



# Introduction

When first arriving in Bolivia, I toured much of the city of La Paz. Captivated by the accidental topography and human vibrancy of this metropolis located in an Andean high-altitude valley, I peered into the popular commercial district of Max Paredes, northwest of the city centre, where the streets are particularly steep and the commercial dynamics seemed delirious. The area was packed with tiny stalls at the roadside, small shops in the typical unfinished red-brick buildings and some scattered commercial galleries. In the area where the electronics trade is concentrated, vendors offered an unwieldy amount and diversity of household appliances, electronic consumer goods and digital devices – big and small; old and new; more, or less, authentic. There seemed to be not a single price tag. In this sea of grassroots commerce and vernacular infrastructure, however, huge and fancy billboards stood out and the newest mobile phones were displaced on glittering branded shelves. The internationally best-known electronics brands were holding local offices and running so-called showrooms in the area. During successive visits, I observed native trader women talking to representatives of South Korean Samsung Electronics and Chinese Huawei Technologies. Although the streets, shops and selling spaces looked informal if not chaotic to the outsider's eyes, the actors and commodities were quite obviously not marginal or secondary to Bolivia's economy, regional commercial dynamics and global commodity chains.

## A Global Connection

If I had to pin down my initial interest in the research that sustains this book, it is this scene: native trader women in conversation with the staff of two of the biggest and most capitalized business conglomerates worldwide. Or, put the other way round, multinational technology enterprises enmeshed in a popular marketplace, advanced capitalism encountering locally embedded trade. This scene sparked my anthropological imagination: What were Samsung and Huawei doing in these

markets? Why did the corporations feel the need to be physically close to traders? How did traders react to their presence? Subsequently, would it be possible to use the close gaze of ethnographic research to understand the intricacies of this ‘global connection’ (Tsing 2005: 2ff.) across difference and scale in a global commodity chain – the distribution end of the chain of consumer electronics?<sup>1</sup> What could it tell us about relations of domination and power in the everyday work of chain (un)making, and practices of translation, accommodation and contention (Çalışkan 2010; Tsing 2013)?

To approach these research questions, I took inspiration from critical studies of marketization and global commodity and supply chains.<sup>2</sup> The encounter between the world of popular economic actors in the cities of the global South and globalization writ large brings into focus that the former are increasingly targeted by big manufacturers and marketers looking for ‘emergent markets’ into which to expand to increase profits. Corporations mobilize resources, technologies, the law, and discourses of authoritative knowledge to actively make and remake market arrangements and commercial channels in different national and regional contexts, they aim at controlling prices, marketing and logistics, and try to render things more efficient and profitable for them (Çalışkan and Callon 2010; Elyachar 2005; Mazzarella 2003; Mörtenböck and Mooshammer 2015; Tsing 2009). This is potentially disruptive. Yet, we ought not think of this as a linear progression towards ‘debasement’ (Gudeman 2008), nor as a process inevitably brought about by the performative power of ‘market devices’ (Callon, Millo and Muniesa 2007). Multinational chain makers depend on regional transport entrepreneurs, local marketers and other commercial intermediaries to move their goods, advertise them to culturally informed customers, and ensure they are adopted in specific retail markets (Foster 2007; Mazzarella 2003; Welker 2018). Likewise, large-scale infrastructures planned and built top-down by state and corporate agents, a category in which to include the infrastructure of corporate supply chains, are in anthropological terms ‘an ongoing process of relationship building’ (Carse 2014: 5). Their maintenance over large distances and across uneven political and cultural landscapes requires enormous amounts of administrative coordination, technology and human labour (cf. Gregson, Crang and Antonopolous 2017).

One aim of this book is to visibilize the continuous cross-cultural coordination and labour necessary to built and maintain mid- and downstream chains which can ultimately fail. In contrast to upstream, production related supply chains, mid- (transport and storage) and

downstream chains (marketing and sales to end clients) have hardly been addressed in anthropology despite the scientific and political importance to understand how relations of domination and resistance work in contemporary world trade. The book is a contribution to this endeavour.

The core of this book, part II, exposes the complacencies, frictions and quarrels between traders and staff of the multinationals at two popular commercial areas in La Paz and along the commodity chain in the region. It offers a nuanced ethnographic analysis of this encounter at different localities.<sup>3</sup> It is at the dock-site free-trade zone of Iquique (Northern Chile), where shipped electronics goods are de-containerized, temporarily stored and loaded for overland transport, that the multinationals lose sight of ‘their’ products. They are disconnected from the corporate chain as they enter the logistics of Bolivian traders. It is at the marketplaces in La Paz where the local employees of Samsung and Huawei and other East Asian multinationals try to regain oversight over the goods through infrastructures of ‘containment’ and ‘information’ (Lammer and Thiemann 2013).<sup>4</sup> They give the goods a legal appearance, highlight their singularity as ‘authentic’ brand-named goods and try to convince traders to place them on branded shelves and register their stocks as corporate inventory. In short: they deploy standardizing and value-adding market devices to ‘govern’ the entire mid- and downstream chain (Callon, Millo and Muniesa 2007; Çalişkan and Callon 2010; Kjellberg 2007; see also Bair 2005; Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon 2005).

Still, corporate supply chain management and brand marketing encounter native commercial infrastructures, forms of valuation and socioeconomic interdependencies that complicate things enormously. The connection between traders and multinationals is a contentious human encounter and it is a disputed infrastructural interface.

## Infrastructural Interfaces

Ports, dock-site free trade zones, wholesale centres, commercial districts and shopping precincts around the world are anchor points of global commodity and supply chains, essential for fulfilling the purpose of logistical infrastructure: to move goods; bring them to consumer markets; and prepare their final sale via inter-modal transport, containerization, sorting and classification (cf. Larkin 2013; Tsing 2013). Yet, they are also the physical sites where the chain manifests its instability. Multinationals that aim for integrating

and commanding the supply chain are confronted with commercial infrastructures already in place. In the Andes, these native infrastructures seem improvised and fragile – second-hand lorries, sacks and even simple bags for transportation, unfinished buildings as storage, self-made selling booths, electricity and security systems – but they enable and channel the circulation of people, merchandise and information both regionally and locally, as does the network of highways and interprovincial roads and drivers' knowledge and use of them. In their interplay, these infrastructures constitute 'pathways for connectivity, orienting and framing – without unilaterally determining – the sorts of connections made' (Fischer 2023: 4; see Larkin 2013; Simone 2014). Likewise, topological conditions matter to understand the kind of connections (Lammer and Thiemann 2023: 7). The electronic products that end up at marketplaces on the slopes of La Paz are moved over scarcely inhabited spaces of the Altiplano plateau and through steep Andean valleys, as well as up from the Pacific coast, a difference of more than 4000 meters in altitude.

In this sense, bottom-up transportation and information infrastructures have oriented and augmented interpersonal contacts and communication between different types of transport people and traders; between those who buy from providers in Iquique and those who sell the products wholesale in Bolivian cities, between these wholesalers and the retail traders who deal with final clients; between wholesalers and lorry drivers, retailers and porters. Likewise, long-term relationships (known as *casero/a*, see below) between these economic actors at every link of the native commodity channels could be seen as the 'peoples', 'relational' (Simone 2004; 2014) or 'social infrastructure' (Elyachar 2010) of Andean commerce. Information about markets, prices, products and providers, the situation at the border and the constitution of principal and secondary roads circulates through this social infrastructure. Contrary to Elyachar's analysis of 'phatic labour' in Cairo,<sup>5</sup> the 'channel through which communication is conveyed' (Elyachar 2010: 458) is known by Bolivian traders themselves. Many of them seem perfectly aware of the strategic function of interpersonal communication, not only as creator of economic value (Elyachar 2010) but also as political instrument and basis of their power of negotiation with state functionaries and the multinationals.

Therefore, acknowledging the dangers of entrepreneurial dispossession of local businesses as analysed by Elyachar in neoliberal Egypt and the ANT Economics heuristic potential and theoretical innovation for comprehending how 'economization' works through the remaking of

markets (Çalışkan and Callon 2010), the study of native trading systems within specific historical and political-economic contexts shows how bottom-up sociomaterial infrastructures and local uses of technology complicate and might block the effects of top-down policies and projects. This book explores how corporate practices of valuation are disturbed by traders' partial disconnection from the supply chain and by native forms of valuation that do not dissociate economic from social value.

## On Mutuality and Economic Morality

Regional trading systems and local marketplaces in Bolivia and central-southern Peru have persistently been described as embedded in long-term relationships between buyers and sellers, known as *casero/ta* (cf. Buechler and Buechler 1992; Seligmann 2004; Tassi 2016).<sup>6</sup> Customers usually come back to the same market woman, retailers buy from the same wholesalers and wholesalers from the same providers. Sellers and buyers at different points in the commercial channel actively forge such interpersonal relationships – both symbolically and materially. A small extra is offered with every purchase to materially induce a long-lasting tie. This *yapa* (or the diminutive *yapita*), a Quechua term meaning 'to add', widely used across the south-central Andes in Aymara-, Quechua- and Spanish-speaking market contexts, is not a functional equivalent of bargaining, nor is the discount (*rebaja* in Spanish, *iraqa* in Aymara). Rather, routinized *yapa* and *rebaja* form part of the 'seductive labour' of traders, especially of women, and the ability to attract and keep clients by gestures; words; and the visibility, taste and smell of their offers (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 107). This labour is discrete. Sellers usually do not physically approach people and 'shove' an offer under people's noses to make them buy, as seen in street and marketplace trade in other countries.

At the electronics marketplaces in La Paz, retailers use to buy from the same wholesalers, although these most often do not have a previous geographical or ethnic bond that tends to strengthen the *casero* relationship. In the retail area of Eloy Salmón, street vendors and shopkeepers quite frequently sell to initially unknown customers from across the metropolitan area. Contacts are less frequent than for products of everyday necessity. Yet, the interpersonal connection between buyer and seller continues to be a powerful *mutual expectation* enacted through words and gestures. The *casero* idiom and related gestures imbue the

commercial transaction with a sense of responsiveness across class, gender and ethnic differences.

As Gudeman (2008) has shown, there is much ambiguity in the wider interdisciplinary use of the term ‘mutuality’. New Institutional Economics evokes it as social glue – similar to the function usually attributed to ‘trust’ – which promises to lower transaction costs and is expected to make markets more efficient. Here, mutuality is even compatible with assumptions about the rational actor and scarcity-driven market choices. In this sense, cartel-like agreements and other arrangements between powerful market actors rely on mutual favours and agreements. Likewise, large retail companies and marketers of consumer goods increasingly rely on special offers (for instance, by membership cards and birthday and Christmas gifts) and marketing slogans that evoke a simulacrum of mutuality. This is a masking of hierarchical relationships and economic power (Gudeman 2008: 103ff.).

In this respect, the electronics corporations in Bolivia try to capitalize on expectations of mutuality among traders, which are grounded in *casero*-relationships as an example of long-term labour relations and interactions (Yalçın-Heckmann 2021). By hiring employees who are responsible for tangible market relations, the multinationals have strategically adapted to the marketplaces. Gifts and monetary incentives should enhance traders’ propensity to collaborate. Contrary to the image of multinational corporations as detached from local life and culture, as dismissive of place-based social relations and dynamics, the East Asian electronics corporations are attentive to traders’ needs and concerns as part of the strategy to reach corporate sales targets, to standardize commodities and homogenize the market. They try to buy into the moralities of the vernacular market by bringing forward their own understanding of appropriate market behaviour. Yet, as will be shown, expectations of mutuality between established trading partners, providers and clients are not easily transformed by these corporate interventions. And not even their own staff are totally faithful as the sociality and potential gains of popular commerce seem more promising than the poor corporate labour conditions. Traders and lower-scale employees have remained notoriously disloyal to the corporations.

Among the different conceptual elaborations of economic moralities in contemporary anthropology,<sup>7</sup> Carrier’s recent proposal (2018) is the most useful for my analysis. It is less concerned with the moral as referring to transcendent values or given ethical frameworks, but foregrounds activities and interactions instead. He keeps an essential

part of Scott's (and E.P. Thompson's) definition of the 'moral economy': it is not just an abstract morality or ethic cognitive scheme we are dealing with, but a morality inextricably tied to human relationships. And these relationships in which people are involved 'have a content that emerges over the course of time' (Carrier 2018: 24). It is this content that interests me, beyond a mere formal description of interactional modes. This approach means being attentive to different degrees and types of expectation and action that emerge from different kinds of relationships (Ibid.: 26). Among traders, these are differences between *casero*, *ayni* (reciprocal exchange) and *compadrazgo* (godparenthood). The first emerges in contexts of work, the second and third through festive and ritual activities. Likewise, past efforts and experiences continue in the present and project into the future. The specific ways traders have related to each other in their marketplaces, and the interdependencies created that lower competition, generate expectations about legitimate commercial practices and common interests (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2019; Dewey 2019).

## The Social Life of Economic Concepts

What has been especially intriguing over the years of research were traders' usage of mercantile economic concepts and legal norms. Traders frequently used terms such as market, investment or disloyal competition. But what did they mean by this? What kind of idea of the market did they have and how did their understanding of the market relate to *casero* relationships? Likewise, which kind of ownership or branding did they tacitly allude to when circumventing the claims of the corporate intellectual-property holders? How did they legitimate and morally justify practices that used to be negatively sanctioned in public discourse and international commercial law? What kind of actions and relationships did they evoke by the notion of investment that they also used in nonmarket situations such as patron saints' festivities and life-cycle celebrations?

With the ideology of 'market society' reaching nearly every corner of the globe, concepts from mainstream economics, macroeconomic analysis and commercial law have literally invaded people's lives. Yet, they are not necessarily understood according to orthodox models and academic schools of thought. The meanings of the market vary cross-culturally, as does the practical organization of real existing markets (Dilley 1992). As

Neiburg and Guyer highlighted for the ‘real economy’, macroeconomic terms are dominant ‘in the organization of the contemporary world, circulating among experts and ordinary people, through scientific and vernacular spaces, in multiple contexts, with shifting meanings’ (Neiburg and Guyer 2017: 262).<sup>8</sup> As other scholars have emphasized, especially for Latin America, we should not assume a ‘simple causality’ between economics and economy(ies), official and local economic knowledge (Motta et al. 2014), nor a necessary purification and formalization of the economy through the application of expert models (Miller 2002). In this book I show how official law and discourses (about disloyal competition, property rights and brand fidelity) stand against the vernacular language of buyer–seller loyalty, local understandings of ownership and moral expectations about respect and mutually beneficial exchange. My analysis of the social life of mercantile terms aims at grasping traders’ modeling and conceptualizing of the economy as a thinking based on ordinary practices (Guyer 2004; Narotzky 2020).

Traders’ meanings of the market have developed through decades of market making dealt with in part I of the book. This has meant enacting, structuring and regulating the marketplaces over time, as inter-personal process and bottom-up institutionalization, as well as building trans-local infrastructure that facilitates connectivity and communication across space. As part of the national street traders’ organizations, the *gremiales* (see below), the electronics traders achieved a piecemeal and incomplete legalization of their street markets over the last decades that, despite of this, evolved into complex wholesale areas and became established as shopping precincts for customers across class without displacing street-level trade. Crucial for the endurance of popular commerce were ‘extra-legal’ negotiations (Smart and Zerilli 2014) with state representatives over official norms and regulatory principles. These came to reflect what traders’ themselves considered licit. Traders’ ideas about economic regulation and self-determined notions about their legitimacy as a collective are relevant for understanding their positioning vis-à-vis the multinationals.

A brief remark on the types of electronics goods at the marketplaces. These are not any longer secondary in customer demand (in supposed contrast to ‘high-end’ shops and department stores), nor exclusively poor-quality products or counterfeits.<sup>9</sup> Traders handle an ample supply mix of commodities that they purchase at different places in the Americas and East Asia (for the latter, see Müller 2019; Tassi 2016). Some of these violate intellectual-property-rights legislation (IPR), many others



do not. Counterfeits (copies, imitations or ‘clones’) are less prevalent than could be expected – among other reasons, as a significant number of Bolivian customers are urban middle and upper-middle class consumers who demand reliable quality and original brands.

Traders’ work of appropriation and the sociality encoded in their entrepreneurial language raise another topic, an issue beyond the pragmatics of everyday commerce. How to make sense of their self-understanding and economic personhood? On the one hand, women and men use mercantile terms, express a high esteem for personal economic independence and proudly claim to be *cuentapropistas* (own-account traders) who manage their own merchandise, capital and investment. However, on the other hand, their business is sustained and made possible by an extraordinarily high degree of mutual obligations with others – providers, customers and commercial partners – as well as through fictive kin and *ayni* reciprocity in other social spheres. Therefore, the appropriation of business terms did not mean the adoption of a universal entrepreneurial selfhood.

To address this conundrum, I start from the premise that economic personhood is influenced by a broad set of experiences, relationships and policies that must be considered in their historical context and contemporary sociopolitical specificity (Ferguson 2013; Martin and Yanagisako 2020). In this vein, traders’ hesitation to form commercial companies and their appreciation of being your ‘own boss’ should not be understood either by referring exclusively to legal or other formal variables, as in the liberal tradition that holds the fragility of the state and legal systems responsible for the small-scale and ‘weakness’ of business enterprises (among others, De Soto 1989), or by a totalizing framework about the sweeping effects of neoliberal capitalism, informalized labour and precarization. Instead, the self-description and collective adscription of traders as *cuentapropistas* must be considered within the context of the historical, colonial and postcolonial ‘precarity’ of native Andean livelihoods (Harvey 2018), sociomaterial trade infrastructures and kinship organization past and present, as well as through traders’ aspirations and values. The personal qualities they associate with trading turn around practical, senso-motoric and social capacities: to observe and travel and get access to products and information through actively tying long-term buyer-seller bonds. So *cuentapropismo* is both individual and relational and traders’ lives are highly interdependent in and beyond the market.

## Embodying Exchange

Persistent human interactions and the circulation of objects and money in other than 'economic' settings are the object of analysis in part III, when the book moves away from the corporations and market transactions. To comprehend traders' life I had to look beyond the electronics marketplaces and the commodity chain, address them among traders of other commodity groups and trespass on the boundaries of the 'economic' towards other social realms, mainly social celebrations and festive gatherings. Questions of the *reproduction of the native trading system*, on the one hand, and the *social reproduction of traders* as human beings were put on the forefront. Large patron saints' festivities and life-cycle events play a key role in traders' lives, both for the human qualities involved and the movement and transfer of resources. It is in these settings that gifting and sharing create the embodied sensation of belonging to an in-group. Traders become friends, *compadres* (godparents) and establish *ayni* (reciprocal relationships). The inter-personal warmth, joy and recognition created through toasting, drinking, eating and dancing together evoke collective well-being. At the same venue and along the entire duration of a celebration, gifts continuously enter circulation networks of varying length and durability. I analyse the articulation of the inner and outer circulation networks of money and objects (from dance costumes and festive paraphernalia to the presents and beverages offered), and the human encounters, social ties and moral orders that bring them about.

While in most of the rural and peri-urban Andean community studies, *ayni* reciprocity is referred to as a balanced exchange of labour (Albó 1985; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999), and while it has been idealized in national public discourse as a general principle of anti-capitalist solidarity (Walsh-Dillely 2017), *ayni* studied here continues to be based on the equivalence of the exchanged (the same amount of the same type of prestation) (Albó 1985; Esteva Fabregat 1972), but it is imbued with people's social aspirations and bound up with the creation of traders' primary resource and means of production: working capital. Trading surplus flows into festive events and festive gains circulate outside these social settings. For a saints' celebration, and also the most important life-cycle event as marriage or baptism, the hosts become tied-in social and material obligations to innumerable others who attend their celebration with *ayni* gifts that should be reciprocated later – preferably with an increment, *cariño*, affect and care always expressed materially.

To analyse social, symbolic and material transactions at these two main types of Andean celebrations, revalued and aggrandized by urban popular traders, and commercial circuits that precede and follow the events, I follow those perspectives in economic anthropology and sociology that consider the social and the economic as overlapping dimensions of everyday life,<sup>10</sup> think of gift and market exchange as having compatible rather than opposing logics and temporalities, and conceive of relationships mediated by money as neither necessarily de-personalizing nor purely instrumental (cf. Parry and Bloch 1989; Dufy and Weber 2009; Guyer 2004a; Hart 2000; Spedding 2008; Zelizer 2011). Once we recognize that market transactions are far more than the immediate exchange of commodities (they depend on implicit and explicit contracts that are medium to long-term), then, as Mauss himself did, we have to refute the idea that gift exchanges and market transactions fundamentally differ as to the timing of the return (Hart 2007).<sup>11</sup> This is especially important in a world, as described in this book, where formalized obligations are not even present in market-based exchange. Instead, expectations of mutuality, felt obligations to reciprocate and the claim to receive a counter-prestation for your offer, support or gift crosscut market and non-market settings and give the trading system a pronounced future and social reproductive orientation.<sup>12</sup>

The enmeshment of the economic and the social value in traders' lives becomes especially noticeable in the usage of the term 'investment'. The meaning of the term is not unidimensional economic but has a multifarious semantic field: as investment in a social relation and affective bond, as material support for others in the present moment and a future input for your own household and business. It is an investment in people and things. The people who are being invested in by others become socially indebted to an enormous amount of people, which is seen as enabling rather than restraining personal agency.

One of the biggest patron saints' festivities in the south-central Andes, *Jésus del Gran Poder*, organized mainly by traders and celebrated in the heart of the commercial Max Paredes district of La Paz, is such an arena of multiple investments. The analysed festive transformations (enormous growth in participants and turnover, the amplification of the fiesta cycle, the paying of quotas, etc.) depend on the logics of trans-Pacific commerce and the availability of cheap Chinese fiesta dresses and paraphernalia in abundant quantity. At the same time, a fiesta-specific investment in people and a 'wealth-in-people' (Guyer 1995; Kusimba 2020) predate monetary investments. Fiesta organizers (*pasantes*) draw together an expansive network of reciprocal obligations. Furthermore,

the way traders organize this fiesta-related provisioning, through rotation and yearly changing networks of service providers and artisans, distributes income opportunities. This temporary distribution of work options,<sup>13</sup> as I argue, is sustained by the notion that yours' and others' livelihoods and the potential growth of your own and other businesses are not opposed or antagonistic, but interrelated. This, however, does not prevent unequal wealth creation. The most prosperous trading families hold a wealth-in-people which translates into more wealth-in-things, they sponsor others and gift and counter-gift generously but also keep – material riches, key contacts and information. Still, as they are physical co-present to others, moral pressure is put on them to be nice, responsive and minimally distributive. The same logic of creating wealth-in-people means a constant growth of festivities and celebrations, heterogeneous people, many new traders and modest families join the events where they make themselves known with the hope and expectation to receive a favour. In other words, we find persistent claims to 'belonging *in*, or, having wealth' by those who are 'wealth-to-others' (Kusimba 2020: 170, italics in original).

## **Trading Histories of the South-Central Andes**

To contextualize the contemporary electronics trade, it is important to reprise recent political and macroeconomic transformations in Bolivia as well as long-term commercial histories. The growth of the informal tertiary sector, street vending and open-air markets can be observed with extraordinary sharpness over the last few decades in Bolivia, as can the reactivation of historical commercial routes, social networks and local institutions that regulate the economy and cushion the disruptive effects of macroeconomic transformations. For the last forty years, the number of traders in Bolivia has not stopped growing. On the one hand, this was an effect of the country's debt crisis and the following austerity measures in the mid-1980s that scaled back jobs in manufacturing and coincided with a severe drought in the highlands. Foreign debt accumulated by earlier military governments, the dramatic fall in world tin prices (the country's premier export resource) and a general decline in Bolivia's mineral, petroleum and agricultural production meant public bankruptcy and a deeply depressed economy. Printing more money led the country into hyperinflation in May 1984 with price rates increasing over 50 per cent per month and an enormous annual inflation rate of 2,177 per cent in 1984 (Klein 2011: 241). The reaction was

the so-called New Economic Plan of President Paz Estenssoro and his most prominent adviser, Jeffrey Sachs: an orthodox shock plan, a set of liberal policies known as the Washington Consensus for which Bolivia was a field of experimentation. The sudden economic liberalization of formerly state-controlled wages and prices, the devaluation of the national currency, privatization of strategic industries and restrictions on public spending had a devastating effect on formal employment and the average purchasing power of the population (Ibid.: 244ff.). It cancelled out decades of poverty alleviation. The situation was especially tragic as it happened only a few years after the return to democracy (after eighteen years of nearly uninterrupted military rule, with several coups d'état). Until today, Decree 21060, passed on 29 August 1985, is highly present in the national political consciousness as synonymous with the beginning of the neoliberal era, the increase in economic precarity and the growth of urban service-related and commercial sectors. Since then, Bolivia and neighbouring Peru have led global statistics on economic activities outside state control and official legality (Schneider, Buehn and Montenegro 2010).

On the other hand, at about the same time, traders' networks increasingly grew, including over greater distances, and commerce expanded through intensified cross-border trade in foreign merchandise available from Arab, Indian, Taiwanese, Korean and Chinese migrant entrepreneurs at the free-trade zones in the region – especially at the Zona Franca Industrial y Comercial (free-trade and industry zone, Zofri) of Iquique (Müller 2017, 2018; Tassi 2016). As consumer goods increasingly arrived in South America from East Asia and China, Zofri, founded in 1975, became the key place for the purchase, storage and handling of a wide range of products destined for Bolivia. This profoundly changed wholesale and retail structures in the country. At a time of decreasing purchasing power among the population through the debt crisis and neoliberal restructuring, traders could offer basic consumer goods as well as clothes and electronics at lower prices than the established trading houses in the country – many of which were owned by European immigrants, who commercialized US-American, Italian and German electronics brands (Müller 2018).

Beyond these more recent developments, a historically informed analysis of contemporary trade highlights the up and downs of cross-Andean commerce in the *longue durée*. First, the Andes have for a long time been a particular fertile ground for questioning the narrative that ascribes money with an inevitable transformative power towards impersonal markets, homogenized scales of value and commodified

social relations – albeit people’s integration into the world economy and global commodity chains (Absi 2009; Harris 2000a; Platt 1992; Ødegaard 2011; Tassi 2016). While highland Aymara and Quechua communities were drawn into the colonial cash economy via an exploitative tribute system and, during certain times, the obligatory acquisition of foreign commodities, coinage introduced by the Spaniards soon acquired more than economic connotations. Ethno-historical analyses of the Altiplano, especially of rural communities in proximity to the mineral economies of Potosí and Oruro (and the colonial mint in Potosí), have highlighted the symbolical nexus of gold and silver with at once cosmological order and social reproduction (Gose 1994; Platt 1992; Sallnow 1989).

Likewise, amidst the exploitation of Indian labour in the mines and on the agrarian estates (*encomiendas* in the early colony, *haciendas* later), as well as the generalized impoverishment and deprivation of rural communities, native highlanders have also made use of their indispensable role in transport and as commercial intermediaries. The ‘Peruvian Economic Space’ (Assadourian 1982) between coastal Lima, the capital city of the Spanish vice-royalty of Peru and the mining town of Potosí on the Altiplano plateau, in the mid-seventeenth century among the biggest cities worldwide, was dependent on the topographical knowledge, mobility experiences and the contacts of native people, as well as on their pack animals. Spurred by these two growth pools, this commercial space expanded from Northern Ecuador to Argentina and Chile (Langer 2004). Indigenous *arrieros*, the llama (*llameros*) and mule drivers, used to transport peasant produce and other community exchange goods along with minerals for export. Ethno-historical research has found different levels of commercial activity and native control over routes and networks in different Andes regions and moments in time, as well as variations in the relationship between native leaders (*kurakas*) and their communities (Assadourian 1982; Glave 1989; Langer 2009, 2004; Stern 1995). They agree in stressing highland-Indigenous agency in the interstices of rural livelihoods, intra- and inter-ethnic exchange and export economies.

Therefore, far from being an isolated ‘export enclave’, the colonial mining industry depended on precolonial routes and patterns of mobility. It spurred an ‘Indian space’ (Glave 1989) of itinerant seasonal trade and agricultural barter fairs (*ferias*) that coexisted yet was only partially integrated with the export economy. It resisted being subsumed under foreign mercantile logics. Two dimensions of Indigenous commercial control stand out: one moral, the other temporal (Langer 2004). The moral economy of Indigenous exchange, especially the reliance on

established personal commercial relationships and pre-established customary exchange rates at fairs, functioned as a barrier against volatile monetary incentives. Indigenous actors insisted on extending the morality of mutual obligation to non-ethnic interlocutors. Likewise, despite exploitative relationships between mine owners, mestizo intermediaries and *arrieros*, the last-named had a certain control over the rhythms of trade as they refused to change their seasonal labour and mobility patterns (Langer 2004: 19ff.).

The historical depth of long-distance routes and exchange patterns is especially strong in what today are the Bolivian *departamentos* (regional divisions) of La Paz and Oruro on the Altiplano plateau. The Altiplano stretches from Central Peru to the Bolivian–Chilean–Argentinian borderlands. On this harsh and dry plateau, 4,000 metres above the sea, people have historically been dependent on complementary produce from lower ecological zones, known in economic anthropology and Andean ethnography as the ‘archipelago model’ or ‘vertical control of ecological zones’ (*pisos ecológicos*) (Murra 2017 [1969]). This precolonial regional system, based on the control of discontinuous territories through the ethno-political leadership of highland Aymara *señoríos* (kingdoms led by local lords and dynastic families), did not last under colonial rule.<sup>14</sup> Yet, although communities lost their territories in different ecological zones during the first two decades of Spanish rule, they maintained a strong outward orientation – especially towards present-day Chile, the valleys of the western mountain ranges and the Pacific coast. As direct access to production zones was cut off, people increasingly engaged in barter and trade for access to vital complementary products (Cottyn 2012).

So, mobility and interregional exchange have a long history and resilience in the Andes, despite being endangered by colonial jurisdictions first and nation-state borders later. After independence from Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Quechua and Aymara communities were separated by the new borders between Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Peru. The overall position of Indigenous communities and native commercial intermediaries generally worsened after independence. While Indigenous commerce was especially vital and omnipresent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, liberal economic policies narrowly focused on exports and facilitated imports on a larger scale by the ascending political and entrepreneurial classes of the Creoles (*criollos*) (America-born people with Spanish descent). The period in Bolivia between the free-trade policies from the 1860s onwards and the National Revolution of 1952 meant a general weakening of native

rural production and commercial activities, although not countrywide to the same degree.<sup>15</sup> Liberal economic policies, justified by evolutionary thinking and social Darwinism leaping in from Europe, led to hacienda growth, the encroachment on and loss of communal lands, and the displacement of native commerce. A marginalization of native trade by the end of the nineteenth century was also forced by the infrastructural shift from pack animals to railroad (Langer 2004, 2009; Platt 1982). In the same period, a series of anti-oligarchic rebellions and continuous legal struggles by Altiplano community leaders for land titles brought native peoples onto the political front line (Rivera Cusiquanqui 2003 [1984]).

It was the National Revolution of 1952 and subsequent agrarian reform in 1953 that spurred mobility and market participation among the Aymara and Quechua rural populations by abolishing bonded labour (*peonaje*) and partitioning estate land into small plots given to Indigenous families, perceived as individual peasant households rather than native communities (Rivera Cusiquanqui 2003 [1984]). The agrarian reform also ‘substantially reduced the role of highland landowners in food distribution’, especially in La Paz department, which had seen high levels of hacienda growth (Buechler et al. 1998: 85). Native commoners and ex-hacienda labourers went into regional transport and the distribution of foodstuffs, coca leaves and imported manufactured goods. In the cities, traders’ associations established regional federations and national confederations to fight the abuses of supervisors, tax collectors and special police agents (Buechler 1997). Networks of commercial ties between the countryside and the city, interwoven with kin and godparent relationships, became ever more widespread (Buechler 1980; Buechler and Buechler 1996). Aymara and Quechua market women started to play an ever-greater role.

Moreover, and closing this topic, considering both the *longue durée* and recent political context of Andean commerce is important in order to understand traders’ livelihoods. For Indigenous and lower-class peoples in the Andes, precariousness is a historical condition – and this should be borne in mind when analysing more recent forms of precarity related to the decline of formal wage work and state-provisioned social security (Harvey 2018). Commerce has been a livelihood need and socioeconomic strategy against both the more recent precarization and precarious livelihoods that have been reproduced by the structural violence and inequality of colonial conquest, postcolonial disruptions and wars (Ibid.).



## Women Traders' Work and Commercial Histories

Aymara and Quechua women hold historically and at times powerful positions as traders in local marketplaces and long-distance wholesalers as well as intermediaries between the rural-Indigenous and urban-mestizo world, as documented by a rich body of ethno-historical and anthropological work (Babb 1989; Buechler and Buechler 1996; Buechler 1997; Larson, Harris and Tandeter 1995; Mangan 2005; Ødegaard 2008, 2016; Seligmann 2004; Scarborough 2010). Contrary to the image of the Andean trader woman marketing small quantities of goods in her indigenous *aguayu* scarf, a persistent representation of subsistence-oriented 'ant trade', women have commercialized agricultural produce along with commodities for a long time. Highland-Indigenous women engaged in urban marketplace sales and the street trade of coca leaves, wax, small amounts of silver and maize beer as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Potosí (Mangan 2005: 42ff.). The *quateras* (from qhatu: marketplace) in early colonial Potosí were 'the final link [eslabón] in the realization of these fully modern commodities, and at the same time sustained by Indigenous technology and knowledges' (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 96). During colonialism, Aymara and Quechua men and women also dealt with foreign manufactured products and foreign prestige goods.

Until today, many Andean trader women externalize their identity as *cholas*<sup>16</sup> according to local and regional variations, but with a recognizable style. In La Paz, these markers are a multi-layered long skirt (*pollera*), a shoulder scarf (either a unicolor manta or the coloured *aguayu*), a bowler hat (*borsalino*) and flat leather sandals. Historically, the *chola* embodies the astute Andean trader woman with a certain economic ascendance who has marketized herself and her household out of modest circumstances while being exposed to overlapping forms of discrimination (Babb 2018). In La Paz, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the affluence of *cholas* and their families led to tensions between economic ascent and racialized stigma, cultural self-affirmation and social discrimination (Soruco Sologuren 2011). The *chola* has provoked admiration and repulsion, erotic desires and moral aversion among White and mestizo men across the Andes (Weismantel 2001). This is expressed in Bolivian novels of the beginning to the mid-twentieth century, where she has also been claimed as the true mother of the Bolivian nation (Soruco Sologuren 2011). The upper-echelon of *cholas* – *chicha* tavern owners; wholesale traders; marketplace

political leaders; money lenders; and, generally, brokers of different social worlds – are often physically large (as a sign of their economic ascent and local prestige) and represented as proud and sharp-tongued (Scarborough 2010; Stephenson 1999; Weismantel 2001).

Complementing the literature that analyses the representation of the *chola* – and stresses Andean trader women’s identities at the interface of gendered, racialized and class-based inequalities (Babb 1989; Buechler 1997; Buechler and Buechler 1996) – my analysis foregrounds their commercial skills and relational labour (see also Seligmann 2004). Women, whether trading alone or with husband and non-adult children, are often the public face of the trading business. They are especially active in initiating and maintaining relationships across class and ethnic boundaries as well as national borders – and with employees of multinationals (see chapter 4). They are also especially attentive to social obligations and mutual respect, as well as positive emotions towards clients (Scarborough 2010; Seligmann 2004).

## **Multinational Corporations and the Plurinational State of Bolivia**

Bolivia saw a major political shift at the beginning of the 2000s. After a sequence of popular upheavals against the neoliberal policies of President Sánchez de Lozada, especially those known as the Water War in Cochabamba and the Gas War in El Alto which were both violently suppressed, Sánchez de Lozada finally left the country. After a two-years interim government, Evo Morales and his party, Movement for Socialism (MAS), gained the election at the end of 2005 and was inaugurated as the first Indigenous president of Bolivia in January 2006. Morales promised a ‘cultural democratic revolution’ and soon started policies to reconstitute a “strong state” and move beyond “colonial dependence” (Postero 2017: 141–2). His government expelled USAID (US Agency for International Development) from the country in 2013 and made the situation more difficult for other foreign institutions and Western NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), perceived as threatening endogenous political priorities. Existing contracts in the energy sector were renegotiated in favour of state royalties (for an overview and evaluation of Morales’ government from 2006 to 2019, see Goodale 2019; Postero 2017).

Despite these policies and rhetorical hostilities towards multinational enterprises and the emphasis on endogenous economic development, the MAS government has selectively looked for international

investments, mainly in the context of bilateral agreements in the energy sector, for the development of large extractivist infrastructures, which has been criticized by Indigenous and ecological groups. In this context, foreign private and public investment as well as international lending from Middle Eastern and East Asian countries has significantly increased and partly replaced the country's multilateral engagements and obligations. By 2016, China had become the largest source of goods imported into Bolivia and Sino-Bolivian deals operationalized infrastructure development and mineral extraction (Ellis 2009; Valle and Holmes 2013). After the negotiation of a 7.4 billion-dollar loan in October 2015 from the Chinese Eximbank, China became Bolivia's main creditor, outpacing the country's obligations to all multilateral institutions taken together (Rodríguez 2015). In the telecommunication sector, Chinese firms Huawei Technologies Co. and ZTE Telecom have become important suppliers of antennas and related services, as well as builders of network infrastructure. Huawei's investment in telecommunications predates its engagement in consumer electronics. Likewise, Samsung Electronics' presence in Bolivia must be seen in the broader framework of its semiconductor industry and the country's rich lithium reserves (Valle and Holmes 2013).

So, instead of leaving the country, as Sony Entertainment and other multinationals had done in the economically volatile and politically unstable late 1990s and early 2000s,<sup>17</sup> the East Asian electronics enterprises increased their investment in Bolivia under the Morales administration. While they had come closer to the Bolivian market since the mid-to-late 1990s, opening regional branches in Santiago de Chile, logistics outlets at the free-trade zone in Iquique and national headquarters in either downtown La Paz or Santa Cruz, they finally became physically present among traders. Sony Electronics was the first to open a showroom and back office in the popular commercial Max Paredes district in 2003. LG and Samsung Electronics followed in 2007 and 2012 respectively, and Huawei in 2016.

These multinationals have followed a dual strategy in the country: first, direct sales to a handful of institutional clients, negligible regarding market shares. These are the three telecommunication companies who operate in Bolivia, apart from a few exclusive retail shops, mainly located in La Paz's prosperous Southern Zone and the city of Santa Cruz. Second, they have established more mediated relationships with traders and shopkeepers in the popular commercial areas, areas the corporations call – using the English term – the *open market*. Despite the 'juridical insecurities' the multinationals referred to in their public

statements – a common argument used by corporate sectors in Bolivia and beyond to lobby for more liberal policies – the Bolivian consumer market for electronics was also framed as ‘unique’ and highly attractive. Rising income and distributive policies under Morales had created a sales boom across different commodity groups of consumer electronics, from washing machines to microwaves, flat-screen televisions, computers and smartphones.

## The City of La Paz and the Electronics Trade

La Paz is the seat of the national government<sup>18</sup> and the capital city of the *departamento* (region) of the same name that borders Peru to the north and Chile to the west. The city spreads along the rugged valley of Choqueyapu River, at altitudes between 3,200 and 3,800 metres above sea level. Bumpy streets and winding roads connect its neighbourhoods. Urban settlements sprawl into the numerous side-valleys and dried-up river beds. The glacier Illimani (6,438 m), the highest mountain in the majestic Cordillera Real east of La Paz, is visible from almost every spot in the city. It is the city’s emblem and an excellent point of orientation. Illimani and other nearby glaciers nourish the many tributaries of the Choqueyapu (meaning ‘field of gold’ in Aymara) and ensure the water supply of the growing urban population. With the city of El Alto, which emerged on the Altiplano plateau above the basin of La Paz because of increased rural–urban migration from the 1950s onwards, both cities form a densely populated metropolitan area of nearly two million people. In the macrodistrict of Max Paredes, on the northwestern slopes of La Paz, relatively close to the centre and easily accessible from other parts of the city and El Alto, traders sell fresh products and wares on the street, either permanently or at fair days.

With the growth and consolidation of the Max Paredes district since the 1980s, permanent street markets and sidewalk sales became materially consolidated through the widespread practice of leaving stalls, shelves and tables on the street overnight. Deliveries became attuned to urban habits such as the purchasing of necessities on Fridays and Saturdays. The proximity of street markets and shops selling fresh fruit, clothing, other consumer goods and electronics permits customers to combine their weekly household provisioning with a look at the newest offer in consumer electronics. It has perpetuated a widespread habit to ‘buy as you go’ (*comprar al paso*).<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Max Paredes is a wholesale and retail distribution centre where rural produce and manufactured

goods continue to be cheaper and in much greater supply than in other parts of the city: cheaper than in the supermarkets and department stores in the central and southern districts.

It is potentially misleading to speak about street trade in Bolivia, if this evokes a separate domain and research field, apart from a core theme in the history of economic anthropology: marketplace trade. First, this is because there are relatively few itinerant peddlers. Street vendors use to have a fixed position. Second, an estimated 75 per cent of all street traders in the country are collectively organized (Hummel 2015: 335). This is a remarkably high number compared with the degree of organization of street vendors in the region and worldwide. Sidewalk vendors with a fixed stall create associations with regulations and responsibilities for all members, and even the ambulant vendors, who usually hawk in a circumscribed area, tend and are socially obliged to become part of the respective association. These local collectives, also called unions (*sindicatos*), form the lowest level of traders' collective organization as *gremiales*.

Third, it is because popular commerce is difficult to delimit. Vending and selling in the Max Paredes district expands over sidewalk sales, markets in traffic-calmed streets, commercial galleries and warehouses. Its protagonists are diverse types of traders and customers, and we also find, as much as in other Andean popular commercial districts, 'performers, private security guards and loaders of merchandize' (Gandolfo 2013: 278). In this book, when I am speaking of marketplace I use the term as synonym for an entire commercial area.

There are about two thousand electronics traders in La Paz, from street vendors to shop owners and different kinds of wholesale traders.<sup>20</sup> While electronics traders share principal organizational forms and terms of political engagement with traders of less-expensive manufactured products such as clothes and furniture, there are some particularities. The three main commercial areas for electronic appliances at Max Paredes (named after the streets around which they have grown: Eloy Salmón, Huyustus and, to a minor degree, Buenos Aires) were established between the 1960s and 1980s by rural Aymara migrants mainly from the department of La Paz, but have since then become more heterogeneous – in particular, the Eloy Salmón retail area, where we find traders of various social and ethnic origins, levels of formal education and business prospects. Furthermore, as already mentioned, electronics traders have constructed commercial areas and shopping precincts for customers who are looking for original brand-named goods. Their interactions with customers tend to be more anonymous

than the seller–buyer relationships surrounding the exchange of goods that are everyday essentials. Their associations supervise some competitive issues such as access, but not others – for instance, pricing. Likewise, electronics traders have not only maintained long-term business relations with intermediaries at the free-trade and industry zones of Iquique in northern Chile and China – as traders across different commodity groups have – but also with the regional and national representatives of the multinational electronics corporations whose goods they sell.<sup>21</sup>

On the political level, electronics traders of different types – from street sellers to shop retailers and wholesalers – form part of Bolivia’s huge traders’ associations or unions that are organized locally, regionally and nationally as *gremiales* (Hummel 2017a). *Gremiales* publicly identify as retail traders (*comerciantes minoristas*) and are persistently associated with the country’s rampant informal economy. However, they in fact represent about 1.5 to 2 million people (from a total population of 11.5 million) who are, one way or another, involved in commerce.<sup>22</sup> The *gremiales* evolved from an organization in defence of street trade, mobilization against police abuse and the urban policies of relocation – as in many other countries in Latin America and the Global South – into an institution that additionally defends traders’ interests in nationwide commercial distribution and consumer markets. They are a collective political subject whose recognition by the state as official interlocutor with ‘legal personality’ legitimizes such a widening of the unions’ aims and strategies.

Having said this, it should be mentioned that I do not deal with the humblest among Bolivia’s traders and street vendors for basically two reasons that are commodity-specific and macroeconomic. First, the higher starting capital and urban contacts needed for the electronics trade (even by street sellers) represent entry limits that do not exist for the sale of cheaper consumer goods and agricultural products. Second, the electronics markets have expanded during the time of research, sustained by continuous economic growth between 2008 and 2018. The redistribution of royalties through social programmes increased consumption levels among the lower-middle classes.<sup>23</sup> Electronics appliances ceased to be luxury goods over the years of my research, such as mobile phones and televisions. The macroeconomic situation undoubtedly contributed to the expansion of the electronics trade and spurred the intensity of social and material exchanges among traders in and off the market.

## Notes

1. Scale usually refers to the spatial outreach of action, as in small-scale commerce: trading across a border, or within a city or province. In this sense, a significant number of Bolivian traders of electronics operate ‘big-scale’ – they have made faraway contacts and regularly move back and forth between Chile and also China (Müller 2019; Tassi 2016). Their connections are an example of what Biao Xiang (2013) calls ‘emergent scales [that] do not have definite shapes, are hard to map’. These are ‘by definition actor-centric and activity-specific’ (Ibid.: 285). Yet, scale most often alludes to a hierarchical order where a maximum level subsumes lower categories. Such taxonomical scales dominate representations of the worldwide spatial order: a hierarchy of degressively encompassing levels from the global and regional to the national and local (Xiang 2013). Power is enacted by corporations across these hierarchical scales (Narotzky and Besnier 2014). The multinationals’ organizational size and scope of operation are large scale beyond the mere spatial outreach of action; they are hierarchical organized, technological bureaucracies.
2. While commodity chains evoke a long history of international production and trade, supply-chain management indexes ‘new profit regimes’ (Tsing 2009: 149). The business literature has identified supply chains as the main competitive actors in contemporary global capitalism (Mangan, Lalwani, and Butcher 2008).
3. The book is based on ethnographic research conducted over a total of twenty-two months between 2013 and 2018. Fieldwork has been carried out across different locales (La Paz, Iquique, border towns and markets) with several groups of economic actors implicated in the regional distribution of electronic equipment. Accordingly, my aim has not only been to follow electronic goods along the regional commodity chain – the classical approach of multi-sited ethnography (Appadurai 1986; Hannerz 2003), but follow a broader array of ‘connections, associations, and putative relationships’ (Marcus 1995: 97) that make up the chain. A clear focus has been laid on traders and multinationals in the main electronics marketplaces in La Paz. I have also participated in two of traders’ dance troupes. In addition, I have been in regular contact with, interviewed and observed corporate staff of the multinationals. I toured the market with lower-scale employees of Samsung Electronics and conducted interviews with middle managers of all four most present electronics corporations: Samsung and LG Electronics, Sony and Huawei Technology. Early in fieldwork, I made use of ‘interface spaces’ (Ortner 2010) where corporations represent themselves to a larger public.
4. ‘Infrastructures of containment’ are separating content, the same things are sorted as to different mercantile value classes (Tsing 2015). They are physically protected to not be altered and brought in line to be prized (Lammer and Thiemann 2023). ‘Information infrastructure’ continues this process of evaluation through branded banners, shelves, packages, labels, bar codes and other material and technological devices, that classify and qualify

- products and make them 'legible' through the connection to corporate information systems.
5. Elyachar takes up the linguistic concept of 'phatic communication' from Malinowski in her semiotic and political-economy approach to entrepreneurial dispossession in Cairo (Elyachar 2010, 2005).
  6. Different to the usage of the term in Iberian Spanish, in South America, *casero* refers to somebody who always buys from the same person or shop.
  7. To name here are, first, scholars that follow the specific contribution of Scott's work (1976), arguably his most prominent one, highlighting resistance and the moral economy of peasants, working classes and other subaltern groups against capitalism; second, the reformulation by Fassin and subsequent researchers (Fassin 2009), who are more interested in the production, distribution and appropriation of moral discourses and concerns than in economic issues proper; and, third, a synthesis that highlights the moral economy of larger political and economic fields as areas of power and contestation (Palomera and Vetta 2016) (see also Browne and Milgram 2009; Mandel and Humphrey 2002).
  8. Here, I am less interested in the truth claims and representational effects of expert enunciations (Neiburg and Guyer 2017) than in contrasting usages of corporate employees and traders in everyday economic life.
  9. This seems to be a prevalent tendency in South America, as for example among the *sacoleiro*-traders of Brazil (Rabossi 2008), but is especially strong in Bolivia, where national department stores and multinational retail chains have faced a difficult investment environment since the 1990s.
  10. Instead of creating ideal types of economic versus social action, instrument versus affect relationships, self-interest versus solidarity.
  11. Being timing a prominent argument made by Bourdieu (1977). Mauss' formulations in *The Gift* (2016 [1925]) are ambiguous about the differences between the two (Hart 2000, 2007). Yet, his political engagement and writing in favour of guild organization and other forms of syndicalist socialism, read against his academic work, insinuates that he was not straightforward anti-market (Hart 2007). Rather, discipline-dominating interpretations of his incomplete work introduced an opposition between gifts and commodities, and a confusion about the nature of this opposition – whether it was merely classificatory and dialectical, an 'analytical fiction', a 'conceptual opposite' or an ontological divide between Western and non-Western cultures (Gregory 2015 [1982]: xxvii–xxix; Hart 2000: 15–17; Sigaud 2002).
  12. My analysis of gifting and reciprocity follows approaches that do not see them as synonyms (Graeber 2010) and move away from conceptualizing the sequence of giving, receiving and returning as a social 'obligation', instead highlighting the concrete 'work' needed to forge and maintain gifting networks and reciprocal relationships (Lazar 2008). In this sense, the 'expectation' of a return gift is a key motivational factor of human action, and practical opportunities enable people to claim a part of the collective riches and demand gifts and counter-gifts (Widlok 2019; Spedding 2008; for a theoretical contribution on claiming (and retaining) (see Narotzky and Moreno 2002)



13. 'Distributive' is different from 'redistributive'; no pooling and redistribution of resources or gains is made, not among fiesta organizers neither among participants.
14. Murra downplayed the role of markets in the precolonial Andes and only recognized the existence of merchant groups in the Northern Andes. Recent archaeological research has challenged this view. Rather than a general non-existence of marketplace trade and commercial exchange in pre-Columbian times, it diagnoses the suppression of previously existing market institutions by the Inka state and highlights the multiple forms of distribution and inter-ethnic contacts and interactions that must have existed beyond centralized redistribution and inner-group reciprocity (Hirth and Pillsbury 2013).
15. Transborder exchange continued and even intensified in the sparsely populated area of Oruro department, where caravan traders continued to go on trips to the western valleys and the Pacific coast, exchanging high-altitude products – salt, wool, *chuño* (freeze-dried potato) and *charque* (freeze-dried llama meat) – for sugar and flour, wine, spirits and other European goods such as cashmere clothing. In the twentieth century, more complex forms of exchange have become increasingly monetarized (Rivière 1982).
16. *Chola* market women, through their persistent presence in the cities, have transgressed racialized and gendered divisions between the domestic and rural and the public and urban since the early Spanish conquest. The Andean market woman is a provocative figure in Bolivian intellectual and political history, but her spatial mobility and structural in-between position (in-between class and ethnicity, the rural and urban; see Seligmann 1989) has also been normalized over time.
17. Sony Music was present in Bolivia in the 1990s but left the country when music and software piracy skyrocketed (Stobart 2011).
18. Sucre holds the title of capital city, which reflects entrenched political disputes between regional elites.
19. The preference to buy as you walk by – favoured by the accidental urban topography, relatively short distances and widespread walking – is so notorious that the municipal government of La Paz is trying to combat street markets and sidewalk trade through a moralizing discourse about the 'stubbornness' and 'irresponsibility' of buying things that have been exposed to the cold and heat, dust and odours of highly transited streets and sidewalks (Müller 2022).
20. The estimate is based on official data on single-person businesses (*empresas unipersonales*) in the rubric of home appliances and consumer electronics in La Paz, the number of licensed street traders at the main marketplaces for electronics, and membership numbers from the various associations of electronics traders.
21. As to my knowledge this is less the case in other product branches. Traders are usually in direct contact with the sales people of national business enterprises whose products they sell. These range from national dairy firms and other grocery companies to the National Bolivian Brewery. In other branches such as furniture, cloths and sport shoes, sourcing in Chile and China is as

strong as with electronic equipment. However, original fashion brands are usually only found in high-end shops in the city centre and the wealthy Southern district.

22. The total number of *gremiales* in Bolivia is difficult to know. According to their self-description, the number lies between 1.5 and 2 million ([https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederaci%C3%B3n\\_de\\_Trabajadores\\_Gremiales,\\_Artesanos,\\_Comerciantes\\_Minoristas\\_y\\_Vivanderos\\_de\\_Bolivia#cite\\_note-40](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederaci%C3%B3n_de_Trabajadores_Gremiales,_Artesanos,_Comerciantes_Minoristas_y_Vivanderos_de_Bolivia#cite_note-40), retrieved 7 July 2020).
23. According to the UN Development Programme, between 2003 and 2013, 2.1 million citizens joined the middle class in Bolivia based on their income (between ten and fifty US dollars of purchasing power), which would be equivalent to a growth of the middle class of almost twenty percentage points (UNDP 2016, 53). Even so, on average, 50 per cent of the Bolivian population living in poverty (based on their income) did not emerge from that situation during the same period (UNDP 2016: 51ff.).