

Heritage, ideology and society: views from Bolivia and Potosí¹

Pascale Absi², Pablo Cruz³

ABSTRACT

The authors start with a general reflection of the concept of heritage and its polemic uses to reach, in this article, the actual case of Potosí in Bolivia, and the social conflicts that have arisen from the contradiction between its industrial identity and its recent patrimonialization.

Contrary to what the concept “universalizer” suggests in the term “Human Patrimony”, in fact, heritage only exists within private socio-historical appropriations and configurations. These are characterized by discrepancies that divide the population over where the authority for the heritage begins and ends. In this way, for the sociologist and the ethnologist, the patrimonial processes are striking revelations of social relations. Patrimony does more than crystallize pre-existing identifications, solidarities and conflicts. The almost sacred dimension and authority it has acquired since the XIX century makes it a political instrument of the first rank. The use of heritage is evidently considered in the processes of unification of national identities in XIX century Europe, and more recently in the demands for restitutions – ancestral territories or museum collections – that accompany indigenous recoveries all over the world.

1) Transnational ideology and local enclaves: the contradictions of heritage

Since approximately three decades, Bolivia is the scene of a recovery process, (re)construction and valorization of identity based on the patrimonialization of its past and focused on a proposal of sustainable tourism. As in many other cities in Latin America, the country seeks in the exuberant layers of its history, tools to improve its future by means of “smokeless industry”. However, we can see how this process of identification, founded on raising the past, responds, like any historical construction, on a particular vision of the world, often hegemonic – which in the case of patrimony presents one “politically correct” line of the globalization of ideological norms – and originates contradictions, occasionally negating the local identities it tries to strengthen.

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² Doctor of anthropology and investigator at the Institute of Investigation for Development. absi@ird.fr

³ Doctor of prehistory, ethnology & anthropology at the University of Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne. pablocruzfr@yahoo.fr

THE UNIVERSAL ASPIRATIONS OF PATRIMONY

As the root *pater* indicates, the term “Patrimony” is very much linked to concepts of parentage and identity. Differentiating it from the term “inheritance” used in English to refer to goods bequeathed from the past, patrimony refers to goods, material or intangible, cultural or natural, willed from the past but present and active in re-affirmation and identifiable limits for people and peoples, marking the difference between the “other” and their patrimony. In “patrimony” we also encounter the concept of “country” (*patria*). “This is my patrimony, my culture, where I come from.” Recent history shows us with innumerable examples, the short distance between the uses of this concept in nationalistic constructs and its derivations in discriminatory ideologies, even racist. We shall see further on, in the case of a “multicultural and pluri-ethnic” Bolivia, the shades that patrimonialism adopts to convert itself, at the same time, into an element of national construction and the homogenization of these thoughts, ending up as the negation of cultural diversity.

Wishing to neutralize, to a certain extent, the nationalistic dangers that the concept of patrimony brings, in the final decades of the last century under the aegis of the United Nations Organization of Education, Science and Culture (Unesco), there was developed and spread at a planetary level, the notion of “Heritage of Humanity” (General Conference of Unesco, Paris, 1972). Taking up this idea, which quickly turned into a universal principle, the world population, through the mainline media, has reacted with horror at the destruction of patrimonial objects in far-off regions, such that of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Afghani Taleban, or the recent sacking of the Museum in Baghdad. Raised to the level of humanity, the protection of heritage has become a common concern of all the peoples. However, and despite the conciliatory and “brotherly” character of the concept of “Human Heritage”, the same displays some dangerous shades, since it corresponds to a private, historic and hegemonic view of the world. At what moment does an element become patrimonial? Who decides what is, or is not, patrimonial?

As a point of departure, it is interesting to signal that the patrimonial vision of the past, in general today is not, in itself, equivalent to a universal phenomenon. It is rather a western concept that rose in Europe in the XVIII century, after the discovery of the Roman sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum amongst other finds. From then on, other “monumental” remains were rapidly put at the service of constructing nations of the old world, principally France, England, Germany and Italy and used as legitimizing tools in the race towards continental, political power. The idealized geopolitical position of the nations was sought in a glorious and monumental past. For its part, the extended concept of patrimonialism seems to have developed as a response to the destruction caused by the two first world wars, if we take into account “international” treaties such the Athens Letter (1931), the Hague Convention (1954) and the General Conference of Unesco in New Delhi (1956), being among the first.

The concept of Heritage of Humanity was one of the key pieces in the construction of a western commonwealth that sought the union of the peoples in the past and at the same time marked its hegemony in the planet. Certainly, in this debate, many regions of the planet were excluded, especially those that were still colonies or regions undeveloped economically that did not participate in the competition for power, nor were part of the prodigious circle that culturally formed the progress of humanity, crystallized as “universal history” and “the universal history of art”, amongst them being Africa, Latin America, and many regions of Asia.

Accompanying the first steps of so-called globalization, it was recently in the ‘80s, that the concept of Heritage of Humanity took on a planetary reach, establishing itself in the thoughts of

third world countries such as Bolivia. However, this expansion did not bring any enrichment of the concept of heritage, but rather followed the same universalizing lines. Indeed these were placed at the service of the ruling ideologies, amongst them the expanding free market idea. Effectively, if we consider how the titles of “Cultural Heritage of Humanity” were handed out by Unesco, as for the requirements for the candidates, we can see in retreat the strict relationship between a city, region or site and its tourist potential, a market developed mainly for and by the first world. Thus, attention should be drawn to the official lexical use and the mercantile orientation of classification as “Human Heritage” where one has to specify the “name of the goods”, the “area of the goods” and “its zone of influence”, “declaration of its value” and its “authenticity” as well as “its comparison with similar goods”, etc. All of which supposes the existence of universal standards of measurement. And it is thus that the logo “Heritage of Humanity” has turned into a trade mark, making up a system of global franchise.

From this perspective, it is striking the fact that the evaluating organisms, those that decide whether or not a site is Heritage or not, have their seats in European countries: The World Union for Nature (WUN) has its central seat in Gland (Switzerland), the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICMS) in Paris, the International Centre for Studies of the Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Goods (ICSCRCG) in Rome. From the other side of the show window, one should highlight the marked absence in all the process of patrimonialization of local populations, who are in effect kept at a distance from the big business of tourism agencies, transport, hotels and restaurants that goes with all this.

In the case of Potosí that we brought up earlier, as for other patrimonial localities such as the Quebrada of Humahuaca in Argentina, this fact made it become a focus of social tension for local populations. Effectively, we can find in this region of Northern Argentina, some parallels to the patrimonial processes of Bolivia.

In la Quebrada, the expansion of the regulating concept of patrimony, as in Bolivia, began to appear in the mid-seventies. Years later, on 29th September, 1986, in the locality of Ticara, the idea of declaring la Quebrada as the “Heritage of Humanity” emerged. From then until the moment when it was recognized and officially declared as “Heritage of Humanity” by Unesco (July 2nd.2003) and a process of valuation of the region and its local cultural standards was held - by the State.

This process appears to have reached its zenith in the middle of the ‘90s, for example, when Law 4977 was created to establish the “Celebration of Pachamama” in all the territory of the Province for the first day of August, each year. As was to be expected, throughout the official proposal to Unesco⁴, the great cultural value of the past of la Quebrada and its material remains was emphasized. Archaeological sites of the pre-Hispanic past, chapels and works of art from the colonial era and the “railway” from the Republic are presented as the most representative examples of the history of the region and testimony of great authenticity. However, in reference to other aspects of the present for the actual population, the proposal document shows itself to be more ambiguous in that though it celebrates the survival and commemoration of the past, it lacks complete authenticity according to the document - with reference to the “full authenticity” that the past possesses. This undervaluation comes from “non-traditional” cultural standards, reflected as much in the modern households of the population, the sketch of new routes and infrastructures of basic services (gas, electricity, communications) as for a certain decadence of local handicrafts.

This conflict between the folkloric and highly valued image of the local population and their daily life shows very explicitly in the chapter destined to factors that prejudice patrimonial goods where it is evident, under the heading of “Pressures owing to development”, that the

⁴ Quebrada of Humahuaca. A cultural stop-over for 10,000 years, proposed for inclusion in the list of World Heritage Sites of Unesco. Jujuy Province, Argentina, 2002

increase of agriculture brought about by the return of inhabitants to the region after the mining crisis. Reading the official proposal it is clear that the main factor against the Patrimonial Goods of la Quebrada is the local population itself or at least those popular sectors that do not represent the folkloric, ecological and tourist image projected for the region. Of course, all this process of “valuing” the region is accompanied by a staggering increase in property prices. From this perspective, we can understand that the proposal is not only for recognizing and valuing heritage but also for planning of a new model of occupying la Quebrada, the improvement of the image by re-localizing social urban provisions is predicted, and the negation of the infrastructure and regulation of cultural norms through the profane argument of tourism (Nielsen *et al.*, 2003; Cruz y Seldes, 2005). The social conflicts arising in la Quebrada around the process of patrimonialization were aggravated by the fact that the population, whose participation in the tourism business was reduced to mere labor, found it impossible, especially for young couples, to acquire land in their own localities. The sum of all these factors led to numerous social conflicts with indigenous communities confronting investors, and locals against migrants, under the framework of a growing demand, by the popular sectors, to “de-patrimonialize” the territory.

In all these regions, beyond the economic projections of the tourism business, the profitability of the program can be better understood if we take into account the backward steps of government institutions in search of tourist micro-businesses, a situation which can be seen in the neo-liberal global context of lessening the presence of the State in the development of primary and secondary sectors. This is clearly shown in the official proposal which establishes the cultural and economic guide-lines to follow in benefit of tourism and which gives incentives to local actors to arrange their economic problems by resorting directly to the market, in this case tourism, without the mediation of State regulation, which is relegated to the simple role international promoter of tourism and a micro-business. Together with the dismantling of the centers of mining production and the lessening of government funds destined for productive development, each person or social sector is to be responsible for themselves and their progress.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF HERITAGE *FOR SALE*

In the specific case of Bolivia, one of the sources of most evident and potentially conflictive contradiction around the concept of heritage is the fact that country has a multi-ethnic population, where the indigenous majority has a particular way of perceiving and dialoguing with the past and its material vestiges, far distant from a patrimonial vision. For example, for many Andean populations, the material remains of the past are not theirs nor are they testimonies of their ancestors, but belong to another humanity, another generation of men, to which they are not tied. Many archaeological remains, termed *chullpas*, are associated by the peasants with a pre-solar period. Meanwhile, other remains, amongst which are sites with stone-age art, are considered alive, active, giving off life and, at the same time, savage forces which are gateways of communication with the world beyond. Equally, many of the colonial chapels and churches in the countryside function as sanctuaries, independently of the official religious capacities they complete. Certainly the festivities and rituals, often very well attended, performed at sanctuaries such as Bombori, Chaqui and Manquiri in the department of Potosí, are prejudicial to the patrimonial image and to their conservation. Should the festivals and rituals be prohibited as has been proposed at times? These examples show that what is patrimony for some is not for others, and draws attention to the contradictions that accompany the establishment of a patrimonial vision as far as a hegemonic vision goes, pointing to a homogenizing of thoughts, which marginalizes local ways of seeing, perceiving and dialoguing with the past.

But the contradictions are even greater if we take into account the “heritage-making” of Bolivia. What image of the country is being modeled? People have inhabited the territory of the actual Bolivia for at least 10,000 years, adapting to the medium and organizing themselves in different ways. Numerous cultures have developed in these lands and been outstanding for their

material productions, much of which have survived to our days. Actually one could say that Bolivia is a crucible of peoples, a multi-cultural nation which reflects the complexity of its history. However, from the power and corporate ambience, the patrimonial image is constructing a privileged Bolivia from its colonial, Catholic and city past. This illustrates, for example, the great inequality existing between funds destined for restoration and valuing of colonial monuments and those destined for archaeological and ethnographic projects and those that value the “indigenous” and “peasant” face of the country. Without doubting the important “real, material benefits” which support the re-evaluation of the colonial and city heritage of Bolivia, we see that it still costs the country to recognize and value the indigenous and peasant contribution beyond its folkloric version.

This situation is clearly shown in the tourist program proposed for Bolivia, essentially city-centered and based on the interconnection of cities by air transport and “night buses”, where the immediacy of rural passages remains reduced to localities such as Copacabana on Lake Titicaca, Coroico in the Yungas and the communities of the Uyuni salt-flats in Potosí. In many cases, these function as “westernized” enclaves, with little or no participation of the communities and into spaces where youths from developed countries shape their first experiences in a context not so different from that of their origins and sanitized (with the possibility of consumption according to their own cultural norms: restaurants, pubs, discotheques etc.) certainly at an economic price. In the case of the communities of Uyuni, the populations see the tourists arrive with meals arranged by the tourist agencies, stay at a few hotels, with almost no chance to suggest from the community alternative routes or paths and be participants in the tourism business, not even to value the patrimony. The slant of the patrimonial project and the tourism program is fixed on the cities that receive, such as Potosí and Sucre, that focus their proposal generally in the historical hub that houses today, as in the past, the center of power.

It is interesting to observe how the majority of conservation, restoration and rehabilitation projects for historical, colonial monuments in Bolivia are and have been financed by the Agency for Spanish Cooperation (AECI) through their Plans for Rehabilitation of Historic Areas, set in the principal cities and in the workshop schools of restoration of historic monuments (Potosí & Sucre). These projects which form a global program for Ibero-America, started to develop strongly during the decade of the ‘90s, officially pushed by the Vth Centenary Movement and felt, in some way, to be a signal of thanks, of reparation and commitment to the colony. Nevertheless, in very few cases the conservation projects or the valuation sustained by this program concern the pre-Hispanic past or seek to revalue the indigenous history of the country, concentrating, above all, on the colonial past. Beyond the rhetoric of the speeches, one has to question the objectives of the program and perhaps link them to the recent entry of Spain into the European Economic Community and into the circle of developed countries. Besides the important aid for economic development of Bolivia and other Latin American countries, it seems clear that Spain is interested in recovering “its” colonial heritage, using its historical implications as a tool giving weight to the negotiations and positioning that it has with its European peers and with the world. “Look at and admire our past contemplate what we’re capable of today.” Nevertheless, although one certainly cannot deny the beauty of colonial structures, the grandness of the baroque churches, the important contributions to world art history, one should not omit that the Colony was, above all, an era of domination and subjection in which many indigenous peoples were rooted out, condemned to the pain of forced labor and the humiliation of their culture. Can one only show an image of a splendid colonial past? Should the sight of the conquered be hidden?

Another example is the blending and stereotyping of different cultural traditions in the patronal festivals of the big cities, going by the names of Guadalupe, Ch’utillos, Gran Poder, Urkupiña or the Oruro Carnival; the value of the multicultural nature of the country and the essence of feeling oneself Bolivian expressed in a limited and contained time and space. It does not result strange then, that these festivals incorporated into the tourist attractions of Bolivia, rescue only a folkloric version of the *tinku* while at the same time the same country version of

the *tinku* from the north of Potosí is systematically repressed by forces of the State police. Or let us contemplate the dance troupes that caricature people of the Low Lands, under the generic name of Tobas, embodying in a certain way our ancestral fear of the uncivilized Indians, masters of undomesticated savage forces of nature, often in their image portrayed as simply wizards, when at the same time the actual demands of the people of these Low Lands fall on cold, deaf ears, above all when dealing with the theme of territory. The troupes were always a space for representing the different groups that conformed and still make up Bolivia. However, it would be important to analyze more deeply what is exactly being played out in the content of these graphically-acted identities. In other words, reflect on the fragility of the frontier between valuing multiculturalism – including making patrimony out of certain dances such as the Diablada – and the reduction to “other hood” of a personage in folklore. Only these last are available to become heritage not those who capture out attention during road blocks. Their figure is thus converted into the new incarnation of “the good Indian”.

In this way, outside official discourse, one can understand the patrimonial process and the tourist program that exists in Bolivia as a vector of domination as well as symbolic violence against local populations that are directed to adopt new cultural and economic standards in the service of the tourism market and the same time as the State relegates its functions to that of developing the micro-business sector.

It is therefore logical that this configuration can break out in tensions and conflicts between the authority of heritage and the interests of the local people.

2. Patrimony; the exploitation of raw materials and social conflict: an example from the Cerro Rico of Potosí.

The conflicts stirred up in the last ten years by the massive exploitation projects at the mountain mine in the Andean city of Potosí, allow us to reflect concretely on the way local populations have taken up the notion of heritage and also about the tensions and dangers that arise from the confrontation between the public, globalizing vocation of heritage and the interests of particular actors on the terrain. The nomination of the colonial city of Potosí to the title of Heritage of Humanity by Unesco in 1987 and the defense of the topography of its mountain went on, in effect, to monopolize all the debate about the economic future of the region. Nevertheless, differently from the European enthusiasm for industrial and worker heritage from which it was much inspired, the movement for the defense of the Potosí hill does not correspond to a site of abandoned production: the mines that cover it have always been in use and constitute the main industrial activity of the region and the means of existence for thousands of families.

POTOSÍ'S “NO” TO THE COMIBOL PROJECT

We are in September 1996. The executive director of the Mining Corporation of Bolivia (Comibol) arrives from La Paz with the intention of wooing public opinion for a large-scale exploitation project at the Cerro Rico. For more than three hours he is going to expound to municipal and prefectural officials, to the representatives of civic associations, to the Ecology Society and to the University, as to news reporters and other interested parties at a meeting in the hall of the Casa de la Moneda.

The Comibol project sought the intensive exploitation of a zone called “the oxides” situated above level 4,400 of the mountain, which is to say on the summit. Using the latest technology, this ambitious project aimed to dig in the heart of the mountain a gigantic ramp which would permit the diggers and perforators access to the layers of ore. The necessary capital would be channeled through a *joint venture* contract for which foreign companies had expressed interest. According to estimates, 450 employees would be enough to extract in 25 years 54 million tons

of mineral (a mix of silver and tin) of the 830 million still in the mountain⁵. But all the efforts of the unfortunate director would be in vain. Outside, the hostility was manifest, orchestrated by the Civic Committee of Potosí and supported by the press.

“No to the tradition which has us believe that our riches are destined for others,” the press rebelled, recording the legend according to which the Cerro had prohibited its exploitation to the pre-Hispanic populations, preferring to offer its wealth intact to the Spanish conquerors⁶. The 117 million dollars offered to the Department of Potosí to execute the project were judged a joke compared to the 560 million of benefits that Comibol and its foreign partners would share out. The opposition also evoked the disastrous ecological impact that 400 dynamite explosions daily would have, the contamination of the soil and the waters trapped under ground by the chemical treatment of the mineral. The conversation of the natural wealth of the country, the rejection of world capitalism and the multinationals which are seen as machines to plunder the local populations, the accusation of industrial backwardness in Bolivia sunk to the status of a producer of raw materials, wove a curtain of great emotion, almost an insurrection, fed by a feeling that nothing had changed since the Spanish conquest, that “the open veins of Latin American”⁷ continued to be irrigated by the sweat and blood of its inhabitants, western economies. The climate of defense of the mineral wealth of the mountain of Potosí brings to mind the famous “Gas War” of September 2003. But in Potosí’s case, the defense of the natural patrimony of the Bolivian subsoil rapidly gave way to that of cultural heritage. The preservation of the silhouette of the Hill as testimony to colonial history would become the main argument in the struggle against the projects of massive exploitation of the Cerro. So the director of the Potosí newspaper concluded his survey of the faults of the Comibol project with these words: “Most important for Potosi is preserving the Cerro Rico”⁸.

Reasonably or not, the Comibol project is accused of threatening the topography of the mountain already weakened by 500 years of exploitation and of putting in danger the very soul of Potosí. The exploitation of the mountain also overturned the life of the Indians of the Andes who discovered through it commercial economy and capitalism.

THE RICH HILL, SOUL OF POTOSÍ AND OF AMERICA

The greatest silver deposit in the world, the Cerro Rico, is the emblematic figure of the city of Potosí, and even more is a mythic symbol for the colonial destiny of Latin America. As a consequence of the discovery of its fabulous mineral wealth by the Spanish conquerors in 1545, its metal fed European economies, favoring the capitalization previous to industrial revolution and provoking the replacement of gold by silver in the international monetary system.

In its time, Potosí was more populated than London or Amsterdam, a Spanish-speaking baroque metropolis and great consumer of Chinese silk. What Charles V had raised to the level of an Imperial City, today has become a small, sleepy, provincial town. Since the mining crisis of the decade of the ‘80s and the application of structural adjustment measures imposed by International Monetary Fund (IMF), the mines of Comibol – nationalized in 1952- closed their doors, leaving in the streets more than 2,500 workers. Entirely focused on mining exploitation, the economy of the city has not recovered at all. With the disappearance of the mining union, the State has also lost of one its main voices on the national political scene.

Even so, the Cerro Rico continues to be present, with its almost perfect conical form, which made it considered a sacred mountain for the pre-Hispanic population. Its image is everywhere:

⁵ *El Minero*, La Paz, 3rd. September, 1996

⁶ *Sumaj Orcko*, Potosí, 7th. April, 1997. See also *La Gaceta del Sur*, Potosí, 26th. August, 1996

⁷ The expression comes from the celebrated work of Eduardo Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*

⁸ *La Época*, Potosí, 29th. September, 1996

on the city arms, of course, and also on the painted fronts of the stations and travel agencies, the logos of businesses, school text books, children's drawings. Restaurants, hotels, tailors' and cobblers' workshops take its name, and if Potosí has been wiped from the political and economic scene, its mountain still adorns the shield of the Nation and the State currency. The mountain even inspires a current of *new age* thought, passionate, of Andean tradition and of mysticism that organizes night-time pilgrimages and considers the Cerro Rico a cosmic axis around which the Southern Cross turns.

In 1987, the nomination of Potosí to the title "World Heritage Site" conferred an unexpected legitimacy and gave a push to this regionalist devotion⁹. At the hour of re-localization of miners, this promotion was received as a vengeance over History, come on purpose to muffle the blows suffered by regional pride. Clearly, Potosí no longer occupied the high rank in the world economy as it once had, but the city was still rich in history and culture. Within its frame of backwardness, the weight of the past had turned into a positive value; Unesco ended up reactivating the status of the Imperial City of Potosí, founded in the image of its mountain in the national emblems and the hearts of its inhabitants. At the same time, on November 9th, a Bolivian law declared the Cerro Rico a "National Monument". While the title granted by Unesco only considered the colonial, industrial infrastructure of the mountain – the mine entrances, chapels, etc - the status of heritage was extended to the Hill itself. Finally, in May 2000, the mountain received from Unesco the title of "Messenger of Peace". In this climate of eagerness of imitation, recognition of the outstanding destiny of the Cerro Rico turned into a sacred argument for all the demands made.

THE DEFENCE OF THE CERRO RICO; CATALYST OF THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN POTOSÍ AND THE STATE.

In the passionate atmosphere maintained by the press appealing to the people, the massive exploitation of the Cerro Rico is qualified as an "offence to Potosí", "infamous" and a "barbaric attack" against the mountain, at times invoked as the "legendary Cerro Rico" and the "Colossus of America" and even "the most prized natural heritage." From then on, the interest is in saving the "symbol of the country, of regional and universal pride." From this focus of the debate over the defense of the silhouette of the mountain, we retain two aspects: the classic phenomenon of identity crystallization – in this case regionalist – around a heritage used in the service of local demands; and a process, at first sight paradoxical, of confining the political and economic swept up by the cultural dimension of the demands of heritage.

The denunciation of the continued "vampirization" of the wealth of Potosí by foreign agents and the references to the American identity of the mountain – understood as a paradigm of Latin American history - places the scene in a double diverging light: the opposition between Potosí and international economic powers on the one hand, and between Potosí and the Bolivian State on the other. The continental fix in the argument converts the defenders of the Cerro Rico into justice-seekers for Latin American history: they are those who would deny the march of imperial capitalism, since the Comibol project is an alliance with multinationals – mainly English and Canadians – that support technology and capital. But through Comibol, the Central Government is also referred to, owner of the company and the sub-soil.

In 1996, the city is still deprived of an airport, and of an asphalt road to the capital, so the inhabitants rightly denounce the negligence of the authorities. Unemployment and informal work are constantly on the increase once the State mines closed; the water the people consume is rationed all the year, consists of rainfall stored as in colonial times; the educational structure is deplorable.... For the population, the injustice is all the more unbearable because the mines were, for centuries, the engine of economic development in Bolivia. However, the origins of the

⁹ This nomination refers to the historic centre, the ancient neighbourhoods situated around the ancient indigenous zones and the colonial mining infrastructure and the Hill itself.

tensions between Potosí and the Bolivian State have roots deeper than the socio-economic rejection and is tied to memories of a time when the political links of Potosí were much more intense – above all with the Argentinean cities of Córdoba and Buenos Aires – than with La Paz. Since Independence, in the XIXth century, the conflicts which confront the city and central government frequently break out in secessionist demands. At the same moment that Potosí is mobilized on behalf of its mountain, there are also threats to declare a federal region and annex themselves to Argentina. On August 2nd 1996, supporting itself on the decline in the population between 1976 and 1992, the State had decreed a reduction in the number of deputies from 19 to 15. Outraged, Potosí therefore claimed a divorce¹⁰. In this context, one has to read the front page of the local newspaper *La Época* which declares on August 26th: “Potosí, a potential Chiapas because of accumulated pessimism.”

THE RELEGATION OF THE INDUSTRIAL DIMENSION OF THE MOUNTAIN.

However, despite the reference to Chiapas and recourse to similar arguments, one cannot relate the position of Potosí inhabitants to popular movements in other parts of the world. In effect, the non-stop references to local history and to the moral - Potosí deserves more, because it is Potosí – limits a more general reflection emerging over the rules of the game for exploiting national raw materials and the appearance of a debate over global capitalism. Moreover, the economic stakes are found little by little to be hidden behind one watchword: the need to save the Cerro Rico. From denouncing the faults of one particular project, one arrives at denouncing all industrial activity at the Cerro Rico.

From this distillation, one would suppose a revision of the nature of the mountain whose productive dimension was dismissed in all the arguments and representations. Now, the press no longer talks of the Rich Hill but of a “monument” (for example, the “the most coveted monument in America”) and of its summit re-named as “the summit of the Natural Heritage of Humanity”, which is erroneous since the exact title of Potosí is “Cultural Heritage”. But to deny the industrial dimension of the mountain carries this price: its inscription as a non-historical vision of nature where man disappears as an actor, giving way to a aesthete. For the same reason, some journalists have chosen to retranslate its Quechua name (*Sumaj Orqo*) as “Beautiful Hill” rather than “Rich Hill”. The allusion to its wealth – at least its being taken advantage of by men – goes too much against its naturalization.

In this scenario, it may seem a strange result, at least surprising, from a survey published in the national daily *Presencia* (4th.September 1996) if one finds out that only 19% of 417 inhabitants of Potosí who were interviewed considered the Cerro Rico and source of minerals, as opposed to 32% who saw it as a patrimonial richness, and 16% as a tourist alternative and only 28% who considered it in its three complementary aspects¹¹. If the Cerro Rico is not, in the first place, mineral deposits, then its raw materials are converted to cultural goods, among everything else. In this sense, the task of its defenders is not so different to the ethnic groups who demand the restitution of what was plundered from their ancestors or their sacred objects.

The indigenous rhetoric is not absent from the defenders of the mountain who do not doubt the invoke the Andean figure of Mother Earth to consecrate their cause. Effectively, the Cerro Rico is identified by the indigenous population with the Pachamama. In the urban context, the Pachamama usually appears as the guarantor of the ancestral values of Andean man who only takes from the earth the necessary for survival and shoes their gratitude in the form of offerings and prayers. In the combat for the defense of the Potosí mountain, it provides the sacred surplus value which sanctifies the patrimony: for its detractors, the exploitation of the mountain is a

¹⁰ *La Razón*, La Paz, 27th. July, 1996

¹¹ One evidently asks from which stratum of the urban population these 417 representatives are who were consulted... Probably they are not from the third of citizens who, amongst miners, transport workers, industrial workers, businessmen and their families, directly from the mining industry.

violation of the Pachamama which puts in danger the cultural values of Andean society. In this sense, resorting to the image of Mother Earth gives rise to the naturalization of the site: its identity snatched away from every industrial reference is returned to the mythical origin of the world.

Of course some isolated voices rise to note that for 500 years, the Potosí mountain has been the principal source of income for the region and try to readjust the debate around the economy affected in the department. Summing up this opinion, an editorial in the national daily newspaper *Última Hora* (19th. June 1996), denounced the suicidal attitude of Potosí that prefers to refuse as a whole the Comibol project in stead of negotiating better conditions for its economy and for its heritage¹². Maybe such a negotiation would have been illusory, maybe not..... Whatever, the debate over the economic future of Potosí, stifled by the breaking emotion in defense of heritage, could not take place. In a desperate attempt, Comibol tried to show the innocence of its project for the Cerro Rico promising to smooth out the excavations halfway through the excavations. It also tried out regionalist rhetoric. In this vein, it edited a special number of the daily *El Minero* (3rd. September, 1996) under the title of “Comibol plans to exploit the Cerro Rico without changing the image”. A photo of the mountain’s profile behind the colonial church of San Benito, occupies the front page. The publication which was widely distributed to the people of Potosí, had no effect; the project of large-scale exploitation was abandoned.

This fact clearly shows how the “patrimonial machinery” – to return to the expression of Henri-Pierre Jeudy (2001)— has come to be the tool that confirms the legitimacy of local demands, to the point of making autonomous the acceptance of the debate and the detriment of the economic stakes that supposedly had served at the beginning. The mountain of Potosí would not be exploited neither by the State nor the multinationals whatever the benefits might be for the region. And now the miners, in their turn, were accused of plotting against the Cerro Rico....

BETWEEN THE HAMMER AND HERITAGE: THE UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION OF THE MINERS.

Fifteen years ago, when the mines of Potosí closed, many of its workers united in cooperatives. In Potosí twenty exist which unite 5,000 miners who, being the main exploiters of the mountain should have been the main interested party for the Comibol project. However, shockingly, neither the cooperatives members nor their federation took part in the conflict. Various reasons explain this silence.

The first refers to the fact that the deposits at the summit of the Cerro Rico are made up of poor minerals, inaccessible to unsophisticated technology of the cooperative members; therefore they were not of interest to them. Again, whilst all Potosí confronted Comibol, the Departmental Federation of Mining Cooperatives was negotiating the use of ancient State exploitations and their infrastructure. To take sides against Comibol would seriously threaten the negotiations of the cooperative sector. Finally, it is easy to see that, unless they were suicidal, the cooperatives could not adhere to the patrimonial cause nor associate themselves with the side of mining activity. Besides, the popular backlash would not protect them.

Throughout the conflict, the press denounced the model of irrational exploitation of the cooperatives, the source of numerous landslides whose consequences on the topography of the

¹² “To refuse the scientific exploitation of the silver in the hill, there not being any danger to its status and its preservation, is to condemn Potosí to starvation and death, despite its title of World Heritage Site, recognised by Unesco, a title which without progress, without development, and an escape from poverty, serves for nothing.”

mountain affected them more than the human dramas which they provoked. The accusations broke loose, even uncommon ones, as in a journalist in *La Época* (17th July 1995) who rebelled against the event saying that “all the miners have the same objective; to pluck from the Cerro the greatest amount possible of mineral resources.” Evidently, going to the mine was not an outing for one’s health, but a productive activity ... Thus, the cooperatives found themselves in the eye of a cyclone. Of course, Comibol took advantage of the situation to confirm that their project of rational exploitation was much less harmful for the mountain than the precarious work of the cooperatives¹³. Far from concerns of heritage, the mining interests condemned them to silence and adopted a position whose ambiguity emerged to the full light of day during the conflict that opposed those that rescued the minerals of the cooperatives — the *palliris*— to the private company Comco¹⁴ that from 1987, recycled the dumps of the mountain.

On 19th August, 1996 whilst Potosí confronted Comibol nearly 200 *palliris* decided to occupy the summit of the Cerro Rico, blocking access to the excavation piles of Comco. From the beginning of this popular operation, the women who worked the mountain in the open air, made it clear that they were fed up with the lack of working space and the competition from Comco. In effect, despite the contrasting difference in their working methods – reduction and selection by hand for the women, mechanical excavation and chemical dissolution by the company - the *palliris* and Comco were exploiting the same mineral which had to be selected from the wastes extracted from the mine. The occupation lasted more than a week; days and nights lashed by the glacial wind of an Andean winter at over 4,700 meters high.

The conflict had been latent for some time, but it was the popular opposition to the Comibol project that gave way to the action of the *palliris*. Once more the defense of the topography of the Hill threatened by the massive fall of the waste piles would occupy the front line of the argument, whilst the problem of the open working conditions of the *palliris* rapidly disappeared. The word of these illiterate women, monolingually quechua, as well as the purpose of their actions, were quickly hijacked by the pressure groups opposed to Comibol. Under their influence, the struggle of these women for their work area was changed into the defense of the mountain and by the population of Potosí, taken up by the Civic Committee and the Municipal Government, who immediately joined their action, robbing it of the economic demands. The *palliris* were considered heroines of patrimony; no-one was surprised that these workers who earned less than a dollar a day should sacrifice weeks of work to preserve the image of the Cerro Rico. But, the cooperatives hardly appreciated their initiative, Some sent them sanction notes, One anonymous letter, obviously cooperative inspired, published in the *Gaceta del Sur* (2nd. September, 1996) even threatened reprisals against the President of the Palliris Committee, beginning with these words: “The miners, who for years have risked their lives extracting minerals (...) will not allow that injustices be committed in name of the preservation of the Hill, in that the Hill has always been the source of our daily income...” Here the impossibility of the cooperatives associating themselves with any questioning of the industrial character of the mountain is expressed.

During the conflict, the *palliris* understood that the cooperatives had conceded, for a slice of bread, their piles to Comco without indemnity for the workers. 26th September an emergency meeting was called at the Federation seat to resolve the problem. In the presence of a representative of the Municipality, it was decided to demand that Comco suspend its work and to smooth over all the holes left by the excavators. Ingenuously one *palliri* inquired if the smoothed material would be composed of exploitable material or of sterile pyrites. In other words, did the struggle of the women only serve to maintain the features of the mountain or would they be given new areas of work? Pretending not to understand, a leader replied that Comco should use material of the same colour to reestablish the aspect of the Cerro. The *palliri*

¹³ *El Minero*, La Paz, 3 rd. September, 1996

¹⁴ The Mining Company Concepción Ltd. (Comco) is a private company whose principal shareholder was Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada.

sat down again and the debate over the color of the mountain continued. The outcome of the meeting confirmed the “victory” of the *palliris*. In the coming weeks, Comco filled in the holes made by their work and the seekers could contemplate again, in its integral majesty their mountain whose riches remained inaccessible. Asked why they had renounced their demands in terms of working areas only to accept the smoothed out mountain of sterile waste piles, one *palliri* replied: “perhaps it wasn’t ours, but for our children. Inside (the residues used for planning) there’s a bit of metal and metal grows, doesn’t it?” Thus, in the agricultural logic of mining representation on the origin of metal, the *palliris* had seen the re-fill imposed on Comco as a re-sowing of metal. Insufficient to be exploited by the scavengers, the little bit of metal existent in the re-fill would mature and reproduce itself in the long term, assuring the future fertility of the mountain-top.

Responsible for this mineral gestation is none other than the Pachamama to whom the workers recur before each drilling and to whom they offer, once a year, a llama so that there be more mineral and less accidents. Even more so, mineral production is conceived as a fertile sexual relationship with the mountain – Pachamama that the miners excite with their entreaties and fertilize with their offerings before the birth of the metal. The Pachamama is therefore the mediator between the fertility of the earth and the work of men. On the other hand, unexploited mines, like land tilled, do not compete for its jurisdiction except to the indifferent forces of the savage world, the *saqras*. The recourse of the defenders of the mountain to the figure of Pachamama confiscates the word of the miners. The Andean logic which claims that the work and exploitation proceeds from Pachamam is denied and even though the miners are the main devotees it is not for them to decide whether Pachamama can support the massive exploitation of the mountain.

The same as in the case of Comibol, the bad luck of the *palliris* and the cooperative miners all show that in the name of the global vocation of heritage, in Potosí a hegemonic word has been installed which condemns to silence anyone not interested in the preservation of the mountain. The cooperatives and also the tradesmen, the transport workers and the engineers, whose survival depends directly on mining activities and in fact excluded from the people who direct the heritage. Placing the regionalist fiber to obtain the unconditional support of the inhabitants of Potosí, local political groups – mainly the Municipal Government and the Civic Committee – did everything possible to mobilize the patrimonial argument to the service of its opposition – with or without reason, this is not the point – to the exploitation project of Comibol. Thus they neutralized with emotion the raising of a really democratic debate and acquired the recognition and legitimacy that politicians could never have obtained without the Cerro Rico: defending the image became more popular than electoral arguments.

UNESCO AT THE SERVICE OF TURNING THE CERRO RICO INTO A MUSEUM

Using this logic, those that were against the project of Comibol had turned towards Unesco¹⁵. They had asked the Bolivian government for additional information and has sent in July 1966 a delegation to Potosí. Taking care not to enter into the conflict, their representative, during a press conference, talked in favor of conserving the Cerro Rico without once mentioning its status as an operating industrial site. The newspaper *El Siglo* of July 17th. 1966 therefore rushed into the threatening headline: “If the Cerro Rico is not preserved, Potosí runs the risk of losing the title World Heritage Site.” But it is through the mine museum that Unesco offered the denoting of the museum with the Cerro Rico as its main example.

The idea of transforming the old State mine into a museum of mining history took flight at the of national exploitation in the mid-‘80s. Born under the auspices of Unesco, the project is to be

¹⁵ Already in 1993, a member of the Ecological Society of Potosí had wrtten to Unesco denouncing the threat of actual exploitation and theComibol project to the topography of the Cerro Rico .

financed to by Departmental Prefect and international organizations such as the InterAmerican Development Bank (BID).

Actually, the exhibition rooms were opened in the ancient galleries, but it is not yet known what they are going to contain. Also a market study was awaited which would validate the rather unlikely hypothesis, according to which tourism would constitute an alternative to mining activity. However, as its promoters claim, the main objective of the museum is first of all to contribute to the preservation of the Cerro Rico by means of a security perimeter of several hectares free from exploitation, around the rooms situated half-way up the mountain. But the fact is that this sector is also the most productive of the Cerro Rico. It contain the celebrated Potosí silver vein, for which the mining cooperatives are in competition since it is no longer exploited by Comibol. Today, the working areas have been officially shared out cooperative members and their Federation has promised to have the security perimeter of the museum respected. However, controlling the advance of hundreds of separate miners underground is utopian. One can see provocative graffiti of cooperative members who have illegally entered the exhibition areas of the museum. Having to share the same circulation galleries with tourists and miners is another sign of the difficulty of forming a museum of a past that has yet to die. If the Colonial indigenous worker constitutes the central personage of the museum as its promoters conceive – Oh! How folkloric and emblematic was the plundering of Bolivia by the West – today's miner is rather importunate. His imperfect productive labors contradict not only the topography of the Cerro Rico, but also Epinal's imagery of ecological, Indian romanticism which underlies its defense.

A MANNER OF CONCLUSION.

The history of the mountain of Potosí puts into perspective a number of questions raised by the precept of global heritage. The first refers to the fact that the ideology of patrimony, at least as defended by Unesco is dominated by a European history in which it is registered at the birth of the International Convention of World Heritage of Unesco in 1972. In Europe various centuries have been needed to move from the family ambience to the advantage of the Nation and for it to leave the sphere of the private and enter the public goods. In France, for example, it had to wait for the Renaissance and the Revolution for ancient monuments leave off being simply places of memory to become historic symbols of the Nation that must be catalogued, preserved and restored. In the collectivization movement, the conservation of global heritage is nothing more than a change of scale: what was of the family has passed on to the national community and then to the idea of universal civilization. If this process seems legitimate from Europe, it is more problematic for some countries that before having had the time or the desire to conduct their own reflection over their patrimony, are face with project from the local to universal. As Alain Sinou has shown respecting Black Africa it is through the vision of colonizing powers that many have appropriated the idea of heritage. This phenomenon, initiated during colonization, is reinforced by the rise of world heritage. Despite the willingness to respect the specific nature of each country, the registration of World Heritage supposes a certain consensus between nations over that is dignified or not to be recognized as having universal value. It is not chance if the title of World Heritage Site of Potosí and the mobilization of Potosinos for their mountain refers only to the vestiges of Spanish colonization to the detriment of a pre-historic past and modern mining history.

The emblematic character of the mountain that resulted from its exploitation and actual aspect now has nothing to do with the pre-historic mountain with trees, populated by ducks and vizcachas. So, why choose to hold back time in the name of industrial history which is not the whole history of Bolivia, but simply an era when its destiny was confused with that of colonial Europe?

This mimicry also operates when the electing to patrimonialize the site of a mine still in production. The movement to universalize heritage over the last thirty years is more a process of internationalization. Successively, all the regions of the world, if not all the branches of human

activity, are open to contributing to world heritage. Also, the defenders of the mountain of Potosí and those that promote a mining museum are explicitly claiming industrial eco-museums for Europe. However, in Europe, the idea of valuing industrial sites emerges at a time when in the '80s mineral and iron foundries are rapidly and irreversibly closing. Before, all idea of preservation would have seemed unreasonable: industrial remains appeared valueless, even an obstacle for the restoration of an attractive economy for devastated areas. But if the idea of registering as national heritage a site of mineral production might seem legitimate in present day Europe, the celebration of the arrival of post-industrialism is far away from imposing itself in a country like Bolivia, which still lives from the production of raw materials. The programmed end of traditional heavy industry permits in Europe the step from value in use to that of historical witness, in an accelerating process of patrimonialism. But can one declare the obsolescence of the Cerro Rico and embalm its miners before they're dead? Certainly the great State mines have closed doors, but they have given way to a myriad of artisanal exploitations.

Finally, the idea that world heritage sites exist, tends to hide, even in the populations concerned, the options for heritage is far from resulting in a consensus. The article of Michel Conan (1986) on Stoke-on-Trent underlines that the decision to make heritage of an industrial site does not always respond to the workers' wishes. It often arises to the wishes of outside planners it may take many years until the workers take to it. In the case of the miners of Potosí, it is not a question of appropriation but rather a recourse to a global desire, and as such transcendental, of heritage to impose a point of view and to blot out the demands of all the others - workers, the Bolivian State and investors - who consider the mountain first of all as economic wealth. So it is that thanks to their interests, contrary to all the business operators of heritage the miners find themselves excluded from the world civilization that was supposed to encompass their mountain. One knows that the process of patrimonialization is intrinsically underpinned by subjective judgments. The example of Potosí shows that only by being adapted to private interests, with or without reason, the most legitimate dominating, can a heritage site declare itself universal.

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