ARE MARKETS MORAL?

Understanding the Roles of Fairness and Power Relations in Rural Trade in the Bolivian Altiplano

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Abstract: Ethnographic research has established the centrality of markets to Andean rural livelihoods, but understandings of fairness and different market actors' power relations in these markets are less clear. Using ten months of ethnographic research in Bolivia's Altiplano, this case study reveals strategies and moral narratives of peasant producers and market traders in an emerging pea market. While traders attempt to deceive producers, the latter have their own means of exploiting competition between traders and advancing their own moral narratives about how the market should operate. Thus, the market is an economic field and a moral one, and traders can be punished for excessively prioritizing profit maximization. The moral nature of the pea trade should be viewed not as a quirk of Andean culture but as an illustration of the embeddedness of all markets and the need for critical examination of the moral economies of market interactions across the capitalist world.

Soon after beginning his first mandate as president of Bolivia, Evo Morales gave a speech in a rural Altiplano community, in which he explained a key insight: the market is not the same as capitalism, and in fact markets are necessary for attaining well-being (*vivir bien*) (Fundación Tierra 2012). The meaning of this message, repeated several times in various ways, was clear: Bolivia under Morales's leftist Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) would break with neoliberalism, recovering control over revenues from the country's gas resources and strengthening the role of the state, but markets per se would not be opposed—indeed, they would be actively encouraged. In the ten years since Morales entered power, a combination of relatively high levels of economic growth and increased public investments in infrastructure have facilitated major expansions of markets across Bolivia, in many cases allowing for significant accumulation by peasant communities and traders of peasant origin (see, e.g., Laguna 2011; Tassi 2012; Tassi et al 2013). The centrality of markets in Bolivia's process of change would not necessarily be sur-

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prising for the majority of anthropologists who have studied Andean peasant and indigenous participation in markets in the past two decades (e.g., Seligmann 1989; Harris, Larson, and Tandeter 1995; Buechler and Buechler 1996; Spedding and Llanos 1999; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 2002). Although much earlier anthropological work in the Andes framed indigenous communities as prioritizing cultural autonomy rather than accumulation or social advancement (e.g., Isbell 1985), this view has increasingly been replaced by a growing recognition of the significant historical participation of indigenous people in markets (e.g., Harris, Larson, and Tandeter 1995; Arnold and Spedding 2009). Moreover, the proliferation of informal trade networks during the economic crises of the 1980s in the Andes entailed a partial switch of the focus of many studies, from looking exclusively at rural peasant producers to analyzing the role of female market traders acting as intermediaries between peasants and urban consumers (e.g., Babb 1984; Seligmann 1989; Buechler and Buechler 1996). Meanwhile, in the late 1990s, markets were acknowledged by researchers as offering the potential for Andean indigenous people to move out of poverty, although this potential was felt to be heavily constrained in most areas because of a combination of low demand for rural products and a lack of adequate infrastructure (Bebbington 1997, 2001; Zoomers 2006). Where economic opportunities were available, however, there was nonetheless growing evidence of the willingness and ability of particular groups of indigenous people to harness markets to their own ends (Bebbington 1997; Spedding and Llanos 1999; Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Meisch 2002).

However, although there is broad agreement on the importance of markets in Andean livelihoods, there is less clarity over the nature of these markets, over the ways they are structured, and over whether they offer poor peasants genuine opportunities for advancement. Much of this depends on the ways in which one understands the roles of power relations and fairness, and how these influence markets. Few people who have studied rural livelihoods would disagree with Bebbington's (1997, 193) assessment that "markets per se are not enough: they have had to be renegotiated so that they offer fairer trade, are open to a wider range of individuals, and allow local-level accumulation and reinvestment." However, the recognition of the importance of fairness raises a set of questions: What does "fairer trade" actually mean, and for whom? And how do different actors negotiate which understandings of fairness should actually govern the way markets work?

It has long been understood by theorists of the "moral economy" approach that local notions of fairness and justice play integral roles in the operation of rural markets, with peasant producers and more generally the poor often advancing their own understandings of morality to ensure a minimum level of livelihood security (Thompson 1971; Scott 1976; Edelman 2005). As E. P. Thompson's (1971) essay on riots in eighteenth-century England showed, the perceived infringement of these notions of justice by market actors, and in particular by market intermediaries, has historically been a major cause of civil disturbance. By linking the moral economy of markets and explicit acts of violence in this way, Edelman (2005, 332) argues, Thompson makes a key contribution to understandings of markets by emphasizing the fact that they are not simply economic institutions but also "political constructions and outcomes of social struggle." More recent work on land conflicts in Brazil has revealed that the use of moral narratives to impose a particular logic over the economy is not exclusive to "subaltern" groups, and that actors on different sides of conflicts can employ distinct and opposed moral arguments to legitimize their own positions (Wolford 2005). Building an understanding of the moral economies of different market actors, therefore, constitutes a key means of understanding the ways in which power relations are contested and negotiated in economic affairs. At the same time, it also allows for the reassertion of a crucial point made by Polanyi (2001), namely that markets have always been embedded in broader social arrangements and that aspirations to move toward a genuinely "free market" economic system are ultimately utopian and impossible to achieve in reality (Block 2001).

In the Andes, researchers have often differed sharply over their interpretations of the precise nature of power relations and understandings of fairness in rural markets. Although some have framed markets as facilitating the one-way exploitation of the peasantry by unscrupulous traders (e.g., Lagos 1993), others have sought to rebut this view but without offering a convincing account of precisely how different actors negotiate power relations (e.g., Babb 1984; Seligmann 1989). In this article, we attempt to reveal the perspectives of both producers and traders, both the strategies they employ to attempt to capture a larger share of profit and the narratives of fairness and morality they hold about how the market should operate. As we show in the concluding section, these issues have important political implications for the way researchers view markets, not only in the rural Andes but in developed capitalist economies as well. Focusing on an emerging pea trade in a rural community close to Lake Titicaca, we argue that markets should be understood not only as economic fields but as moral ones as well, ones that are continually being contested by different actors through direct actions and through competing moral narratives.

FAIRNESS, POWER, AND MARKET REGULATION IN THE ANDES

In the past, much literature on markets in the Andes has argued that trade does not deliver benefits for peasant producers precisely because it *not* fair, as intermediary traders are able to exploit asymmetries of information and inadequate infrastructure to extract profits from producers. For example, Mayer (2002, 163) describes the trading relationship between indigenous peasants and mestizo (mixed-race) traders in the Chaupiwaranga region of the Peruvian Andes as "impersonal, stereotypical, brief, and strictly business oriented; it was often patronizing, but sometimes also notoriously abusive." Meanwhile, Lagos (1993) argues that intermediaries with roots in rural communities often exploit aspects of peasant culture such as reciprocity, co-parenthood and the idea of "the community" to increase their own control over trade networks. While Seligmann (1989, 708) provides a more nuanced account of the role of markets traders, she still argues that they manipulate traditions of reciprocity as opposed to peasants who use them for subsistence and maintaining religious and ritual balance. This narrative of the "exploitative intermediary" has often been used to support government and nongovernmental organization (NGO) programs that have aimed to bypass intermediaries, connecting producers directly with consumers (Babb 1987). Frequently, these schemes have been used either by governments looking for an easy scapegoat during periods of high inflation (Babb 1984) or by progressive and sometimes radical NGOs aiming to "empower" the peasantry by reducing their dependency on "unproductive" traders. However, the assumptions underlying this narrative are heavily disputed, with anthropologists disputing the idea that traders simply form part of an exploitative class that is distinct from the peasantry (Buechler and Buechler 1996; Tassi 2012), as well as highlighting the role they play in productive processes (Babb 1984) and in connecting the rural economy with national markets (Seligmann 1989; Harris 1995). It is worth emphasizing that while many anthropologists have defended traders against the rather crude anticommercial analysis of the previous narrative, they have not done this by reverting to idealized neoclassical formulations of markets—indeed, in some cases they have argued that traders could form the bedrock of emancipatory political and economic movements (Seligmann 1989; Tassi 2012).

Some studies reveal that understandings of fairness by local actors may differ substantially from those of outsiders. For example, in Harris's (1995) study in northern Potosí, peasant producers justify apparently exploitative relations with traders because of the convenience of the latter coming to the countryside to buy their products. One female trader is seen as "bad" not for charging high prices but for being mean with food and hospitality, whereas those who are perceived as being generous are viewed as "good," and therefore deserving of making a profit (Harris 1995). Meanwhile, in a more recent study of trade organizations in El Alto, Lazar (2008, 226) reveals a starkly contrasting view of fairness to the exploitative intermediary narrative. When a federation of fishing workers demand a fish terminal allowing fishermen from Lake Titicaca to sell directly to consumers, female fish traders and their supporters are aghast, arguing that this proposal is morally wrong as it would force them out of work in a context of widespread unemployment. Thus, in this version, the narrative of the unproductive, exploitative intermediary is replaced by something quite different: hardworking women who have carefully constructed trade networks to bring produce to market and who deserve to have a livelihood.

Lazar's (2008) findings complement Buechler and Buechler's (1996) ethnographic life history *The World of Sofía Velasquez*, which covers the life of a market trader named Sofía Velasquez. When Sofía is attempting to get involved in trading eggs for the first time, she notes that "people always get upset" when new competitors move into markets, and in fact she feels the need to tell a lie in order to be able to begin trading (31). Once she herself has become a more experienced trader, however, Sofía remarks, "Now, I too become angry when [unknown buyers] come," and at one point she allies herself with other established traders to "scold" (i.e., tell off, shout at) competitors and intimidate them, in order to prevent them from buying up eggs (50). Thus, not only can different people have different understandings of fairness; their own views can change according to their own evolving position in local economies. Moreover, the study reveals the tendency of market traders to attempt to protect their markets from competitors. Throughout

Sofía's life, she participates in different types of markets (eggs, chicken, potatoes), all of which are subjected to forms of regulation, as different actors attempt to impose certain rules that determine who can participate in markets, how, and who is barred. In *The World of Sofía Velasquez,* obligations to support cultural events are used as means of deciding who has legitimacy to benefit from market participation and who does not. These informal rules of the game are commonly enforced by scolding competitors who are deemed to be outside of the established framework. In another ethnographic study, Colloredo-Mansfeld (2002) reveals the different moral values that are employed by different actors to argue over who can trade in indigenous artisan products in the northern Ecuador town of Otovalo. According to Colloredo-Mansfeld (2002, 123), painters oppose the reselling of paintings by intermediaries who are accused of driving down prices without improving the market, whereas the intermediaries themselves counter by emphasizing their contributions to the local economy, and more importantly, their status as painters in their own right.

In sum, while it is clearly unfair and simplistic to frame intermediaries and other types of traders as being inherently exploitative, acknowledging the positive role they can play does not entail returning to the neoclassical formulation of the market as an institution where rational actors behave atomistically according to their own self-interests. Rather, the ethnographic research detailed here reveals the way that understandings of fairness and legitimacy depend on the ways traders link their market activity with the broader social and cultural context in which they operate, for example by demonstrating their generosity or willingness to sponsor fiestas or contribute to the local economy. Polanyi's (2001) insight in *The Great Transformation* that markets do not exist in an analytically distinct sphere, but rather are embedded in other social arrangements, is not hard to sustain in the Andean context.

However, these reflections still leave various questions unanswered. First, how are the understandings of fairness wielded by market actors related to the actual power they possess? Simply identifying the fact that different actors have different understandings of fairness, and that these affect the ways in which markets are regulated, is one thing, but it does not help us understand the relative balance of power between different market actors and how this may be negotiated. Anthropologists have done a good job of refuting the stereotype of the "bad intermediary" and also of identifying the "embeddedness of market relations, but that is not enough: the precise ways in which power relations, concepts of fairness, and market regulations are disputed between different market actors needs to be revealed in further detail. In this article we attempt to do this by revealing the actions and discourses of both traders and producers as they negotiate an emerging pea trade in the Bolivian Altiplano.

THE CONTEXT

The community in concern lies at an altitude of 3,860–4,000 meters above sea level, approximately one kilometer from Lake Titicaca. It lies on an unpaved road, about forty-five minutes from one of the main towns in the region and more than two hours' drive from the city of El Alto. The community is made up of thirty-one Aymara-speaking households whose main cash income is provided by selling peas in the months of February and March. They also grow potatoes, *oca* (a sweet-tasting root vegetable), beans, and barley, and they use winter frosts to produce *chuño* (freeze-dried potatoes) and *kaya* (freeze-dried oca). Although all of the products produced in the community can be sold and bartered in markets, most of them are grown primarily for self-consumption, then any surplus is sold or bartered, and only by people who have enough land to produce a surplus. Peas stand out as the only cash crop that is grown exclusively for sale. The community possesses microirrigation infrastructure that plays a key role in productive activities, and a significant amount of pastoral land in the hills up above the community, where *comunarios* (the term community members use to describe themselves) take their animals to graze. Sheep and cows, in particular, constitute a significant source of cash income as well, with grown cows (four years old) fetching prices of 3,000–4,000 *bolivianos* (US$434–$579). As is the case in most of highland Bolivia, land is held individually in the form of small dispersed plots, and comunarios are required to participate as village authorities on a rotational basis as a condition for owning land. Comunarios perceive that the climate is changing, in that there is increasingly reduced rain at the beginning of the rainy season (in September and October) and excessive rain at the end (January and February). It should be emphasized that despite the growing opportunities to generate money via pea selling, out-migration continues to be very high, particularly to the garment sector in São Paulo, which offers young people greater opportunities for accumulation than exist in the local area. These migrants frequently use their savings from work in the garment sector either to start up their own businesses in São Paulo or to purchase land and housing in El Alto. Greater road connections and transport have meant that markets have been reconfigured in recent decades, such that smaller, more localized markets have declined, and those in the regional towns have increased significantly. Moreover, the transport also makes it easier for traders to expand their networks, and indeed the two female traders at the heart of this case study use vehicles for the pea trade. Moreover, agriculture has also been made easier by an explosion in the use of hired tractors for plowing and harrowing land plots in the past two decades, a development that facilitates farming, particularly for households without any younger, able-bodied members. Some of the community's cultural events have disappeared or become less well attended as a result of out-migration, but young people still return for key fiestas and to play football at Easter. Meanwhile, approximately half of community members attend an Evangelical church in the community—the pastor of the church is a comunario.

The field site provides an attractive opportunity to study the interactions of peasant communities with markets, because in terms of the wealth generated by emerging opportunities, it lies comfortably between the extremes that arguably characterize discussions in existing studies. The Lake Titicaca region has long been known for having relatively productive land and for being integrated into regional market networks. The opportunities created by the emerging pea trade mean that the community in question does not fit into the general picture of extreme poverty and environmental degradation described by Bebbington (1997), but it still falls far short of areas dynamized by highly lucrative market openings such as with quinoa in the southern Altiplano (Laguna 2011) or even dairy production (Bebbington 2001).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEA TRADE

The community's recent history is one of a steady improvement of living standards and food security. Comunarios remember the past as a time of scarcity, when few people were able to produce enough potatoes to guarantee household food security, and it was necessary to journey to other communities to work for food. What little food that people did produce was consumed or bartered for other foodstuffs, and only a few individuals were able to accumulate significant monetary or food savings. Instrumental in the improvement of production was an NGO intervention that delivered improved seed varieties of peas, potatoes, onions, and other vegetables. Before this, the comunarios already produced peas on a small scale, but they were not of high quality and were sold at very low prices (10 bolivianos, or US$1.40 per arroba, which is about twenty-five pounds), if at all.

Meanwhile, pea production is closely linked to the existence of modern irrigation infrastructure, which has dramatically increased the productive potential of the community. Before the infrastructure was built, comunarios used an indigenous system of irrigation whereby they journeyed up to natural lakes and dug drains to bring the water down and irrigate land parcels in the event of inadequate rains. However, the amount of water capacity in this system was limited, and it was extremely time-consuming. The current irrigation system is particularly important in the context of the previously mentioned tendency for rains to fail at the beginning of the rain season (September–October). It also provides protection against late frosts that might fall in August or September, and thus allows comunarios to sow peas as early as August, even if there is no rain. Other than the improved seed intervention and irrigation infrastructure, the success of the pea trade in the community owes itself to the rapidly growing rise in prices for peas. Peas sold to intermediaries in early February can gain prices of up to 120 bolivianos (US$17.40) per arroba, before falling to as low as thirty bolivianos (US$4.30) by late March, when the pea market becomes saturated with peas from the valleys entering the market.

Households grow peas on two to four land plots, and each plot is harvested two to four times during the harvest season depending on how productive it is. We estimate that seasonal income ranges from 5,000 bolivianos (US$850) per household (in the case of a household of two elderly people) to more than 10,000 bolivianos (in the case of a younger family with a number of children to help with the work and large land sizes). Inequalities in land ownership mean that while some households make only enough income to cover their current costs throughout the year, others can accumulate long-term savings from them, some of which they invest in education and/or land and housing in El Alto. Despite these inequalities, all comunarios feel they benefit from the pea trade and consider its

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growth as a positive development, and several comunarios have expressed an intention to dedicate more land to pea cultivation in future years to take advantage of rapidly increasing prices.

THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES

Early on in the development of the pea trade it was necessary for producers to transport their peas to El Alto themselves and sell directly to wholesalers. This represented a significant time and financial cost for the majority of comunarios, and therefore the entry of two women (hereafter referred to as "intermediaries") to buy peas and transport them to La Paz to sell them there was viewed as a positive development. Both women act independently in the sense that they are not part of an association, and both work with a family member (one with her husband, one with her daughter), who drives the car to transport peas and when necessary negotiates directly with producers. Unlike in some case studies where the intermediaries are from a dominant ethnic group to the producers (e.g., Mayer 2002), the intermediaries in this case (as in much of the Bolivian Altiplano) are close to the producers in class and ethnic terms: in fact, all the key actors in the pea trade, including the intermediaries themselves, the producers who negotiate with them, and the people who purchase the peas from them in El Alto, are Aymara women. Importantly, one of the intermediaries is herself a community member (hereafter referred to as the *lugareña*, or "from the place," intermediary) and part-time producer, whereas the other is based in El Alto. This supports arguments made in previous studies that the dividing line between "producer" and "trader" is often a blurry one (Babb 1984; Tassi 2012). Both of the women take advantage of having both rural and urban connections, as other studies have shown (e.g., Buechler and Buechler 1996), and the lugareña intermediary is in constant contact with her El Alto–based daughter to communicate over the prices of peas and to transport produce to the city. Moreover, the lugareña intermediary is the wife of the pastor of the Evangelical church, a man respected even by non-Evangelicals as someone who is honest and hardworking. Although some families with a large labor force (i.e., teenage children) and a house in El Alto can go to the city to sell peas directly while their children look after the animals, this option is not available to small families, families with young children, and elderly people. The price difference between selling to an intermediary and selling directly to wholesalers in El Alto ranges from 10 to 30 bolivianos (US$1.40–$4.30) per arroba depending on prices, which is not enough to justify continual visits there for the majority of comunarios. For them, selling to intermediaries means that they can sell their produce without diverting their efforts away from other activities, such as harvesting more peas or looking after animals. For these reasons, as other studies have identified (e.g., Babb 1987; Seligmann 1989; Harris 1995), there is no real desire among the majority of comunarios to bypass the intermediaries. Beyond this, however, the pea trade remains a field of ongoing contestation, one in which the two intermediaries and producers constantly attempt to advance their own interests through guile and appeals to understandings of fairness. This article now outlines some of the main strategies of the different actors.

INTERMEDIARIES' STRATEGIES

The two intermediaries employ a number of strategies to induce pea sales in their favor. They form personalized links known as *casera* relationships with some producers, whereby there is an understanding that a particular producer will sell the majority of her produce to her casera. This allows the intermediaries to be certain of having a certain amount of produce that will be sold to them. This is common in agrarian markets, where personalized relationships between sellers and traders have historically played a key role in facilitating market development (Mintz 1961; Trager 1981; Finan 1988).

In some cases the intermediaries offer advances on coming pea harvests to prevent their competitor from making a purchase, tempting producers with the possibility of upfront cash. According to some producers, the lugareña intermediary often agrees to deals but delays payment until later on, when she then revises the price downward after the producer has harvested, claiming that there has been a sudden and unpredictable price fall. Intermediaries also offer gifts to induce deals. These may include fizzy drinks, bread, fruits, and vegetables, and the "outsider" intermediary brings gas cylinders from the town for cooking, thereby saving some comunarios the time and effort of purchasing and transporting the cylinders themselves. As Harris (1995) suggested, traders' legitimacy vis-à-vis producers can depend on their perceived levels of generosity in distributing these gifts.

At times when prices are beneficial the intermediaries themselves apply considerable pressure on producers to sell to them. They often walk directly to the fields as people are picking their peas (rather than waiting until the end of the day when harvests have been collected) and demand that producers sell to them immediately. This can lead the two traders to argue and shout at each other when they are both trying to buy from the same producer at the same time, although it does let the producers know that their product is in demand, and as we will see, it can generate opportunities for them.

Many producers complain that the intermediaries protect their market by preventing other traders from buying peas. They allegedly do this by scolding anyone who tries to enter the market, including one trader who operates in a nearby area and is a wife of another comunario. Her husband claimed to us that the two intermediaries had teamed up, offering beer to community authorities to allow them to maintain their control of the market. In this case freer trade would theoretically benefit the producers by providing them with access to more intermediaries to whom they could sell, thereby increasing their bargaining power and pushing prices up. As we have seen earlier, these alleged attempts by intermediaries to protect their market control have precedents in Buechler and Buechler's (1996) study, which details numerous cases in which established traders aim to prevent new competitors from entering markets. Indeed, none other than Adam Smith, in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* recognized the possibility of private actors "fixing" markets through collusion over prices or to exclude competition. Meanwhile, the existence of regulations imposed by private actors lends partial support to one of Polanyi's (2001) key observations, that regulating and protecting markets usually occurs spontaneously, without any guiding ideology or long-term planning to drive it. For Polanyi, by contrast, what is known as free trade is something that necessarily has to be ideologically driven, heavily planned for, and implemented by a strong central state. Therefore, the fact that informal developing markets should, in fact, be subject to different forms of regulation should not be particularly surprising, or even proof of some sort of cultural characteristic particular to the Andes.

At the same time, producers argue that intermediaries should buy their produce even when prices are not desirable. Sometimes intermediaries are not around to buy peas when producers expect them to be (at the end of the day), thus leaving producers waiting until nightfall or even the next day to sell. This could simply be because they are operating in other communities, but it could also be due to prices that do not offer possibilities for the intermediaries to profit. Thus, neither the producers nor the traders actually seek a fully free market; rather, they aspire to have a market that is regulated in their favor. These examples suggest that, regardless of the minimal state intervention in these markets, economic actors themselves have strong incentives to construct their own forms of regulation, which supports the claim that "markets, left alone, hardly ever stay free" (Aldred 2009, 85).

PRODUCERS' STRATEGIES

From the complaints of producers, there seems little question that intermediaries use at least a degree of trickery to increase their returns at the expense of producers, as well as employing a form of protectionism, preventing new traders from entering the market and thereby maintaining dominance of the local pea trade. Thus, the narrative of the exploitative intermediary does have a kernel of truth, which is arguably overlooked by some of those anthropologists who have sought to defend traders against this charge (e.g., Babb 1984, 1987; Harris 1995). However, focusing on this alone would allow for only a very partial interpretation of the complex and dynamic relationship of power between intermediaries and producers.

First, as the literature on personalized market relationships makes clear (Mintz 1961; Trager 1981; Finan 1988), these sorts of relationships are often beneficial to both parties. Producers use casera relationships to ensure that they have a buyer for the bulk of their produce, knowing that they may be able to pressurize the intermediary to buy their produce even when prices do not benefit the intermediary in order to sustain links with their caseras. Moreover, producers in a good casera relationship have confidence that they receive good prices and/or additional nonmonetary inducements. One of the women most loyal to the lugareña intermediary insists, "I always sell to her, she always gives me the *yapa* [a bit extra]." In two other cases producers cited the transportation of the gas cylinder as the main reason they chose to sell to the other intermediary. At the same time, being in a casera relationship does not prevent pea producers from selling some produce to the other intermediary at certain moments; it merely means that they sell the majority to their casera.

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The presence of more than one competing intermediaries allows producers to avoid becoming dependent on just one and generates possibilities for producers to maneuver. This is demonstrated by the fact that occasionally producers from areas where other intermediaries are operating bring their produce to this community to sell when they have had a dispute with their casera. We now consider two events that demonstrate how producers negotiate with and exploit competition between the two intermediaries.

In one case, a couple expressed a preference for the external intermediary, who tended to give them better prices. This was linked to a sense of having better fortune with money when they sold to that intermediary, such that the money they gained was less likely to be spent quickly: "When we sell to her [the lugareña], we notice that the money gets spent very quickly. But when we sell to the other one, we can really save the money."

Although she was not their casera, the lugareña often came to the field where the couple were harvesting, demanding that they sell at least some of their produce to her. They were anxious not to offend by selling nothing to her, and they stated that they found it desirable to retain the option of selling to both intermediaries, so they prepared in advance how many peas they would sell to each intermediary, separating them in bags. They then concealed the bags of peas that they intended to sell to the other intermediary in the field to hide the fact that they were selling most of their produce to the rival and not the lugareña. Occasionally they would lie outright to the lugareña intermediary, saying that they had nothing to sell. In this way, producers sold the majority of their produce to one intermediary but maintained a degree of good feeling with the other one, to whom they might want to sell on another occasion. In some cases one intermediary would discover that they had agreed to sell to the other and got angry, but whoever was present shifted blame to the absent spouse, claiming ignorance in an attempt to maintain good relations: "It was my husband; it wasn't me. As you can see I'm sick. It wasn't my decision."

In the second case, a group of producers had just agreed to sell to the outsider intermediary and were sharing two bottles of soda with her husband to celebrate the deal, when the lugareña intermediary arrived, insisting that they sell at least one arroba to her on the basis that she is lugareña, and they should show some loyalty. The producers initially resisted, saying, "We'll sell to who we want," and the husband of the other intermediary said, "Look, it's a free market. They've chosen to sell to me." The producers then talked to the lugareña intermediary out of earshot of the other one, claiming that they were selling at 50 bolivianos (US$7.20) per arroba (they were actually selling at 45 bolivianos, or US$6.50). In her desire to capture a sale from her rival, the lugareña bought two arrobas off them for 50 bolivianos. Having achieved this, they then used the fact they had gained these higher prices to successfully renegotiate for a higher price with the other intermediary. Therefore, the competition between the two intermediaries can generate opportunities for producers to negotiate for better prices, thus demonstrating the diffuse nature of power and the ability of apparently weaker actors to advance their own interests. A similar example is provided in a study by Spedding (1994, 103), who notes that coffee growers in the Yungas often take advantage of competition between traders to sell their product immediately after cleaning it, before it loses weight, and thereby fetching a higher price.

Moreover, the two women's control of the pea trade is something that can potentially be challenged. One comunario expressed to us a frustration with both intermediaries for failing to arrive at the right time to buy peas and hinted the following: "We're thinking of selling to different buyers [intermediaries] because often they arrive too late. Sometimes we have to wait until nightfall. We're thinking of bringing in some new ones. But the two women don't allow new ones to arrive. That's how they are. But we the comunarios are thinking of authorizing the entry of new traders."

In this account the disillusionment with intermediaries leads to the threat of a reprisal by the producers, who could break the market open and bring in new traders, revealing the power of the producers to counter perceived abuses by traders. In a study of quinoa producers in the southern Altiplano, Laguna (2011, 336) shows how they rejected the unequal terms presented by the intermediaries and formed their own association to control the commercialization process. Similarly, Tassi and colleagues (2013) show how urban Aymara traders often deceive Chinese family consortiums. These examples reveal that even when power relations are unequal, there can still be opportunities for actors to advance their interests vis-à-vis ostensibly more powerful actors. The agency of peasant producers to take advantage of the presence of different intermediaries, exploiting differences between them and, when necessary, challenging their control over markets is something that has too often been missed on discussions of trade in the Andes.

MORAL NARRATIVES AND GOSSIP

As was discussed in the earlier section, literature from the Andes suggests that markets are often regulated through different understandings of fairness. In this section, we look at the moral narratives of different actors in the community's pea market and the ways gossip advances particular ideas of fairness, which are then used to attempt to regulate actors' behavior.

The lugareña intermediary maintains a strong moral justification for her activities, reinforcing what she considers the moral superiority of her own business activities compared to those of the other intermediary. This includes making constant references to the fact that she is lugareña and therefore has a stronger sense of responsibility to the producers. On one occasion she claimed she buys up the produce at a loss when prices are low to "make sure they don't suffer," without complaining to them about the loss she was incurring.[1] By contrast, according to her, the other intermediary "escapes" when prices are not desirable. On another occasion she also told us that the two intermediaries indeed have an agreement with the community to keep out other intermediaries, but this is on condition that they buy up people's produce no matter what. She qualified this, however, saying,

1. The need to occasionally sacrifice short-term profits to maintain a casera relationship was also found in Buechler and Buechler's (1996, 51) study, when the trader describes having to borrow money from truck drivers to buy up all their caseras' eggs without earning anything.

"But because I'm a Christian, I couldn't really stop anybody else trading. Even you could trade." The reference to her membership of the Evangelical church in the community is something that she frequently refers to, apparently demonstrating her good character. For example, during negotiations she often attempts to convince people she is being honest about the prices, and the weight of the peas,[2] by saying, "I'm a sister [Evangelical]; I can't lie to you."

To what extent should we take the proclamations of the lugareña intermediary as evidence of a deeper "strategy" to get the best possible deal from her interactions with the producers? As Lazar (2008, 227) notes in the previously mentioned dispute over fish selling in El Alto, different sides in a commercial conflict may paint their adversary as being solely motivated by profit to discredit them and to improve their own legitimacy. We might also be rather skeptical about intermediaries' claims of having to purchase produce at a loss. As Spedding (1994, 103) notes in the Yungas, traders often have a discourse about all the costs they have to incur, and if it were all true they would hardly make any profits at all. However, in some cases the lugareña's claims to be an "ethical" trader may have some validity, as an example of what Graeber (2014, loc. 1992) calls "baseline communism," namely that "if the need is considered great enough, or the cost considered reasonable enough, the principle of 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' may apply." Graeber notes that "if one is on sociable terms with someone, it's hard to completely ignore their situation" (loc. 2080), something that can lead merchants to make concessions to help out people in need, especially those from their own community or ethnic group. As Sayer (2011) argues forcefully, moral feelings are not merely the products of "socialization" or strategic adaptations to a broader social context; they also reflect the fact that people do tend to have genuine feelings of compassion toward fellow human beings. The lugareña intermediary, as someone who lives in the community and knows the producers on a day-to-day basis, may indeed feel a greater inclination to help them out when they are in need.

In spite of this, however, at the time of the study many producers were expressing disillusionment with the lugareña intermediary, mainly because of her previously mentioned (alleged) tendency to agree on deals based on one price, delaying payment and then later reducing the price. Many of these sentiments were expressed through what might be called "gossip" between different producers and within families. As Scott (1985, 282) emphasizes in his classic study *Weapons of the Weak*, "Gossip is never 'disinterested'; it is a partisan effort (by class, faction, family) to advance its claims and interests against those of others." In a similar vein, Lazar (2008, 76) reveals the role that gossip plays in constructing public opinions and influencing local politics in El Alto. In our case study, the gossip focuses on the behavior of the lugareña intermediary, which was perceived to be departing

2. Spedding (1994, 103) notes that in the Yungas, producers often suspect that intermediaries use false weighing scales to trick clients. Buechler and Buechler's (1996, 23, 104) study has a confirmed example: the protagonist's mother teaches her to use an altered weighing scale to deceive customers when selling candles, and she continues to use this throughout her life as a trader. Thus, the suspicion shown by producers should not be written off merely as "paranoia."

from certain norms of fairness. In the words of one producer: "She really is a bit *k'asa* [deceitful]. She only pays people with debt. That's not right."

Contrary to her own claims, some people argue that the lugareña has been known to refuse to buy people's peas when prices are not attractive. The fact that she is a Christian but acts (in their view) greedily, is commented on, tapping into a frequent non-Evangelical criticism that Evangelicals are hypocrites for preaching Christianity yet acting rapaciously. They accuse her of feigning concern for producers in order to convince them to sell to her: "Even though she's a Christian, it's her way to deceive people with nice words. That's just how she is."

Thus, even her attempt to brand herself as an honest Christian entrepreneur is something that can get turned against her. When criticizing her, many people use the morally charged accusation *ukhamapuniwa* (*así siempre es*, in Spanish, or "that's just how she is"), a term that is virtually always used for attacking someone else's character. In fact, the entire discussion over the behavior of traders is made in almost exclusively moral terms.

Comunarios also discussed her alleged tendency to take people's new bags when buying peas and return older ones later on. This appears to be a trivial issue (new bags only cost 3 bolivianos, or US$0.40), but it still matters not only for the convenience of having new bags but also because it appears to reveal her as a deceptive person. Producers therefore argued insistently on ensuring that the bags returned to them are the same, or as new as the bags they had given to her. The intermediary herself, meanwhile, suggested to us that it is actually the producers who are deceptive: "When I return a sack after selling peas, people always say that their sack was new. Everybody's sack was always new!"

By contrast, during the fieldwork period many saw the other intermediary as a reliable buyer who always paid the amount agreed, and up front, both of which were greatly valued by the producers. According to one of the comunarios, this has led the lugareña intermediary to look for new sellers in another community, where she had not previously been operating, and the people there sell to her "because they felt sorry for her." In this account she apparently did so complaining that the people in her own community do not want to sell to her anymore, and exploited the sympathy of these women (who did not know her well) to start buying from them. Even here, the decision of these other women to sell to the lugareña is explained in terms of their moral feelings rather than any market calculation. This suggests that the producers are aware of their own power to cease to sell to her, something that could force her to look for new markets.

The difficulties faced by the lugareña intermediary tell us something about the way markets interact with wider social relations. As a member of the community and the wife of one of the community's most respected members, one might expect her to have a series of advantages over the outsider intermediary, given her deeper knowledge of the lives of the producers and their economic situations, as well as the potential to build up a reliable group of caseras. However, the blending of market relations and social relationships, which is certainly a feature of her business strategy, also exposes her to the accusation that she is manipulative and deceitful. As Graeber (2014, loc. 2080) suggests, it can be very difficult for traders to make profits operating in areas where they grow up or are familiar, because they are continually under pressure to help out their friends and contacts. In sum, embeddedness is potentially a double-edged sword for a trader, because it generates expectations that may be hard to reconcile with profit maximization.

The nature of the gossip about the lugareña intermediary, and the fact that she was losing sellers and having to search for new markets during the fieldwork period, suggests again that the producers do wield a degree of power in their relationship with the intermediaries. Not only are they capable of outwitting the traders and exploiting competition between them; they are also capable of advancing their own narratives about how traders should behave (i.e., they should pay people up front, they should buy people's produce even when unprofitable to do so, and/or they should allow other traders in to buy peas as well). Although the traders certainly do not comply with all these ideas all of the time, we can see from the way in which the lugareña intermediary justifies her behavior compared to the outsider trader that she implicitly validates these concepts of fairness, and indeed uses them to try to position herself as a more compassionate trader. As suggested earlier, it is notable that these discussions are invariably made in moral terms, referring directly to the personal character of the traders rather than any "impersonal" factors such as the structural nature of the economy. Following Scott (1985), we agree that this tendency to focus on issues of morality (as opposed to, say, the traders' structural positions in the local economy) does not necessarily demonstrate a failure to understand the structural nature of the disputes, and it might actually encourage people to actively challenge unfair practices.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have shown the ways in which pea producers and traders interact with one another and attempt to advance their own interests in order to reveal how power relationships between market actors are negotiated and how concepts of fairness influence the ways people act. Rather than presenting the question as an either-or dichotomy (i.e., whether traders are best framed as exploitative or not exploitative), we have attempted to reveal the actions and narratives of both sets of groups. The argument is not that traders do not at times employ trickery and deception in their market activities: they clearly do, but this is far from being the full story, primarily because the power relations are far more complex than are often assumed. Moreover, as the moral economy school has long argued, markets are not just economic but also moral fields (Thompson 1971; Sayer 2000; Edelman 2005). In this particular field, not only are producers able to capitalize on competition between traders by playing them off against each other; they are also able, through gossip and rumor, to advance their own moral narratives about the way traders should behave. Where a trader is perceived to prioritize profit maximization excessively, she is punished by negative gossip, which in turn threatens her market share. Indeed, it is possible that the lugareña trader may actually be punished for being particularly embedded in the community she trades in, as the greater degree of mixing between her commercial interests and her social relations (i.e., in the way she relates to other people) is easily interpreted as proof of deceptiveness. Thus, the embeddedness that helps the lugareña trader operate in a localized market also places constraints on her market behavior. The upshot of all this is a market that is implicitly regulated all sides, by the traders who keep out competitors, and by the producers who insist on the traders buying their produce even when it is unprofitable. These rules are not set in stone but are subject to ongoing contestation between different actors, and there is good reason to believe that producers have the ability to challenge unfair arrangements, both as individuals and collectively.

How unique is this set of affairs, and to what extent is it characteristic of the Andean region, or of agrarian economies? As we have suggested earlier, the fact that markets often appear to be subjected to forms of regulation should not necessarily be surprising. Moreover, as far back as 1947, Herbert Simon (1997) noted that apparently noneconomic human traits such as emotions, loyalty, and ideas about fairness were fundamental to the functioning of large companies in the United States, as they allowed members of companies to better harness their energies and work together collectively. In the 1980s, Dore (1983) highlighted the role of trust in regulating relationships between firms, and Granovetter (1985) emphasized the importance of trust and interpersonal relations in market transactions. Therefore, as Granovetter and Swedberg (2011) argue, there is a clear danger of exaggerating the extent of embeddedness in preindustrial societies, and of assuming that market relations in fully capitalist ones are fundamentally disembedded from other types of relations. Indeed, as Block (2001) points out, although Polanyi argued that modern economic thinking attempts to construct a "disembedded" economy, he also showed that this "utopian" project cannot succeed without bringing about the total destruction of society. In practice, therefore, even markets in developed capitalist countries remain embedded in social relations, although these are often not recognized as such and tend to be warped in favor of the most powerful actors. It therefore follows that, as Sayer (2000) argues, awareness about the relationship between moral norms and economic behavior should not be confined to studies of rural markets in developing countries but should also constitute the bedrock of a critical analysis of the way capitalism operates in developed countries as well.

Rather than building up a strong and potentially misleading dichotomy between the embedded nature of markets in the rural Andes and allegedly disembedded nature of fully fledged capitalism, the task for researchers should be in assessing the conditions under which relatively less powerful actors are able to exercise influence over more powerful ones. In this example, it is clear that the producers are capable of identifying the actions of the traders as directly impinging on their own interests and visions and acting accordingly. Conversely, as Sayer (2000) points out, in fully integrated capitalist economies, less powerful agents may have more difficulty in identifying the actors responsible for a particular economic situation, because the social relations of the market are concealed (what Marx called mystification). Indeed, such mystification is actively encouraged by those who aim to obscure or deflect anger from unfair arrangements. As Sayer (2014, loc. 3830) notes, vague, impersonal, and apparently untouchable terms such as *the markets, market forces,* and *investors* are often used to conceal the identities of powerful interests who favor measures that many in the population would consider unfair and immoral. Moreover, even if citizens manage to over-come mystification and actively pinpoint a culprit, it is much harder for them to have an influence via the techniques used by the comunarios here, such as negative deception and gossip. Thus, although modern capitalists do not conduct their affairs according to the formulations of neoclassical dogma, they nonetheless are often far less accountable to those whose lives would be affected by their decisions than the female traders discussed in this article. Unlike the lugareña trader, they do not have to spend their entire lives interacting personally with the people who are affected by their commercial decisions. This creates major challenges for advocacy organizations and progressive political movements who attempt both to do what the producers of this community do and to generate alternative moral narratives around discussions of economic relations in order to bring about fairer outcomes (Edelman 2005). The challenge for anthropologists, whether they are studying market relations in the rural Andes or on Wall Street, is not only to reveal the relational nature of markets and the exercise of power within them but also to assess the capacity of relatively less powerful agents to call more powerful ones to account by imposing their own understandings of fairness on market interactions.

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