

# Gifting Dependency: The Effects of Donations on Women and *Ayni* in Bolivian Mining Communities

by Natalie Kimball

## INTRODUCTION

Faith-based reciprocity, or *ayni*, forms an integral part of the culture of Bolivian mining communities. *Ayni* regulates the relationships that women in these communities share with their work, their neighbors, their friends, and with the deities they pay tribute. This reciprocity has its root in Quechua and Aymara religious and cultural beliefs but it can also be found in the local brand of Catholicism, which contains aspects of these indigenous cosmologies.

For the past several years, the United States government and the Programa Mundial de Alimentos (PMA) have donated thousands of metric tons of foodstuffs to Bolivia, mostly destined for women and children. Aid from the United States began in 1955 and from the PMA in 1964 and reached its peak in 1987 with 273,764.5 metric tons of food from both groups, including dairy products, a variety of grains, salt, sugar, and canned meats.<sup>1</sup> Since the early 1990s, food donations from all sources have been on a steady decline, and Bolivia is now near losing its designation as a priority country for nutritional aid. Although the Bolivian government welcomed these donations during their heyday and only once refused an offer of assistance,<sup>2</sup> several studies arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s documenting the unintended effects that this aid has had on its mostly female recipients. These were most notably a sense of dependence on foods and assistance from outside the country and a subsequent change in the eating habits of these women.<sup>3</sup> To remedy these ills, groups of women who accepted donated foodstuffs in partnership with women's and community-based organizations undertook productive projects to return the recipients to social actors rather than passive beneficiaries of aid. These efforts were largely successful in establishing stable local sources of food and restoring productive capacity to the people.

As in many poor countries, in Bolivia there are literally hundreds of different institutions that are dedicated to raising people's quality of life through projects in various areas from education to small loans or microfinance. Some of these institutions give out free materials to their students or even work in partnership with existing food aid programs, making donations of food to those who attend classes.

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This practice, though smaller in scale than the food donations of previous years and coupled with educational courses, reinforces patterns of dependency among the woman recipients, discourages the practice of *ayni*, and makes more difficult the work of those institutions that do operate within a framework of *ayni*. This is occurring for three reasons. First, the recipients are accepting things that they are not expected to return or reciprocate later, even when they are financially able to do so. Also, these institutions are encouraging and operating within a structure of gifting that is foreign to the local communities and in which everything necessary for the classes is brought in from outside. Finally, in some cases institutions are explicitly using gifting as an incentive to attend class.

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This paper will begin with a discussion of the practice, roots, and philosophy of *ayni* in Bolivian mining communities, with a focus on how women use *ayni* to relate to one another and to the world in which they live. The second section will outline the history and current state of food donations to Bolivia and will also examine assertions that these donations have created dependency among women recipients. This section will also deal with a few of the productive projects that were adopted by women's organizations to attempt to free recipients from this dependency. The body of the paper will look in depth at two institutions that are currently working in mining centers that are gifting educational materials and one of which is donating food through the PMA. One of these groups is an investment company from Bolivia called Cumbre del Sajama S.A. that buys mining cooperatives and teaches classes to cooperative members on conservation of the natural environment, civic education, and citizen participation. The other group is a non-profit, evangelical Protestant organization called Alfalit International that has its base in Miami, Florida, and conducts classes in literacy, math, and science, and that is also beginning to teach traditional medicine. I will attempt to show that despite the differences in the goals and structure of these two institutions, their practice of gifting materials reinforces dependency and discourages the use of *ayni* among their students and complicates the work of non-gifting organizations in the communities in which they work.

### **THE ROOTS OF *AYNI* AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN EVERYDAY**

Until recently, few workers in Bolivian mines were born in the communities where they work; they almost all came from the *campo*, or surrounding countryside, in villages of Quechua or Aymara origin. When these workers and their families move to the larger, more dynamic mining centers, they bring their religious and cultural beliefs with them, which mix with those of the local community. The principle of *ayni* is one that finds its origin in rural areas.

*The mining community depends on traditions inherited from the rural ayllus, or kin-defined local groups that were the basis of the pre-Hispanic Quechua culture, for accumulating capital or mobilizing assistance. These include the ayni [sic], or reciprocal exchange.... The ayni implies a sense of interest payment, since the person who lends money, goods, or services receives them twofold when they are returned.<sup>4</sup>*

Any person who accepts help or material goods from another in a mining district is expected to repay that when the borrower so requests. Such acceptance indicates that the two individuals have entered into a contract of *ayni* that is not complete until the debt is repaid, sometimes as late as fifty years later. If a person fails to keep their end of the bargain, they will never be invited into another *ayni* contract by anyone who is aware of the previous failure and their social relationship with their lender will also be broken.<sup>5</sup> Two people who are unrelated by blood that enter into a contract of *ayni* through lending assistance begin a relationship of social kinship that becomes solidified upon completion of the contract. Simply by being born, however, children also hold *ayni* contracts with their parents, which they are expected to repay when they are adults in the form of financial and emotional support. Relationships of reciprocity between blood relatives often move back and forth throughout their lives as they exchange assistance several times. Thus, children expect to be rewarded with inheritance for accompanying and helping their parents in their old age. One ex-miner I spoke with in the city of Potosí insisted that his life would have no meaning without the sacrifice that he had made for his children and the promise that this would pay off when they had reached adulthood.

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Women who are employed in the mining industry also use *ayni* to request assistance from deities in revealing the location of minerals and ensuring productivity. On specific days of the year, *palliris*—the women who work outdoors on the slag piles selecting mineral from loose rocks—will perform *ch'allas*, or blessings, of their work areas. With colored scraps of paper, candies, coca leaves, and pure alcohol, the *palliris* decorate the areas where they work in honor of the *Pachamama*, or female earth spirit, in hopes that she will reveal bits of mineral in the stones they break apart with hammers. If a *palliri* is having difficulty finding mineral in the rocks she is working, others will often suppose that she has not performed the *ch'alla* sufficiently, and that the *Pachamama* is angry. Accidents that occur on the slag piles, such as avalanches, are also attributed to the *Pachamama* and her dissatisfaction with the workers for their failure to compensate her adequately. Thus, the *ch'alla* operates as a sort of payment that the *palliris* extend to the *Pachamama* in exchange

for security and productivity in their work.

Alongside the pre-Columbian beliefs that miners hold in the *Pachamama* and other Andean deities, are Catholic beliefs that are also sometimes regulated by contracts of *ayni*. Most members of mining communities identify themselves as Catholic despite the contradictions that their faith in indigenous deities would seemingly present. People engage in reciprocal exchange with the Catholic god and saints through their participation in local festivals such as the *Carnaval* of Oruro, which requires a great expense of money, time, and energy. Thousands of people dance in *Carnaval* as a way of showing their devotion to the *Virgen del Socavón*, or the Virgin of the Mineshaft, patron saint of the miners of Oruro.<sup>6</sup> The route that the dancers follow begins near the outskirts of the city and stretches four kilometers to the *Iglesia del Socavón*, or Church of the Mineshaft, where the participants enter and pass in front of an image of the Virgin on their knees to thank her for allowing them to arrive there unharmed. Cecilia Molina, a woman who has danced for fourteen years in the *Carnaval* of Oruro, explained to me what happens when the dancers enter the church at the end of the route.

*There the priest is waiting for you to come in, recite the prayers, and you have to pass in front of the Virgin on your knees to thank her...for having allowed to arrive there without any problem, because...if something happens to you during the dance it's because you have not danced out of devotion for the Virgin...so the Virgin has not allowed you to finish....But if you arrive very well, then she has accepted you, she wants you to dance, she wants you to participate.<sup>7</sup>*

Similar to the *ch'alla*, the dance is a form of payment that participants offer up to the Virgin in exchange for her blessing and acceptance.

Some institutions that have emerged in mining centers to educate the people who live there have attempted to continue the tradition of reciprocal exchange in the methodology they employ in their classes and in their organizational structure. For the past twenty-five years, the secular, non-governmental organization Centro de Promoción Minera (CEPROMIN) has been teaching classes in literacy, traditional medicine, industrial security, and gender relations in various mining communities. In these classes, when a product such as a medicinal balm is developed, every member of the course contributes both materials and time to its creation. The students then sell these products in their communities and keep the proceeds for their own families. Upon completion of the classes, some of the students are trained as teachers to pass on the information they have learned to others at CEPROMIN's offices in the mining districts where they live as paid employees of the organization. In each of the communities where they have offices, CEPROMIN also maintains a library for public use and a health post for the men, women, and children who work in the mines. Because of the historical dependence of Bolivia and its citizens on more developed countries for economic, nutritional, and technical aid, CEPROMIN finds it especially important that its members acquire at least a basic level of education and financial independence. This objective is being sought through the

commercialization of products, the utilization of home health remedies, and literacy training, all of which are facilitated by members of the students' own communities.

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The presence of institutions that gift materials to their students in mining districts undermines the work of CEPROMIN and organizations like it that work within a structure of *ayni* while simultaneously reinforcing patterns of dependency among women in these communities. By making donations of food and materials to their students that they are not expected to reciprocate later, these institutions encourage a structure of gifting and discourage the continued use of *ayni* in mining districts. Because of the recent nature of this phenomenon and its small scale, few if any works have been written to document it, unlike the effects of the food donations that occurred in previous years. However, like the food donations, gifting materials to people in Bolivian mining communities, works against the local cultural principle of reciprocal exchange and contributes to the dependency of these individuals on outside sources of sustenance.

#### THE CASE OF FOOD DONATIONS

Although sales of food for credit from the United States of America to Bolivia began as early as the 1930s, food donations from that country did not begin to arrive until 1955, twelve years after the passage of Public Law 480 (PL-480) in the U.S. in 1943. There are three titles of the food aid law PL-480, which have directed different amounts and types of food assistance to Bolivia at different periods. Title I of the legislation is a continuation of the food sales on credit system from previous years; the only product it issues is wheat and has only been active in 1984-1985 and 1992-2000, although this title is still in effect today and could potentially extend further donations to Bolivia. The wheat and wheat flour sold on credit terms through Title I of PL-480 is purchased at very low interest rates that can be repaid as late as thirty years later. The recipients of the Title II donations, which have been issued every year since 1955 and vary from milk and cheese to vegetable oil, wheat, rice, salt, and sugar, are non-governmental organizations that later pass the food on to individuals through their various programs. Title III aid—which was exclusively wheat since its inception in 1978, except during 1983 and 1984, when rice was also included—was imported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Bolivia which later distributed it to other institutions to sell. The funds generated from these sales could only be used on development projects that would theoretically benefit the host country. Title III donations were discontinued after 1994.<sup>8</sup>

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The majority of the remainder of food aid to Bolivia has come from the Programa Mundial de Alimentos (PMA), which in 1964 began sending assistance to the country through the United Nations, of which the donating states were members. This program still works with Bolivia, though since the early 1990s the donations have steadily declined. The PMA sends the widest variety of products of all the donating organizations, including items such as tea, canned meats and fish, soup, noodles, and quinoa. Aid from this program is received by the Bolivian government through their Oficina Nacional de Asistencia Alimentaria (OFINAAL), which cooperates with several other institutions to distribute the goods to families.<sup>9</sup>

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Prior to 1978, the amount of food donations arriving in Bolivia from all sources was small and the annual growth rate was negligible; only during a few years did the quantity surpass 9,000 metric tons. Between 1978 and 1992, however, huge amounts of aid arrived yearly, most notably from the United States, whose portion of the total hovered around 88 percent. From 1977 to 1978 alone, food assistance grew by nearly 80,000 metric tons. Contrary to what might be expected, the growth in food aid over this period and the annual variations in quantities sent—which sometimes were extreme—had less to do with necessity in Bolivia than with availability and surplus in the donating countries.

*These variations...in the volume of the donations over the course of the years do not obey internal factors such as natural disasters or reductions in the national agricultural production, rather they obey the external availability of food that the donors have and which countries they designate as priorities, thus the recent and massive support being shown toward Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup>*

In addition to how much was sent, *what* was sent was also the decision of the donating countries, not of the recipients. For this reason, the largest amount by far of any food item sent between the years 1955 and 1992 was wheat, and 80 percent of the total donations were some kind of grain. Especially between 1980 and 1992, various industrialized countries had accumulated surplus wheat, and to protect their own farmers from price fluctuations much of this was donated, imported, or sold on credit to developing countries. In 1984 and 1985 alone, nearly 150,000 metric tons of wheat was sold to Bolivia on credit through Title I of PL-480. During the same period that these donations were sent, Bolivia produced over 50,000 metric tons yearly of wheat for domestic consumption.<sup>11</sup> This amount increased by three times in the next five years due to credits that the USAID put toward the production of wheat in the Santa Cruz department, and donations and imports of wheat and wheat flour did not decline. The result of these massive amounts of wheat and wheat products in Bolivia, in one author's words, is that Bolivia has become "... a country addicted to wheat with a higher consumption per capita than any other product."<sup>12</sup>

Lower income individuals consume most of these wheat products in the form of noodles and bread, which are foods that succeed only in filling the stomach and have very little nutritional value. Thus, not only have food donations negatively affected local eating habits, they have also made Bolivia dependent on wheat from abroad and on credits to foster the local production of wheat in order to support these altered eating habits.

Perhaps the most bizarre example of what foods donor countries have decided to send is the dehydrated products distributed in the Bolivian cities of La Paz and Potosí during the early 1990s that were leftover foodstuffs intended for United States soldiers during the Gulf War. It was the first time that Bolivians had seen produced dehydrated foods such as freeze-dried ice cream.<sup>13</sup> This odd choice of food aid brings to mind the stories of Pop Tarts and peanut butter that were dropped on the Afghan countryside following the U.S. invasion of 2002. It would seem that donors put very little thought into Bolivia's nutritional needs both in terms of how much they send and what items, let alone any possible cultural responses to the phenomenon of gifting. In fact, the current debate surrounding nutritional assistance to Bolivia deals with genetically modified foods that the United States is sending that have failed that country's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tests for consumption of the domestic population.

Who food donors target within a developing country as potential aid recipients makes a bit more sense. Food donation projects around the world have targeted women and children for a number of reasons. In areas of high poverty and malnourishment, women and children are usually disproportionately affected as a result of cultural norms that dictate that food should be provided first for grown men before other people within a family. Also, it has often been argued that women hold more control over food within their families than over money and thus prefer to be given food. In some cases men will try to prevent their wives from participating in donation programs where cash is involved, thus cutting off the family from assistance.<sup>14</sup> Donating food is seen as a means to avoid these issues. Evidently, however, directing food donation to women, while it has sometimes increased nutritional levels among them and their children, has also created issues of dependency that call into question the real benefit of these programs when they fail to include productive potential.

*Food is not a better way to reach women. It's a way to involve women in the short term, but not necessarily to benefit them. Unless you make it possible for women to grow or buy their own food, food aid can further marginalize them—for example by cutting them off from other resources. In Bolivia, since Mothers' Clubs were receiving food aid, their need for cash resources was overlooked.<sup>15</sup>*

The existence of organizations that distribute free goods serves as a disincentive to invest in the production of a local, more stable source of sustenance. Unless women recipients of donated foodstuffs can be involved in the production process while they are receiving rations, it is likely that they will become dependent on these charities and be willing to make compromises for them to continue. For example, in

exchange for the donated foodstuffs, several mothers' clubs, which were usually organized by political parties, illegally required that recipients vote for the candidates that they endorsed.<sup>16</sup>

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In the most important years of the food donation period, several projects were created to try to minimize the dependency-causing aspects of this practice, some of which were more successful than others. One of these was called Alimentos por Trabajo, or Food for Work, and included aid from both the PMA and from Title II of the PL-480. Only people with four or more dependents were eligible, and usually the workers were women, because men were more likely to have steady employment outside the home. Food for Work jobs varied from street cleaning and road maintenance to tree planting, and the food rations included wheat, vegetable oil, canned meat, beans, iodized salt, and rice. Women generally worked between eight to ten hours a day and were accompanied by their children at the work sites. Aside from the food, participants in this program did not receive any compensation. Unfortunately, rather than providing temporary employment for an out of work sector of the population, the Food for Work program attracted people from rural areas to the cities, which created more instability.

*Many of the women recipients [of donated food] come from the countryside in search of work but in the cities they do not find it. There are only programs of Food for Work and the manner in which the different agencies distribute the food is very prejudicial; there are 'food for work' programs, and communal activities without a perspective on integral development for the workers, and the political parties abuse this situation of dependency.<sup>17</sup>*

Internal migrants from the *campo* who entered Food for Work jobs were even more vulnerable than those from the cities, because they could not count on a wide support system when the temporary jobs ended.

The most successful projects undertaken to decrease the negative effects of dependency in these women's lives were initiated by groups of these women themselves in partnership with neighborhood associations and women's rights organizations. A few of the distributing institutions of Title II PL-480 aid such as Caritas International and Catholic Relief Services also undertook projects of this type using their own funds with groups of women recipients. These projects involved the construction and maintenance of vegetable gardens and the development of artisan products such as weavings that the participants later sold in local markets for profit. Most of the projects were financed either with donations or quotas that the women paid toward the upkeep of the work spaces or gardens and for materials. The organizations that



worked with these groups of women also provided education in the administration, organization, and technical aspects of these projects. Many of the participants had not been involved in classes of this sort since primary school, which several of them had not had the opportunity to finish. The effects that these projects had upon the participants were gleaned from surveys distributed by the cooperating organizations and designed by the Centro de Información y Desarrollo de la Mujer (CIDEM), a third-party group that undertook the evaluation of many food donation programs.

*With respect to changes [that have occurred] in the woman [participant], it must be mentioned that the projects seem to have provoked a greater desire to excel as an individual, and for training and education. Another consequence of the introduction of productive projects has been the generation of responsibility, self-valorization, and valorization on the part of the family.<sup>18</sup>*

While it is simply untrue to say that humanitarian aid always creates issues of dependency in its beneficiaries, it is important to keep these problems in mind when designing food assistance programs.

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Very often, gifting items to people in need creates as many problems as it intends to solve because this practice is almost always temporary and does not provide long-term solutions to poverty. Such programs should also take into account the local customs regarding gifts and exchange. The tradition of *ayni* in Bolivia makes donations more problematic because they interfere with societal obligations of reciprocity, discouraging the continued use of *ayni* in addition to reinforcing patterns of dependency that are already present in much of underdeveloped Latin America. Through the introduction of productive projects among groups of women recipients of donated food, the aid was able to continue to provide a nutritional supplement to families while minimizing the negative effects of gifting. The recent arrival of institutions in mining communities that gift materials to their students is troubling because it mirrors the negative aspects of food distribution programs without offering productive solutions. This practice is helping to maintain destructive patterns of dependence among women participants as it weakens the work of those groups that are educating community members within a framework of *ayni*.

#### EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: GIFTING DEPENDENCY

The two institutions that I have chosen to examine in relation to the practice of gifting are Alfalit International, a non-profit evangelical Protestant organization from the U.S., and Cumbre del Sajama S.A., a Bolivian investment company in mining

that also teaches classes. Although the structure, goals, and class themes of these institutions are quite different from one another, they both gift educational materials to their students, and one of these groups also collaborates with a food aid program.

Alfalit International was founded in 1975 as a non-profit organization in Miami, Florida, but adult literacy pioneer Dr. Frank Laubach developed its teaching methodology much earlier in 1943. This organization has been present in Bolivia for the past twenty years but is just recently extending its work from the cities into the smaller mining centers around the country. Alfalit is a well-established literacy organization; it was granted the UNESCO First Prize for World Literacy for its work in Peru in 1983. Through literacy classes, Alfalit hopes to educate others about its faith and convert those interested to Protestantism. In addition to literacy, Alfalit also teaches math and science for basic readers and has recently begun to offer courses in traditional medicine. The largest portion of its financing comes from USAID. Alfalit's regional coordinator in La Paz, René Choque, told me that he believes that it is due to USAID's funding that the organization has recently grown to more than 20,000 students in Bolivia; probably 90 percent of these are women. The classes are organized into levels that last three months each; classes meet for three hours a day, two days a week. Alfalit representatives generally go door to door to find students, but they also make presentations about their classes and philosophy to existing literacy groups at other organizations such as CEPROMIN.

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Cumbre del Sajama S.A. is an investment company that buys cooperative mines from their owners in mining centers around the country and carries out technical studies in mining, geology, and energy sources. It also teaches educational courses at cooperative mines in the areas of civic education, citizen participation, and environmental management. Cumbre del Sajama was formed in 1997 and has its only office in the neighborhood of Obrajes in La Paz. The company sends teams to different mining centers to give courses in rooms made available by the cooperative involved. In order to advertise its courses, Cumbre del Sajama generally approaches mining cooperatives directly at their offices at the mines themselves. The general manager of Sajama, Ana María Aranibar, told me that because the company approaches cooperatives directly and because of the types of courses they teach, there are usually more male students than female. The women meet apart from the men and tend to be concentrated in the classes dealing with civic education/citizen participation.

Although Alfalit International and Cumbre del Sajama S.A. have very different backgrounds, class themes, and goals, both institutions gift materials to their respective

students. One of the reasons that this practice discourages the use of *ayni* and contributes to dependency in mining communities is because when Alfalit and Sajama donate these materials, they neither expect nor require their students to return them later or reciprocate with a different gift, even when these women are financially able to do so. It is due to the mutual expectation and indeed obligation of reciprocity that *ayni* has been present so long in Bolivian communities and up until recently, regulated even the most basic exchanges among their members. The fact that this exchange is essentially a social obligation between individuals can be seen in the ostracism a person suffers if he or she does not complete the contract of *ayni*. Now that these institutions hand out materials and specify that they need not be returned later, the expectation and obligation of *ayni* are overridden and the students become accustomed to receiving no-strings-attached gifts. The fact that these gifts are generally small, inexpensive items is significant because if these gifts were costly or abundant, the women students (who are all low income) could not even imagine being financially able to reciprocate, even years later. Because these are small donations, however, it would be logical for the students to reciprocate—they in fact would probably do so if these were exchanges between themselves rather than between an institution and individual. Since they are not requested to contribute materials or money to Alfalit or Sajama in exchange for the free classes and books, the practice of *ayni* is not used.

Alfalit International develops its own materials for use in its classes that are based on Dr. Frank Laubach's literacy training methodology. These materials include books in reading comprehension, writing practice, mathematics, and natural sciences. Apart from these, Alfalit also hands out blank notebooks to its students for completion of homework and exercises. Each class that Alfalit teaches lasts for three months and meets two days a week for three hours each day, and comprises reading, writing, math, and science. All of the classes are taught in Spanish. After three months, if a student passes the final exam, she goes on to the next level, which will last another three months. Each student is given an average of four books and one notebook every three months if she progresses normally through the levels. Each of the books that Alfalit uses has around thirty pages and probably would not be worth more than \$3.00. if bought in La Paz, the largest city in highland Bolivia. The notebook would cost closer to \$1.50. Although many women students are reluctant to spend money on their own education when they have to invest in that of their children, two different Alfalit students told me that they would still be able to come to classes if they had to buy their own notebooks, and another told me directly that, "...it is not necessary that they always give us materials, you know."<sup>19</sup> Salomé Limachi, a woman who lives in the mining district of Atocha and works with the literacy department of CEPROMIN, told me that people's traditional sense of obligation to a contract of *ayni* is lost when they are given something that they are not expected to reciprocate.

*[Gifting things] influences, I mean, I always say that it, it gets us people accustomed to receiving, right? Before, it was different. Every time that you...gave me something,*

*I had to reciprocate...it was that way, but not anymore. Right? So, that, that reciprocity, it's like it's being lost, you know?*<sup>20</sup>

Because students are becoming accustomed to receiving gifts from these institutions, they no longer feel the personal obligation to reciprocate that the use of *ayni* normally would dictate in exchanges of gifts or services.

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### **Gifting materials serves as a way to introduce the company to cooperative members and create trust between the two.**

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According to its general manager Ana María Aranibar, Cumbre del Sajama S.A. is the only company in Bolivia that gives classes as well as engages in income-producing activities. These classes are shorter term than those of Alfalit and are in the areas of civic education/citizen participation and environmental management. These classes are taught in Spanish and in the indigenous languages Aymara and Quechua by professionals (Bachelor of Arts or Sciences degree holders or higher), who live in La Paz and travel to mining centers for the duration of the classes. Sajama's class methodology is described in its company profile as, "[based] on popular education, utilizing techniques and group dynamics that allow a direct relationship and an easy access to different groups in the communities."<sup>21</sup> The module on civic education/citizen participation lasts for ten hours total, two hours a day for five days. Three books, about fifteen pages each, come with the course. The class on environmental management lasts for seventy-eight hours total, and it is divided into forty hours of theory and thirty-eight hours of practical application on some project in the community. This course also comes with three books, each with about twenty pages. These materials are essentially workbooks, with information in Spanish and blank spaces for students to write in answers to questions that are listed.

Like Alfalit, Cumbre del Sajama neither expects nor requires its students to return or reciprocate the materials that it gives out in its classes. In fact, according to one engineer I spoke with, gifting materials serves as a way to introduce the company to cooperative members and create trust between the two in the event that Sajama later becomes interested in buying the cooperativized mine. Thus, it is to Sajama's advantage to gift materials to its students. Since the individuals who teach the institution's courses do not live in the mining centers where they work, rather in La Paz, they also are less likely to form intimate relationships with their students that might otherwise obligate them to engage in contracts of *ayni*.

The way these institutions work also reinforces dependency and discourages the use of *ayni* among their students because they both operate within a structure of gifting in which everything necessary for classes is brought in from outside the communities, even in some cases from outside the country. This foreignness reinforces the assumption that reciprocity will not be necessary, since the assistance or gift is coming from outside *ayni's* sphere of influence. In addition, because Bolivia has for so many years received large-scale assistance such as food donations and

monetary loans from outside the country, the fact that these smaller gifts are also foreign further discourages local individuals from seeing these donations as subject to the obligations of *ayni*.

Alfalit brings in chalkboards, benches, paper, pencils, and other materials that might be needed into the spaces where they teach classes, which often are people's homes. I spoke with one student in Potosí in whose house Alfalit gave classes for five years in the late 1990s who insisted that the benches and chalkboards that the organization brought into her house for the courses were from Ireland and had been donated by Irish people who worked with the organization.

*Eh...what is that place called? Ah, some gringos [white foreigners] came. They also brought us notebooks, everything. Ireland. Well, it was from there, that help. Yes, from there they have helped us, five years ago....Yes, all of the benches, just like that they brought us, chalkboards, there was always everything [that was needed].*<sup>22</sup>

Because people associate such foreign assistance from industrialized countries with larger-scale forms of aid such as International Monetary Fund loans and food donations, the simple fact that this student believed that these materials were from as far away as Ireland discourages her personal sense of obligation to reciprocity. The source of these benches and chalkboards also places this donation into a pattern of north-south gifting upon which Bolivia has depended to one degree or another for several years.

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**Foreignness reinforces the assumption that reciprocity will not be necessary, since the assistance or gift is coming from outside *ayni*'s sphere of influence.**

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As was mentioned earlier, Cumbre del Sajama brings in not only materials for its courses in mining centers, but also personnel. General Manager Ana María Aranibar told me that, "[t]he professors [of the Sajama classes]...are professionals in the field. They live in La Paz and they travel and stay in the mining districts. They stay [there] until they finish their module."<sup>23</sup> *Ayni*, as I explained in the first section of this paper, is a cultural phenomenon native to indigenous communities on the Bolivian *altiplano*; it is not often used in La Paz or other large cities in the country. Since the professors that work with Sajama live in La Paz, it is unlikely that they as individuals use *ayni* in their own lives much less encourage this system among their students. Similar to the materials brought in from Ireland for Alfalit classes, when Sajama's professors come in to communities for a week or two to impart knowledge and then leave, it reinforces the feeling that these isolated areas are dependent upon larger, more dynamic cities and countries for material and intellectual sustenance. This dependency begins to feel natural to people who live in these mining districts who learn to see opportunity and abundance as possible only outside of their own communities. At a children's talent show that I attended in the

mining center of Siglo XX, one boy who was probably ten years old recited a poem that encouraged other young people to study so that they wouldn't have to be miners and live in Siglo XX like their parents had.

Another way that *ayni* is discouraged by donations is through the practice of incentive gifting, in which an institute specifically uses gifting to encourage individuals to attend its classes or events. With incentive gifting, an individual already knows about the donations before coming for the first time to a class; indeed, he or she comes to receive the gift. Not only does this practice erode *ayni* by encouraging people to accept gifts, but the fact that it functions so well also serves as evidence of this same erosion—if people expected to have to return something later, it would not be a true incentive to come and get the gift. This practice basically advertises to potential recipients that this is to be a no-strings-attached, non-*ayni* gift.

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**Once word gets around in mining centers about the presence of institutions that give out materials and food, that knowledge itself becomes an incentive for people who are unfamiliar with the classes to go to them.**

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Alfalit engages in incentive gifting through its involvement with the Programa Mundial de Alimentos. In addition to giving out books, pencils, and notebooks, Alfalit also works with the PMA in some of its districts, such as Atocha in the south of Bolivia. There, for each day of Alfalit class that a person attends, he or she receives noodles, rice, sardines, wheat flour, and oil. This has led people who are even high school graduates (and can therefore probably read and write) to make the instructors believe that they are indeed illiterate and attend these classes because of the food incentive. This is logical because of the extreme poverty in many of these mining centers. Salomé Limachi, who lives and works in Atocha, told me that she thinks the simple act of bringing in food from foreign countries creates dependency in the communities that accept it.

*It creates dependency...just bringing other foods that come in from another country in my opinion is dependency. Because if they did not give it to us, we would look for a way to produce our own foods. Because we as Bolivians, everything that is ours such as quinoa, all of that, our natural products we don't eat because they give us [food]...from somewhere else, isn't that right?*<sup>24</sup>

The food assistance that is given to participants of Alfalit acts as an incentive and brings people to these classes whether they can already read and write or not. Incentive gifting discourages the use of *ayni* because, like giving out books and notebooks, it advertises the fact that individuals are not expected to reciprocate with assistance or materials at a later time.

Once word gets around in mining centers about the presence of institutions that give out materials and food, that knowledge itself becomes an incentive for people who are unfamiliar with the classes to go to them. I spoke with one woman

in Potosí who used to teach classes in sewing and cooking for a “mothers’ club” that was sponsored by a political party. In exchange for food donations and gifts of sewing materials, the women attending these classes were supposed to vote for the party’s candidate.

*I think that [the gifts] must benefit [the people] because it's a help, a notebook helps your son do his homework, a kilo of sugar helps you give your children tea for at least two days, so it helps them a lot. It's not bad, but the people become shameless, they don't have any delicacy at all, they go to one [political] party, receive one thing, go to another party and receive another thing, and go to another par...like that, now. Last year I wasn't working anymore with UCS [Unidad Cívica Solidariad, a political party] and I said to the moms, 'but compañeras, how can this be?' From every party they went receiving [things], right? One thing and another thing and at the end, we don't even give them our votes.”<sup>25</sup>*

Because of the poverty of these communities, the food or notebook that an institution gives out for many people becomes the reason to attend class, show up for a meeting, or even vote for a candidate; the institution’s original goal can be lost. One woman who teaches classes for Cumbre del Sajama in the district of Atocha told me that oftentimes after the first class in which the company distributes books, some students do not come back to finish the course. It seemed evident to this teacher that her students knew about the books that Sajama was offering and came specifically because of this incentive.

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**In its work CEPROMIN consistently requires that in exchange for the classes that it gives for free, students must contribute money or materials toward the development of foods or medicinal products such as soy drinks and lotions.**

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The effects of Sajama and Alfalit’s work in the district of Atocha is particularly noticeable because the town is quite small in comparison to other mining areas in the country, and because neither institution has been there for more than eighteen months. The organization CEPROMIN, however, has been in Atocha since the early 1990s and the recent arrival of Alfalit and Sajama has negatively affected its work. Salomé Limachi was born in Atocha and has lived there for all of her life. For the past three years Salomé has worked as the regional coordinator of CEPROMIN’s literacy program, and has seen the changes that have occurred in her students since Sajama and Alfalit have arrived and begun to distribute materials and food through the PMA. In its work CEPROMIN consistently requires that in exchange for the classes that it gives for free, students must contribute money or materials toward the development of foods or medicinal products such as soy drinks and lotions. Salomé told me that when she first began working with CEPROMIN, she never had difficulty collecting these contributions from her students. Now that some of her students

have visited Alfalit and Sajama classes, however, Salomé has encountered resistance to her requests for contributions.

*We have seen that yes, in some way, [gifting materials] is hurtful...Always people go for something, but they want to receive and receive, but later they do not want to contribute...at least with the responsibility that their involvement in some project might entail, you know?...And there are some projects for example that give out a snack and all, and now they only come for that...This solidarity is disappearing, that for us was very important. And now it's not. [Things] have individualized, they have personalized, everyone wants something only for themselves. And well, the rest doesn't matter to us anymore.<sup>26</sup>*

In addition to her difficulty in collecting contributions from her students, Salomé has also lost many students to Alfalit and Sajama as more and more of the women have gone to those institutions for the incentive of notebooks and food.

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**In order to positively contribute to the education of women in mining communities, traditional cultural principles such as *ayni* and historical issues of dependence that are exacerbated by donations must both be considered in the design and implementation of training programs.**

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Juana Choque, a literacy teacher for CEPROMIN in the district of Potosí, also told me that she has lost students to Alfalit and to Sajama because of the materials they gift. She also explained to me why CEPROMIN chooses not to engage in the practice of gifting, and instead requests contributions from its students.

*It's that the participants leave, they desert...to these, to these places [Alfalit and Sajama]...uh...CEPROMIN doesn't give out books, we don't have a book which the women can study, they don't have maybe a notebook in which to practice calligraphy, they don't have one. So, at most we have given them a notebook, which we have sold them anyway—why have we sold it to them? So that they learn the value of it, because there are times when we give something, it's like...if we give it to them as a gift, sometimes they throw it away: 'they gave this to me,' like that. Even I sometimes have done this. I realize that sometimes I have been given something and I throw it away, but when you buy it with money, you know how to appreciate it, it's that, you know.<sup>27</sup>*

The presence of Alfalit International and Cumbre del Sajama S.A. in areas where CEPROMIN also works has made it more difficult for the organization to successfully reinforce the practice of *ayni* in its methodology because of the competition that it faces with these other two institutions. One of CEPROMIN's current students in Potosí who took classes from Alfalit in the early 1990s asked me at the end of our interview if I, as a white foreigner, was interested in reopening Alfalit classes in her area, and to please "...let [her] know if it's going to open, because [she] really need[s] the bit of help from the brothers (Alfalit's representatives are called 'brothers' and 'sisters').<sup>28</sup>



Institutions gift materials for a variety of reasons. René Choque of Alfalit explained to me that they give out books to their students because they teach according to a unique methodology and therefore need to develop and distribute their own materials. Other groups may feel that women in mining communities cannot afford to pay for their own materials, and others still may use gifts as a way to draw more students into their classes. Institutions often need to secure a stable student base as well in order to meet quotas set by funding organizations. *Ayni* has regulated the exchange of goods and services in Bolivian mining centers for hundreds of years and has assured a unique mutuality among its people. Organizations such as CEPROMIN that operate within this framework gain trust in the community and help to encourage the use of *ayni* by reflecting its principles in their work. Institutions such as Alfalit International, a U.S. non-profit, and Cumbre del Sajama S.A., a young Bolivian investment company, are new to mining areas and perhaps unfamiliar with *ayni* and its importance to these communities. These groups' use of gifting mirrors the larger-scale patterns of food donation programs and encourages dependency and a loss of reciprocal exchange among the recipients. Local cultural phenomenon, such as *ayni*, need to be taken into account by institutions hoping to work in communities with which they are unfamiliar. When they are not taken into account, these groups' operations may unwittingly transform existing structures, as Alfalit and Sajama's work is doing in mining centers.

## CONCLUSION

Bolivia is the poorest country in South America and has depended for years on industrialized countries for various types of assistance. Large-scale food donations to the country have increased the nutritional levels of the mostly women and children recipients, but they have also created and reinforced historical patterns of dependency in both Bolivia and individual beneficiaries. These donations also clash with the local cultural tradition of *ayni*, in which the recipient must return gifts of goods or services to the donor at a later time. The recent arrival of educational institutions that gift materials to their women students in mining centers is troubling because it mirrors the larger-scale food donations to the country and is similarly reinforcing dependency and discouraging the use of *ayni* in recipients. These organizations are new to mining areas and to indigenous communities and are unfamiliar with the principle of *ayni* and with the effects that their practice of gifting has on this phenomenon. Local cultural phenomenon such as *ayni* must be taken into account by institutions that hope to have a positive effect upon people in mining communities. Other organizations such as CEPROMIN whose staff and methodology are from mining centers are familiar with the practice of *ayni* and employ its principles in its work. The competition that gifting institutions such as Alfalit and Sajama present to groups like CEPROMIN serves as an obstacle to the effective training of women in these communities from a place of reciprocity. In order to positively contribute to the education of women in mining communities, traditional cultural principles such

as *ayni* and historical issues of dependence that are exacerbated by donations must both be considered in the design and implementation of training programs.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Julio Prudencio Bohrt, *La Ayuda Alimentaria en Bolivia* (La Paz: Servicio Holandés de Cooperación al Desarrollo, 1993), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The Bolivian government declined a donation of vegetable oil from the US in 1989 because of concerns that it would interfere with the price of domestically produced oil. Prudencio Bohrt, *La Ayuda Alimentaria*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Julio Prudencio and Monica Velasco, *Mujeres y Alimentos Donados* (La Paz: CERES, 1987); Verónica Flores B., ed., *Memoria: Desarrollo de la Lechería* (La Paz: CIDEM, 1995); The Mayatech Corporation, *Gender and Food Aid* (Silver Spring, Md.: The Mayatech Corporation for Office for Women in Development, Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination, U.S. Agency for International Development, 1991); Tony Terpstra, *Memoria: Producción de Alimentos Nacionales P.A.N.* (La Paz: CIDEM, 1995), and idem, *Donaciones Alimentarias y Seguridad Alimentaria* (La Paz: CIDEM, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 110-111.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> Not all of the dancers in Carnaval participate out of religious devotion; just as many take part in the festival simply to dance and enjoy themselves.

<sup>7</sup> Original in Spanish. "Ahí te está esperando el padre para que tú entres, rezas las oraciones y tienes que pasar ante la Virgen de rodillas para agradecerle...por haberte permitido llegar hasta allí sin ningún problema, porque...si te pasa algo en el baile es que no has bailado en devoción por la Virgen...entonces la Virgen no ha permitido que tú termines....Pero si llegas muy bien, entonces que ella te ha aceptado, ella quiere que bailes, ella quiere que tú participes." Translation by author. Cecilia Molina, interview by author, tape recording, La Paz, Bolivia, 27 January 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Julio Prudencio Bohrt, *La Situación Actual de las Donaciones de Alimentos en Bolivia* [paper on-line] (La Paz: 2002, accessed 18 July 2003); available from [http://www.cebem.com/redes/redesma/boletin/bol\\_2003/bol\\_25/donaciones\\_alimentarias.pdf](http://www.cebem.com/redes/redesma/boletin/bol_2003/bol_25/donaciones_alimentarias.pdf); Prudencio Bohrt, *La Ayuda Alimentaria*, pp. 9-32; Prudencio and Velasco, *Mujeres y Alimentos Donados*, pp. 103-104, and The Mayatech Corporation, pp. vi, 1. Titles I and III of PL-480 were significantly altered after 1990 with the passage of the Agricultural Development and Trade Act, however these changes will not be taken into account as the majority of the aid was granted before this date.

<sup>9</sup> Prudencio Bohrt, *La Ayuda Alimentaria*, pp. 14-23.

<sup>10</sup> Original in Spanish. "Estas variaciones...en el volumen de las donaciones en el transcurso de los diversos años no obedece a factores de índole interno como desastres naturales o caídas de la producción agropecuaria nacional, sino a la disponibilidad externa de alimentos que tengan los donantes y a los países prioritarios que ellos designen, como es el reciente y masivo apoyo a los países de Europa del Este." Translation by author. Prudencio Bort, *La Ayuda Alimentaria*, p. 12. It must be noted that the increase in donations during the years 1983, 1984, and 1986 was indeed due to natural disasters in Bolivia; during that period, the country was alternately affected by harsh floods and droughts.

<sup>11</sup> Prudencio and Velasco, *Mujeres y Alimentos Donados*, pp. 100-101, and Terpstra, *Donaciones Alimentarias*, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Original in Spanish. "un país adicto al trigo con un consumo per capita más elevado de cualquier otro producto." Translation by author. Prudencio Bohrt, *La Situación Actual*.

<sup>13</sup> Prudencio Bohrt, *La Ayuda Alimentaria*, pp. 15-19.

<sup>14</sup> The Mayatech Foundation, pp. 4-5, 15-16, and Terpstra, *Donaciones Alimentarias*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in The Mayatech Foundation, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Juana Choque, interview by author, tape recording, Potosí, Bolivia, 7 July 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Original in Spanish. "Muchas de las mujeres receptoras [de alimentos donados] vienen del campo en búsqueda de trabajo pero en las ciudades no lo encuentran. Solamente existen programas de Alimentos por Trabajo y la manera en que las diferentes agencias distribuyen los alimentos es muy perjudicial; hay programas "alimentos por trabajo", y acciones comunales sin perspectivas de desarrollo integral para los(as) trabajadores(as), y donde los partidos políticos abusan de esta situación de dependencia." Translation by

author. CIDEM, ed., *Memoria: Alimentos por Trabajo* (La Paz: Subsecretaría de Asuntos de Género, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Original in Spanish. "En lo que respecta a los cambios en la mujer [participante], hay que señalar que los proyectos parecen haber provocado mayores deseos de superación, capacitación y educación. Otra consecuencia de la implantación de proyectos productivos ha sido la generación de la responsabilidad, auto-valoración y valoración por parte de la familia." Translation by author. Rossana Barragan, *Memoria del Encuentro Nacional Sobre Proyectos Productivos con Mujeres Receptoras de Alimentos* (La Paz: CIDEM, 1989), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Original in Spanish. "[N]o es necesario que nos den materiales siempre, ps." Translation by author. Paulina Vilcamarca, interview by author, tape recording, Potosí, Bolivia, 26 August 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Original in Spanish. "[Regalar cosas] influye, o sea, yo siempre digo de que nos, nos malacostumbra a la gente, ¿no? Antes, era diferente. Siempre que tú...me dabas algo, yo tenía que retribuirte...era éso, pero ahora no. ¿No? Entonces, esa, esa retribución, como que, está perdiéndose, ¿no?" Translation by author. Salomé Limachi, interview by author, tape recording, Atocha, Bolivia, 31 July 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Original in Spanish. "[Basada] en la educación popular utilizando técnicas y dinámicas de grupo que permiten un relacionamiento directo y un fácil acceso a los diferentes grupos en las comunidades." Translation by author. "Cumbre del Sajama S.A.: Inversiones y Proyectos," company profile, personal gift from Cumbre del Sajama S.A. General Manager Ana María Aranibar, La Paz, Bolivia, July 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Original in Spanish. "Eh...¿qué se llama ese lugar? Ah, unos gringuitos venían. Esos nos traían también cuadernos, todo. Irlanda. De allí era ps, esa ayuda. Sí, de allí nos han ayudado ps, hace cinco años....Sí, todos los bancos, así todos traíanos, pizarrones, todo siempre había" Translation by author. Vilcamarca, Interview.

<sup>23</sup> Original in Spanish. "[L]os profesores [de las clases de Sajama]...son profesionales del área. Viven en La Paz y viajan y se quedan en los distritos mineros. Se quedan hasta terminar su modulo. Translation by author." Ana María Aranibar, email correspondence, 11 October 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Original in Spanish. "Crea dependencia...el sólo traer otros alimentos en que ingresan de otro país para mí es dependencia. Porque si no nos darían, nosotros buscaríamos la forma de cómo se produce o producir nuestros propios alimentos. Porque nosotros como bolivianos, todo lo nuestro que es la quinua, todo eso, nuestros productos naturales no consumimos porque nos dan...de otro lado, ¿no es cierto?" Translation by author. Limachi, Interview, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Original in Spanish. "[Y]o pienso que le debe beneficiar [a la gente los regalos] porque es una ayuda, un cuaderno le ayuda a tu hijo para que haga su tarea, un kilo de azúcar le ayuda para que por lo menos le de unos dos días a sus hijos para tomar té, entonces les ayuda bastante. No es malo pero la gente se vuelve sinvergüenza, no tiene nadita de delicadeza porque se va a un partido, recibe una cosa, se a otro partido recibe otra cosa y se va a otro par... así ahora. Yo el año pasado ya no estaba trabajando en la UCS y he comentado con las mamás, pero compañeras como es eso ¿no?...[D]e cada partido han ido recibiendo ¿no? una cosa y otra cosa y al final de cuentas no le vamos a dar nuestros votos." Translation by author. Choque, Interview, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Original in Spanish. "[H]emos observado que sí, de alguna manera, perjudica [el regalar materiales]....Siempre la gente va por algo, pero quieren recibir y recibir, pero después no quieren aportar...por lo menos con el compromiso que puede tener algún proyecto de parte de ellas, ¿no?...Y hay algunos proyectos por ejemplo que dan refrigerion y todo eso, y ahora sólo vienen por éso....Está disminuyendo esta solidaridad, que para nosotros era muy importante. Y ahora no. Se ha individualizado...se ha personalizado, todos queremos para nosotros nomás. Y bueno, el resto ya no nos interesa." Translation by author. Limachi, Interview.

<sup>27</sup> Original in Spanish. "[E]s que las participantes se van, desertan...a esas, a esos lugares...eh... CEPROMIN no da libros, no tenemos un libro en el cual ellas puedan repasar, no tienen tal vez un cuadernillo en el cual practiquen caligrafía, no tienen. Entonces, a lo mucho les hemos dado un cuaderno el cual les hemos vendido eso también, ¿para qué les hemos vendido?, para que aprendan a valorar, porque hay veces le damos una cosa es como si eh...le damos de regalo, a veces lo botan: 'me han regalado,' así. Yo misma alguna vez he hecho eso. Yo me doy cuenta de que alguna vez me han regalado y lo boto, pero cuando comprás con dinero, sabes valorarlo, es éso ¿no?" Translation by author. Choque, Interview.

<sup>28</sup> Original in Spanish. "[A]víse[le] si va abrir, porque realmente [ella] necesit[a] la ayudita de los hermanos." Translation by author. Vilcamarca, Interview.

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