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"Gringo Jeringo": Anglo Mormon Missionary Culture in Bolivia

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> The story is our escort; without it we are blind.
> —Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

From 1964 to 1989, amidst the ever-present dust and harsh sun of Bolivian working-class neighborhoods, Anglo Mormon missionaries zigzagged in white-shirted pairs from heavy wooden to sheet-metal doors.[1] Everyone watched them and wondered, from time to time, where they came from, what they were doing so far from home, whether they had ulterior motives, why they were not like other strangers who passed through town, and where they were going. People gossiped about them. They told folktales of getting them drunk, of seducing them. As the missionaries would walk, children would gather, sometimes to play, sometimes to taunt, and often to flee after yelling the common rhyme "gringo jeringo mata la guagua" (gringo asshole / syringe[2] kills the little child).

To the Bolivians the missionaries seemed strange, incomprehensible, mystical, and perhaps dangerous. The average person seldom had sustained interactions with them. Generally when they met, it was in brief and tightly constrained ritualized circumstances, where neither side came to understand the other but where each would cultivate images of the other. These images were contained in stories, gossip, rumors, and jokes that inevitably mediated people's interactions. In short, stories were their escorts across the field of interaction.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the ambivalence and sheer mystery of the missionaries' relationships with Bolivians, the Mormon church has been quite successful in Bolivia. In those same twenty-five years, it has gained forty thousand members, built expensive chap-

els throughout the country, and deployed thousands of young, volunteer missionaries, primarily from North America. As a multinational enterprise, the church depends on at least three critical material supports: (1) money to finance its far-flung organization, (2) a constant flow of missionary youths (since every two years it suffers a complete turnover in staff), and (3) new tithe-paying converts. Stories and other verbal forms of popular culture exercise a critical role in the social processes from which these come. These discursive practices require considerable study for us to understand fully the processes of Mormon society and religion (see Knowlton 1988, 1989a, and 1991a for other analyses of Mormon narrative practice).

In this we follow the recent anthropological interest in discourse, narratives, practice, and social reproduction and transformation (see, for instance, Bauman, 1983; Bourdieu, 1977; Bowen, 1989; Briggs, 1987; Myerhoff, 1978; Ortner, 1984; Rosaldo, 1980; Sherzer, 1987; Taussig, 1984, 1987). Instead of following the philosophical and discursive forms of hypothetical deductivism, more common in sociology, this essay depends on an interpretive approach. I do not explore these stories to induce propositions about cultural interactions for testing elsewhere. Rather, I view stories as texts requiring interpretation in light of much theoretical and empirical work about narratives.

Such stories are therefore not merely spontaneous tellings of momentary interest. They are socially situated practices, organized according to patterns, and they emerge according to standards and performance criteria. As Renato Rosaldo (1980:17) notes for the Ilongot, "Their statements about the past were embodied in cultural forms that highlighted certain facts of life and remained silent about others through their patterned way of selecting, evaluating and ordering the world they attend to." Yet they are also critical in creating, sustaining, and transforming the culture within which they appear. They not merely express but also constitute social and cultural relations.

I also follow the growing interest among anthropologists in missions and missionizing as important social organizations and processes in their own right (see, for instance, Aaby and Hvalkof, 1981; Alves, 1985; Bastian, 1985; Comaroff, 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986; Flora, 1976; Harding, 1987; Knowlton, 1982, 1988; Lewellen, 1978; Stoll, 1991). A multitude of contradictory social processes contribute to the rapid expansion of missions throughout the world and to people's acceptance of them, often for very concrete local reasons. Since missionaries are central to this process, caught in the Mormon case between the institutional hierarchy and local social dynamics, I focus on them.

I consider the images of "self" and "other" constructed and deployed in the stories and lore that the missionaries would tell one another, that they and the Bolivian members would share, and that the members would tell about the missionaries, and their relationship with the traditional Bolivian idiom of the other (Knowlton, 1988). Stories form an important nexus among these relationships and, as such, help create and sustain as well as challenge the shared meanings and the differences that constitute Anglo missionary culture in Bolivia. This folk culture lies out of the direct control of the church's authorities, arising as it does in relatively informal interactions among people, yet it is critical to the church's self-maintenance and expansion.

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> Surely it is in the coils of rumor, gossip, story, and chitchat where ideology and ideas become emotionally powerful and enter into active social circulation and meaningful existence.
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> —Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror—Space of Death"

Telling stories is a critical aspect of missionary life, as William A. Wilson (1982) justifiably argues. Missionaries learn them from one another and use them to entertain themselves as well as to understand their own actions and the world around them. Every time the missionaries gather, they talk, gossip, tell jokes, and share stories. Just as they learn the missionary sociolects of English, Spanish, and so on from their peers, so too they learn, perform, and add to this corpus of tales. To be a missionary is to participate actively, albeit with varying levels of competence, in this expressive and unwritten tradition.

Hearing and performing stories is arguably a primary means by which youths are socialized into wanting to go on missions and later into the missionary role. The Missionary Training Center can be viewed as a liminal institution in which missionary initiates learn much of this crucial folklore from their peers, supervisors, and teachers, many of whom have just finished missions. They thereby ensure the reproduction of this culture among the next generation of missionaries.

As a situational culture, it stems from the Rocky Mountain Mormon homeland, with its own rich and ongoing tradition of folklife and popular religion. Converts to the church, although they are not formally instructed in the popular Mormonism that runs parallel to and at times diverges from the formal "gospel," must learn it. In reality this popular religion both frames and constitutes the substance

by which the more formal, institutionalized religion becomes anchored in their lives. It thus is a potentially insurgent, contestatory religion in tension with the formal church. Missionary culture builds from and relates to this everyday popular Mormonism.

This Rocky Mountain culture, with its 150 years of missionary tales and sayings, has been transported by the missionaries to Bolivia, where it entered into syncretic relations with a similarly rich Bolivian popular culture. Out of this incessant, but structured, interrelationship of two very different expressive cultures has developed a Bolivian Mormonism. Unfortunately, this vibrant, active, syncretic Mormonism generally passes unseen before the apparent uniformity of standardized chapels, routine meetings, and white shirts.

In what follows, I consider various themes arising from this complex, multilayered set of popular practices as they relate to the formation of the concepts of *self* and *other*. This leads to a marvelously complex situating of self and other within the relational context. Methodologically, I rely on my memories from when I was an active member of this culture, on my diaries and notes, and on recollections from my subsequent interactions with missionaries and members while I performed anthropological fieldwork in Bolivia on other topics related to the expansion of Mormonism and Protestantism in the country. While valuable in itself, my data are limited, suggesting the need for further systematic study of these issues.

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> In the end knowledge of self is requisite to complete consciousness; consciousness requires reflecting surfaces. Cultures provide these opportunities to know ourselves, to be ourselves, by seeing ourselves.
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> —Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*

When the young missionaries came off the plane and passed through Bolivian customs, they faced the reality of culture shock, once the exhilaration of beginning their work faded. They attempted to make sense of the strange world around them, whose ways directly challenged their own customary understandings. They faced what the theologian David Tracy (1986) aptly calls the "horror" of the other, a reality whose very nature undercuts what seems central and is taken for granted. Once they entered into the relations of missionary life, they were supported in their view of the world by missionary culture itself. Bolivian reality loomed, though, threatening to challenge the reasoned cultural supports of their view of how life should be.

As a result, the new missionaries required lots of "reflective surfaces" to help them form and maintain their sense of self and distinguish it from the other. They thus depended on the guide of stories to help them find their cultural eyes in this period of social blindness, stories invested with considerable emotion and energy. Whenever missionaries got together, they talked and shared their understanding of events in their lives, and they told stories of the past and the present. They thereby enabled the construction of images informing the *self* and giving purpose and meaning to the *other*, the world around them. As James Fernandez (1982) notes in his discussion of metaphor, they located the personal pronoun within a certain conceptual space.

These images were not simply binary—us/them—rather, they worked themselves out in nuanced ways that enabled subtle distinctions of value and difference to be applied to the world around them and that informed the user's experience. This facilitated debate over how a story or theme should be applied to understanding events and required mastery of the corpus for one missionary to convince others. Images were constantly being reconstructed with varied polarities out of the formal and thematic material available. Given the restrictions of my data, instead of looking at the generation of images through the situational emergence of narrative (the current trend in folkloristics and narratology), I unfold themes as they are mobilized in use.

Out of these themes arose images of self and other, but they were seldom firmly fixed or univalent images. Rather, they manifested an essential ambivalence, a situational ambivalence demonstrating their flexibility for use in informing particular circumstances. Ironically, this ambivalence related nicely with an indigenous Bolivian cosmological precept on the inherent ambivalence of all forces in the world, a precept that is radically different from the polar Manichaeanism inherent in Western—and hence Mormon—thought.

Inevitably these images and stories became syncretic. Although firmly grounded in Rocky Mountain Mormon tradition, they interacted with Bolivia's symbolic and narrative traditions, establishing points of elective affinity. This enabled the missionaries' stories to become meaningful and relevant to the Bolivian members and the missionaries to have an interpretive code for understanding, at least partially, the tales the Bolivians told them. Just as the missionaries, as bearers of a foreign culture, worked within the order provided by Bolivian culture, so too their narratives operated within a symbolic space situated among the broader sets of meaningful distinctions around them. As a result, their discourse was no longer simply a sub-

set of Anglo Mormon culture but stood between that and the realm of Bolivian folklore, popular narrative, and everyday gossip.

One well-polished reflective surface appeared in considerations of missionary life and the actions of other missionaries. Like the frame of a mirror, these narratives held the structure of the missionaries' life in their ambivalent discussion of the rules, authorities, and conditions. They valued the outlandish and the humorous as well as the exemplary—although the ribald and the picaresque seemed to get more play. The following stories illustrate these narrative mirrors.

One elder and his companion were tracting[3] around dusk in a notoriously dangerous neighborhood of La Paz. Suddenly they were attacked by a pack of dogs—an experience almost every missionary in Bolivia had. To defend themselves, they used every weapon they had, including their flip charts and Books of Mormon. The elder was flapping his umbrella back and forth. As a particularly ferocious dog lunged at him, fangs bared, the elder thrust his umbrella's spike down the dog's throat, killing the dog. From then on, whenever the children of the neighborhood would taunt him with "gringo jeringo mata la guagua," they would rhyme it with "con su paragua" (with his umbrella), and the elder would lunge at them with his blood-stained umbrella, chasing them screaming down the street. The elder thus appropriated the image of the "gringo jeringo" to validate himself, recognizing the danger his fellows frequently faced as they went door-to-door as well as laughing that Bolivians might find him and his companions dangerous.[4]

It was said that the Aymara-speaking missionaries were less constrained and wilder than the city elders—thereby picking up the Bolivian distinction between the "savage campo" (rural countryside) and the urbane city. Tales were told of elders riding with a crowd of people standing up in flatbed "chola" trucks with wooden slat sides (the major mode of transport in much of the campo) who would accept the dare to drop their pants and defecate over the side of the moving truck. *Qué pícaros*, what rogues these trickster/missionaries were as they defied the norms of civility forced on them by mission codes.

As missionaries, we were shown pictures of the missionary branch president of an urban La Paz branch surrounded by huge tropical vegetation. He was jumping upward from a rock and dressed only in a swimming suit, a forbidden state of undress for missionaries. We were told that he had accomplished the greatest feat. Although a church authority, he had traveled to the taboo, tropical Yungas, where his companion had taken the picture of him diving into a jungle pool, all of which was strictly forbidden.

We heard about the rural missionaries in the far south of Bo-

livia, who grew their hair and beards out, wore embroidered levi jackets instead of suits, and then decided to take a side trip into Argentina, all forbidden things. In Córdoba, a two-day journey from Bolivia, they were approached on the street by two clean-cut missionaries assigned to Argentina. (Both urban and rural Bolivian missionaries felt pity for Argentine missionaries because they had so many more rules to follow than we Bolivian missionaries did.) The two asked the bearded rogues if they wanted to know about the Mormon church. "Oh no," they responded, "we are missionaries in Bolivia." They thus re-created once again the stereotypical view of Argentina and Bolivia, the two sets of missionaries standing for the characteristics of each country. They also illustrated the (relative) freedom we Bolivian elders felt (our primary rule was "freedom with responsibility"), particularly when compared with rule-bound missionaries elsewhere. On days when we felt particularly oppressed by regulations and authority, we needed only to reflect on missionaries elsewhere, like those in Argentina, to make ourselves feel better. After scratching their heads for a day or so at these wild Bolivian elders, the Argentines were reported to have called their president, who phoned the president in La Paz, who then telegraphed the rural village to ascertain the whereabouts of the suspected elders. When the telegraph from La Paz arrived, however, the missionaries were back stabling their horses in the corral by their rural chapel. Once again the elders had triumphed over the system, even though they never seriously challenged it.

Interestingly, in many of these stories one senses the adoption of spatially symbolic coordinates of Bolivian folk logic, as one point of elective affinity between the Rocky Mountain culture of the missionary and the Bolivian traditions. The tales organize the social reality of missionary life in terms corresponding to the distinctions Bolivians make in their binary and at times tripartite cosmological and moral reference points. On the Copacabana peninsula, where I did field work, for example, the center of the community is conceived as human and "civilized," while the periphery is considered dangerous and savage. The city of La Paz, the de facto national capital, thus becomes the reference point for civilization, along with other cities, each with its own unique stereotypical characteristics—which the elders to some extent adopted reputedly—while the tropical lowlands are seen as the land of the *ch'uncho*, or barbarian jungle Indians, and the grasslands belong to the *lari* or *cimarrón*, that is "savage," "wild" Indian.

We contemplated the mystery of a district of elders in the min-

ing community of Llallagua, an area known in Bolivia for its strong, rebellious, labor activism against the powers of the state, who decided to take a secret and carefully planned trip to Chile for a week. The evening before their scheduled departure they were shocked when they received a telegram from the mission president saying, "Do not travel to Chile, stop." Like the miners of Llallagua, the elders planned an antiauthoritarian strike; however, as often happens to the miners, they were pulled up short by a surprisingly well-informed central authority.

Of course, to the missionaries this also was a confirmation of the president's spiritual authority. He had to be anchored firmly in sacred process, otherwise how could he possibly have known their secret plans? In the earlier story the elders from southern Bolivia, like the classic Bolivian *mañudo*, or picaresque figure, managed to outfox the Argentine and Bolivian authorities in a kind of rogue, antiauthoritarian anarchy much loved in Bolivian folktales (see Knowlton, 1988, 1991b).

Another common theme in missionary interaction dealt with life in the United States as lived, understood, and strategically remembered by a postadolescent. The unconscious complexity of North American life became simplified into a number of critical themes that stood symbolically for the whole. These were invested with emotional and almost sacred intensity because they propped up the missionaries' sense of self and maintained coherence in their lives as well as directly contrasted the remembered United States and Canada with the Bolivia of their everyday experience.

Missionaries therefore spent a tremendous amount of time discussing their premission life, defining it and the nature of "things at home." They actively contrasted Bolivia with North America, sometimes tacitly and sometimes with strident explicitness, in ways that were often arrogantly ethnocentric and insensitive at best. As one missionary commented while walking down the main street of La Paz, searching in vain for the candy she called "nigger's toes," "This is not America!" (Although to a Bolivian, Bolivia is most definitely *América*.)

Missionaries discussed suddenly coming across U.S. consumer goods in out-of-the-way places, particularly foods, such as cornflakes, chips and picante sauce, Oreos, Milky Way bars, hamburgers, and tacos. They contrasted these with the curious foods many claimed to find inedible (which others actually liked although they would rarely admit it), such as *ch'uño* (freeze-dried potatoes). Missionaries joked about difficulties they had when Bolivians invited them to eat in their

homes. They would comment about finding flies in the food. Or they would joke about searching assiduously to find and remove the ever-present hair. They complained about grit and sand in their rice or commented on being served taboo foods, such as chicken feet, eyeballs, innards, guinea pigs, and pork skin with bristles intact. Some elders, particularly campo elders, reveled in eating the "wild" foods that the urban elders eschewed. In short, missionaries expressed tremendous ambivalence about eating Bolivian food and distrusted the Bolivians who invited them to share a meal.

This parallels a Bolivian theme of distrust of others. It is said that in Camiri, a city in the lowland Bolivian department of Santa Cruz, a person once bit into a *salteña*, or meat pie, and pulled out with their teeth a human finger with a ring on it. Mothers frequently warn their children of the dangers of eating in the street or at other people's homes, warning that, who knows, the food might be *q'uñichi* ("dirty") or *recalentado* (rewarmed). After all, people are not to be trusted.

Yet when the native Bolivian missionary companions overheard the Anglos retelling these stories of the dangers of Bolivian cuisine, only sometimes did they sympathize and participate in their telling. At other times they were angered by these tales that insulted their country and their food. While living in Bolivia, interacting with Bolivians, and adopting Bolivian expressive modes, Anglo missionaries remained symbolically dangerous foreigners, even to their Bolivian companions.

Yet sharing or exchanging food, particularly at ritually stressed times, is for Bolivians one of the major mediators of social difference. The sharing of food and the reciprocal gift-giving of food marks solidarity and builds community out of the ambivalent mistrust that ideologically characterizes Bolivian life. The definition of the good outsider is one who accepts the gifts of food and who makes gifts of food and sustenance in return. In the community of Huacuyo, when I asked the converts to Mormonism what distinguished one church from another, they responded that, among other things, the Mormon missionaries would eat their food, shake their hands, and play with their children, while the Evangelicals rejected their food and called their children "dirty little pigs."

The Bolivian missionaries often recognized the humble sincerity with which most people made tremendous sacrifice to feed the Anglo missionaries and felt hurt by any breech of proper manners. To not eat proffered food in Bolivia is a direct insult, a rejection of the *cariño*, human warmth and kindness, of the person offering it. One incensed Bolivian missionary decided to get even with her Anglo peers

for their hypocrisy in eating food and then talking among themselves about how bad Bolivian food was. She made a chocolate cake, an Anglo favorite, but she liberally included ground *ch'uño* in the flour. Then she laughed and laughed when she told them they had just eaten a *ch'uño* cake, something they would not believe.

The missionaries talked about the packages they received or did not receive from home, about the Top Forty music hits list, sports, dating, movies, and sometimes about their adolescent experiences with alcohol, drugs, and sex. At the same time they frequently discussed the apparent "absurdity" and "silliness" of Bolivian life. One missionary wanted to write a book when she returned home detailing the humorous experiences everyone had, asserting that it would surely be a best-seller. She planned to entitle it *It All Happened in Bolivia.* She was going to mention the time the Bolivian Air Force lost a plane containing a cadet pilot and a well-known, experienced, veteran air force pilot. On the way to the funeral another plane crashed with a substantial number of Bolivian Air Force personnel on board—or, as the missionaries wryly noted, "The Air Force lost its other half."

While this remark sounds a theme common in Bolivian folk tradition of the irony and often absurdity of Bolivian life, it does so in ways that would be insulting to Bolivians if they overheard it from Anglos. Bolivians tell, for example, of the time the president was deposed in a coup and took a suitcase of the nation's gold reserves with him as he fled to Peru, only to have it confiscated by the Peruvian consular officials. "What a country," the Bolivians ruefully shake their heads, "Even our presidents lose our nation's wealth!" As in-group joking, this would provoke wry smiles. If a foreigner dares to speak this way, however, Bolivians immediately jump to the defense of their national honor.

This attitude presented a problem for the missionaries as foreigners living in Bolivia. They had to explain to themselves the strange world around them while at the same time supporting their own sense of self. Unfortunately, the genres in which they heard Bolivians describe their country were humorously self-deprecating, whereas the missionaries tended to exalt and even sacralize their own country—as many of the Bolivians did as well. Yet if Anglos expressed this attitude too openly, they risked severely insulting their hosts. As a solution, they generally saved these comments for in-group grousing in English, a language most Bolivians did not speak. When it was understood, however, it created substantial ill will.

This condescending attitude toward their host country was one

of the most common themes of missionary interaction. Although the missionaries frequently misunderstood and devalued Bolivian life, these exchanges served to support the missionaries' value system through the creation of a sense of self and other. They created this cognitive construct within the coordinates of the Bolivian symbolic order and through solidarity with or separation from Bolivian reality. For example, an elder received a shipment of cookies, candy, popcorn balls, and letters from home, but the package had been opened and a substantial portion was missing. Upon inquiring what had happened, he was told that a mouse had nibbled the package open. "Sure," he replied. "Only in Bolivia!" He meant thereby that only in Bolivia would a mouse be blamed for consuming his goodies from home, when the customs' officers probably just helped themselves. "Only in Bolivia" emphasized how distinct the felt social order was from the missionaries' home society. The elder did not know that the mission secretary had the habit of opening packages for customs' agents to inspect and then sharing some of the sweets with the agents to maintain their goodwill for shipments of church supplies. Similar misunderstandings lay behind much of the missionaries' discussion of Bolivian life.

This sense of self and other became critical because the missionaries did not see themselves as only teaching a limited number of discussions and baptizing people. Like the Bolivians, they wondered why one nation is developed and another underdeveloped. For the missionaries, the answer often depended on a divine sanction for the United States as the homeland of the gospel. They frequently said that "the solution to Bolivia's problems is the gospel." By the gospel they tacitly meant the socioeconomic formation of the United States and Canada, as they understood it and as they sacralized it through their religion.

Conversely, missionaries often expressed admiration for Bolivians and humility before them. They argued that Bolivians were much more spiritual than secular and skeptical North Americans were.[5] They were supposedly more open to and trusting of the supernatural. The missionaries told of the chapel in Quiriza, where the poor, illiterate, Quechua-speaking members sacrificed to build a chapel before the presiding bishopric's office initiated the policy of funding local meetinghouse construction. They had struggled, making all the money they could and devoting their own labor to making adobes, laying foundations, and raising walls. When the main beam arrived for the roof, they found it was too short. Since they had no money to buy another, they fasted and prayed that the Lord would solve the

problem. After a few days of fasting and praying, they gathered to look at the beam, wondering what they would do. A miracle had happened. The log had stretched just enough at one end to enable them to roof the chapel.

Similarly, the missionaries often spoke in reverent tones about how well they were treated by many Bolivians. Many of the missionaries felt particularly close to one family or another, even to the extent that they would establish fictive kinship relations with them. They would call the mother of the family *mamá*, and she would call them *mi hijo*, my child. They would refer to the family's children as *mi hermano* and *mi hermana* (as siblings). Such relations were very close, and many endured long after the missionary returned home. Missionaries exclaimed over how kind their Bolivian families were. "Can you believe it? Sister Gonzales came to La Paz just to visit me and see how I was doing. She brought me a package of food, even cleaned my room, and made Thanksgiving dinner for me and my companion." Interestingly, in this vein, the Bolivians were following a tradition of establishing fictive-kinship, reciprocal relations across ethnic and class lines for mutual benefit and assurance. Few of the missionaries understood the nature of the prestations or the obligations they were taking on. They talked about it as would nineteen-year-old boys away from home for the first time who had found a surrogate "mom," with whom they shared feelings of mutual "love and appreciation."

Not only did the missionaries develop strong solidarity ties with Bolivian Latter-day Saints, bonds amply celebrated in an almost competitive fashion among the missionaries, they also cultivated feelings of ambivalence and mistrust. For example, they discussed the "dollies" or "snakes," the young women who supposedly threw themselves at the missionaries in hopes of trapping one of them with their all-too-abundant sexuality. They discussed the tricks people played on them, such as members' giving them vodka and telling them it was water or offering them *chicha*, corn beer, and insisting it was orange juice. They talked of the gossip, viciousness, and frequent *envidia*—malicious envy—among the members. They recounted how sometimes when a missionary got too involved in internal branch (or now ward) politics, other ward factions attempted to stifle them with mean and devastating gossip, generally about their supposed infractions of the mission rules, most often targeting their behavior with some woman or another. At times this gossip evidently motivated unjust church court action against certain elders.

Within the corpus of Bolivian missionary lore, there is a long tra-

dition of tales of danger and persecution. Everyone knew missionaries who had been shot at or had stones thrown at them. Stories were told about how the early missionaries in Bolivia were barely able to escape "mob action" on several occasions. The missionaries spoke about the sometimes severe reactions against them by local Catholic clergy, motivating people to treat them badly. They would discuss how people frequently would lie to them, maintaining their pride by telling stories about the ostensible stupidity and incompetence of these Bolivians' deceptions. They would discuss authorities that would "hassle" them for a "contribution"—a bribe. They also would recount the coup attempts when missionaries had been caught near or in the fighting, but these tales usually stressed the missionaries' separation from these events. They felt they were protected by God and hence were safe.

In short, they would discuss the alienation and ambivalence they felt in Bolivian life, at the same time they recounted extreme solidarity and bonds of mutual affection with the Bolivians. Once again they picked up an important Bolivian position reflected in the proverb "Never trust even your own shadow," paired with a strong ethic of solidarity and reciprocity with in-group relations. It was not merely a distinction of in-group and out-group, though. All relations, from the Bolivian perspective, have the possibility for great benefit and solidarity, although they are simultaneously dangerously ambivalent. At any moment they can become relations of exploitation, trickery, and deceit.

Another common theme concerned the frequent gastrointestinal illnesses the missionaries suffered and the lack of adequate sanitary facilities. The elders would tell endless, humorous stories about urinating and defecating in the street. There were areas of every neighborhood the missionaries called "crap alleys." It was a sign of daring machismo to use the crap alley, since answering one's needs in public went against their Anglo sense of propriety. They told about seeing the mission president come up out of the "largest" crap alley in a dangerous part of La Paz, adjusting his pants.

They spoke of the problems of "brown outs," sudden losses of bowel control due to dysentery. Some missionaries bragged about never having browned out, since it was horribly embarrassing to do so and could happen at any moment. It is said that one new missionary, later assistant to the president, argued that browning out was merely a lack of self control. He maintained that if one set one's mind to it, one could at least hold it long enough to reach a bathroom. So the elders across the mission placed bets on how long it would be before he would brown out. One day he was working about two miles

from his home on the edge of town, when suddenly a galvanized look transformed his face, and without a word he turned and ran as fast as he could. When his companion caught up with him, he was standing at the door of their apartment, key in hand, brown puddles at his feet. After helping him get in the tub and wash up, the companion dashed to the post office and telegrammed around the mission, "Elder ——— browns out."

The missionaries had an eloquent repertoire of tales and distinctions to discuss sickness, insect bites that might lead to permanent disease, missionaries barely saved by faith from amoebas, *binchucas* (carriers of Chagas' disease), and so forth. While these tales evoked the dangers they faced in their daily activities, they did so in ways that strongly contrasted Bolivia with the United States and Canada. When Bolivians heard some of these demeaning stories, as happened when a *Sports Illustrated* article about college athletes serving Mormon missions was translated and published in a Bolivian newspaper, it provoked considerable anger at these ungrateful and condescending Yankees. Many of the missionaries' Bolivian companions reacted with strong anger that developed into near hatred toward the Anglo missionaries because they had "maligned" Bolivia.

Nevertheless, the Bolivian members played an important role not only in reproducing this folklore but in injecting it with Bolivian themes, since they told it among themselves and then repeated their Bolivian versions of these folk stories to the new missionaries. They organized good-missionary-and-bad-missionary stories. Good was someone expressing solidarity and confidence; bad was someone who was *antipático* and discourteous and rejected proffered solidarity with Bolivians. Although many of the stories told of an elder or sister breaking the rules, the stories were valued as picaresque if the rule breaker was "good" and proof of bad seed if the missionary was "bad." For example, it is told with affection how one elder who was very close to one particular family decided to visit friends in Potosí for a week. While he was visiting his family, a mother and her daughters, the Potosí missionaries knocked on her door. The visiting elder hurriedly hid in a freestanding armoire. The local missionaries stayed and stayed. One of them had come to tell the *hermana* that he had been transferred to La Paz and did not want to go. He would be leaving in the morning and had come to say good-bye. He continued to stay, delaying as long as possible his farewell. The *hermana* asked him which branch he would be working in. It was the same branch as the elder's in the closet. "Who are you replacing?" she asked. It was the elder in the closet. Thus the visiting elder found out he had been transferred. That night, as soon as the other missionaries left, the

hermana put him on a bus for La Paz. Just by luck he was able to make the transfer, and no one in the mission hierarchy ever knew he was AWOL.

The Bolivian members, while playing a critical role in reproducing this folklore and in connecting the Anglo missionaries with Bolivian reality, also constructed another set of images of self and other, using solidarity and separation to mark the boundaries of important social categories. The "good missionary," the solidary one whose foreignness was mediated by social interaction with the people, contrasted with the "bad" missionary, who insisted on social distinctions and separation, which stressed foreignness.

While foreign missionaries, and indeed foreigners in general, are viewed with tremendous ambivalence in Bolivia, they are also valued highly. In this they fit into what I have called the Bolivian discourse of the other, a flexible set of images used to describe social difference (Knowlton, 1988). When social hierarchy and distinctions are mediated by relationships of ritual and social solidarity, such as fictive kinship marked by exchange of socially specified gifts, then the language of family and community applies. When, however, the relationship is one of social distance, distinctions, and hierarchy, then a set of dangerous images of social nakedness and exploitation applies. These include those of the *q'ara*, the naked (i.e., the outsider, devoid of community and solidary relationships), or the *k"arik"ari*, the extractor of blood and fat, which are to Bolivians the principles of life. The *k"arik"ari* is often considered to be a gringo, whether a North American engineer, a Catholic priest, or a Mormon missionary. Instead of someone whose social distinctiveness is overlain by solidary relations, the person is an isolated outsider, a parasitic *other* who arguably lives by extracting the lifeblood and fat from one's social group.

The image of the "gringo jeringo" has always frustrated the Anglo missionaries in Bolivia. Inherently, it expresses the ambivalence of their position within the country and the dangers in their interactions with Bolivians, an ambivalence that is expressed both in Bolivian and missionary lore.

* * *

> Each story became a lens for looking at other lives.
> —Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

We have explored the ambivalences of Mormon missionary folklore. Out of these narrative mirrors, missionaries—these "long and

shadowy figures in anthropology," as Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1986) call them—developed a flexibly ambivalent but coherent and meaningful situational culture. It not only enabled them to understand themselves but also provided guides, in its deployment of multiple images of the self and other, to the missionaries' interactions with the world around them. As such it provided points of contact, or elective affinity, with Bolivian culture, which enabled the missionaries to function within the somewhat different symbolic system of Bolivian society.

All the while these stories enabled the missionaries to fulfill their duties, they also constrained them. Of particular importance, given their expression of the missionaries' frequent feelings of alienation paired with warmth for Bolivia, these tales could seriously anger Bolivians when they were picked up by the press or simply overheard. They were thus necessary but dangerous.

These tales, in the tradition of such Mormon "mythic" heroes as Wilford Woodruff, Samuel Smith, and Joseph F. Smith, were reworked in the particular context of Bolivia. Interestingly, particular Mormon themes became integrated into a more Bolivian pattern, allowing for a tacit creation of an indigenous missionary culture, even though it actively resisted much of Bolivian life. Of particular importance was the active use of an idiom of the "other" similar to the traditional Bolivian "other" exemplified in the rhyme "Gringo jeringo, mata la guagua." Only in reworking these themes, the missionaries ambivalently repositioned and reconstructed the "gringo jeringo" for their own purposes.

I wonder what missionary folklore is like now. The Anglo missionaries were absent for a while after the terrorist assassination of two elders in 1989. For a time the church continued, staffing itself solely with Latin missionaries. Now the Anglos are back, but they are a minority inserted into the Latin Mormon missionary culture. I wonder how this new culture has reworked the themes of Mormon missionary life, if it indeed inherited them?

Notes

1. This essay was originally written shortly after two Anglo-American missionaries had been assassinated by the Zárate Willka Armed Liberation Front, as a consequence of which all North American missionaries were withdrawn from the country. See David Knowlton (1989b) for an exploration of the killing of the two elders.

The style of this essay responds to a degree to the current "experimental

moment" (Marcus and Fischer, 1986) in anthropological writing. Or, as Roger Bartra (1992:ix–x) writes, "Anthropologists, historians, and sociologists in this country are gradually beginning to appreciate the usefulness of the free essay, a genre which opens the doors to those opaque and difficult areas of knowledge. . . . it is important to recognize in the essay tradition—which begins with Montaigne—a value that academic studies have denied . . . imaginative essays and the rupture of traditional frontiers are opening new spaces to help us understand the world's journey into the next century." Continuing with Bartra (3), this essay is something of an exploratory meandering into a subject matter, a cluster of often loose ends, which make statements even as they leave paths open to the reader's imagination.

2. In Bolivian slang, *jeringo* comes from the verb *jeringar.* The word is never used in polite company and means "to fuck" someone or to "screw up" something in both the literal and figurative senses. The word simultaneously suggests the syringe, since it is the masculine form of *jeringa. Gringo jeringo* takes on a more intense meaning because of a subtle reference to needles U.S. Peace Corps volunteers use. In common Bolivian understanding, the needles are used to abort babies and sterilize women. Both meanings are heard simultaneously.

3. Going from door-to-door to present a brief discussion and hand out missionary tracts.

4. I do not provide a detailed analysis of these narratives but rely primarily on juxtaposition with each other and theoretical discourse to suggest possible interpretations for them. In this lack of analytical closure, I mimic the way stories create tentative but heartfelt meaning in real life when missionaries tell them to each other. I also recognize the futility of analytical closure at this removal from missionary life.

5. One should note how similar this discourse is to the bipolar honorific/dismissive attitudes toward women that have been criticized by feminists.

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