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# **Honors Project**

Macalester College

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Author: Rebecca Jackson

# Decolonization and Community Media: Fostering a Decolonial Imaginary in El Alto, Bolivia

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## **Abstract**

Radio Trono, a community radio in Bolivia, uses grassroots critical theory and participatory media to illuminate the influence the colonial matrix of power has on participant's bodies, daily lives, and imaginations. Corporal decolonization, the theory of decolonization developed by the collective that manages Radio Trono, focuses on the body as a site of liberation at multiple scales of geography, and links new bodily configurations to new imaginaries and possibilities for resistance to coloniality of power. This theory infuses Radio Trono's production process and content while the radio's presence in El Alto works to decolonize and democratize the city's media system.

In the spring of 2012 I had the privilege of studying in Bolivia. During my time I was extremely lucky to be introduced to Comunidad de Productores en Arte<sup>1</sup> (COMPA). My first time in COMPA's *casa cultural*, their headquarters in El Alto, I was introduced to the collective and their work in community theater, visual art, music, and dance. I was also allowed to tour their community radio station, Radio Trono. What I found most interesting about Radio Trono was the effort of those involved to ingrain corporal decolonization into their media making process and radio content. COMPA, the artist collective that manages Radio Trono, developed their theory on corporal decolonization through a grassroots process over the past 25 years. As student of Latin American Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Media Studies, I was excited by COMPA's work and determined to learn more.

The second time I visited the *casa cultural* I stayed for a month. In that month, COMPA allowed me to live in their space, work with the radio, and collaborate with them to create a short documentary on Radio Trono, and corporal decolonization. I interviewed Ivan Nogales, the founder of COMPA, and those who ran the radio station, participated in radio classes, and produced shows for broadcast. Interviews were filmed and conducted in Spanish. I transcribed and translated these later. I also filmed the radio classes, and a few live radio shows. As director and camera-person for the documentary I became a peculiar observer. By the end of my time with the radio I assisted in recording programs and facilitating classes, all while

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<sup>1</sup> Community of Art Producers



keeping an eye out for important information and visual cues for the film. I used the tools I had (a camera, some knowledge in filmmaking, and a will to engage my subjects and subject matter) to learn as much as I could about COMPA, Radio Trono, and corporal decolonization. I learned much in such a short time and remain grateful for my time with COMPA<sup>2</sup>.

One of the key things I learned from COMPA was the value of reciprocity. A notion of exchange far richer and more complex than capitalist ideas of commodity/capital exchange, reciprocity calls for an exchange of value (in the form of labor or resources), which builds a mutually beneficial relationship among parties involved. Reciprocity ties us together as we work to sustain one another. It also resists the devaluation of our efforts by refusing to commodify them.<sup>3</sup> For example, while I paid to live in COMPA's *casa cultural*, that money did not express the value of my time spent there. Instead that money represented both my commitment to support COMPA and the impossibility of completely extracting any project or community from the logics of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> I delve into a brief explanation of reciprocity in an effort to clarify my motivations behind this work. This work is an attempt to engage COMPA in reciprocity by connecting it to resources I have access to. One such resource is the Western academy. I hope that my work in this essay points resources and enthusiastic supporters towards COMPA. I also hope that my

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<sup>2</sup>I expand on my methods in the "Methodological Appendix" on page 78.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of reciprocity was shared with me by Ivan Nogales and others at COMPA in informal conversations.

<sup>4</sup> Some may disagree with the impossibility of existing outside of capitalism. I recommend David Harvey's analysis on the matter in *Spaces of Hope* (2000) in affirmation of that dismal fact.

critical analysis of corporal decolonization and Radio Trono, once translated into Spanish and sent to El Alto, will reaffirm COMPA's efforts and prompt them to think about the radio in new ways and help them refine Radio Trono into an even more effective community media and decolonization project.

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Radio Trono, a small community radio station in El Alto, Bolivia, has set its sights on decolonization. Plywood walls lined with foam and carpet house the station's recording studio and radiate a do-it-yourself aura. The station also houses free workshops for anyone who wants to learn to produce. Radio Trono broadcasts programming by community members, alternative music, and announcements about upcoming events in the community. The station's workshops prioritize open-access education about radio while also discussing theories and methods of decolonization. Programming covers diverse topics from many perspectives. Many shows reflect a distinctly critical bent, focusing on the legacies of Western imperialism and decolonization efforts in Bolivia and around the world. These services reflect the many benefits to the community that a community media outlet produces and the ways these outlets try to effect social change. Radio Trono's use of corporal decolonization reinforce such efforts.

COMPA, the artist collective that manages Radio Trono, developed their theory on corporal decolonization through a grassroots process over

the past 25 years. This theory infuses Radio Trono's production process and program content, while the radio's presence in El Alto works to decolonize a media system that keep influence over the media in the hands of an elite few. The theory responds to the coloniality of power as experienced in the intimately local happenings of the everyday and as expressed in a global matrix of power. The theory also focuses on the body as the necessary site of anti-oppression work (to undermine processes of colonization) and as a gateway to the imaginary in an effort to think beyond colonization, to imagine what else is possible, and begin to construct new decolonial realities.

Efforts in decolonization must simultaneously work to undermine colonial knowledges and structures of power while producing new ways of thinking and being that are increasingly more free from relationships of domination. In an effort to understand community media's potential role in decolonization I evaluate how Radio Trono uses corporal decolonization to respond to and undermine the coloniality of power and produce a decolonial social imaginary. I have structured this work into three sections.

The first section, "Coloniality of Power and the Decolonial Response" lays the foundational postcolonial theory needed to understand what colonization was and how it influences the contemporary world. Then I move on to focus briefly on the history of colonization and coloniality of power in Bolivia. Once the conditions to which corporal decolonization responds are established, I discuss the tenets of the theory, analyzing how the theory understands coloniality and what new worlds/realities/ways of being the

theory imagines. Next I discuss the benefits and challenges of a decolonization theory and practice which focuses on the body before moving on to explore the notion that the body can be used as a gateway to the imagination. Finally, I suggest decolonial consciousness be understood as a global social imaginary from the perspective of coloniality.

The second section "Changes in the Coloniality of Power and the Bolivian Social Imaginary" explores the significant changes in the colonial matrix of power after the election of Bolivia's first indigenous president Evo Morales. While decolonial work certainly pre-existed Morales' presidency, and in fact made it possible, his rise to power and public use of decolonial language possible, relocated decolonization from the margins to the center of power in Bolivia and have intensified decolonization's (in its many practices and meanings) influence on the Bolivian social imaginary. At the close of the section, I explore the relationship between decolonization, social imaginaries, and media representation.

"Radio Trono and Decolonization," the third and last section, focuses on the work Radio Trono does before moving on to evaluate theories on the benefits and challenges of community media and its relation to the public sphere from a perspective of coloniality. This section includes formal analysis of several of Radio Trono's program and the imaginary they encourage in participants and listeners.

Ultimately I find that Radio Trono fosters a decolonial public sphere and a decolonial global imaginary. By fulfilling its role as a community radio

and incorporating corporal decolonization to this work, Radio Trono exemplifies the role a community media outlet can have in in decolonization.

## **Coloniality of Power and the Decolonial Response**

Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others — the empires and their native overseers. In the colonial and neocolonial alchemy, gold changes into scrap metal and food into poison. Potosi, Zacatecas, and Ouro Preto became desolate warrens of deep, empty tunnels from which the precious metals had been taken.

-Eduardo Galeano, "The Open Veins of Latin America"

In order to better understand what decolonization is, I examine colonization. Commonly understood as the process through which European countries established hegemony over the Americas and areas of Africa and Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, postcolonial scholars like Anibal Quijano (2000), Walter Mignolo (2007), Madina Tlostanova (2007), and Ramón Grosfoguel (2007)<sup>5</sup> work to deepen such an understanding. Their work

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<sup>5</sup> While I do not work directly with Immanuel Wallerstein's theories in this piece, the scholars mentioned here owe much to his world-systems theory.

establishes several important principles for understanding what colonization did in the Americas and how contemporary systems of power are shaped by this history. In this scholarship, colonization is tied to modernity, race and racism, Eurocentered global capitalism, racialized divisions of labor, and the production of the colonial difference and Eurocentrism.

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano writes that "America was constituted as the first space/time of a new model of power of global vocation, and both in this way and by it became the first identity of modernity" (533). Quijano establishes that Americas was not discovered but rather produced, that colonization was a new global model of power, and that both the production of the Americas and this new global order mark the origins of modernity. Quijano identifies two historical processes which "in the production of that space/time [colonial America] converged and established the two fundamental axes of the new model of power," one was "a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products" (533). This new structure of control assembled multiples forms of labor control, "slavery, serfdom, petty-commodity production, reciprocity, and wages" and inscribed each in the work of producing commodities for a world market (535). In effect "a global model of control of work was established for the first time in known history," thus is the capitalist legacy of colonization, which produced the colonial Americas and new world order (535).

In the Americas this produced violent methods of primitive accumulation, which extracted natural resources and labor from the

Americas. This process had a high human cost. Quijano is careful to make the point that the vast genocide of the native peoples of the Americas in the first few decades of colonization was caused, not by plagues or warfare but because, "so many American Indians used to disposable labor were forced to work until death" (538). More than primitive accumulation in a new place and the exploitation of new peoples, Quijano views the colonization of the Americas as the first moment in the articulation of a global capitalist order dominated by European interests. Since the extraction of labor and resources also provided the capital necessary to establish and maintain a capitalist order the "global capitalist economy could not have existed without the colonization of the Americas" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 111).

The other fundamental axes to this new model of power was the production of race and its use to structure unequal power relationships between colonizer and the colonized. According to Quijano "the idea of race, in its modern meaning, does not have a known history before the colonization of Americas" (534). For Quijano this modern meaning refers to "the supposed differential biological structures between" Europeans and the peoples of the Americas. Since the social relations produced in the Americas during colonization were ones of domination, the supposed "differential biological structures" between colonizer and colonized marked the colonized as not only inherently different from but also inferior to the European. In short "race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social

classification," and stratification (534). This inferiority, an establishment of the "lesser human", later conceptualized by decolonial scholars as the denial of dignity<sup>6</sup>, justified colonization. What would the 'lesser beings' do with their natural resources and labor power? As far as the logics of colonization were concerned the value of the Americas and its peoples was 'created' via colonization, before which they contributed nothing to the global order (541).

As European colonization of the Americas spread to the rest of the world, race and labor control became articulated against one another on a global scale (Quijano 539). The global divisions of labor organized bodies within colonization so that those peoples raced by the Europeans and deemed inferior were inscribed in most of the world's unpaid labor (slavery, serfdom). Paid labor and the ownership of the means of production were reserved for Europeans. Racial division of labor became a characteristic of a global system of capital accumulation and labor control, which did not exist before the colonization of the Americas. In other words global capitalism and racialized divisions of labor did not exist, and as argued below, could not exist without the colonization of the Americas (539).

Quijano and Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova (2007) identify the subjugation of colonized peoples to European interest not only in economic and racial term but in cultural terms as well. The racial difference between colonizer and colonized and the assumed inferiority of the former

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<sup>6</sup> See also Walter Mignolo's chapter "The Zapatistas' Theoretical Revolution: Its Historical, Ethical, and Political Consequences" in his book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011).



eventually expanded to become the colonial difference within which the "languages, religions, economies, and social organizations" of the colonized were considered inferior to European alternatives (Mignolo and Tlostanova 110). A process which began in the Americas would spread to envelop the world resulting in, "the incorporation of the diverse and heterogeneous cultural histories into a single world dominated by Europe," producing "a global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony" which "concentrated all forms of control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge" to that hegemony (Quijano 540). Of course this process was influenced by global capitalism so that European colonizers expropriated that which was useful "for the development of capital and the profit of the European center" and then "repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, the models of the production meaning, their symbolic universe, the model of expression and of objectification and subjectivity" which were not useful to capital accumulation and labor control. (541).

Latin Americanist postcolonial scholars argue that this complex system of processes and power relations is constitutive of modernity.

Mignolo lays out the key premises of this line of thought:

1. There is no modernity without coloniality, because coloniality is constitutive of modernity.
2. The modern/colonial world (the colonial matrix of power) originates in the sixteenth century, and the discovery/invention of America is the colonial component of modernity whose visible face is European Renaissance.

3. The Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution are derivative historical moments consisting in the transformation of the colonial matrix of power.

4. Modernity is the name for the historical process in which Europe began its progress toward world hegemony. It carries a darker side, coloniality.

5. Capitalism, as we know it today, is of the essence for both the conception of modernity and its darker side, coloniality.

6. Capitalism and modernity/coloniality had a second historical moment of transformation after World War II when the US took the imperial leadership previously enjoyed at different times by both Spain and England.

These key premises translate the colonization of the sixteenth century to contemporary structures of power.<sup>7</sup> Coloniality of power is engrained in contemporary capitalism and US imperialism, and reflected in today's racisms and divisions of labor. That is, contemporary systems of power are shaped by the colonial systems of power so that vestiges of colonial power structure endure in contemporary systems of oppression. Mignolo goes on to argue for a view of history and the contemporary global order from the "perspective of coloniality" by which he means a non-European perspective, and more specifically, a perspective in which "the center of observation will be grounded in the colonial history that shaped the idea of the Americas" (xi). The perspective of coloniality is a counter-narrative to the European history

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<sup>7</sup> The influence of colonial structures of power in the contemporary global order are referred is expressed in the term coloniality which I understand as analogues to neo-colonialism. Coloniality of power and the colonial matrix of power refer the actual contemporary power structures which colonial power structures have influenced and made possible.

which identifies Europe and modernity as the culmination of human achievement (xi). Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova argue that "making visible the logic of coloniality implies a shift in the geography and biography (i.e., a version of body-politics of knowledge), shift toward a geopolitical and corpopolitical perspective that places at the center of knowledge production the 'colonial wound' rather than that "achievements of modernity"" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 112). Modernity is thus recast in light of its connection and dependence on colonization and its violences, and knowledge making is located within a perspective which denies the assumption of European authority over history and cultural superiority.

In his work "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms" (2007) Grosfoguel expands Quijano's and Mignolo's work to evaluate the power matrix of modern/coloniality. Grosfoguel asserts that this matrix of power produced and maintains a global racial division of labor and hierarchy, a hierarchy privileging core over the periphery, global gender hierarchy, global sexual hierarchy, and a spiritual hierarchy. Taking a step beyond Quijano's concept of coloniality which focuses on capitalism and race, Grosfoguel understands the global coloniality of power as "an entanglement of intersectionality of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic, and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversely reconfigures all of the other global power structures" (217). In short, once modernity/coloniality was imposed on the Americas it became

the power dynamic which structured most of life in the Americas by bending other power dynamics to its needs.

I understand colonization as a disavowal of indigenous culture<sup>8</sup> and violent imposition of European social imaginaries on the first peoples of the Americas, Africans brought as slaves to the Americas, and their variously mixed heritage descendants. These disavowed imaginaries were replaced by Western modernity, which came from Europe to the Americas and was imposed by force<sup>9</sup>, therefore the social imaginaries and modernity/coloniality of the Americas developed in relation to Western modernity. This process had material effects on the geographies, economies, cultures, and subjectivities of the colonized peoples and brought the world into a global order predicated on unequal power relationships.

### **Coloniality of Power in Bolivia**

Estimates suggest that during the Spanish colonial era, around two billion ounces of silver were extracted from Potosí's Cerro Rico mountain alone. Bolivian folklore claims that enough silver was taken from the mountain to build a bridge from Potosí to Madrid and that the bodies of the

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<sup>8</sup> Culture as discussed by Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (1997) as the collective, although not identical from person to person with the collective, process and set of practices that giving the world meaning (2). The lens through which reality is made.

<sup>9</sup> Quijano notes that characteristics commonly attributed solely to modernist thinking like, "rational science and the secularization of thought" and innovative technologies existed outside of Europe. The pre-Incan civilization which built the ancient city state Tiawanaku (located 45 miles west of La Paz, Bolivia), which had irrigation, drainage systems, masonry, geometry, and urban design, is one example. However modernity/coloniality and global race/labor control was a uniquely European creation.

indigenous and African people enslaved in the mine could stand in a line on this bridge from Madrid back to Potosí.<sup>10</sup> The cultural loss, the loss of cosmologies, of ways of interacting between human beings and with the world, is of course incalculable, to say nothing about the loss of life. Colonization in Bolivia, as everywhere, was always about capital and labor but generated losses which are beyond economic expression.

In 1825 Bolivian independence from Spain was won in a revolution led by the famous Simón Bolívar, who was an skilled in defeating the Spanish in war but knew little about the hierarchy of power in Bolivia. As a result the overthrow of the Spanish resulted in the transference of power to a small wealthy Criollo landed elite while division of labor and power hierarchies remained unchanged. The 1952 revolution led by the MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) political party was "one of the most far reaching in Latin American" with profound consequences including universal suffrage (ending literacy requirements and racial restrictions), the nationalization of the tin industry, and sweeping land reform (Canessa 148, Cordero Carraffa 27). Unfortunately 1952 revolution did not produce a official state recognition of indigenous identity, writing writing indigenous peoples into the new constitution only as peasants (*campesinos*) and ascribing them rights as such (148). However the 1952 revolution and following agrarian reform returned land to indigenous peoples and for many "marked the end of

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<sup>10</sup> Estimates on the loss in terms of human life vary widely although all indicate a genocide of massive scale.

'Spanish' domination, the true anticolonial moment" (148). Sadly the following decades saw an erosion of the rights earned in the 1952 revolution and by 1964 Bolivia, like many Latin American countries at the time, found itself under dictatorial rule. As reflected in the 1964 *Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico's* "Memorandum for the 5412 Special Group: Increase of Subsidy Provided to the Bolivian Government to support its Covert Action Projects designed to break the power of the [[National Revolutionary Movement]] of the left (MNRI) and the [[Community Party of Bolivia]] (PCB)" during this time coloniality of power in Bolivia was expressed in dictatorial regimes which received funding from and whose military forces enjoyed training by the CIA<sup>11</sup> (148).<sup>12</sup>

1980 marked Bolivia's transition into democracy and what Latin Americanists refer to as The Lost Decade because of the aggressive neoliberal economic and social reforms introduced to the region which prompted a sharp decrease industrial production<sup>13</sup> and general economic stagnation (Karen L. Remmer 778). Coloniality of power in this decade was expressed in

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<sup>11</sup> This was a wide-spread trend in Latin America which intensified after the 1959 Cuban Revolution and 1965 creation of the Community Party of Cuba. The United States backed dictatorial regimes regardless of the threat to and assault on human rights and dignity so long as these regimes pledged to keep their countries from socializing. See also Augusto Pinochet in Chile (1973-1990) and The Dirty War in Argentina (1976-1983)

<sup>12</sup> This memorandum was included in a wikileaks document and is cited and alluded to in a number of websites including Wikipedia. However the source itself could not be found. As mentioned in the previous footnote, CIA tactics such as those described were not uncommon in Latin America and are well documented in other cases.

<sup>13</sup> Of which Bolivia has always had a meager amount. The Library of Congress' *A Country Study: Bolivia* (1991) reports that in the late 1980s Bolivia had the second least industrial economy in South America.

the neoliberal imperialism, facilitated by the United States, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank, which made structural adjustments and the adoption of neoliberal policies a requirement to receive aid and loans, aid and loans which Bolivia, and other countries similarly disadvantaged by the history of colonization and the Western-centric global economy, had come to depend on to keep poverty at bay.

The Library of Congress' *A Country Study: Bolivia* (1991) in section "Tin and Related Metals," reports that said structural adjustments forced the Bolivian government to lay off miners who worked in the nationalized mining industry (Hanratty and Hudson). This provoked waves of migration to El Alto<sup>14</sup>, a slum city adjacent to La Paz, as unemployed miners and their communities looked for better economic opportunities closer to the country's capital city and largest economic hub. This pattern of urbanization was not uncommon in Latin American at the time. However the increased tendency of these newly urban dwellers to identify as indigenous (mostly Aymara), makes the Bolivian urbanization quite unique (Canessa 150).

The colonality of power worldwide and in Bolivia from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the last few decades provide the historical context and political, economic, and cultural milieu within which corporal decolonization was theorized. To quote cultural studies theorist Lawrence Grossberg, this "context is not merely the background but the very conditions of the

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<sup>14</sup> I'll remind the reader that El Alto is the city in which COMPA was founded and is currently headquartered and thus also the city Radio Trono serves with its radio classes, free recording studio access, and broadcast programming.

possibility," of the existence of corporal decolonization (12). This overview of colonial structures of power and their influence in the contemporary world are thus foundational for understanding corporal decolonization as a notion, process, and goal.

### **Corporal Decolonization**

Over 30 years ago Ivan Nogales began a theatre troupe with homeless youth in El Alto, Bolivia. They called themselves *Teatro Trono*<sup>15</sup>. As time passed, other artists and youth joined the group. Years later this collective, which now produced theatre, music, visual art, dance, and wanted to expand to other art forms and media, established itself as Community of Art Producers (Comunidad de Productores en Artes) or COMPA. Today COMPA is headquartered in El Alto's *Ciudad Satelite* neighborhood. There are three other COMPA locations in El Alto, one in Cochabamba, and a small COMPA outpost in Berlin, Germany. Since its beginning COMPA produced various art forms and developed its own theory of decolonization. COMPA's art tries to prompt participants and viewers to "think, feel, and live differently" (Gutiérrez interview). Their theory of decolonization, which they call corporal decolonization, articulates guidelines which have aided the collective in this process.

Corporal decolonization was born of praxis and now functions dialectically with COMPA's praxis. That is, the theory and praxis develop

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<sup>15</sup> Trono is a play on words meaning both throne and 'to ruin one's life' (Nogales interview).



alongside one another, forming and informing one another, and adjusting as community needs change. I understand this theory as grassroots since it was developed by a collective, over several years, and in constant response to the needs and desires of the surrounding community. These principles are not the work of one academic reflecting on the experiences of many but rather the product of a community giving voice to its needs and hopes on the path to liberating themselves and creating "a more humane world for all of us" (Nogales interview) In a further attempt to make their theory responsive to the community, the principles of corporal decolonization are never fully articulated, they are never "finished," just as COMPA and the community are never finished reflecting on their needs and hopes. These principles overlap, depend on one another, and are without hierarchy. Stated as necessary elements of corporal decolonization they are spaces of collective well-being (*espacios de bienestar colectivo*), relational existence (*existencia relacional*), de-encampment (*descampamento*), bodies with souls/without fear (*cuerpos sin miedo y con ajayu*), anti-domination (*anti-dominación*), and migration to your own center (*migrar a tu propio centro*).

*Spaces of Collective Well Being:* COMPA holds that the process towards decolonization is best facilitated by living and working in a space of collective wellbeing. Such a space should "make you feel comfortable, allow you to open your body to creativity, and give you feelings that prompt you to emancipate yourself, liberate yourself" (Nogales interview). Nogales, the founder and director of COMPA, believes that the collective's headquarters, what they

refer to as a “cultural house” is an example of a space of collective wellbeing. The house is a seven story colossus, built with reclaimed materials. The outside is painted sunshine yellow, and decorated with murals and trimming in a rainbow of bright colors. The inside is just as eclectic. Almost every room has a mural and the hallways are lined with photographs, posters, and other artworks. The bathroom doors are made of reclaimed bus doors and the sinks decorated with a mosaic of reclaimed glass. The house is structured like a square donut so that if you look up from the ground floor you can just make out the seventh story’s skylights. Since the entirety of the corporal decolonization project seeks to open up new possibilities for a more humane world by exploring different bodily behaviors, it is significant that COMPA takes environment’s influence on bodies into account. Bodies always exist as entities inscribed in particular spaces. Therefore as space informs the body, COMPA uses spaces of collective wellbeing to free bodies to enable the whole person and to explore and imagine new realities.

*Relational Existence:* The principle of relational existence theorizes the self in relation to the body and community:

In theatre you exist only when another is able to act as your mirror.

The other is the one who gives you feeling, the “me” does not exist without the “you”. I exist only when there is a “we”, there is no isolated person, no Robinson Caruso. The “I” does not exist. I only exist in that I have relations with others and when I have relations with others.

Therefore “we” are most important. Further the only way to recognize your own physicality is through the other’s gaze. (Nogales interview)

As a theory that emphasizes the importance of recognizing your body, this point is fundamental to understanding corporal decolonization. If the only way to recognize your physicality is with the help of another, than the only way to move forward with the process of corporal decolonization is with the help of another. Nogales mentioned this explicitly when he said “this is key to decolonization – to recognize and accept others as a guide, to allow you comrades to be a guide to becoming yourself – you can never decolonize yourself alone. The collective defines you. It makes you grow” (Nogales interview). Consequently COMPA does not understand any individual as a discrete entity. This is very different from modern Western<sup>16</sup> conceptions of the individual as a self-contained whole. This principle also rationalizes privileging collective interests over self-interests. This principle then undermines both traditional Western conceptions of the self and capitalist economic models which privilege individual gain over other considerations.

This principle also undermines the singularity of the body as traditionally understood in the West (i.e the self has one body and the body contains only one self):

The exercises we do are always in collectives and through collective creativity you find a multitude within yourself. And that’s beautiful;

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<sup>16</sup> While Western scholar have develop more relational conceptions of the self (Jaques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kriteva, for example), I refer here to normative notions of the self adhered to in the West.

you come to realize that there are always other selves within yourself.

And decolonization hopes to allow all of your other selves to exist.

Each one of US is a community – we contain many. Imagine all that is within each of US and all that is within all of US. (Nogales Interview)

This point suggests two implications worth exploring. One is that the body plays little role in constituting the self since within one body there are many selves and subjectivity is dependent on relationships with others. It seems unlikely that this is the idea COMPA intends to communicate with the principle of relation existence given that all of corporal decolonization is predicated on the importance of the body's lived experiences to understand colonial oppression and learn to intervene in said oppression. Instead I suggest interpreting this principle as an expression of the body's instability. The body is always changing. In his 2000 work *Spaces of Hope*, David Harvey makes an identical claim stating that "the body is not a closed and sealed entity, but a relational 'thing' that is created, bounded, sustained, and ultimately dissolved is a spatiotemporal flux of multiple processes" (98). Again this is a very different understanding of the body and the self than those expressed in normative Western thought.

*De-encampment:* This principle turns a critical eye to the geographies, or spatio-temporal contexts, within which bodies exist. This principle reflects

COMPA's cognizance of the ways coloniality of power is articulated via capitalism and the impact capitalism has on the construction of space<sup>17</sup>:

The whole world is an encampment, the way cities are now they're designed for exploitation, wherever there are natural resources, we must exploit them, extract them, suck them out. In the meantime we put up mice sized homes for people to live in but these are homes without dignity and are useful only for exploitation. We live encamped lives in encamped nations. This is true for our bodies and minds as well. Every day we do the same routine like mice in a laboratory, scratching lines into the same paths. We are the rats of modernity and we perpetuate a capitalist system, we perpetuate encampment.

(Nogales Interview)

This quote clearly expresses one of the ways which COMPA understands coloniality of power and its influence on daily lived experience. While spaces of wellbeing draws attention to the architectural nature of the spaces inhabited by bodies, the principle of *des-campamento* draws attention to the nature of urban design and the geography of exploitation. According to this principle, most of the world functions as an encampment where the geography of space is determined by the needs of capitalist exploitation. Here capitalism is linked to modernity and both are tied to feelings of being

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<sup>17</sup> This idea is analogous to David Harvey's theory of uneven geographical development and the ways capitalism constructs space.

trapped by lives that deprive victims of their dignity while reinforcing the system which oppresses them.

Since COMPA holds that the function of contemporary urban design is to facilitate extraction of resources and exploitation of labor, it also calls for the des-campamento or 'de-encampment' of urban space and ultimately of the world:

We need to 'un-encamp' our lives and make spaces of wellbeing where anything is possible. We need this so we can imagine other types of relationships, other forms of attitudes and corporal behaviors, so that we can invent these together. (Nogales interview)

This principle is explicit about the link between bodies, geographies, and systems of power. To break this link COMPA proposes new types of urban design which promote creativity and equality but also encourage people to start interacting in their urban geographies differently. Instead of repeating the same routes and routines every day, COMPA would have people work to invent new lifestyles and new relationships between people and their urban geographies. A notable implication of this principle is that living within contemporary geographies without challenging their design through action, "works to re-inscribe the processes of modernity and capitalism which oppress us" (Nogales Interview). Doing nothing is not a neutral act; it re-inscribes oppressive systems of power.

*Bodies without Fear:* This principle responds directly to colonial legacies expressed in the body and employs indigenous knowledge and histories of resistance to imagine ways to undermine this legacy. Many Aymara<sup>18</sup> Bolivians believe that when you are frightened your soul escapes from your body, but that calling to your soul once you are no longer afraid causes it to return to the body. COMPA believes that 500 of years of colonization and oppression<sup>19</sup> have frightened the Bolivian people and caused their collective soul to flee (Nogales Interview). In an effort to recapture this soul COMPA works to abolish fear of oppression. To help get his point across and emphasize the importance of living without fear Nogales related an anecdote about Domitila Chúngara, a mining labor organizer who played a significant role in ousting Bolivian dictator Hugo Banzer from power in 1978:

Domitila, before a gathering of miners she was trying to prompt into rebellious action said, "our strongest enemy isn't out there waiting for us. Our strongest enemy is the fear each of us carries within." So we work to abolish fear and reclaim our souls - this in one way of fighting against a colonization that has penetrated the body.

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<sup>18</sup> The Aymara are the second largest indigenous group in Bolivia. Aymara populations are most dense in the Andean highlands surrounding La Paz and El Alto.

<sup>19</sup> Nogales used the terms *aplastó* (to crush or flatten) to describe the effects of colonization on the soul.

COMPA takes seriously colonization's effects on an emotional and spiritual level. and it uses indigenous epistemes to arrive at and express an understanding of these effects.

*Anti-Domination:* This principle is the most vague of all the principles but it clearly expresses COMPA opposition to all relations of domination. Rather than naming explicitly every type of domination COMPA opposes, the open-endedness of this principle allows corporal decolonization to address the many intersections of oppression the colonial matrix of power produces and to adapt over time as coloniality of power changes:

We've all been taught that like the pharaohs in Egypt, and indeed like the shape the great pyramids indicate, it is ok for one ruler to lord over the masses. We see this in the teacher student relationship. . .

This manifests in everything we do. We live competitive lives, each one of US wants to be on top, we want to be the ruler. (Nogales Interview)

This quote reflects the insidious nature of domination and power; just as we are dominated, we seek to dominate others. This principle opposes systems of social organization which allow a few to have power over the lives of many, while the masses have little say in the matter. The use of the pharaoh as the examples is key. COMPA doesn't oppose every and any form of hierarchy, in fact COMPA has a hierarchical structure; only Nogales is identified as the director of COMPA. However in COMPA Nogales can not make decisions for the collective. Every major decision is discussed in weekly meetings and the members of COMPA deliberate until they reach a consensus. At the same time



having a director helps the collective run smoothly and allows Nogales, the member with the longest history of experience doing community art and managing the collective, to advise and guide the group but never dominate it.

COMPA also applies this principle to the body, asserting that the brain and reason have been unjustly privileged above the body and feelings or intuition (Nogales interview). Therefore COMPA's principle of anti-domination also argues for the re-integration of the body whereby the "head should return to its natural role as an important part of the body," rather than continue to be recognized as the ruler of the body (Nogales interview). This principle directly connects to the aims of critical theory, which work against systems of supremacy and domination. It also questions the supremacy of rational thought and intellectual knowledge over emotional knowledge, intuition, belief, and body knowledge.

*Migration to Your Center:* This principle explicitly addresses Euro-centrism and U.S.-centrism and works to undo the colonial thinking formation often adopted by colonized peoples living a world structured in coloniality and an assumed core-periphery relationship:

We all look at the north or the center of the world which might be La Paz, Buenos Aires, New York or Miami, or Paris, depending on who you are and where you are, but everyone wants to go to these centers. The real symbolic value of these centers is that they continually construct a colonial gaze, they generate the idea that the ideal life is lived in this centers. Television and capitalism also reflect this paradigm, this

centralized model of thinking, that to be, to really matter, you need to live as those in the center do. If people can't physically migrate to the center they are still encourage to migrate in a different way through the TV. (Nogales Interview).

With this principles COMPA identifies Eurocentrism which marks the 'centers of the world' as such and constructs Eurocentric desire so that those who do not live in a global center of power wished they did. The underlying fear which COMPA teases out is that one is not really living unless you are living in the center, that life outside of the center is meaningless, and that by existing outside of the center you are meaningless. According to Ivan, even if one can't afford to move to the North, television and capitalism work to direct attention towards the North and its consumerist lifestyles. This exacerbates the fear and intensify a longing which disavows the value of non-Western cultures in favor of moving ever closer into the center of Western power<sup>20</sup>. In fact, the principle's name "migrate to your center" is a play actual global migration patterns wherein thousands immigrate from South and Central America to North America but few immigrate in the reverse. COMPA suggests another way of imagining the world and one's position within it:

Migrate to your own center, take a hard look at yourself as a whole person. You are your own center, we need to migrate to our own centers. Here that might mean a return to your own corner, to your

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<sup>20</sup> I think of this as "The American Dream for the Diaspora" or the hope that the harder you try to assimilate the more you will be accepted in the center of power and be allowed to enjoy its privileges. This is a myth.

own barrio. We need to recognize the profound richness we have in our own powerful and wonderful histories and stories. We need to learn how to tell them, to respect our own memories and look in our own mirrors and narrate the world with our own dignified lives so that and others can see them as well as examples.

COMPA suggest focusing on local culture and histories and using these to narrate one's position in the world. The goal is not only to remove the desire to move to the center but to relocate the center entirely.

### **Why the Body?**

In *Spaces of Hope* (2000) David Harvey offers guidelines for imagining utopias and methods for carrying out utopic projects (which I understand decolonization to be) to bring ourselves and the world closer to that image. In this work Harvey evaluates the utility of the body as the measure of the success of such projects. He writes that that "contemporary loss of confidence in previously established categories has provoked a return to the body as the irreducible basis for understanding" (97). However Harvey cautions against retreating to an overly simplicity understanding of the body, suggesting instead a "more dialectical way of understanding the body . . . [as] an unfinished project, historically and geographical malleable in certain ways" (98). For Harvey, just as for COMPA, the body is constituted by its relations to other bodies, architecture, geographies, and the "technological, physical, social, and economic practices that operate in society" (98). In short, the body is a "spatiotemporal flux of multiple processes" (98). However this does

not mean the body is a completely passive site upon which various processes act unihibited. Instead, "the human body is active and transformative in relation to the processes that produce, sustain, and dissolve it" (99). In essence the body and a complex array of intersecting, reinforcing, and conflicting processes simultaneously and dialectically form one another.

This is the great benefit and risk to focusing on the body as the site of a decolonization process. The body is fluid and will be altered by changes in the coloniality of power, thus changing the colonial matrix of power as well. This means changing the coloniality of power is possible<sup>21</sup>! However there is no guarantee that the process will be a positive one over-all, bringing us close to a world free of oppression, or not. There is however a way of slanting the odds in favor of decolonization (despite the overwhelming power of the colonial matrix of power, racisms, capitalism, etc.). Harvey asserts that:

The study of the body has to be grounded in an understanding of real spatio-temporal relations between material practices, representations, imaginaries, institutions, social relations, and the prevailing structures of the political-economic power. The body can then be viewed as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached. (130)

Corporal decolonization addresses forces which limit and produce the body on a range of geographic levels. The theory does not focus solely on the individualized body but also on the body in community, the body in social

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<sup>21</sup> And, as I'll demonstrate later, already happening.

structures, the body within urban design, and the influences of global colonial discourses on bodies. In other words, corporal decolonization grounds COMPA's work and engagement with the greater community in an understanding of the "relations between material practices, representations, imaginaries, institution, social relations, and the prevailing structures of the political-economic power" from a perspective of coloniality. COMPA absolutely view the body as "as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached" (130). Corporal decolonization works with this nexus by using the body's dialectical relationship with the imagination.

Corporal decolonization's emphasis on the body also reflects COMPA's origins as a Latin American community theatre group. In his extremely influential *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979) Augusto Boal explores different methods for using theater as a tool for critical thinking and intervention in oppression. Boal suggests exercises that prompt "the spectator to start acting again" (95). Here, Boal's work shares a principal tenant with corporal decolonization: that in order for the oppressed to recognize and exercise their agency they must first recognize oppression's expression in their bodies and learn to use their bodies in ways which are not complicit with systems of domination (103). Theater of the Oppressed and corporal decolonization share the objective of "making each person aware of [their] own body, of [their] bodily possibilities" in an effort to prompt them into imagining new realities altogether (103).

In COMPA this is facilitated by various exercises which correspond to and are taught in relation to COMPA's different art forms as well as exercises taught in the corporal decolonization course (which is free and open to the public). These exercises all seek to have participants realize oppression's influence on their bodies and then prompt them to imagine new possibilities. The potential power of this process comes to light once the imagination is understood more fully.

The imagination is essential to action, which means it is essential to change and to decolonization. According to theater scholars Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson, "agency – the ability to act – is dependent on having a well-developed imagination" (qtd. in Goulet 93). Linda Goulet, Warren Linds, Jo-Ann Episkenew, and Karen Schmidt elaborate on this point noting that, "before taking action, one must first imagine what change might look like, second, imagine the steps required to achieve that change, and third have the volition and agency to enact the imagined changes" (93). In addition, "imagination refers to the capacity to see in and think about something as that which it is not to represent the absent as present, with all the thought and feelings it would bring if it were present" (94). In this sense then, corporal decolonization is predicated on the ability of participants to imagine, on their ability to think about the world as being outside or beyond coloniality even while their realities are inscribed in coloniality. According to Shani Orgad (2012) quoting Arjun Appadurai (1996), "while imagination provides 'a sense of how things Usually go' (in other words, it is factual), it is

interwoven with an idea of how things ought to go, in other words it is *normative*"(45). Given that decolonization processes must always offer an understanding of coloniality and then imagine a world beyond the coloniality of power, imagination must be at the center of this process.

Corporal decolonization's emphasis on the body is only effective as method of approaching the "possibilities for emancipatory politics" because it assumes and encourages a dialectical relationship between the body and the imagination. Corporal decolonization does not negate the importance of the mind and the need to decolonize thinking, instead the collective believes that if one's body is not liberated from colonial oppression then our minds and souls will never fully realize decolonization. In this sense corporal decolonization engages the body (mostly through art making) in an attempt to access the imagination. Corporal decolonization encourages the exploration of bodily possibilities to engage the imagination and ultimately translate the new bodily possibilities in the establishment of new relational possibilities i.e. new sociologies, economies, politics. However the exploration of new bodily possibilities is always engrained in the global coloniality of power. As a result, changes in the coloniality of power change the range of bodily possibilities available to be engaged in corporal decolonization's process. The past few decades in Bolivia have witnessed a significant change in the coloniality of power in that country. I believe this change positively affects the impact processes/projects like corporal decolonization can have in Bolivia.

## **Changes in the Coloniality of Power and the Bolivian Social Imaginary**

While Walter Mignolo links decolonial consciousness to border thinking or thinking from the margins, today in Bolivia, decolonization is debated and understood as politically and socially useful, if not necessary, for national progress. This is a result of a significant shift in the coloniality of power seen in Bolivia in the last decades. Movements against the colonial matrix of power and towards decolonization have fueled municipal civil wars<sup>22</sup>, battles against transnational corporations for water rights, and increased recognition of the rights of Bolivia's indigenous peoples<sup>23</sup>. The 2006 election of Evo Morales, the first indigenous president<sup>24</sup> in the world, is a watershed moment in which indigeneity and language around decolonization was not only included in the Bolivian public sphere but

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<sup>22</sup>Like the one fought between La Paz and El Alto to establish the latter's independence from the capital city. Previously, El Alto was another of La Paz's periphery barrios.

<sup>23</sup> These are often discussed as struggles against neoliberalism not untrue given that capitalism has always been included in the global colonial matrix of power.

<sup>24</sup>The first president to openly identify as indigenous.



enjoyed a dominant positions. Reviewing Evo Morales position within the colonality of power and his rise to power in Bolivia gives a better sense of the state of the colonial matrix of power in Bolivia today.

As a coca farmer Evo Morales' decolonial consciousness and political sensibilities were formed from a precarious position within the colonality of power. Coca has long been used by the indigenous for its healing and stimulant properties. Coca also has spiritual significance for many of the peoples of Bolivia. Today sun dried coca leaves are commonly chewed similarly to tobacco or steeped in teas, but coca production and use boomed under colonial Spain. Coca kept laborers working longer and played a similar role to sugar in the newly industrialized England, caffeine in today's workplace, or incidentally, cocaine in the financial districts of the US in the 1980s. Aside from its health properties and spiritual value, coca leaves are an ideal crop given Bolivia's geography and climate. Coca yields more value per growing season than other crops, requires less water, sunlight, and physical labor, and is well suited to both the semi-tropics of Bolivia's eastern lowlands and the arid Andean highlands to the west. In addition, once harvested and sun dried, coca is more easily transported from distant villages and farmlands to larger economic centers than perishables like fresh fruits and vegetables. Coca makes the most economic sense for farmers but because coca leaves are the organic matter necessary for cocaine production, the US war on drugs and subsequent war on terror (narco-terrorists) has criminalized growing coca and marginalized these farmers.

A 1994 study by the Rand Corporation found that destroying coca crops, one technique in the US's war on drugs/terror, as a means of lowering cocaine consumption, was up to ten times less economically efficient than user treatment and prevention programming stateside (Chomsky 2012). Nevertheless the U.S. continues to pressure Latin American states like Bolivia to fight coca production by any means necessary. Because aid is linked to cooperation with the U.S. war on drugs/terror this so-called war against a U.S. consumption problem becomes another means for subordinating Latin American states to U.S. imperial power. Given this history, coca can be understood as a commodity whose production and consumption patterns have been directly shaped by coloniality of power, from Spanish colonial rule to US imperial hegemony.

The colonial matrix of power has always been and continues to be articulated through a global economic order. This order prioritized the needs and desires of Europe and now the US at the expense of the sovereignty of the peoples of Latin America. These people's livelihoods and economic positions are shaped by the colonialist economic order which positions these people to be particularly open to a perspective of the world from the view of coloniality.

It is important to know the history of coca in order to understand what it means that Bolivia elected an indigenous coca farmer to the presidency (and by a rare majority of the popular vote). A vote for Evo Morales was framed by his campaign, and understood by many in Bolivia, as a vote from the perspective of coloniality. To side with the coca grower was to

side against US imperialist and economic control. To side with the indigenous leader was to side against a history of colonization, which had for hundreds of years kept an indigenous person from the highest position of power over the most indigenous state in all of the Americas. The 2006 election of Evo Morales to the presidency (by a rare majority of the popular vote) was partially an expression of Bolivian rage towards colonialism and US imperialism. An anecdote recorded in Time Magazine<sup>25</sup> demonstrates the phenomena concretely:

In 2002, when the former coca farmer first ran for President, the US Ambassador to Bolivia at the time, Manuel Rocha made an off-the-cuff threat that Washington would withdraw millions of aid dollars should Morales win. Morales was an underdog at the time, but the threat drove his numbers through the roof – such is the anti-Yanqui sentiment in Bolivia. (Time 2008)

Rocha's influence on the election was not simply a US media fabrication. At the time Morales referred to Rocha as his best "campaign manager" (time 2008).

### **Decolonization in Morales-Era Bolivia**

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<sup>25</sup> Not coincidentally this quote ran in an article on U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia Philip S. Goldberg's expulsion from Bolivia in 2008. President Morales cited a U.S. attempt to overthrow his administration as cause for the expulsion. "Such is the anti-Yanqui sentiment in Bolivia," indeed.

The day before Morales' official inauguration, hundreds gathered at Tiawanaku, a pre-Colombian ruin often referred to "as the cradle of Andean life," to hear his acceptance speech. In it Morales made clear that he was not simply the first indigenous keeper of the country's status quo. Instead Morales declared that, "'for the first time in Bolivian history Aymaras, Quechuas, Moxeños are all president,'" referring to a few of Bolivia's many indigenous groups and invoking a "specific highland indigenous notion of participatory democracy" (Schiwy 2011, 729). In this moment, decolonization, recognized by the Morales administration as the struggle against "ongoing racial discrimination along with economic exploitation and the corresponding dismissal of indigenous and working-class political thought," became an institutionalized project, moving from the margins of socio-political agitation to the center of political power in Bolivia (731).

However in Evo-era Bolivia there is no absolute definition of decolonization. Instead the term functions as an ideological sign or "site of struggle," between a, "range of understandings" (Howard 177). In *Language, Signs, and the Performance of Power: The Discursive Struggle over Decolonization in the Bolivia of Evo Morales*, Rachel Howard explores language use, dress, and media coverage as different arenas within which this struggle takes place. Howard uses the term "performance of power," to illuminate the way choices in these arenas, "discursively constitute power" and fix various meanings to the term decolonization (178). For example, when Evo Morales and other national administrators wear indigenous

clothing to formal government events, their choice discursively constitutes power to fix 'decolonization' with the administration's meanings: "releasing colonized subjects from domination, injustice, and oppression," by bringing indigeneity into the political sphere, so long as doing so does not undermine other administrative goals, and without radically restructuring the Bolivian state (177). (Although Morales oversaw the writing of a new constitution, the country still has national government officials, banks, money, a military etc. and is therefore not radically transformed.) While varying performances of power fix 'decolonization' with various meanings, so too do different decolonization projects. In Bolivia today, decolonization is expressed in many different projects and processes and understood in a number of different ways.

A number of articles explore this context and reflect the multiplicity of decolonization's meanings and practice in Bolivia. Rosaleen Howard's (2010) *Language, Signs, and the Performance of Power: The Discursive Struggle over Decolonization in the Bolivia of Evo Morales* analyzes Evo's cultural performativity and the Bolivian mass media's reaction to these, thus showing that decolonization is a contested discursive space. Decolonization's meaning in Bolivia is not fixed and both Evo and the mass media struggle to control/solidify the term and determine what decolonizing practices in Bolivia will look like. Freya Schiwy's (2011) *Todos Somos Presidentes/We are all Presidents* explores decolonization's relation to democracy and communication in Bolivia. Here Schiwy asserts that democracy is being

redefined in Bolivia to incorporate anti-colonial conceptions of governance and that media plays a role in this redefinition. Schiwy's (2007) *Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity* presents media forms which grapple with this issue and add to what decolonization means in Bolivia. Andrew Cansessa's (2007) work, *Who Is Indigenous? Self-Identification, Indigeneity, And Claims to Justice In Contemporary Bolivia*, also addresses subjectivity and its role in decolonization. And lastly Benjamin Kohl's and Rosalind Bresnahan's (2010) *Bolivia Under Morales: Consolidating Power, Initiating Decolonization* provides important context as it explores Bolivia's political environment under Evo Morales. These articles highlight the multiplicity of meaning articulated in the term decolonization in contemporary Bolivia and identify a number of discursive sites of struggle whereby the dominance of these meanings is contested. Each article, with the exception of the Kohl and Bresnahan piece, mentions the use of media to engage in or undermine various contemporary Bolivian decolonization projects.

Within this literature, and informed by my time spent in the country, I've identified three spheres of decolonization which are given the most attention, both in Bolivia and by Western academia, and which I believe exert the most influence on the Bolivian national decolonial consciousness.

Institutional decolonization is the decolonization project put forth by Morales and his administration, intellectual decolonization refers to the decolonization of knowledge and methodology which is not exclusive to but

concentrated in institutions of higher education, and indigenous decolonization which focus on indigenous rights and sovereignty.

### **Institutionalized Decolonization**

Perhaps the most contentious, the most fraught with internal conflict, institutionalized decolonization has the strongest hold on the Bolivian decolonial imaginary. By this I don't mean that the Bolivian people Morales' are more loyal to or invested in Morales' ideas of decolonization over others, but that when one thinks of decolonization in Bolivia the vast majority of people (both inside and outside of Bolivia) will think of Evo Morales. I discussed above the meanings fixed to decolonization when Evo wears indigenous clothing, but Howard also discuss the president's use of language as a constitutive discursive practice. Morales speaks Spanish exclusively in the public sphere, which has prompted criticism from indigenous groups, but which he has defended as a "centralizing" tactic (181). As a result, in this instance of an institutionalized decolonization project, decolonization is fixed with yet another meaning: it has a place but does not always serve as the centralizing force uniting the Bolivian people; therefore there are other concerns, imaginaries of belonging unifying the country. The Bolivian state, although now a multi-national, multi-cultural, decolonizing state, exists at least partially outside of decolonization. Alternatively, this instance can be read as another example that decolonization is understood as a productive

move forward rather than a move to uncritically/impractically revert to pre-Columbian life for all of Bolivia.

Institutional decolonization is fraught with internal tension. This is apparent in the non-radical although decolonizing mentality behind Evo's administration and the tensions surrounding language use. This idea is best demonstrated by a phrase by Canessa that, "one of the sources of Morales' legitimacy is his ability to speak for the indigenous people of Bolivia" (156). As discussed above, the indigenous peoples of Bolivia constitute a heterogeneous group. This identity is fluid and ever more so since Evo's election. To follow this thought to its logical conclusion brings up a formidable question. Does the institutionalization of a decolonization project, its situation in a place of hegemonic power (the presidency of Bolivia), undermine the nature of the project itself? Can Evo speak for the indigenous of Bolivia? And even if he can, a number of decolonization meanings and projects exist outside of this interaction. Such questions must be dealt with in an expansion of this topic.

### **Intellectual Decolonization**

Howard identifies intellectual decolonization with theorists like Silvia Rivera and Esteban Ticona and understands the project as, "shifting the epistemological center, allowing new forms of knowledge to evolve and be recognized – a kind of decolonization of the mind" (177). This decolonization project resonates with representations of decolonization in both Schiwy



articles. The first, *Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity* discusses Nelly Richard's critique of the geopolitics of knowledge. Richard challenges Northern academics who "disdain the theory produced in the South in favor of cultural manifestations to be theorized," and defends the idea that the process of theorizing should not be abstracted from particular lived experiences (Schiwy 2007, 277). Richard would find corporal decolonization to be a viable decolonization project because it both presents new ways of thinking and is responsive to the oppressive experiences of real people. This idea speaks to the larger project of *Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity* which is to expand decolonization's reach to address feminist issues.

In *Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity* Schiwy, affirms that gender "is an inseparable part of the casting of subjectivity through the colonality of power," and explores methods of deconstructing gender as a means to further decolonization (271). The piece examines the work of Nelly Richards (discussed above), *Mujeres Creando* a queer feminist street performance group, and a film produced by a rural indigenous collective. Schiwy explains how *Mujeres Creando* undermines the Andean paradigm of gender duality before tying this duality to the process of decolonization practiced by CAIB-CEFREC, an indigenous video organization. The video analyzed in the piece depicts a non-Western conception of gender (complementary and reciprocal) and of video production and distribution (likewise predicated on reciprocity rather than market logics) (284). In this

way the video provides an indigenous epistemology for understanding gender and video production/distribution but fails to recognize gender as a variable construct and relies on essentialist conceptions of gender to carry its narrative structure (283-4). In spite of this short coming, the piece works to decolonize knowledge by presenting viewers with non-Western methods for comprehending gender. Both Howard and Schiwy understand intellectual decolonization as a productive move forward to new understandings and not simply a reductive retreat to pre-colonial understandings of the world (Schiwy 2011, 738).

### **Indigenous Decolonization**

The third decolonizing project is indigenous decolonization which Howard connects to “ideological radicalism” which seeks *pachakuti* (a Quechua term for world turning, or radical revolution). While it may seem that electing the first indigenous president office would equate indigenous decolonization with institutionalized decolonization, in fact, as Kohl and Bresnahan point out, “the agenda of Morales can be seen as in opposition to that of the indigenous groups” since Morales’ goal is to build a nation-state instead of “seeking a radical transformation of the state”(8). Further, indigenous decolonization would vary greatly depending on the indigenous group/person and their context. For example, while the new constitution protects the privileges of a “largely Aymara-derived collective indigenous

subject," it fails to recognize or provide for a "growing population of urban indigenous groups whose identities are more complex and fluid" (11).

In a final addition of complexity to the indigenous decolonization project, Andrew Canessa in his piece *Who Is Indigenous? Self-Identification, Indigeneity, And Claims to Justice In Contemporary Bolivia*, discusses the fact that a majority of Bolivia's public identifies as indigenous, although a significant portion of these neither live in rural collectively held lands nor speak an indigenous language (157). Canessa's piece explores the fluid nature of indigenous self-identification or non-identification in Evo-era Bolivia noting an "indigenous awakening" marked by the increased socio-political utility of indigenous identification and surge of indigenous cultural pride. The meanings of indigeneity in Bolivia are changing, so that, so too are meanings of decolonization.

In contemporary Bolivia, decolonization is a very active discursive field; talking about decolonization in Bolivia is not out of the ordinary. In addition, decolonization in Bolivia has multiple and ever changing meanings; little about it is common sense. Questions like what decolonization should do, whom it should engage, and why Bolivia needs decolonization, are all viable (they are reasonable things to ask) and contentious (their answers are not generally agreed upon). Consequently, theorists of all kinds have the discursive space to engage in innovative thought, just as Bolivians has discursive 'room' to understand a number of decolonial projects.

This literature legitimizes a space for grassroots decolonization theorizing as part of the multiple on-going decolonizing projects. Since coloniality of power is a complex matrix of intersecting power relations, any person's or community's position within this matrix impacts their experience such that any number of experiences of the coloniality of power exist at any time. As a result different people and communities may have different particular interests within the larger shared interest of subverting the coloniality of power. The most prominent fields of decolonization in Bolivia address and engage supporters of Evo Morales; those (usually academics) working to articulate new decolonial epistemes, methodologies, and socio-political theories; or those involved in indigenous rights movements. Some Bolivians' decolonial interests are not addressed by any of these three fields. Consequently, in order for decolonization to transform Bolivia into a pluricultural decolonial nation free of colonialist forms of oppression, there must exist in Bolivia other fields of decolonization. One such field should be grass-roots decolonization which addresses indigeneity but is not focused on indigenous rights<sup>26</sup>. This is precisely the type of decolonization work COMPA does through corporal decolonization and their community art programs.

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<sup>26</sup> While the majority of Bolivians identify as indigenous, most do not qualify for state recognized 'indigenous rights' (Gutiérrez interview). For example, El Alto's population is the largest, most dense population of indigenous identifies peoples in the Americas. However, because these people have moved off of their ancestral lands and communities, most are no longer afforded their indigenous rights. This is due partly to the fact that many of the indigenous rights respected by the state are collective rights (Gutiérrez interview).

While corporal decolonization is a testament to decolonial work happening in Bolivia before Morale's election (which made that election possible), Morales' election to the presidency constituted a significant change in the coloniality of power in Bolivia. The increased contestation of decolonization's meaning since the early 2000s reflects the more central position decolonization has assumed in the Bolivian social imaginary.

### **Decolonization and the Social Imaginary**

In her 2012 work *Media Representation and the Global Imaginary*, Shani Orgad develops her idea of the global imaginary which is useful for understanding decolonization as collective consciousness. The global imagination "refers to both the faculty to and process of forming mental images and concepts of the world, and of ourselves and others as traversing this global social space" (51). As "places, people, and cultures become increasingly part of an imagined space, within which they live side by side," a global imaginary is produced (50). Orgad's concept of the global imaginary expands Charles Taylor's 2002 work "Modern Social Imaginaries".

In this work, Taylor traces the European social imaginary that allowed for the rise of Western modernity. For Taylor a social imaginary encapsulates "the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 106). The social imaginary

is also constituted by a rough sense of history and the "big-picture" order of things that allow daily acts to have meaning (109). Rather than a set of ideas, the social imaginary "is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of society" (91). That being said then, a global (social) imaginary allows people to imagine how they fit together globally and provides a framework for understanding, or a rationalization of, why people think, act, and live the ways they do. A global imaginary makes sense of and enables the practices of a global society. Besides detailing the basis upon which Orgad's global imaginary is built, Taylor's work also gives an account of the assumptions and beliefs that underpinned both Western modernity and Western modernity's understanding of itself. I believe decolonization, decolonial methods of understanding history and the contemporary global order and intervening in that order, can be understood as another kind of global imaginary.

However the social imaginary, as theorized by Taylor, is constructed from the perspective of modernity. According to Taylor, the European social imaginary gave rise to Western modernity while other "divergent social imaginaries" gave rise to multiple other modernities (91). Taylor does not explain the relationships between European and non-European social imaginaries or Western modernity and other modernities. In fact he fails to acknowledge that these social imaginaries and modernities have any relationship with each other at all besides all being forms of modernity, as though modernity was always inevitable everywhere and the development of modernities around the world not inscribed in Eurocentric power relations.

The social imaginary, which Taylor argues allowed for the rise of Western modernity, was predicated on a moral reordering. This new moral order stressed "the rights and obligations that individuals have in regard to one another" and sought "certain common benefits, of which security is the most important" (93). Taylor doesn't talk about who was included in this moral order, the connection this inclusion/exclusion had to capital and power, or whose security was valued over others' vulnerability. This new moral order began as the postulations of a few men but then became ingrained in the social imaginary of the broader society (92). This social imaginary became the condition for the existence of Western modernity defined by Taylor as "that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices of institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, and urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality), and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution)" (91).

I believe decolonization is a form of global imaginary that takes the perspective of coloniality (rather than modernity) and sees modernity for all that it was. For example, Walter Dignolo might argue that in a list of modernity's new practices and institutional forms, Taylor left off colonization and racial division of labor, ignored colonizer and colonized as new forms of living without which modernity could not exist, and forgot incalculable cultural loss, genocide, and colonial suffering as modern forms of malaise. Given that imagination provides both a sense of how things are and how

things should be, decolonization as a global imaginary understands the world and how it should be and imagines how the world could be from a non-Eurocentric viewpoint and with the understanding that coloniality is constitutive of modernity (Orgad 45).

### **Representation and the Decolonial Social Imaginary**

The global imaginary thus claimed for the purposes of decolonization, I turn to the representation's role in producing the social imaginary. Orgad links Charles Taylor's notion of the social imaginary to media representation, noting, "media representations are fundamental resources and facilitators of this collective imagining" (3). She goes on to note that "media transform imagination into the property of the collective" and that local imaginings, the process whereby global phenomena are translated and understood in local terms, increasingly occur in mediated spaces (43-4). As we know from Stuart Hall "representation through language is central to the process by which meaning is produced" (1). Language here is understood broadly as any representational system. Orgad's connection between social imaginary and representation makes sense since "in part, we give things meaning by how we represent them" (3). In other words, our social imaginary, which gives us a sense of understanding of our relationships to others and our function in society, is partially produced by representation. However it is important to note that the form of a representation (the signifier) and the meaning it produces (the signified) are not inherently linked to one another (Hall 21).



Therefore the meanings of a representation can change and be multiple at any one time.

It is for precisely this reason that Orgad can write that media representation “constitute a site for the struggle and subversion of power relations” but also “legitimize discourses, inscribing them in the mainstream, the acceptable, the legitimate ‘regime of meaning’” (46). According to Michel Foucault, the productive flows of power are never fully fixed and thus media representation becomes a site on which power can be contested or exercised in non-normative ways. This is why decolonial media representations can exist. But by the same token, media representations’ relation to resistance is not guaranteed, and in fact I would argue that most forms of media representation circulated in global society and used as a resource for the global imagination are complicit to the global hegemony of capitalist modern/coloniality. Not coincidentally, many of the discursive struggles over decolonization’s meaning in Bolivia are expressed in media.

In addition to institutional, intellectual, and indigenous influences on what decolonization in Bolivia means today, media and communication play a role in defining decolonization and forming decolonization projects. In her article *Todos Somos Presidentes*, Freya links communication, decolonization, and democracy together as three forces “profoundly reshape[ing] the relation between the social, the cultural, and the state,” in Bolivia (Schiwy 730). The piece quotes Bolivian political theorist and vice-president Eduardo Rodríguez echoing Hall and Foucault by stating that, “‘behind every word, every

discourse, there is a wordless war over establishing the dominant forms of meaning in the world” (731). Media representations of decolonization or that engage in decolonization projects give this wordless war form and tangibility.

For example, the Bolivian legacy media (mainstream, privately owned news print and media) attempt to redefine decolonization as, “disrespect for non-indigenous cultures,” and undermine the understanding of decolonization as a productive, rather than reductive and regressive, project. These media representations also attempt to undermine Evo Morales and his administration’s institutional decolonization project by implying Morales is a hypocrite for speaking Spanish, using cell phones, etc. (Howard 186). In a similar vein radio and television channels covering the constituent assembly, a process whereby indigenous groups participated in a national project to an unprecedented degree, focused on indigenous displays that were framed as inappropriate for a formal governing setting (Howard 187). These representations of indigeneity and decolonization attempt to undermine a social imaginary from the perspective of coloniality by associating decolonization with ignorance, backwardness, and poverty. The decolonial social imaginary is represented as a foolish way of understanding the world. However legacy media were not the only media engaged in the discursive project of assigning decolonization its connotative meanings.

Community media forms engage in the new decolonizing democracy by asserting that decolonization can have a productive use in Bolivia. Such

media include CAID-CEFREC indigenous video and *Mujeres Creando* street performance and graffiti. CAID-CEFREC videos produce representations of decolonization and a decolonizing project by using indigenous participant, and modes of production like reciprocity and collective ownership. Graffiti and street performances by *Mujeres Creando* illuminate the relationship between colonialism and gender construction and struggle to bring these issues into Bolivian discourse on decolonization. These media act as additional processes which limit the range of understanding decolonization can provide in an Evo-era Bolivia.

Foucault's notion of the discursive formations refers to the "rules and practices which shape and govern what is sayable and knowable in any historical moment" (302). Decolonization as a global imaginary allows us to think and know things (and imagine possible lives) that are not possible from within a global imaginary from the perspective of modernity. For example, corporal decolonization provides new principle and practices by which to speak about and know the body's relation to the mind, to history, to other bodies, to capital, to geography, and to modernity/coloniality.

### **Radio Trono and Decolonization**

COMPA began working with radio in 2007 by offering radio production classes to the children and youth involved in COMPA's theater

program in an effort to record their stories (Fernández interview). Since they didn't have an antenna to transmit their programming, once the programs were complete they were played at COMPA gatherings, copies were given to the youth, and occasionally COMPA would set up dance party speakers in the street and play their shows for passers-by. Two years after that, Ivan Nogales traveled to Chicago where he was introduced to the organization *Radios Populares* (Nogales interview). *Radio Populares'* mission is to help found community radio stations in all regions of Latin America. Their blog states:

Our work is grounded in a solidarity model which builds alliances between our radio collective as well as other media activists and community organizations on the front lines of the social justice movement. We are guided by the belief that community ownership and access to media and control over media content are not only essential to achieving media justice but are also invaluable to the larger social justice movement.

Once Ivan introduced the organization to COMPA, corporal decolonization, and the work they were already doing with radio, the volunteers at Radio Populares were excited to get an antenna to El Alto. For the next several months Radio Populares fundraised and obtained the necessary equipment. Then in late 2009 two volunteers from Radio Populares traveled to El Alto with antenna and equipment in tow. The volunteers, installed the antenna and recording and editing equipment, helped construct the recording studio out of wood and foam, and helped put everything in order (Fernández

interview). The first few programs recorded on the new equipment were recorded with the help of volunteers who gave lesson on how to use the equipment and on the different forms of radio programs. After a few months COMPA unveiled their officially registered 24/7 community radio station at a neighborhood block party (Nogales interview). A few months after the opening Daniel Fernández and Edwin Gutiérrez, college student's studying radio and TV production in La Paz, came to work for Radio Trono.

COMPA is very committed to running their station on a participatory community media making model and wants the radio to serve as "a voice of our collective, to share with that other collective constituted by the surrounding community" (Nogales Interview). Many in COMPA consider radio a particularly well-suited media form with which to engage community members. Both Fernández and Gutiérrez believe the radio is an especially democratic medium since a radio is cheap, one can listen to the radio while continuing to work, and literacy is not required to understand the content. This is especially important as the radio reaches out to citizens of El Alto, the vast majority of whom are working class, and many of whom either cannot read at all or cannot read in Spanish.

In the 1980s and 1990s El Alto experienced intense urbanization, becoming one of Latin America's fastest growing cities and booming to over 1.18 million inhabitants in 2010 (Lazar 3). Over 74% of El Alto's population identifies as indigenous while 75% of the city is under the age of thirty (Lazar 2, Nogales interview). El Alto is home to the largest, most dense population of

indigenous people in the Americas and quite possibly the world. Nogales believes the city's young population, indigeniety, and poverty prompt it to be Bolivia's most rebellious city (Nogales interview). In reference to the organizing and political movement that transformed Evo Morales from a coca union leader into the President, Nogales says "all of the most profound changes in our country over the last decade have El Alto to thank as the flag bearers, as the point of the lance" (Nogales interview).

This is the community Radio Trono engages in community radio production. Fernández and Gutiérrez each hold free weekly radio classes for children, and youth and adults (Gutiérrez interview). They also do weekly radio trainings at local elementary schools. In addition they sometimes do short "crash-course" type classes for parents who are interested in radio but don't have the time to take a full course. At each level of radio classes, Daniel and Edwin teach radio basics like how to speak into a microphone and construct a radio drama and ensure that participants always finish the course having contributed to a completed radio program that goes on air. At the higher levels of instruction Fernández and Gutiérrez engage participants in discussions on the value of producing substantive content that serves the community rather than producing commercialized content that's only purpose is to make money (Fernández interview).

As an educative community radio, Radio Trono transmits material that is relevant to the community and which fulfills a social need (Fernández interview). On the educative side of things Radio Trono produces educational

shorts which air several times a day and address both corporal decolonization and issues of gender, environmental justice, children's and youth rights, sustainable development, and leadership. Further, the radio transmits a number of weekly live and pre-recorded full-length programs that often include a educational element (Fernández interview). *Vivir Recordando* for example uses a portion of its show to educate youth on vocational options, while *DJ Tutlio*, a satirical talk show, engages the community in political discussion. In an effort to fulfill a social need, Radio Trono freely records and transmits music by local bands, giving them exposure that would be otherwise extremely expensive to attain. The radio also broadcasts genres of music from all over the world that would be difficult to hear elsewhere. Radio Trono also airs "commercials" advertising community events (Fernández interview). The music broadcast by the station reflects a greater diversity than the music on commercial and government station's. In addition much of this music is music of resistance and protest for all across Latin America. This music educates the public on the many region's many histories of resistance. As a result of the educational and social commitment, Radio Trono's broadcasts serve to empower the surrounding community by keeping community member informed on local happenings, exposed to local cultural productions, and educated on issues which impact their lives. This overview of Radio Trono's history and work with the community will ground an evaluation of the utility of the public sphere and community media for the work of decolonization.

Media studies often theorize the benefits of community media as they align with the needs of democracy. To this end, these theories focus on the role community radio can play in maintaining a healthy public sphere. My aim here however is to evaluate the benefits of community media as they align with decolonization generally, and corporal decolonization specifically. While decolonization and democracy are not mutually exclusive, neither are they identical. One significant difference between the two is that democracy and theories on the public sphere have historically been theorized and advocated for from a perspective of modernity, while decolonization requires a democracy theorized from the perspective of coloniality.

### **The Public Sphere and Counterpublics**

Habermas' public sphere and the theoretical interventions made by media scholars around this term justify the need for community media in increasingly privatized media environments. For Habermas the public sphere is, "an arena distinct from the institutions and operations of the state, the market economy, and the domestic sphere of the home, where private individuals constitute themselves as public" (Howley 2012, 1). Within this sphere, members of the public engage in rational critical debate for political discussion and democratic decision making. To this end the public sphere underlines the important relationship between democracy and communication systems: for the public to engage in rational critical debate they must be well informed (4). It is the duty the communication system to



offer members of the public multiple sources of quality information. This information may be either descriptive and 'unbiased' or analytical and from an argumentative stance but both types of information must be available (4).

A number of critiques to Habermas' original theory complicate and expand the notion of the public sphere making it more useful for media scholarship. Habermas overstates universal access to the public sphere; this space was actually exclusive and operated under normative power dynamics so that white bourgeois men enjoyed easiest access to the public sphere and constituted a disproportionate amount of it (Howley 2012, 4). A number of theorists argue instead that we understand the public sphere as multiple and overlapping (Fraser 1992; Meadows 2005). In addition Habermas argued that individuals entering the public sphere should "abandon their self-interest" and strive for face-to-face communication. In contrast Howley finds that bringing self-interest into the public sphere increases the diversity of voices and perspectives needed to make informed decisions. Moreover, the emphasis on face-to-face communication is antiquated. Instead Howley asserts the "indispensable role" mass media play in contemporary democracies, arguing that public discourse is "mediated within and through print, visual and electronic media" (5). Given these modifications, the public sphere serves as a useful conceptual framework by which to evaluate democratic media systems. However, Western modernity is characterized by

"certain social forms" and the public sphere is one of these<sup>27</sup> (Taylor 92).

Since coloniality is constitutive of modernity, I want to critically investigate the potential of working within the public sphere (a social form of modernity/coloniality) to undermine or challenge modernity/coloniality. To this end I've begun working with Michael Warner's (2002) "Publics and Counterpublics".

Building on Nancy Fraser's idea of "subaltern counterpublics," Warner finds that the counterpublic is an oppositional space "structured by different dispositions or protocol" and wherein the counterpublic makes "different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying" than the dominant public sphere. Unlike Fraser, for Warner the term dominant is more important to understanding the counterpublic than the term oppositional. Habermas' original conceptualization of the public sphere accounts for, and is predicated on opposition and contention, however Warner's contribution to an understanding of what makes a counterpublic different from the public is that the counterpublic "maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status," to the normative public (86). The counterpublic is aware of its marginalized position in relation to the normative public.

I propose that a decolonial global imaginary affirms the marginality of a perspective from coloniality in relation to the colonial matrix of power.

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<sup>27</sup> As are racial division of labor, a global capitalist order, and Eurocentrism, as previously established.

Decolonization work must simultaneously refuse the colonial order of power and invent new ways of existing in the world. Refusal of the colonality of power requires a knowledge of the colonality of power. For example, the six principles of corporal decolonization reflect a clear and nuanced understanding of colonality's impact on the body, the self, and the collective. In response the principals offer interventions for the body, new ways of being, in an effort to disrupt and alter the colonality of power. The decolonial response (new ways of being) is predicated on the knowledge of the workings of colonality. Knowledge of colonality, since colonality is a system of domination, always also implies a knowledge of the colonized's marginalized position within the colonial matrix of power. In other words, those who engage in decolonization are always aware that they act in opposition to the colonial matrix of power and from a marginalized position within that matrix. The decolonial public is a counterpublic.

When I asked students and volunteers at Radio Trono about the value of a community radio station, almost all of them connected a station's value to its engagement with a public. Julia, a young woman taking a radio class, told me that, "community radio transmit the experiences of the people, what has been lived, customs and livelihoods. It can also be used to overcome taboo, so that the public connects better with new information because the radio personalities are familiar" (Choquewanka interview). In this comment the radio's value is conceptualized in terms of its ability to circulate information amongst a public. Cafu, a member of COMPA who produces a

show on the Beatles for Radio Trono, mentioned that, "if you share the talent you have the people [via the radio] little by little they'll gather together. In this way you'll generate another type of encounter, a more intimate one" (Cafu interview). Cafu relates the radio's ability to generate a public, not just share information with an existing one. According to Cafu, the radio allows otherwise unrelated people to share something in common and over time produces encounters and interactions between members of this public. These comments are representative of the ways Radio Trono's relation to those outside the station were understood. It seems that although the public sphere is an invention of modernity/coloniality, those involved in Radio Trono find it a useful framework for understanding the work the station does. However, since Radio Trono engages in decolonization work, the station generates and supports a counterpublic sphere.

### **Radio Trono and Corporal Decolonization**

Since Radio Trono contributes to a counterpublic sphere, a notion not entirely divorced from the public sphere, I explore the station's contribution to this counterpublic in much the same way I would for any community media. The exception here is that contributions which would normally be made to the public sphere are made to a counterpublic. In review of the literature exploring the value of community media I found that community media support an effective public sphere by supporting personal development, community empowerment, and a more democratized media

system. Interestingly, these contributions align in many ways with the principles of corporal decolonization. The following section incorporates field observations and interviews from my time with COMPA and analysis of a few radio programs to identify the way Radio Trono's contributions to a counterpublic further corporal decolonization.

Community media contribute to the public sphere through personal development or the capacity building process whereby community members are prepared to engage in the public sphere. These processes intervene in political and social systems that repress particular voices and communities. To this end community media focuses on giving training and access to media equipment to groups who otherwise would not have this access (Milan 600). Community media then encourage those ignored by mainstream media to speak for themselves and be listened to (600). For many, community media is a tool used to share "concerns, expression, and imaginings" (606). The experience of being listened to is two-fold since participants are listened to throughout the media making process as they direct the focus and form of their media as well as afterwards as others listen to and engage the finished product.

In the case of Radio Trono, providing the people of El Alto access to community media intervenes in the coloniality of power that works to repress the voices of the poor and indigenous. Radio Trono exists precisely to promote the stories and experiences and imaginings of the ignored. This mission aligns with corporal decolonization's principle 'migrate to your own

center' by refusing Western-centrism and acknowledging the value of local culture and the personal experiences of the people of El Alto.

In addition, in each radio class the station offers students must work collaboratively to write and produce a radio program. For the children's classes this results in an episode of *Gritos al Cielo* (Shouts to the Sky). The show is by kids for kids and episodes themes have included the environment, solidarity, family rights, freedom of speech, right to life and family, children's rights, human rights, and gender equality. The students, even the very young ones, work together to pick the theme and control every aspect of the program. In this process they must listen to one another and experience being listened to. As a result the class functions to promote anti-domination, another principle of corporal decolonization. Edwin Gutiérrez and Daniel Fernández facilitate the classes to ensure that no one student or faction of students imposes their will upon the group. Likewise Gutiérrez and Fernández make suggestions and encourage the students to produce programs that reflect critical thinking and innovative use of radio techniques but do not control any aspect of the program.

Each episode begins with an opening musical theme in which the voices of many children saying "gritos al cielo" sporadically before they yell the title in unison and lays this recording over acoustic guitar. The next minute to two minutes are spent introducing the topic and defining terms which some children may not know. There is no narrator or host and introductions are generally presented in the form of multi-person

conversations. When a child is not speaking their line they are responsible for helping to make any needed sound effects. After the introduction the next several minutes are a radio drama which explores the topic. For the episode on freedom of speech the drama was set in a jungle where the king tiger would not allow any of the other animals to make noise. In the face of adversity some of the animals left while others simply kept quiet. Eventually this quality of life became unacceptable and the animals all joined together and made noise as loud as they could and went to confront the lion. The lion is scared away from the jungle and the animals live free to express themselves however they choose. The narrative arc of the story skillfully presents principles of anti-domination, relational existence when the animals act collectively, and bodies without fear in a manner accessible to children.

Formal elements of the drama reflect the same principles since no one character/voice actor is singled out as the star of the drama, the characters often speak in unison, several different voices narrate the action, and everyone makes sound effects. Because no one student could produce a show by themselves this project encourages students to realize their relational existence as they work together in a collective. These classes engage the student in corporal decolonization while helping them develop useful skills like teamwork and public speaking.

Community media also contribute to community members' self-development by providing members with enough media access, training, and support to allow them to "move on . . . and gain employment elsewhere" as a

media producer (Howley 18). Several of the students who attend the radio classes have gone on to produce their own show for Radio Trono. In one case a student who, "when he first came here was so shy you could hardly hear him talk," went on after completing the course to host his own show on a commercial station (Fernández interview). For this student, and others who are at first hesitant to speak publicly, working with Radio Trono is an exercise in over-coming fear, an endeavor aligned with the principle of bodies without fear.

Community media contribute to the counterpublic sphere through community empowerment which strengthens the bonds of communication within the community, a necessary condition for engaging in meaningful dialogue. Because community media "decentralize and diversify cultural production," they foster communication between community members and provide a space to share knowledge that might be useful for everyone but not spread through commercial media (Howley 16). To this end Radio Trono interviews local artist on air, play local music, and share announcements of on-going events to the community. When the taxi drivers in the area went on strike they aired their demands on Radio Trono (Fernández interview). A few days later community members aired their own response. Over the next week or so, the two sides communicated with one another via radio announcements and eventually resolved the issue in a compromise, "that everyone seemed happy with, which rarely happens" (Fernández interview).



In this case community members came to Radio Trono and used this resource as a tool to mediate conflict and strengthen the community.

Community media also play a role in “reflecting and constructing local culture,” “fostering and consolidating a sense of place,” and can serve as an educational resource on a variety of issues (Gaynor 439, Milan 600). They combat “historical amnesia” by preserving local histories and consequently advancing “the cause of social and economic justice locally as well as globally, and [helping] promote a sense of belonging and solidarity within and between geographical communities” (Howley 16).

Many programs aired on Radio Trono contribute to the decolonial counterpublic in at least one of these ways. The historical documentary *Hijos de la Mina* explores the history of the mining industry and its influence on the national identity. Episodes for the series have covered accidents in the mines, labor organizing, women’s roles in the mining industry, cultural celebrations of mining communities, and games the children of miners played growing up. The breadth of topics fights historic amnesia by refusing a simplistic narrative of what life working in the mines was like or what the mines meant to the miners and to Bolivia. In fact the series was produced in an effort to link El Alto’s younger generations to the lived experience of their parents and grandparents who migrated to El Alto when the mining industry collapsed (Gutiérrez interview). Every episode interviews one or more peoples whose lives once to revolved around mining. The opening musical theme and much of the background music feature sounds of the *charango*, a small stringed

instrument popular in the Aymara communities of Bolivia. Musical transitions between narration and interviews use panpipes and acoustic guitar. These musical cues evoke a strong sense of place, while the content ground the programs in historical context. The program strongly fosters 'migration to your center' by focusing on rich history of the local community. This program also contributes to cohesion and further strengthens the community by bridging the generational gap.

Finally, community media contribute to the revitalization of the public sphere through the democratization of the communication system on which the public sphere is predicated and through which it is mediated. In short, "community media democratize the structure and discursive practices of modern communication systems," and in so doing strengthen the public sphere (Howley 2012, 3). Radio Trono is the only non-governmental and non-commercial radio station in the area. As a community media, Radio Trono "plays a key role in promoting participation" in the (counter)public sphere (441). This broadening of participation, by bringing more people to the conversation, is complemented by the increasing depth of each person's knowledge as a result of community media's diversification of the available media, focus on local issues, and use of the radio as an educative tool. By supporting personal development, community empowerment, and the democratization of communication systems, community media supporting community members to be aware of their own agency, capable of working with one another and making decisions, and comfortable expressing

themselves and being listened to<sup>28</sup>. By fulfilling its role as a community media outlet, Radio Trono also works with the community to further corporal decolonization. While Radio Trono does a fine job using community media's strengths to further decolonization, it also overcomes community media's weaknesses.

The pair identify two challenges alternative community media face while trying to contribute to broad social change. The first is that relying solely on community media to bring about social change may actually result in fragmentation of the public sphere (143). By focusing solely on the local and not attempting to engage other media outlets in conversation and collaboration, community media undermine a viable counter public, dividing possible coalitions for social change into ineffective "individualistic spaces of withdrawal" (144). David Howely echoes this issue, pointing out that relying solely on community media to counter the shortcoming of commercial and state media results in "niche audiences" rather than an informed public sphere (2002, 2). It is important to remember that the public sphere functions at multiple levels of geographical scale and that often, broad

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<sup>28</sup> While community media can play a significant role strengthening the public sphere it does have its limits. Obviously participation in community media won't produce the same results in every participant. Likewise participants who are disenfranchised to varying degrees by systems of power and governance (For example, people of color, the poor, women, those differently abled, or any combination of these) might require more support and time participating in media making to realize their potential as community members to be able to fully participate in the public sphere. By the same token, participants endowed by systems of power and governance with various degrees of privilege may need more support and time learning to recognize privilege and how to enfranchise those not traditionally privileged. Community media are not the only key to ending inequality, but they can and do play a role in bringing community members to a state where they can participate in the public sphere.

coalitions are needed to protect the needs of the public or promote a viable movement for broad social change. Radio Trono's programs *Ritmos y Sabor de la Noche* and *¡Vamonos!* reflect the station's effort to reach beyond their immediate community and establish relationships with communities which are markedly different from El Alto.

*Ritmos y Sabor de la Noche* is the children's radio show produced by Radio Trono in the village of Mururata. COMPA acquired land adjacent to the village, located a few hours drive outside of El Alto, where they intend to build a decolonial commune. In an effort to establish a relationship with the nearby community, COMPA visits Mururata monthly and holds theater and radio workshops for the villagers. Due to the infrequency of the workshops the participatory process for *Ritmos y Sabor de la Noche* is less intensive than that used for *Gritos al Cielo*. However the children still choose the theme and generate the content for each episode. The episode "El Rey" focuses on the true story of the royal family of Mururata. As the program relates, the African slaves the Spanish colonizers brought to Mururata to work in agriculture were mostly from the same community. One of these slaves was the king of the community, however his identity was hidden from both the Spanish colonizers and Aymara serfs beside whom the slaves toiled. Over the generations the crown was passed down through the royal families matrilineal line. Once the Spanish were overthrown and the Aymara and now Afro-Bolivian communities learned to live together in harmony the king was revealed to the rest of the village. Today the King Juan Piñedo holds an

influential place in Mururata and its governing system. He is also the grandfather of a few of the children who participate in the radio workshops.

At the close of the program, the children narrate, "today is not like the past, we are all free and have the same rights. We can make a different future," before saying what they would like to be when they grow-up. Professions include a professional soccer player, architect, soldier, school teacher, and doctor. Similarly to Gritos al Cielo, the narration is shared between all of the children and speaking in unison for emphasis is common. The program's music includes African styles and styles traditional to the Aymara. The program's narrative focus and music choices reflect Mururata's multi-cultural history and reaffirms the 'migrate to your center' principle of corporal decolonization. The closing section of the program encourages the children to think of new ways of living that are unexpected from children of that region (most of the village works in agriculture, and has for centuries). In this way the project promotes a type of de-encampment by encouraging the children to live in new and unexpected ways. Meanwhile the radio workshops link Radio Trono to the community of Mururata and attempt to spread corporal decolonization and the benefits of community media beyond El Alto.

The program *Vamonos!* also links El Alto to distant and different communities. The program is hosted by volunteers Teo and Daisy young students of theater from France. A talk show, the program focuses on political current events in France and Bolivia and interviews the many international visitors COMPA receives to their headquarters throughout the year. Teo and

Daisy's analysis of French and Bolivia political event is explicit about the role of neoliberalism, racism, and xenophobia play in local and global politics. As such the program functions as a liberal articulation of the colonality of power, since it aims to connect systems of oppression in France and around the world to the Bolivian context. Interviews of international visitors make the community aware of the new visitors and focuses on how the visitors think Bolivia compares to their home country. These conversations are often focused on politics and social movements, reflect the belief that decolonization must involve those associated with the colonizer, and seek to illuminate a global order to the world's experiences.

Another challenge to alternative community media is an effective navigation of capitalism. While alternative community media, like Radio Trono, work against class inequalities created by contemporary capitalism, using a community model of media production doesn't inherently guard against the commodification of these productions. For example, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr user-generated material to turn a profit and reify contemporary capitalism. While this concerns Sandoval and Fuchs, the two warn against trying to avoid capital all together. Often alternative community media trade visibility and increased effectiveness in an effort to avoid engaging commodities and capital (143). Sandoval and Fuchs stress that no media outlet exists outside of capitalism and proposes the alternative community find a balance that allows them to struggle against oppression from within an oppressive system (144).

Just like the radio antennae and much of Radio Trono's recording and editing equipment was donated by a non-governmental organization from the United States, much of COMPA's resources and funding come from organizations from the United States and Europe (Nogales interview). Another significant portion of COMPA's funding is received through fund from entities interested in supporting art and culture in "developing countries" (Nogales interview). The theater troupe brings in some financing when it goes on tour in the U.S. or Europe. Most of these come from Europe. COMPA's director, Ivan Nogales acknowledges that "this is a colonial system," of staying afloat, but counters that COMPA has few other options for acquiring the resources they need. Nogales described a constant negotiation of balancing the partner NGO or grant requirements with COMPA's values and aspirations (Nogales interview). In spite of this financing system, COMPA has been able to do remarkable work in the arts and to further decolonization. Remarkably, COMPA has carved a space of hope within global capitalism and the colonality of power from which to struggle for decolonization.

## **Conclusion**

By incorporating corporal decolonization into the participatory media making process and the content aired on the radio, Radio Trono furthers decolonial work by hailing and supporting a anti-colonial counterpublic and fostering a decolonial global social imaginary. Corporal decolonization offers a meticulous understanding of the influences the colonality of power has on

the body. Using the body as the site of intervention keeps corporal decolonization connected to a material reality and ensures that the theory stay relevant to the people COMPA wishes to support in the decolonial process. While the body as inscribed into a material reality is also fluid, numerous expressions of the colonality of power effect the body's physical condition (i.e. the body is hungry, sick, tired, strong, enduring, etc.), and also the concept of the body and how it should be used and what it needs. The body is changeable and produces changes in the power systems that interact with the body. This malleability is the point of hope corporal decolonization focuses on.

Warm-up exercises used by Radio Trono, like yelling as loud as you possibly can, mirroring the actions of a partner, or walking across the room as slowly as you can<sup>29</sup>, prompts students to realize their physicality and how oppression shapes the body before facilitators ask them to imagine new ways of being in the body and in the world. Corporal decolonization uses the body to access the imaginations of participants and encourage them to envision decolonized ways of life.

The Bolivian context validates this practice. Decolonization is changing the ways Bolivian's imagine their country and assess what education, healthcare, the economy, etc., should be like. That Bolivian's talk about decolonization on the national stage means that the Bolivian national identity is increasingly tied to a decolonial consciousness. This consciousness

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<sup>29</sup> These and other exercises are described in Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*.



is an oppositional consciousness; it opposed the coloniality of power. In Bolivia a decolonial public sphere is coming into being. Radio Trono works to strengthen this sphere. The decolonial public sphere is fairly strong in El Alto, as noted by Ivan Nogales when he pointed out that El Alto was at the front of movements to elect Evo Morales to the presidency and write a new constitution (Nogales interview). However this sphere tends to coalesce and be most active in time of political tension (Nogales interview). COMPA and Radio Trono bring decolonization into daily life and target everyone from the very young to the elderly, where as, given the physical intensity of Bolivian protests, these groups might be excluded from expressing themselves in a decolonial public which only assembles in times of turbulence.

As a community media outlet, Radio Trono strengthens the counterpublic by empowering individuals to value their heritage and opinions, to exercise their agency, to work together as a community, to encourage a collective identity, and to diversify media available in the area. Because Radio Trono is committed not only to being a quality community radio but furthering corporal decolonization, the station's contributions to the counter public are contributions with further corporal decolonization. For examples, programs which focus on El Alto's culture affirm "migration to your center," the teamwork involved in producing a radio program affirms "relational existence," being in COMPA's beautiful headquarter to attend a radio class locates you in a "collective space of wellbeing," rearranging one's day to incorporate a visit to COMPA headquarters involves one in "de-

encampment," and exercise to practice speaking into a microphone are used to produce "bodies without fear/with souls." In this way Radio Trono offers the public new ways of thinking about the body and encourages them to imagine what a decolonial existence will be. Radio Trono manages to focus primarily on the experiences of the people of El Alto (and rightfully so) and support a decolonial global imaginary.

Radio Trono's working relationship with the village of Mururata, programs like *¡Vamonos!*<sup>30</sup> and *Los Beatles*, a program which explores the political tensions of "a beautiful era of resistance," via the Beatles discography, and music from all over the world broadcast by the station, encourages listeners and participants to think about resistance on a range of socio-geographic scales. At a minimum this practice encourages listeners and participants to be aware that Bolivia's political and social movements and economic realities are both unique to Bolivia (which has the world's only indigenous president) and part of a global system. At best, these practices foster a decolonial global imaginary. The programs illuminate the many ways resistance to oppression and the colonality of power take form across the globe and help link Radio Trono's local decolonization efforts to a transnational movements for change.

Radio Trono is an example of the elegant articulation of the local /global dialectic for the purposes of decolonization. This strengthens the

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<sup>30</sup>*¡Vamonos!* and on air news updates follow global environmental summits and movements against capitalism (discussing the Occupy movement was a favorite on air pastime of my friends at the radio).

station's resistance to the colonality of power and allows Radio Trono to encourage new imaginings for a decolonial world at multiple socio-geographic scales. Consequently, Radio Trono exemplifies the role a community media outlet can have in in decolonization.

## Methodological Appendix

In the Spring of 2012 I lived and studied in Bolivia with the SIT Study Abroad Cochabamba program entitled "Multiculturalism, Globalization, and Social Change." While I lived and attended classes in Cochabamba I also traveled to other Bolivian cities with the program. These visits were essentially multiple-day long guided city tours with some time for independent exploration. During the city tour of El Alto the group was introduced to COMPA. At COMPA Ivan Nogales, the collective's director, gave us a brief explanation of corporal decolonization before giving us a tour of the headquarters. I first learned of Radio Trono during this tour.

My study abroad program ended with each student conducting a month long independent study project of their own design. Because I am interested in decolonization and community media I called Nogales and asked if I could study with COMPA and make a documentary about the radio station. I moved into COMPA's headquarters at the beginning of April 2012 and lived there for a little over three weeks. Once I arrived, Nogales introduced me to Edwin Gutierrez and Daniel Fernandez, the two young men directly responsible for managing Radio Trono. These two helped me immensely. I spent my first days shadowing them and chatting with them about the radio. They identified and helped me connect with people they thought it would be useful for me to interview. My conversations with them, and latter their formal interviews, helped me learn which questions to ask about the radio and how to ask them.

Gutierrez's and Fernandez's interviews focused largely on the everyday workings of the radio and how they manage all of the radio's programming and classes. From these two I learned the services offered by Radio Trono and the daily challenges of running a community radio station. I also asked them about their most rewarding and discouraging experiences with Radio Trono and inquired after their notion of how Radio Trono engaged (or failed to engage) decolonization. The interviews were conducted at COMPA with each man individually. Interviews were filmed by me and conducted in Spanish.

After I conducted these interviews (latter on I would conduct follow-up interviews with Gutierrez and Fernandez) I began interviewing people who were taking radio classes or hosted their own show. I interviewed Don and Sra. Pinto of *Vivir Recordando!*, Teo and Daisy of *Vamonos!*, and Cafu of *Los Beatles*. I also interviewed four students who were taking radio classes at Radio Trono. I asked participants how they got involved with Radio Trono, why they were interested in radio, what they liked and disliked about working with a community radio, if and why they thought a community radio station was important to El Alto, and if and how Radio Trono engaged decolonization. Some of these interviews were conducted in pairs, all were conducted in Spanish, and all were filmed.

The last person I interviewed was Ivan Nogales. While most interviews lasted about half an hour, this interview took over an hour and a half. I spoke with Nogales about COMPA's history, the history and tenets of

corporal decolonization, and how he understood the radio to accomplish COMPA's goals in relation to decolonization.

When I wasn't conducting and filming formal interviews I filmed the radio classes and live radio production. I also learned to use some of the equipment and recorded a few jingles for the station. I left COMPA's headquarters to accompany Gutierrez on two school visits. I filmed these visits and helped Gutierrez facilitate a class on how to produce radio programming. I also left for one weekend to accompany Nogales and a few other members from COMPA on a visit to Mururata.

Besides on film, I also recorded my experiences in a journal keeping detailed descriptions of where I was and what I felt. I also kept a list and description of my contacts, a calendar, and a shot list which described every shot I took during this process. I cataloged the interview in this list but also worked to transcribe my interviews as I continued to film. The last week of my independent study period I moved back to Cochabamba to edit my documentary. Copies of the documentary were sent to COMPA and were well received by Nogales.

I was not with COMPA for very long. As a result most of my time there was spent learning what Radio Trono did and how rather than asking more critical questions or pressing my informants to speak about uncomfortable issues with regards to their experiences with the radio. This partially explains my enthusiasm for Radio Trono's work; I didn't spend long enough with the station to learn many of its challenges. I did note that while COMPA

as a whole enjoys an equal number of male and female members, Radio Trono was very heavily majority male. I asked Gutierrez and Fernandez about this in conversation but not formal interviews since I felt the goal of the film was to highlight the strengths of community radio. I have also noticed in my studies of Latin America that often academic studies represent the peoples of Latin America as a victims and nothing but.

In opposition to this I wanted my documentary and present work to reflect the strength, innovation, and sophisticated skill the people of COMPA and Radio Trono use to address injustice in their communities. Altogether these forces may have given me an overly-rosy colored view of Radio Trono. Although I would say that after conducting research on the subject of community radio's for a year since my time with COMPA, it would seem that Radio Trono is doing just about everything right.

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