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The ayllu and territoriality in the Andes²

Editorial note

Alternautas is extremely proud to present this excerpt of the work of the Bolivian sociologist Simón Yampara. Born and raised in the Aymara *ayllu* of Chambi Grande, from the 1970s onward, Yampara participated in the Katarista movement, one of the main drivers of the indigenous turn in Bolivian social movements, particularly among peasant unionists. Yampara has retained close ties to his community, and has become a renowned sociologist. He teaches at the UPEA (Public University of El Alto), and devotes most of his intellectual work to the Andean *cosmovision* or worldview. This paper is excerpted from the concluding chapter of his book, *El ayllu y la territorialidad en los Andes. Una aproximación a Chambi Grande* (2001), in which he discusses the territorial, socio-political, economic and cultural organization of the *ayllu*. As this excerpt is the conclusion of a lengthy work, some clarification is needed.

The *ayllu* is a political, geographical and ethnic unit that encompasses indigenous communities occupying different ecological levels (Condarco Morales, 1970; Murra, 1975). It was the most basic indigenous territorial organization before the spread of *haciendas* in the Andean region and it is practiced today in zones historically unaffected by *haciendas*, or by communities that seek to rebuild their indigenous

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² This article has been translated by Sue Iamamoto and was originally published in <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2017/5/22/the-ayllu-and-territoriality-in-the-andes> on May 22nd, 2017.

socio-political organization. The text below focuses on how the Aymara concept of *suma qamaña*, normally translated as “living well” or *vivir bien* in Spanish, relates to a native perspective of development stemming from the *ayllu* organization itself. The book was published in 2001, during a time when “communitarian lands of origin” (TCOs, in their Spanish acronym) were starting to be recognized and institutionalized, a process that began in the mid-1990s. Yampara’s discussion of *suma qamaña* was highly influential amongst academics and helped to shape the policies adopted by the current administration under Evo Morales.

Despite the important influence of this book in particular, and Yampara’s work in general, in Bolivian national politics, his work has remained largely absent in English-speaking academia. We are very happy to share this first translation with you and we welcome comments and inquiries.

Before concluding these reflections, we will discuss some of the ideas of Condarco (1970), Murra (1975), Troll (1987) and Dollfus (1991), who reflect upon the types of memories that interact in Andean spaces. They tell us:

The “domesticated” nature contains different information from the “savage” nature, where **landscapes are history settled on the earth, which provide information both about the “memory of men’s (sic) time” and the “memory of nature”**.³ These landscapes are at the same time an indication of human action and a matrix where life is created. **“Being in the Andes means being in an unstable place (...)**. Therefore, only by being named, a place is given the attributes associated with different information extracted from each one of the memories” (Dollfus, 1991, p. 11).

This contrasts to a certain extent (though it does not necessarily contradict) with Mason’s opinion (cited by Condarco, 1970) that **“few regions in the world contain such contrasts**, from the sea level to the highest inhabitable regions, from completely

³ All the bold text was given by the author (translator’s note, T.N.).

arid deserts to the lushest tropical forests, from permanently hot regions to zones where snow and ice are eternal. **Probably nowhere else in the world it is possible to have similar transitions in such a limited space**". In the Andes there is a wide variety of geographic spaces. There, to live together, each group "produced" a "society" characterised by working rules, but at the same time that "the society is being produced", it produces its own space.

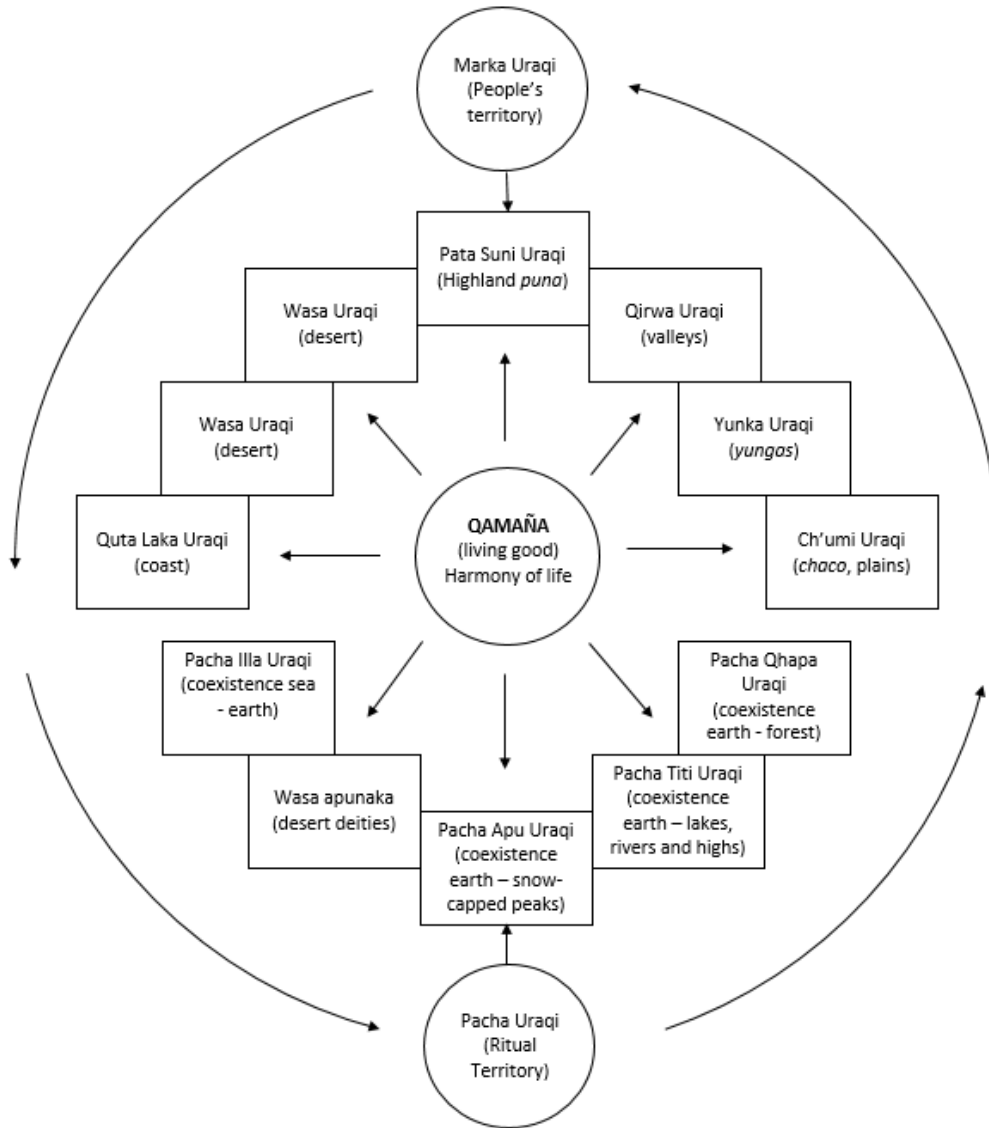
"Human activity creates spaces that condition relationships, which are established in a given extension, choosing certain places distant from each other, each of them characterised by a number of attributes". However, **the spaces overlap, coincide, and the same places can become causes of conflict and competition: these are the eternal conflicts for space. The geographic spaces, products of groups and societies, are not immutable, they last as long as societies and human interventions.** "The 'landscape' did not create, in any sense, the 'man' (sic), but the men (sic) have extended their dominance of the landscapes they enjoyed and occupied. Agriculture is the root of all spiritual and social culture".

As we will see, the geographic space of Andean territoriality encapsulates contrasts and mysteries, as well as the blessings of "lush" climates and inhabitable deserts. That is to say, the most extensive climatic variety imaginable in limited spaces.

On the heterogeneity and variety of ecological spaces

The graph below helps us to understand the territorial organization of the Andean space in its diverse ecologies and ecosystems of production, wisely articulated by the system of Andean *ayllus*:

Graph 1 - Geographic representation of Andean ecologic space organization



Translation note: *Puna* refers to a semi-arid plateau in Andean highlands; *yungas* are a tropical forest region to the East of the Andean mountain range; and *chaco* denotes lowland plains that occupy a vast territory shared by Eastern Bolivia, Northern Paraguay and Argentina and Western Brazil.

One of the main purposes of the work of this memory was precisely to understand, from the logics of a concrete *ayllu* as Chambi Grande,⁴ the old strategy of territorial management complementarily articulating the variety of ecological spheres of the *ayllu*'s life. In this regard, the graph is very illustrative, particularly if one contrasts it to the stone carving of Tiwanaku complemented by the Andean cosmovision.⁵

The steps of the Puerta del Sol (Sun Gate) in Tiwanaku address the memories of “nature” and of “man” (as identified by Dollfus, 1991). They do so through a kind of architecture, or “floor plan” of the Andean ecology and ecosystems, where only the engineering of the Andean *ayllus*' men (sic) had the virtue and capacity to build the house of life, which in Aymara is called **Qamaña**.⁶ This architecture of staggering in different “ecological levels”, in our criteria, is precisely represented in the central part of the gate under a character in mythic ritual action, constructed in stone carving. This is schematically reproduced in our graph, obviously lacking the symbolic elements of Andean ritualism, but containing the identification of sacralised spaces and degrees of territorial authorities of the Andean cosmovision, practised and reproduced by Andean *ayllus*. In identifying each ecological space we have found empty spaces known as deserts or inhabitable moors, but also their corresponding “unknown” and “empty” spaces in the world of deities. Thus, the men of the Andean ayllus move along the variety of natural physical spaces and the inhabitable, empty, and deserted physical spaces that have their expression also in the world of the deities.

⁴ Chambi Grande is an *ayllu* in the Southeast of La Paz department, part of a greater ethnic unit called Marka Curawara de Pacajes. In chapter 3 of the book, Yampara explains the history of the *ayllu* in detail. Although its inhabitants resisted the occupation of its territory by neighbouring *haciendas* and remained an autonomous indigenous territory, Chambi Grande westernised its socio-political units after the 1952 National Revolution, adopting the structure of peasant unions. In 1999, the authorities of Chambi Grande decided to return to their indigenous socio-political organization, the *ayllu* (T.N.).

⁵ Tiwanaku is an archaeological site northwest of the city of La Paz, which was the centre of a pre-Columbian civilization. Yampara makes reference to the stone carving of a human figure standing on the top of a platform formed by a sequence of steps, located at the top of the Puerta del Sol, one of the most important monuments of Tiwanaku. An image of the carving can be found here: <http://pueblosoriginarios.com/sur/andina/tiwanaku/iconos.html#> (T.N.).

⁶ *Qamaña*, a key concept in this text, relates broadly to the verb “to live” (T.N.).

This is something to be further investigated. The *yatiri* and *chamakani*, wise Andean masters, processors of the Andean cosmivision, can shed more light on this problem. It is also necessary to call archaeologists, geographers, anthropologists and ethnologists to work critically on Tiwanaku with the logic of Andean *ayllu*. The combined reading of both parts will be able to provide us an adequate comprehension of both the territoriality and institutionality of the Andean *ayllu*.

On the “Ayllu – Qamaña”

The empirical evidence of life in the ayllus surprisingly reveals the key to the Aymara life, a model called *suma – qamaña*, which is qualitatively superior to the model of “community development” proposed by the state and private institutions.

The *Ayllu-Qamaña* is a systemic and holistic institution with four fundamental organizational pillars: a) management of territory; b) productive and economic system; c) the cultural system and the hierarchy of ritual spaces; d) the socio-political system and the hierarchy of authorities. These factors, combined, keep the balance of the life in the *ayllu*.

Qamaña (Qm) approximately equals the sum of the material growth (mg), biological growth (bg) and government of ecosystems (gec). $Qm \cong mg + bg + gec$, where the territorial organization and the adaptation of production create a “tetralectical” process, or *tiwana-qalqu* in Aymara. This process is comprised of elements such as the “*jaqi tamacha*” (socio-political organization), “*japhalla qamasa*” (spatial distribution of spiritual and ritual energy), “*yapu, aynuqa-anaqa*” (land allocation for agriculture), “*uywa anaqa-aynuqa*” (land allocation for cattle). These factors provide harmony to the life of the ayllus. The logic of the ayllus combines and harmonises the double dimensionality of property law of these territorial spaces. That is to say, *sayaña* is the space of family usufruct, where family private law (a partiality) is exercised, while *saraqa* is a space of movement and usufruct of all the families in the community, where community law (the other complementary partiality) is exercised. This is where we see that both private and community interests co-exist in the life of

the *ayllus*. The territorial property is of the *ayllu*. *Sayaña* and *saraqa* are spaces of family and community usufruct, since families belong to the *ayllu*'s territorial space. This is the simultaneous implementation of a mixed law (private and communitarian).

Returning to the equation of the *qamaña*, from the study of the life of Chambi Grande *ayllu*, we can infer the following equations:

The *Ayllu-Marka* (**Ayma**) approximately equals the sum of the territorial organization logic (**teol**), the production and economic system (**proecos**), the cultural and ritual system (**curis**) and the socio-political system and the hierarchy of authorities (**soposha**), thus $Ayma \cong teol + proecos + curis + soposha$ (first equation).

As with the previous systems, the members of the *ayllus* seek “living well” in harmony with all and among all, **Suma Qamaña (Suqm)** in Aymara, which approximately equals the sum of material growth (**mg**), biological growth (**bg**), spiritual growth (**sg**) and the government of ecosystems (**gec**). Thus $Suqm \cong mg + bg + sg + gec$ (second equation).

The exercise of law in the life of the ayllus (**Lay**) approximately equals the harmonizing sum of family private law of the *sayaña* usufruct (**fpl**) and the combined law of the *saya-saraqa* (**clss**) and the community law of the *ayllu* (**cla**). Thus $Lay \cong fpl + clss + cla$ (third equation).

Finally, *Suma Qamaña (Suqm)* is found in the sum of the life of the *Ayllu Marka* (**Ayma**) and the exercise of the law of the *ayllu* (**Lay**), thus $Suqm \cong Ayma + Lay$. This is the equation pursued by Aymaras organized in the *Ayllu Marka*.

On the historical process of the ayllu

While working in the Chambi Grande *ayllu*, we analysed the process from the theoretical or ideal *ayllu*, relating it to the evidence of the historical *ayllu* and the concrete contemporary *ayllu*. In order to understand the trend or projection of

the *ayllu's* organization, we ask the following questions: Which structures are kept and which ones are changing? How can this model be not only ecologically sustainable, but also a contribution to human life? If this model is managed sustainably, is it possible to mathematically measure it? If so, how? Which are the components of the *ayllu's* long-term planning?

Another important aspect is about the territorial scope of the *ayllu*. What is the optimum biomass amount over this territory? That is to say, how much human, animal and vegetable population can an *ayllu's* territory sustain? How can the equations $Suqm \cong mg + bg + sg + gec$ and $Suqm \cong Ayma + Lay$ contribute as factors of balance/harmony in the lives of the *ayllus*? These questions are to be explored in future research and invite us, Andeanists, to work resolutely.

On the structure of the Ayllu-Marka

The four pillars found in the work of the Ayllu-Marka - a) territorial organization (management and administration of continuous and discontinuous territories), b) productive systems and economy, c) complex cultural-technological fabric, d) socio-political system and the hierarchy of traditional authorities, crosscut by social action and the judicial system practiced by Aymara and Qhishwa people – provide a stamp/code of and Andean institution with systemic and holistic characteristics.

Historically, in the Ayllu-Marka, the following territorial spaces were defined:

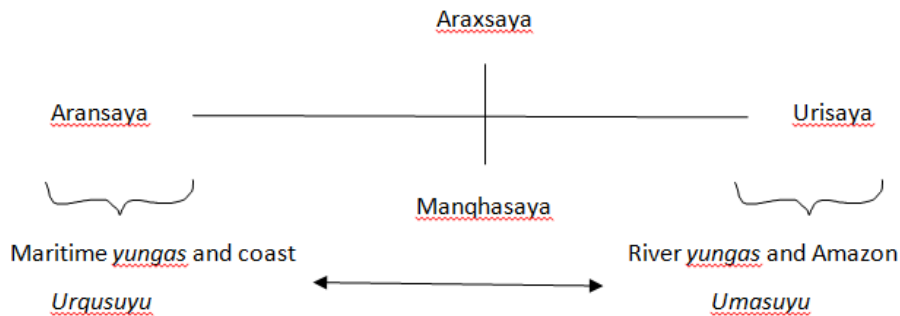
- The region of lakes and rivers in high altitudes, or *Titi* territories.
- The region of highlands and mountain ranges, or *Apu* territories.
- The region of coastal lands, or *Illa* territories.
- The region of Amazon forests, or *Qhapha* territories.

Structurally, we highlight that the interlinking of ecological levels of the *Ayllu-Marka* is defined over this base:

Water in high altitude	Highlands
Water in sea/forest	Lowlands

Alansaya Lands	
Titi <i>Pata alax quta</i> <i>Uraqi</i>	Apu <i>Suni uraqi</i>
Masaya Lands	
Illa <i>Quta laka uraqi</i>	Qhapha <i>Ch'umi uraqi</i>

The *markas* of these regions have their ayllus distributed in all these ecological levels:



Currently, this framework has suffered a break and a separation caused by the colonial process, reinforced by the agrarian laws of the republican system. In particular, coastal lands and the lowlands are now disconnected. That is to say that the people of the highlands have their wings cut. Still, the families of the *ayllus* subterraneously control the territories against these adversities, they do not renounce the reconstitution of these spaces, even though the *ayllus* call themselves communities in the low lands. They are aware that, because of external action, they have suffered a process of fragmentation and delegitimising, a territorial body dismembered in a similar way to

the bodies of its leaders.⁷ Despite these challenges, however, the territorial reconstitution and its authorities remain latent, they appear from time to time as a proposed society model to the Bolivian process. The administrators (governments) of the Bolivian state do not want to understand – because of colonial prejudices – why this system is used and how it constitutes a life system of indigenous peoples. However, paradoxically, they seek the development of these peoples by classifying them as peasants, organised in unions in rural communities. Thus, they avoid discussing the issue of territory and recognising the collective subjective identity as the people's dignity, with full exercise of their rights. Why? Do human rights support indigenous rights? How long will the homogenization and civilization of indigenous peoples remain in effect? How is it possible to achieve their autonomy and self-determination?

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⁷ Here, Yampara makes reference to the anticolonial struggle of Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa in the eighteenth century. After their defeat, these leaders were killed and dismembered, with their arms and legs being sent for public exposure in the four rebellious provinces to ward off future revolts (T.N.).