cultures have received a higher status through recognition by Western “experts”. This appeal of



“newly discovered” superfoods excludes, however, the less privileged population. They may be welcome as producers of a cheap product, but not as consumers. In other words, they are seen as unworthy of having the same taste as the privileged.

Taking on international food customs, from eating sushi to celebrating with French wine, is an important part of the “distinguished taste” of privileged Bolivians. Being able to access these goods is the result of being in a favorable socio-economic position rather than the expression of a refined taste. Thus, consuming food from all over the world is more than the sign of a “benevolent globalization”. It is the expression of privilege. The advance of consumerism in Bolivia provides the illusion of societal progress while in actuality deepening existing inequalities.

The contestation of tastes may, over time, result in more profound change and challenge historically developed social logics such as the colonality of taste. I have been wondering whether the continued appeal of urban markets, the common taste for *mestizo* cuisine, and practices of cooking and eating together could be seeds for decolonizing Bolivian food culture. Still, even recent attempts at “revaluing” traditional cuisine are often patronizing and reproduce social divisions instead of challenging them.

### 6.3 Linking the social and the biophysical

In critical realist terms, everyday practices are surface phenomena which are linked to underlying social and biophysical structures and mechanisms. Everyday practices reproduce, produce, and negotiate social structures *as well as emerge from and feed back into biophysical conditions*. Oftentimes, we are not aware of underlying structures and mechanisms. Many consumers of cheap chicken meat, for instance, would not know about the support which the poultry industry has received by Bolivian government policies.

Following the critical realist theory of stratification and emergence, the social emerges out of the biophysical – our existence has an inherently biophysical basis as well as biophysical effects. Still, modern thinking has created a distinction between society and nature (Soper, 1995), suggesting that humans, rather than being a part of nature, may dominate and appropriate nature. Food is a case in point. While agriculture is one of the oldest ways in which humans have changed nature, technological progress has created the widespread belief that food is a social rather than a biophysical product. The false dichotomy between society and nature has long been a problem even in academic studies of food and agricultural systems (Goodman, 1999).

I argue that, while society and nature are intimately connected through emergence and feedbacks, it is still possible to distinguish between them: while the structures and mechanisms at work in nature are biophysical, social processes have a symbolic dimension of meaning-making (see also Hornborg, 2017). Through symbolic meaning-making, we interpret our biophysical environment and interact with it. We also reproduce and negotiate social structures in this process. Colonialism and capitalism are important social structures being reproduced and negotiated through such meaning-making. One instance is the interpretation of indigenous peoples as being “closer to nature” allowing for the assertion of “inherent superiority” of the colonizers. This was one conceptualization underlying the exploitation of the indigenous population alongside with nature, feeding the hunger for raw materials and cheap labor inherent in colonial exploration and emergent capitalism.

As I have explained above in my outline of a coloniality of taste, coloniality has the continuation of unequal social relations at its heart. This also means that the human interaction with the biophysical environment involves an *unequal* appropriation of biophysical resources as well as *unequal* biophysical effects on human health and ecosystems. Having a high social status means taking a bigger share of biophysical resources as well as being protected from biophysical risks.

If we take the case of chicken meat, industrially produced poultry contains residues of substances used as growth promoters and to avoid diseases, particularly antibiotics. Many substances which are banned from their use in poultry farming in other regions of the world are still in use in Bolivia. The entire population is at risk from ingesting drug residues and bacteria resistant against antibiotics when consuming chicken meat. Additionally, in less privileged neighborhoods, the risk of eating chicken meat in an unsanitary state after having been stored in the open and exposed to contaminants, is higher than in more affluent *barrios*. Chronic health effects such as obesity and diabetes are much more likely to result for those who regularly resort to eating fried chicken in particular. Recent studies show that about ten percent of the Bolivian population suffers from diabetes (Lanza Lobo, 2017).

As I mentioned in my first paper, waste from poultry production and slaughtering, particularly chicken litter, feathers, intestines and blood, are sold to farmers all across the country (while litter and feathers are used as fertilizers, the waste from slaughterhouses is sold as swine feed). This means that the residues of drugs contained in these waste materials are distributed to the rural ecosystems of Bolivia. It is also the population of the urban periphery and the rural areas which is most exposed to the direct effects of poultry production, from odors caused by decaying chicken carcasses and residues leaking into waterways, to packs of stray dogs attracted by these residues. The effects of feeding the cities are felt elsewhere, in the hinterland.

Production and consumption processes involve the appropriation of land and labor, as Hornborg (2006) would say. As an outcome of this appropriation, the quality of resources is *degraded* (see also Heyman, 2005). Industrial poultry production is closely tied to the large-scale production of feed crops, particularly soy and corn. The production of soy involves the appropriation of large portions of land, often through foreign investors (Perez Luna, 2007). Soy plantations are encroaching onto forests and, through the extensive use of aggressive agrochemicals, leaving behind a trail of land that has lost its productive capacity.

In terms of labor, the entire poultry chain involves the exploitation of workers, who do the bulk of the work without taking part in the profits of the business. In Bolivia, racist preconceptions serve to justify dire working conditions. Working in the poultry industry is degrading to human dignity and quality of life. This issue has also been taken up by international scholars and organizations who have shown, for instance, that workers in poultry processing plants do not even get bathroom breaks (Oxfam 2016; Striffler 2005).

Looking at the material flows involved in poultry production and consumption, water is contaminated throughout the process, from the runoff from chicken farms to the residues from slaughterhouses and the residual fecal matter of the consumption process itself. In the Bolivian context, where water treatment plants are either inexistent or insufficient in capacity, all these contaminants *stay in circulation* in the water, instead of being removed. This does not only mean that drinking water is usually contaminated with fecal matter, but also that this water is used for the irrigation of fields downstream from the big cities.

This situation is particularly concerning when it comes to vegetables that may be eaten raw, such as lettuce. Studies have shown that vegetables commonly sold at the markets in Bolivia are contaminated with a range of bacteria and parasites stemming from fecal matter (Ortiz & Laura, 2008). This is common knowledge amongst the population of Cochabamba city, and those who can afford it are resorting to buying fresh vegetables, particularly lettuce and tomatoes, from newly emerging *hydroponic* farms.

These vegetables are cultivated without any contact with soil or contaminated water, but grow in a substrate and are irrigated through a controlled system. Neatly wrapped in plastic, hydroponic lettuce and tomatoes are sold at a substantially higher price in supermarkets and some neighborhood shops. Eating healthy vegetables which are not contaminated has, thus, become a privilege. On the other hand, the less privileged population is exposed to the risks of eating contaminated food and drinking contaminated water. A stomach infection caused by such circumstances can be deadly, particularly in persons with a weakened immune system and infants.

The isolation of more privileged Bolivians is, thus, a social and a biophysical issue. While keeping to “private bubbles”, from shopping malls to fancy restaurants, in the city, or even eating and spending leisure time mostly in the home is a way of avoiding social pollution, it is also a way of staying clear from the city’s “visceral” ecosystem. In the eyes of the privileged population, eating and buying at the local markets means exposing oneself to the contaminants that frequent the stomachs of *Cochabambinos*.

The recent popularity of organic produce only reaffirms that the products of best quality have always been reserved for the well-off. The distribution and sale of these products is often controlled by the more privileged population, leaving producers with little freedom to decide over their production. Organic products and also “superfoods” have been marketed under the guise of “helping the local population”. But in fact, as many studies show (see for instance the collection of articles by LIDEMA, 2008; and Jacobsen, 2011), the “discovery” of quinoa, for instance, has led to conflicts over land and to unsustainable production patterns.

The latest boom in superfoods in Bolivia, the sugar replacement stevia, has led to scams, promising farmers profits for buying shares in production schemes which were non-existent (Los Tiempos, 2015). Food products which have received international attention are often represented in connection with the ecosystem they stem from and sometimes connected to romanticized images of indigeneity. Beyond the exploitation of land and labor, such strategies commercialize meanings attached to landscapes and ecosystems. In Cochabamba, the appropriation of some products marketed as “indigenous” by the privileged population can be understood as claiming a more “legitimate” belonging to the Cochabamba valleys.

Imported foods have a high status amongst more privileged Bolivians, and given the fact that these goods have long transport routes and are often processed foods, the ecological implications of such preferences are certainly severe. In comparison to locally produced foods, particularly the carbon dioxide emissions created by processing and transport are much bigger (see the work by Frey and Barrett, 2007, which suggests that consuming locally produced food could significantly reduce the ecological footprint of the UK’s food system). Yet, some imported food products may be of doubtful quality, arriving via illegal imports in Bolivia. Lately, farmers and consumers have been protesting about the presence of Chinese garlic in the markets, creating competition for local producers and insecurity for consumers (García, 2018).

When it comes to what, how, and where to produce food in Bolivia, the well-established elites still have strong influence over government politics. Together with the Santa Cruz elites, the current Morales government has decided to allow for extensive deforestation (Fundación Tierra, 2015). Large-scale agriculture in Bolivia comes with high tech equipment and chemical aids. Many large-scale farmers have

bought into the promises of a “technological fix” to agricultural productivity. Still, the quality of the technology used in Bolivia, particularly the fertilizers and pesticides used, is often outdated by current Western standards. As the director of an organization working with pesticide use in Bolivia explained to me (PLAGBOL, personal communication, 2015), oftentimes pesticides in use all over the country have been banned in Europe and the USA.

The same issue came up in my investigation regarding the use of banned antibiotics in poultry production. This means, in terms of coloniality, that, although many privileged Bolivians have bought into the promises of Western modernity, they and their fellow Bolivians are only *partly* allowed into this modernity. They stand, privileged or not, on the fringe of Western modernity, being exploited as producers and as hungry consumers of the promises of modernity. In many cases, Bolivians are left with products and technologies which are not wanted any more in the Global North. I argue that this is a form of *environmental load displacement*, the shifting of biophysical risks and degradation to the Global South (Hornborg, 2009).

The concrete risks that Bolivian bodies are exposed to through the *selective inclusion* into modernity have a harsh underlying message: not all lives are of equal worth. This message is justified by the symbolic positioning of some individuals as “closer to nature”. Women are often represented as particularly “connected to nature”, and so are indigenous peoples. As Kate Soper brings out, this actually means that Western societies consider these social groups as less civilized and less human (Soper, 1995, p. 74).

As society is often sharply distinguished from nature, whoever is “closer to nature” is discursively placed further away from the center of civilization. This discursive act has the material dimension of normalizing precarious living situations of less privileged social groups in the urban periphery or rural areas, where they are more exposed to biophysical risks. And it creates a wall of indifference against concrete impacts on the non-white, non-male population. This symbolism serving to justify material conditions can be seen as yet another aspect of the colonial subduing of people and nature.

The taste that distinguishes well-off Bolivians as having a higher social status comes with the appropriation of land and labor, the imposition of production regimes, and the displacement of environmental loads towards the less privileged. Still, it seems that *all* Bolivians are, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, marginalized by the workings of the coloniality of taste, as the imposition of chicken meat as a cheap yet unhealthy protein source shows. The elite benefits from this imposition through the exploitation of land and labor, yet they are nothing but middlemen reinforcing the power relations of coloniality.



Through their socialization into the dominant mindset, the privileged population has learned to ignore dissident voices. This is, at once, the condition for survival in their private “bubble of privilege” *and* a mechanism hampering a further improvement of living conditions in Bolivia. Those being ignored stand at the border between modernity and subalternity. Could the realization that even the more privileged population is being marginalized by global coloniality create a movement for decolonizing Bolivia?

Consumers in the Global North are indeed also part of the coloniality of taste. We have the privilege of appropriating food practices and products from around the world, without being exposed to the consequences of this process. In contrast to the Bolivian population, we don’t have to see the farmers migrating to the city in search for work or the destruction of rainforests for soy production. We may even eat healthy and organic food, but are oftentimes only fostering the exploitative production of “superfoods”. Indeed, the products we don’t want any more and the production techniques we have abolished will end up being sold to other parts of the world who have been seduced by the promises of Western modernity. In an unequal world, how can we create a sustainable food system?





## 7 Where to Go from Here

Suddenly he feels a raging disgust at being always surrounded by nervous watchdogs and high walls with crushed glass cemented on top. I travel from one white bunker to the next, he thinks. Everywhere this terror.

Henning Mankell, *The Eye of the Leopard*

I could start these final considerations with big words such as “counter-hegemony”, “reflexivity”, or “decolonization”. It is indeed necessary to create alliances between the different social groups of Cochabamba city, to critically reflect upon the history of social inequalities in the city and in Bolivia, and to struggle against colonial mindsets and structures. I argue here that all this can be done starting with the concrete practices of everyday life. My critique of social inequalities in Cochabamba city started with the analysis of food practices, and pathways beyond social inequalities might also start at this level of concreteness. After all, enjoying good food is an inherent part of the identity of the *Cochabambinos*. And it is through these practices that the people of Cochabamba meet each other.

Anthropological theory confirms the notion that “we are what we eat”. Our choice of food does not only constitute us biophysically, but also socially. As Claude Fischler states, the eater is incorporated into a social group and its culinary system, including the distinctions between “good” and “bad” food (Fischler, 1988). And Bourdieu, whose theories I have relied upon throughout this thesis, notes that by classifying everyday items and practices, humans classify themselves.

Eating is an encounter with “the Other”. It does not only mean ingesting substances that are sometimes new to us, but it also means consuming what another person has produced for us. Eating means consuming a part of someone else, a part of who they are, as farmers, market vendors, housekeepers, or chefs (Meigs, 1997). And as Anna Meigs notes, it is this fact that makes food so interesting to think about social distinctions: “As output of one person and as input into another, food is a particularly apt vehicle for symbolizing and expressing ideas about the relationship of self and other” (Meigs, 1997, p. 105). Food helps to foster group membership but also distinction from Others.

All this is visible in Cochabamba food culture. Indulging in the food of Cochabamba city, one becomes part of the city and is biophysically and socially incorporated into

urban society. From *salteñas*, meat-filled pastries eaten after breakfast, to the meal of the day following a schedule of food for each day of the week consumed at a *pension*, to the empanadas eaten in the afternoon and the *anticuchos* indulged in after nightfall at the food stand around the corner – Cochabamba offers culinary temptations for everyone. Most *Cochabambinos* willingly give in to these temptations, although the price range and quality of the food they have access to varies. It is this food culture that the people I have lived and worked with in Cochabamba are proud of – but also anxious about.

At the same time as delicious food is tempting, it also comes with the anxiety of encountering “the Other” through these traditions. While “the Other” may be portrayed as bacteria invading one’s stomach or as the indigenous food vendor who has not washed her hands, the bottom line is the same: a fear of contamination through contact with those who are not of one’s social class.

In an almost textbook example for Mary Douglas’ (1966) theory of social pollution, privileged *Cochabambinos* anxiously keep up social boundaries through several maneuvers. Some of them emphasize their taste for the foreign, for instance, as opposed to the traditions of Cochabamba city (while still secretly indulging in street food bought from their *caserita*). Another maneuver is the strict “sanitary” control exerted upon housemaids and food vendors, implemented by civil servants who claim to have the markets “under control”. It is also not a coincidence that more and more “private” spaces for eating have been established in Cochabamba and other Bolivian cities, which are a desperate attempt to close oneself off from “the Other”.

Still, the people of Cochabamba are meeting each other through food, more than they admit to themselves. What can be done to make it a meeting on equal terms? Frequently, meeting the Other becomes an event of consuming the Other. As belle hooks (2006) notes, many people in Western consumerist societies have gone from looking at the Other with disdain to longing for the Other in order to fill an existential void. This is a development that can also be seen in Bolivia, with the privileged population being eager to “rediscover” indigenous traditions, including food items. Very often, this amounts to an essentialization and appropriation of “exotic” cultures. The Other is consumed in a manner that maintains the status quo of material relations of exploitation. But, as also belle hooks asks, can this longing for the Other also be used as a springboard for establishing a more genuine connection?

I think that, in the case of Cochabamba food culture, it is possible to critically appreciate (I want to avoid using the term “value” with its commercial connotations) the existing food culture. I believe that this food culture has the potential to genuinely connect all inhabitants of Cochabamba.

As a scholar, it is important for me to base a renewed appreciation of Cochabamba food culture upon a critique of existing inequalities in this very culture. But certainly, not everybody will listen to this academic critique. Still, many people will understand that Cochabamba does not need more supermarkets, but markets that are safe and economically accessible for everybody. They will understand that Cochabamba does not need another fast food chain selling fried chicken, but diverse street food that is safe to consume. I am certain that they will understand because, actually, most of the people I have met do appreciate the markets and the vast offer of cheap and tasty food in the city.

Much can be done to overcome anxieties rooted in structures and mindsets of coloniality. Consumers can get to know the working conditions of those producing their food, and maybe join in the struggle to improve these working conditions. Meeting places can be created where the people of Cochabamba share ingredients and recipes and prepare meals together. And why not play upon potential anxieties created by the proliferation of places where generic industrial food is served? For sure, ingesting food coming from factories must create anxieties about the “unknown” as well, which have been hidden beyond the desire to join Western modernity.

A food culture that functions as an equitable meeting place for different social groups is, also, a sustainable food culture. Appreciating Cochabamba food culture means moving towards a sovereign determination over which food is consumed. This may also go hand in hand with a critical appreciation of the conditions under which this food is produced, thus ideally moving towards better working conditions for farmers, who will not have to harm ecosystems in order to produce for a soulless market.

All this can happen if we do not only indulge in food, but – as famous anthropologist Levi-Strauss said – also use food to *think with*.



# Epilogue

I have said much about the social significance of food, but little about cooking. One reason for this is that I am, I have to admit, quite useless as a cook. This soon became clear to my Bolivian family, and it must have been hard for them to understand. Women and men in my Bolivian family cook well and like cooking, apart from my mother-in-law, who says she is too busy to cook. I was trying to make a similar argument, inventing urgent commitments whenever it would have been up to me to prepare food for the family.

The person who transmitted cooking knowledge to the younger generations of my Bolivian family was their grandmother, who lived in the same house and helped to raise the children. In Cochabamba, cooking is seen as a way to gain a person's affection, and I certainly failed to use that avenue into people's hearts.

Whenever there were family meetings, for a birthday or national holiday, there was an outburst of busyness in the house, particularly amongst the women, who came up with the most luxurious banquets without even consulting cookbooks. From the top of their head, they recited recipes for *pollo al horno* with mashed sweet potatoes or *camote*, varieties of salads, fresh or matured in vinegar overnight, chocolate desserts, cakes of all sorts, *flan*, and so on. Soon I realized that even young kids knew how to prepare food that I was struggling with. My Bolivian niece can expertly peel and slice a papaya to prepare a delicious milkshake with it. I would not even know how to choose a mature papaya at the market.

I started to feel that I should also contribute something. But I could not come up with any recipe that I could prepare with confidence to impress my new family. Grateful for what seemed to her as a newly discovered passion for cuisine, my mother sent dozens of recipes via e-mail. My husband prepared the food following my translation of the recipes. Soon, the word spread in my new family that I was no good for cooking. "*La Sarita quema hasta el agua*," my sister-in-law jokingly remarked: "Sarah can even burn water."

But I continued to try my best. Whenever it was time for preparing lunch, I offered my help, which was kindly accepted. I put myself in the role of the *ayudante de cocina*, the kitchen help, chopping vegetables, cleaning potatoes, and setting the table. I learned that tomatoes are chopped in small squares for some recipes and longitudinally for others. Cleaning potatoes seemed like an easier task, but who can



imagine the heaps of potatoes necessary for feeding an extended family? And what if there is no water available for cleaning the ingredients?

With time, particularly when the head chefs were not at home and when there were fewer mouths to feed, I built up the courage to start cooking myself. This brought up another difficulty: what modifications to traditional recipes would be acceptable for my family? And of course, the answer is almost none. When I started to prepare a vegetarian dish, chicken was brought along at the last minute. “Throw this in as well!” When I prepared a meal that was typically Austrian, it could only pass when I gave it some Bolivian touches.

During hours and hours of chopping ingredients, being made fun of for not knowing how to do anything right in the kitchen, and anxieties over not burning the rice and serving everyone the right portion, I have experienced Cochabamba cuisine in a very non-intellectual way. Writing this thesis has meant reflecting critically upon my experiences in Bolivia and the context my family members are embedded in. But I have cooked, eaten, and shared their everyday worries with them, and this makes me deeply connected to them. I am part *Cochabambina*, and as such, I want to contribute to a critical re-appreciation of Cochabamba cuisine. Doing this has involved as many anxieties as preparing a family banquet, and I do hope that the result is better than my half-burned *pollo al limón*.



Image 6: *Lljwa* sauce (photo by the author)



Image 7: *Picante de pollo* (spicy chicken) with *chuño* (freeze dried potato) (photo by the author)





Image 8: *Kawi*. Potatoes with *locoto* (chili), *quesillo* (fresh cheese), tomatoes, and onions (photo by the author)



Image 9: *Chicharrón*. Pork boiled in *chicha* (maize beer), served with mote (boiled maize), potatoes, and banana (photo by the author)





Image 10: *Trancapecho*. White bread filled with fried beef, fried egg, rice, fried potatoes, tomatoes and *locoto* (photo by the author)



Image 11: *Anticuchos*. Smoked cow's heart (photo by the author)





Image 12: Food stand in *Villa Bosnia* (photo by the author)



Image 13: Restaurant in Cochabamba city (photo by the author)

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