

Proposal to Fulbright IIE 1997-98

## **Manufacturing Identities in Lowland Bolivia: National, Ethnic, and Individual**

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### **Statement of the Problem**

As the globalization of capital, markets, and images becomes ever more homogenizing, Bolivia's new neoliberal government has taken a surprising turn: it has declared Bolivia to be a multicultural pluri-ethnic nation. While the resurgence of local particularities has been a common albeit paradoxical worldwide response to global trends, what is particular about the Bolivian case is the pairing of multicultural/indigenous identity with the national economic development. For instance, a new Popular Participation program recognizes indigenous groups as important actors in municipal-level economic development. Why is "Indianness" becoming important now when for centuries Indians have been marginalized? I hypothesize that as the Bolivian state incorporates the rapidly developing eastern lowlands, home to many indigenous groups, into its national strategies, it must tie their citizenship to the nation's economic development. But the socially constructed category of "Indian" has very different meanings for the state, the indigenous groups, and the individual indigenous people. I propose to examine this reformulation of the relationship between the state and ethnic groups by studying Guaraní Indians who have migrated into the growing metropolis of Santa Cruz, in eastern Bolivia. They are caught between the contesting pressures of assimilating into a hypermodern urban environment and reinventing themselves as a modern indigenous group to avail themselves of the economic and cultural opportunities now available.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1) National Identity: As the Bolivian national identity moves from the traditional focus on Andean miners and *campesinos* to its new focus on global capitalism centered in the eastern lowlands, the nation-state is reforming itself through new discourses and practices

of multicultural pluri-ethnic nationhood and popular participation. This has two effects. First, it brings the lowlands more strongly into the nation's political economic sphere. Second, this indigenous identity contests the homogenizing power of global forces.

2) Ethnic Identity: Twenty-three communities of Guaraní migrants to Santa Cruz have recently formed a governing organization, the Capitanía, to mediate between them and the state, to obtain funding for development projects, and to provide a positive alternative vision for a modern urban Guaraní identity. After hundreds of years of discrimination, Guaraní identities are currently subject to starkly contested meanings: traditional warriors, subjugated peon, Bolivian citizen, autonomous indigenous people. I suggest this ongoing process of identity creation will be strongly influenced by the state, and by non-governmental development agencies who offer money for groups practicing "ethnodesarollo" (ethno-development). The challenge for the Guaraní is to be able to use their own cultural resources to redefine both Indian and economic development on their own terms.

3) Individual Identity: Indigenous migrants who have come to Santa Cruz must negotiate multiple identities within this new urban landscape, internalizing the national development project on some levels and resisting it on others. I suggest that for individual Guaraní ed, creating an urban "Indian" identity is a series of agonizing situation-specific choices. For instance, many Guaraní parents decide not to teach their urban children to speak Guaraní to avoid an Indian accent, then watch with both pride and sorrow as they become Spanish-speaking "Bolivians."

### **Background: *State Formation, Development, and Identity***

Beginning in the 70's, international funding focused economic development on large-scale agribusiness and highway projects in eastern Bolivia (Casanovas 1990; Eckstein 1983). As a result of these economic changes and the coca boom (Sanabria 1993), thousands of people migrated to the lowlands (Stearman 1985, Gill 1987), and Santa Cruz has now become the richest area of the country. Guaraní migrants came from subsistence farms in the country into the huge city which combines economic optimism, immigrant mingling, narco-dollar consumerism, and the disjunctures typical of global

capitalism (Harvey 1990). Much of the identity literature focuses on how identity is produced. Corrigan and Sayer (1985) describe how the state makes subjects who fit into social categories such as citizen, ethnic group, taxpayer, thus focusing on the individualizing dimensions of state formation. Such a framework sets out the central terms around which contestation and struggle can occur (Joseph & Nugent 1994). In Bolivia, as in much of the Third World, that means relating to the discourse of economic development. Recent theorists have allowed us to see development as a system of knowledge and power, a discourse (Foucault, 1977, 1980) as well as a set of political, economic processes (Escobar, 1995,1992; Ferguson, 1994; Said, 1979). Identities are formed and meaning is produced everyday on symbolic grounds affected by this dominant discourse, (Melucci, 1988, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Volosinov 1986, Lagos 1993) as well as its material social processes: the rituals, practices, and institutions of the nation (Roseberry 1994, Urban & Sherzer 1991). I argue that this widely accepted view of identity must be combined with practice theory which focuses on the actors: identity must also be seen as a set of individual choices and practices made by actors whose everyday lives are the arenas in which they organize the world and transform received worldviews (Bourdieu 1980, Ortner 1989, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). My proposed study site is a perfect opportunity to analyze the relation of state formation to identity because Bolivia is undergoing radical economic and political change and the urban Guaraní are just beginning to formulate their new identity.

### **Method of Study/Goals**

I intend to study these questions through nine months of ethnographic research in a Guaraní barrio in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. In 1995, the Guaraní Capitanía de Zona Cruz invited me to research the status of their members in the urban zone. During the summer of 1996, I carried out the first ever study of the urban Guaraní in Santa Cruz, an initial house-to-house survey of the community: who they are, how many are they, where they came from, why they came, where and how they are living, how they are supporting themselves, etc. I also interviewed local anthropologists, development agencies, and advocacy groups who work with the Guaraní in the rural zones, to analyze Guaraní - NGO relations. On my return, I now intend to study emerging identity formation on the

three levels described by the hypotheses above, by carrying out structured observations in the spaces -- both public and private -- where identity and ethnicity are manufactured. I will spend two months in La Paz, interviewing government officials, Indian and non-governmental organizations, and examining public records and media representations to analyze national discourses and practices regarding indigenous groups. I will then spend seven months in Santa Cruz following the Capitanía's efforts to forge a new ethnic identity, through interviews with local and national Guaraní leaders, attending regional assemblies, and through observing their relations with the government and development agencies funding them. To study the individual level, I will live in one of the urban Guaraní communities which I surveyed in 1996, Barrio San Jorge Palmasola, which has approximately 40 families. I will probe the processes of balancing multiple identities through a wide range of techniques including taking of life histories, and observing family dynamics, rituals, child rearing, employment decisions and language choices. I have had no trouble with language during my two summers of work with the Guaraní ed. The great majority of Guaraní migrants to the city speak Spanish, in which I am fluent. I began learning their dialect this summer to speak with those few who have not learned Spanish. I am presently studying Guaraní by book and tape, as I can find no native speakers of their dialect here in California. I will continue to study Guaraní upon my return.

### **Significance of Research**

My research on identity and development is innovative because it brings together analysis of national discourses about Indians with a study of the practices and choices of the individual Indians whose identities are at issue. I believe this research can be helpful to the nation, development agencies, and indigenous organizations as Bolivia works out what a multicultural identity will mean for its people. I am particularly committed to sharing the results of my analysis with the Guaraní people with whom I work, in the hopes that my work will not just be an extraction of truths, but will give them information with which they can better control their lives and resources. The Capitanía is strongly supportive of my research as are the members of the barrio where I will work.

## Travel Plan

I plan to travel to Bolivia in September 1997, shortly after completing my oral examinations, and return in June of 1998. My Project Statement has not yet been approved by my department.

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