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# Scenes from El Alto: Indigenous Youth Visions for Urban Bolivia

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**ABSTRACT**

This article contributes to debates on Indigenous planning from the perspective of Latin American urban Indigenous youth. It focuses particularly on Bolivia, a country renowned internationally for promoting indigenous rights, post-neoliberal development, and decolonization in its 2009 constitution. Research to date, however, highlights the gaps between legal rhetoric and planning practice, emphasizing how government authorities continue to reproduce Spanish colonial imaginaries, for example, by considering cities—albeit home to a predominantly young self-identified Indigenous population—as non-Indigenous spaces. In addition to being denied Indigenous rights and experiencing discrimination, urban Indigenous youth currently confront a domestic crisis exacerbated by the global pandemic. They lack socioeconomic opportunities despite high levels of education. Young Indigenous women are also disproportionately affected by intrafamilial violence and sexual harassment. Yet, urban Indigenous youth have not lost hope. Mobilizing Appadurai's (2004) "capacity to aspire," we argue that Indigenous youth represent planners of their own lives who confront hardships with their own future imaginations. We draw on collaborative research with four young Aymara women belonging to distinct Indigenous movements and collective organizations in the city of El Alto, with whom we deployed participatory video-making—a methodology that combines insights from popular education, docu-fiction, and visual anthropology. We demonstrate how Indigenous youth enact their problems and visions by deploying a particular urban Aymara filmmaking aesthetic that, aligning with conceptual work on *ch'ixi* by Aymara scholar Rivera Cusicanqui (2018), combines insights from Indigenous and modern urban worlds without ever fully mixing them. Based on a discussion of film scenes, we reflect on how urban youth articulate dreams for antiracist forms of urban cohabitation and challenge inequalities and racialization under urban coloniality. We conclude by exploring how participatory video-making can open possibilities for alternative planning approaches grounded in Indigenous youth visions for more just urban futures.

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**Key words:** participatory video, Indigenous planning, urban indigeneity, El Alto, Bolivia

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# Prologue

This article contributes to literature on Indigenous planning, speaking particularly to research that emphasizes film as Indigenous planning intervention (Sandercock and Attili 2010, 2013, 2014). Unlike previous research

that predominantly focused on the use of film screenings to initiate planning conversations, we focus here instead on the role of participatory video-making in Indigenous planning processes and as a tool for Indigenous youth to articulate and communicate their own imaginations for more just urban futures. In what follows, we draw on insights from an ongoing two-year-long collaborative project involving four young female Aymara coresearchers based in the Bolivian city of El Alto, a research coordination team including three Bolivian researchers (two male and one female), a male Berlin-based filmmaker, and ourselves—one female and one male white European non-Indigenous scholar.

A key long-term goal for us is to go beyond habitual research paradigms and contribute to the literature on decolonial and Indigenous methodologies (Kovach 2009; Smith 2012) through more self-questioning and ethically responsible critiques of knowledge-exchange processes, especially where urban Indigenous peoples are involved. Following this aim, and an effort toward more equal and relational ways of knowledge production, we have been working with different urban Indigenous collectives throughout the last decade, codesigning research protocols, methods, and outputs that predominantly address the needs and priorities of our Indigenous collaborators (see also Casagrande et al. 2022; Horn 2019). In the collaborative project in El Alto, research activities center around participatory video-making, a method and way of representing knowledge that our coresearchers find much more appealing than planning documents and academic articles. Unlike written text, video enables them to articulate and communicate issues of concern in line with oral traditions and locally recognized aesthetics. Therefore, our coresearchers, like other Indigenous research groups in Bolivia (see, for example, Rivera Cusicanqui 1991), primarily seek to address members of their own Indigenous community and are keen to use video-making as a more accessible tool than conventional academic reporting or writing. At the same time, we are very much aware that academic texts still represent the dominant mode of representing planning knowledge, and we, as well as our coresearchers, are supportive of special issues like this one, as they advance a more just Indigenous planning agenda and thereby disrupt the colonial cultures of planning from within the academy.

In preparing this article, we therefore had to wrestle with an important question: How do we contribute to a written collection of academic articles in a way that respects the priorities of all team members? Team discussions led us to the decision to combine insights from different modes of representing knowledge—academic text and video. The text part of this article is written and authored by the two European and English-speaking researchers from their own situated positionality, though it has been discussed, reviewed, and agreed on with all team members, ensuring that it captures their priorities. Embedded video scenes, for which we provide English subtitles, were coproduced with our Indigenous coresearchers, building mainly on their narrative, orality, and visual aesthetics.

What we present here, then, is ultimately a multimodal representation of knowledge (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019; Dicks, Soyinka, and Coffey 2006), but it also resonates well with what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) refers to as *ch'ixi*. In Aymara, *ch'ixi* refers to a color that looks gray from afar, but when

getting closer, you see it is made up of dots of the pure and agonistic colors of black and white. For Rivera Cusicanqui (2018, 84), the *ch'ixi* allegory serves to denote "zones of friction where opposites confront each other, without peace, without calm, in a permanent state of friction and electrification [that] create the magma that makes historical transformations possible, for better or for worse." In this article, we therefore deploy *ch'ixi* to bring together text and video as well as our different priorities, skills, and positionings without having to fully mix and reconcile them. As we highlight in subsequent sections, *ch'ixi* also helps in articulating alternative planning futures that bring Indigenous and modern urban worlds into a zone of friction.

In what follows, and to work within the mode of film as a planning process and tool, we present our discussion in the classical "Three Acts Structure" of screenwriting (Field 1979). Act one, referred to as "setup," introduces the viewer to the world the key characters live in as well as conflicts and issues to be explored later. In our paper, through a review of the relevant literature, the "setup" historically situates the role of indigeneity in Bolivian urban planning and provides an overview of El Alto. It also introduces the film directors (our four coresearchers, Eliana Cordero, Estela Maldonado, Helen Mamani, and Soledad Tancara) as well as their desire to share their problems and visions with both their own communities and a broader audience of youths. Act two, referred to as "confrontation," establishes the tools characters deploy to address conflict; in our paper, this serves to discuss how we collaboratively deployed different methods associated with participatory video—ranging from video interviews to docu-fiction—to make visible the problems and future visions of Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol. Act three, referred to as "resolution," ties the different elements of the story together. In this part, we examine the role of editing as a storytelling device that enabled our team to assemble different shots into a coherent narrative framed around a *ch'ixi* aesthetic. In the epilogue, we reflect on the potential of participatory video-making in planning processes and as a tool for Indigenous youth to articulate their imaginations for more just urban futures.

## Setup

Bolivia is renowned internationally for its progressive constitution ratified in 2009. It defines the country as a plurinational state composed of several Indigenous nations, calls for the decolonization of society, and recognizes specific Indigenous rights for so-called "Indigenous Native Peasants," including rights to territorial autonomy, prior consultation, and social, economic, and cultural self-determination (Schavelzon 2012). Yet, as argued by Horn (2019), despite enshrining the principle of decolonization, the constitution and related legislation and planning documents continue reproducing ethno-spatial imaginaries rooted in colonialism that draw on Western understandings of territories as spatially bounded and fixed (see also Elden 2013) as well as on the Spanish colonial model of blood politics (see also Wade 2010). The Spanish colonizers, deploying planning's toolset of mapping, surveying, and zoning (see also Porter 2010), introduced rigid ethno-spatial hierarchies between bounded territories such as cities—conceived of as "planned" spaces associated with "white" Spaniards or people of "mixed blood" who were granted citizenship—and the countryside—conceived of as "Indian" place, home to the "non-white" native population who was granted relative autonomy over

internal community affairs but denied citizenship, land and subsoil use rights, and the right to live in cities (Abercrombie 1994; Hardoy 1989).

Contemporary urban policy and planning reproduces such patterns by failing to recognize urban indigeneity and Indigenous rights in cities, assuming instead that Indigenous people lose their identity through rural-to-urban migration (Horn 2019; Ugarte, Fontana, and Caulkins 2019). This is particularly problematic in Bolivia, where most of the country's population (70 percent), Indigenous peoples included, live in cities. Throughout recent decades, Indigenous peoples moved to cities for a variety of push factors, including displacement from rural territories, and pull factors, including access to education, work, and other modern amenities associated with urban life (Horn 2022). The case of El Alto, situated on a flat plain at 4,150 meters altitude in the Andean Altiplano and above the city of La Paz, is emblematic of Indigenous urbanization. El Alto is a young city, both in terms of its history and population. Until the 1980s, hardly anyone lived there, as people mainly migrated to adjacent La Paz. With La Paz densifying and lacking space to physically expand, migration shifted toward El Alto (Arbona and Kohl 2004). Home to only 11,000 inhabitants in 1950, El Alto grew to become Bolivia's second largest city, with an estimated population of 943,558 in 2020. It is a predominantly Indigenous city composed mainly of people of Aymara descent; 72 percent of the population self-identifies as such. It is also Bolivia's youngest city; 66 percent of its population are between the ages of six and thirty-nine (Escobar de Pabon, Hurtado Aponte, and Rojas 2015).

Urbanization in El Alto was "unplanned" and occurred through squatting, occupancy, and incremental self-help housing (Arbona and Kohl 2004; see also Turner 1968). Public service provision remained nearly absent in the city's early history, as municipal resources were mainly channeled to La Paz's "white" urban core. Only by 1988 did El Alto become an independent municipal government, separated from La Paz, though it remains underfunded to this day. The city continues to grapple with a series of problems: El Alto has some of the highest numbers of murder (especially femicides), sex trafficking, and domestic violence in the country (Choque Aldana 2020). Police presence remains low, and community justice is widely practiced (Risør 2010). Most residents struggle to find formal employment and, instead, work in unregistered small-scale enterprises in the informal economy (Arbona and Kohl 2004). Some informal workers generate a decent income and experience upward mobility, forming part of a new Aymara bourgeoisie (Maclean 2019). However, 32 percent of the city's population still lives in relative poverty (Fundación UNIR Bolivia 2020). Despite improvements in education levels, 63.4 percent of young people work informally in often precarious conditions (Escobar de Pabon, Hurtado Aponte, and Rojas 2015). The mitigating measures of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as confinement, transport restrictions, physical-distancing practices, and closure of street markets and fairs, further led to a reduction in informal workers' incomes. Healthcare provision remains inadequate, with only 55 health centers serving nearly one million people. Most residents therefore rely on self-medication and traditional healing practices, including to treat COVID-19 (Pachaguaya Yurja and Terrazas Sosa 2020). In a context in which basic needs and demands are often unmet, El Alto residents frequently engage in social uprisings—with the most famous one being the 2003 gas wars leading to the ousting of the pro-neoliberal

government led by former President Sanchez de Lozada (Postero 2007). More recently, in 2019, popular uprisings occurred in the neighborhood of Senkata amid a national political crisis, which led to the fall of former President Evo Morales (himself of Indigenous descent) and to the introduction of a right-wing interim government (Farthing and Becker 2022).

When beginning our project at the start of 2021, our coresearchers Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol highlighted that their everyday lives take place and are shaped by the abovementioned issues. The four of them share that they are young, all in their early 20s, identify as Aymara, and call El Alto their home. Eliana, Helen, and Sol were born in the city. Estela is a first-generation rural-to-urban migrant. All maintain connections with their Indigenous rural communities of origin in the Bolivian Altiplano through frequent family visits, participation in cultural events, and agricultural activities but also via phone calls and WhatsApp chats. They, hence, lead multilocal lives spanning urban and rural territories that do not map easily on bounded conceptions of territory established by the colonizers and maintained presently by governments (see also Antequera Durán 2011). They either completed or are near to completing university degrees, but, similar to El Alto's young majority, they struggle to make ends meet economically. All of them complained about what they refer to as "lack of opportunities," a sexist culture, everyday insecurity, and discrimination they experience because of their Aymara background.

Despite all this, they articulate a broadly positive future orientation that is at once grounded in their Indigenous identity, their relationship with ancestors and rural communities of origin, and their urban present. As will be unpacked in the coming acts, their future orientations closely resonate with what Appadurai (2004, 69) refers to as "capacity to aspire—conceived as a navigational capacity which is nurtured by the possibility of real-world conjectures and refutations," deriving from a larger system of cultural norms, systems of ideas, affects, and sensations. For Appadurai (2004, 69), the capacity to aspire connects different temporalities by deploying culture, something that is grounded in past experiences and learnings, serving as a navigational tool to draw out future articulations. Similar to Appadurai, advocates of Indigenous planning also argue that related interventions must be "mindful of the past, cognizant of the present, and suitable for the future" (Jojola 2008, 43). This resonates well with Aymara understandings of past, present, and future being interconnected (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018). The past, called *nayrapacha*, is what is visible for people (*nayra* translates to eyes). The future, called *q'ipo* and meaning one's back, is something that is unknown and, like the body part, may become painful when one sits around for too long. The present, therefore, refers to the act of walking, requiring corporal engagement with past—eyes—and future—back (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018).

In our collaborative project, the priority for Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol was to tell their history, highlight their current problems, and articulate their future visions all in relation to their past-present and the place they currently inhabit—El Alto. They were interested in engaging in what Matunga (2017, 642) would refer to as Indigenous planning—a process of "spatializing their aspirations, spatializing their identity, and spatializing their indigeneity." They wanted to feel represented and articulate their understanding of reality but at the same

time relate this to broader issues concerning urban Indigenous youth in El Alto and beyond. This required coming up with a process that enables a sort of zooming in, looking for a shared place-based construction of meanings rather than trying to represent a social phenomenon in its entirety. It also required prioritizing bodily and affective understandings of the future and its relation to the past and present. Capturing the affective side of future-making is increasingly recognized as an important component for planning, itself a future-oriented discipline (see also Inch, Slade, and Crookes 2020). Yet, conventional planning procedures, which often privilege particular forms of scientific rationality and textual modes of representation associated with the reproduction of the "lettered city" (see also Rama 1996; Rivera Cusicanqui 2018), seemed unfit for the purpose of our project. What was required instead was an immersion into the everyday landscape of Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol through a method that can elicit and capture diverse forms of knowing, "experiential, intuitive and somatic knowledges; local knowledges; knowledges based on the practices of talking and listening, seeing, contemplating and sharing; and knowledges expressed in visual, symbolic, ritual and other artistic ways" (Sandercock and Attili 2010). Our collective discussions led us to the conclusion that participatory video-making, and the production of a documentary film called "*Los Raices Adelante*" (Roots Ahead),[1] would be the way forward.

## Confrontation

Matunga (2013, 27) emphasizes that a key priority in an Indigenous planning process is self-definition, with Indigenous peoples being planners of their own lives who map out their preferred futures by deploying "planning approaches and tools to consolidate this." Yet, there exists no predetermined answer on *what* planning approaches or tools should be deployed for such a process. Instead, as Appadurai (2004, 67) emphasizes, future articulations "must be expressed in terms of actions and performances which have local cultural force." For our coresearchers, film tended to be a mode of expression that serves this purpose. All of them are active social media users, sharing their day-to-day experiences through platforms like Facebook and TikTok, and some, like Estela and Helen, are active video communicators. For example, Estela has a part-time job as TV presenter where she reads news in Aymara, and Helen and Estela also livestream video sessions of radio shows by their political collective called "*Colectivo Curva*," in which they discuss current affairs with urban Aymara activists. Hence, for them, video—as was the case with radio for previous generations of El Alto's Indigenous population (Rivera Cusicanqui 1991)—helps them express their Indigenous identity and related political concerns through integrating ancestral knowledge with technologies associated with the modern urban present. Such associations resonate with previous work by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2015), who highlights the potential of video- and image-making for building anticolonial representations and epistemologies. Her move toward a "sociology of image" was precisely to counteract the violent imposition of hegemonic colonial discursive practices. Her sense that audiovisuals are able to reach popular experience much more than written text is rooted in her critique of language as contaminated in order to conceal, rather than designate, a reality of internal colonialism and related inequalities. Images, on the contrary, "offer

interpretations and social narratives that since precolonial centuries illuminate […] perspectives to critically comprehend reality" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2015, 176, our translation).

In addition to being appropriate and both culturally and politically relevant for our coresearchers, film is also recognized as a useful tool in the planning literature, as it "can give expression to a dense qualitative analysis of social phenomena [in our case Indigenous youth problems and aspirations] in a territorial context," making visible "what normally remains invisible in planning" (Sandercock and Attili 2013, 68). Collaborative video-making, with its oral and visual modes of engagement, opens a space for people involved to make their own decisions in matters of representation, narrative, and topics. Potentially able to produce political impacts for the local communities involved, and challenging hegemonic systems of knowledge production, it makes visible problems and aspirations usually marginalized, especially in contemporary urban contexts (see, for example, Mistry, Bignante, and Berardi 2016, 2; see also White 2003; Lunch and Lunch 2006; Pink 2009).

We deployed film, or, better, participatory video, as an Indigenous planning tool to collaboratively construct a narrative around the problems and preferred futures of Eliana, Helen, Sol, and Estela. What interested us the most was the negotiated, collaborative, and script-less process of construction of a narrative alongside one another. The reflexive and dialogical aspects of collaborative research went hand in hand with a commitment to practice, creativity, and experimentation, and this allowed for an ongoing debate with team members of the project rather than at the level of theoretical abstraction remote from people's lives and concerns (Cox, Irving, and Wright 2016). Methodologically, we proceeded by putting together different layers interconnected by the common effort of making visible the lived experiences of Eliana, Sol, Helen, and Estela. Thinking of the applied methods of the participatory video-making process, we can distinguish between four main "planning" stages: (1) diagnosis, (2) training in filming and interview techniques, (3) the actual filming process, and (4) the construction of the final "story" through editing. These stages, separated here for reasons of clarity, were rather overlapping. The back and forth between them shaped the final product and the broader process of reflexivity in which we were all involved. However, we want to emphasize here how our dialogue and reflections, rather than being abstract, were always grounded and related to specific practices (e.g., filming or interviewing) and pragmatic choices (e.g., the opportunities of filming in certain sites or of interviewing specific persons). We discuss the first three stages here, putting particular emphasis on stage three. Stage four will be discussed in the "Resolution" section.

## Making Problems and Challenges Visible Through Docu-fiction

The diagnosis stage helped to identify core problems and challenges—many relating to issues discussed in the Setup section—but also aspirations, as well as how those were perceived by our coresearchers, in a workshop setting. We did this through virtual and onsite collective discussions, deploying standard tools associated with action planning, such as problem trees, drawing exercises, and photo elicitation. At this stage, we also discussed how the different issues identified can best be captured through film, with our coresearchers initially prioritizing "documenting" themselves and other Indigenous youth through video interviews and footage of

their environment. Training then focused on documentary film techniques such as interviews and filming B-roll using smartphones—a gadget that was available to all team members and served as a basis for more horizontal relationships in the filming process (see also Marzi 2021). Filming then unfolded in different ways—individually (with each coresearcher undertaking some activities individually in their homes or neighborhoods), via Zoom (e.g., through conducting video interviews), and through more classic in situ filming techniques that revolved around the creative coproduction of material with different team members in El Alto[2].

As filming unfolded, our coresearchers highlighted that "documenting" reality was necessary yet insufficient. This activity enabled them to capture some of their and other's concerns, but the lived experiences associated with commonly mentioned problems such as discrimination and violence could not be made visible through this technique. In this context, a series of important pragmatic question arose for our team: How do we *show* violence and discrimination? How do we convey these issues within the narrative of a documentary? A key practical solution to these questions at the crossroad of our filming project, similar to other experimental research endeavors such as Jean Rouch's "cine-trance" (Sjöberg 2008), was the use of fiction and reenactment, which gradually acquired a central role alongside interviews and more documentary-like filming techniques (see below for two example video scenes).


Video 1


Video 2

In the scenes shown above, dealing with difficult and usually invisibilized aspects of Indigenous urban life in Bolivia, filming focused on our coresearchers acting out their own and others' lives in front of the camera. This served as a "therapeutic planning process" in which a "dialogic space is created for the unspeakable, for talk of fear and loathing as well as of hope and transformation" (Sandercock and Attili 2014). Allowing them to "tell their own stories in their own way" through improvised acting enhanced their freedom and the possibility for them to actively shape their own representations (Sjöberg 2008, 236). As such, the fictive frame becomes a pretext for our Indigenous youth coresearchers to discuss their existence (Sjöberg 2008, 239)[3]. Yet at the same time, fiction provided a space for subverting common situations of subtle or more open violence and racial discrimination. In both the scenes shown above, the depicted situations are far from hopeless, and the agency of the protagonists is central. In their improvisations and reenactments, they show the possibility to act on and against hardships and injustices (i.e., in Video 1, Helen walks out of the shop and refuses to buy from someone who discriminates against her; in Video 2, Eliana uses her university-acquired skills as a social worker to provide advice to her client—impersonated by Sol—on how to help another woman seeking support to confront domestic violence). As such, our coresearchers play with the possibility of responding to situations of discrimination and intrafamilial violence through creating proposals that emerge from past ideas and knowledge acquired (as is particularly evident with Eliana). In other words, fiction enables them to unleash their "capacity to aspire" as they actively engage with the "as if" of film and fiction, depicting their real world but also allowing themselves to imagine it *otherwise*.

As we discuss in further detail below, these imaginations are deeply grounded and situated in place. This aspect not only resonates with general principles of Indigenous planning as "place-based" (Matunga 2013) but also with other struggles in Latin America, such as the feminist movement #NiUnaMenos. As argued by Verónica

Gago (2019), an academic forming part of and writing about this movement, the strikes and protests that characterized the continent in 2017 and 2018 expressed themselves through deeply situated ways of thinking, struggling, and imagining alternatives. This *situatedness*—which Verónica Gago relates to the force of embodied desire in rethinking the possible—is probably one of the main aspects that traverses different yet interconnected social movements and collective organizations across the continent (and beyond). This is also the case in El Alto where not just feminist movements like *Mujeres Creando* but also Indigenous youth collectives like the Colectivo Curva—of which Helen and Estela are members—deploy an approach in which specific bodies and situated thinking express certain desires as political force. Here lie the connections between these broader movements and efforts by Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol to render visible their everyday struggles and possible solutions through docu-fiction.

While representing a political and an epistemological act, we also consider docu-fiction to be a form of Indigenous planning. The use of fiction is a relational way of constructing knowledge and rethinking the city, abandoning and challenging the scientific rationality and textual modes of conventional planning. Instead, and aligning with Augusto Boal's (1996) image of theatre as "telescopic," we consider the use of fiction as a "telescopic approach" to planning. Boal used this visual definition to emphasize theatre's capability of bringing to light aspects obscured or hidden, thus restituting a more articulated and complete picture of reality. For us, this claim also holds for planning, as the fictive scenes of situated imaginations are capable of shaking hegemonic regimes of "visibility."

## Situating Future Aspirations in Relation to Past and Present

Film not only helped our coresearchers to make visible problems such as discrimination, gender-based violence, economic uncertainty, corruption, and favoritism as perceived from their perspective, but it also enabled them to articulate their hopes, desires, future plans, and dreams. Aligning with general principles of Indigenous planning to connect people, places, and knowledge across generations (Jojola 2008; Matunga 2013), and specifically with Aymara understandings of past-present-future being interconnected (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018), all of them wanted to articulate their future orientations (*q'ipo*—one's back) by being in and moving through spaces they associate with their and their people's past (*nayrapacha*—what one can see through the eye). Film, in this regard, was particularly helpful in visualizing this past-present-future trialectic and is therefore considered here a useful Indigenous planning tool. As is evident in the two film scenes depicted below, the camera can address this trialectic simultaneously through (1) centering its lens toward settings of biographical or historical significance associated with the past; (2) capturing how protagonists sit, stand, or move within these settings in the present; and (3) recording (through its audio function) situated articulations of the future.


Video 3


Video 4

The places chosen by our coresearchers (e.g., in the case of Estela in Video 3, a monument of Aymara resistance fighters Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa who came from the countryside to stage a siege in the city of La Paz; in the case of Helen in Video 4, a rural valley situated at El Alto's city edge) also enabled them to connect insights from urban and rural worlds they inhabit or previously inhabited without ever fully mixing insights from both worlds. This again closely aligns with what Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) refers to as *ch'ixi*. Helen addresses the suffering of her extended Indigenous community living in the countryside—where they tend to confront issues of material deprivation—and in El Alto—where racism and discrimination but also a

sense of individualism and capitalist greed shape everyday life. But she also reflects on the positive features of both places—the rich history and culture of rural communities and the educational and economic potentials available in the city. Her aspirations and dreams for the future creatively engage with cultural, social, political, and economic issues that characterize both settings. By deploying the skills and knowledge gained as part of her urban life, mobilizing her university degree in tourism, and making use of the city's economic potential, she dreams of setting up an ethical tourism enterprise. Through this, she hopes to induce positive changes. In her rural place of origin, she hopes to generate additional financial resources that can be managed collectively by the community, thereby challenging individualist capitalist practices occurring in the city. In cities like El Alto, she wants to expose diverse urban residents to the cultural richness of the Aymara people, thereby breaking down negative stereotypes and racist attitudes. Likewise, Estela emphasizes connecting her skills gained in the city (e.g., her engineering education or her role as intercultural communicator in radio and television) with her rural community of origin, where she engages in a series of collective activities such as festivities, agricultural work, and territorial governance.

What results from this, then, is an articulation of Indigenous futures that draw on and modify coexisting knowledges, material and cultural systems, and temporalities associated with specific rural and urban places that shape the lived experiences of our coresearchers. Others have referred to such processes as pluriversal politics (Escobar 2020), and we consider this a specific type of Indigenous planning that lays out alternative futures that, to paraphrase Rivera Cusicanqui (2018), connect different poles without creating a synthesis and by making visible contradictions and problematizing tensions. From this perspective, being in the city does not lead to the obliteration of Indigenous knowledges, traditions, rituals, and cultural practices from elsewhere. This is visible in the video scene of Estela who stands in El Alto's urban core wearing traditional clothes, shouting in her Aymara language, and mobilizing knowledge from her community of origin as a catalyst for urban change. Likewise, rural communities of origin cannot be thought of as isolated from the city. Instead, by mobilizing insights from both worlds, as is visible in the case of Estela and Helen, alternative futures are articulated that are grounded in rural–urban exchanges. Such future imaginations, then, at once invoke the integration of Indigenous traditions into urban life, antiracist forms of urban cohabitation, and the arrival of elements of urban modernity to Indigenous communities but in such a way that local residents can use this to create their own version of a good life.

## Resolution

Once filming was concluded, with many hours of footage produced, we entered the fourth planning stage: constructing the final story through editing. Narrative choices have accompanied all the previous stages of our filming process, from the diagnostic to the actual shooting of scenes and interviews. Discussions about content, meaning, and message shaped our practice from the beginning, as outlined above, led by the interests and concerns of Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol. However, the editing moment possesses peculiar qualities of narrative construction on its own. It is about the crafting and molding of a story into a complex multisensorial

object, involving the visual, sound, and rhythm as much as content and aesthetics. In a collaborative video-making process, the need for "opening up" the editing suite is key. Especially when working in Indigenous territories, as noted by scholars employing participatory video in such contexts, shared and negotiated representations through media need to engage in a constant dialogue with local narratives, orality, and aesthetics (Willox et al. 2012, 129). To avoid reproducing a colonial gaze, critical attention should be given to the construction of stories and related narrative devices as well as to "the often-undiscussed dominance of Western realist conventions" (Kindon 2016; Schiwy 2009).

With our youth collaborators, this primarily involved a discussion around the audience—who do we want to tell this story to?—that quickly evolved into issues of rhythm, sound, and aesthetics. When it became clear that the addressed audience was mainly constituted by Indigenous youth in El Alto and beyond, the codes to be employed were those Eliana, Estela, Sol, and Helen reproduced in their everyday use of social media (e.g., rapid, sharp rhythm, jump-cuts, multiple videos on screen, Aymara hip hop music). We asked them to share clips and films they liked, and from there, we went into discussions of the way they wanted to work through visual representations. We then reproduced still images from our shooting to identify each scene, and, in collaboration with the other Bolivia-based team members, we printed them out and asked them to construct a first narrative on paper. The still images were stuck on a wall in the offices of our Bolivian research collaborators, and Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol worked on a first structure that they then shared with the team, highlighting their choices of scenes, timeline, and cuts. Moving from there, we started the actual editing process in Adobe Premiere, with the technical support of a professional documentary filmmaker. While advancing with the editing, we organized feedback sessions with Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol to watch, critique, and discuss changes as we progressed. At this stage, our collaboration centered ever more around how to tell Estela's, Eliana's, Helen's, and Sol's story.

Storytelling has long played a key part in planning: it translates complex information into clear and accessible narratives, and appeals to both emotion and intellect as part of meaningful community engagement (Sandercock and Attili 2014). As underlined in the analysis of what has been defined as the "story-turn in planning" (Sandercock 2004), stories can become catalysts for opening urban conversations and engaging in deeper community dialogues (Sandercock and Attili 2010, 26). Stories and the city thus have a long-lasting relationship, as do stories and places more broadly. Storytelling, as is evident especially beyond the Western context, is much more than words and orality: It is linked to bodily practices and to the body or bodies situated in and moving through place—something that, as argued previously, can better be captured through film. These practices, whether more ritualized or rather improvised, are collective and relational. Stories unfold in the articulated space between one or more narrators and an audience. Stories contribute to the very construction of relationships, with people and with places. Especially in Indigenous contexts in Latin America and beyond, storytelling and place-making are often brought together by similar gestures and narratives (see Feld and Basso 1996). As beautifully described by the anthropologist Michael Jackson (2002), the telling of story is a

fundamental attempt to understand the world and our place in it—a practice of communicating with others but also of situating oneself and, in the process, of making and remaking the world[4].


Video 5

In our dialogue with Eliana, Estela, Sol, and Helen, the ways in which storytelling and place-making are related, both shaped by local codes and aesthetics, is probably particularly evident in their editorial choices concerning the opening scene of the film (see Video 5 above). We see the earth from a distance, and we zoom toward the Latin American continent, Bolivia, and El Alto, while Aymara rap plays in consonance with cuts from Google Earth. Shootings of the city, cuts from the news, and archival material follow in rapid succession, showing us Aymara women in their traditional outfits, market vendors, the cable car connecting El Alto and La Paz, political protests, insecurity issues, and historical migration from rural areas. This introduction to the city, characterized by a very quick rhythm and a juxtaposition of different materials, represents very well their take on El Alto, bringing together both their experience and their interpretation of it. In what can well be conceived of as a *ch'ixi* city (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018), different codes and aesthetics are simultaneously present, reproducing contrasts that find their own way of articulation but without ever fully blending into one another. Our collaborators move skillfully within this variegated context, employing these different "materials" both alternatively and simultaneously. Their editorial choices for the introductory part of the film were faithful to this "jumbled aesthetic" (see also Casagrande et al. 2022), able to traverse and gather different codes and modes of representation.

## Epilogue

In this article we have highlighted how urban Aymara youth filmmaking and editing aesthetics, in dialogue with the notion of *ch'ixi*, are capable of building more affective, future-oriented imaginations in line with

Indigenous planning ambitions to spatialize aspirations, identity, and indigeneity while moving beyond Western scientific rationality and conventional textual representations that reproduce the "lettered city." If *ch'ixi*, in Rivera Cusicanqui's terms, is to coexist between opposing mandates, and to create links through allegories and by embracing contradictions, Indigenous filming is a good example of weaving interconnections in the crafting of new languages and worlds (Rivera Cusicanqui 2018; Schiwy 2009). These languages, following Tanja Winkler (2018), are "endogenous systems of knowledge production" resulting in "resistant texts." Rivera Cusicanqui's analysis helps us again to make sense of this process, underlying how anticolonial acts of image-making need to go through what she calls "the decolonization of the gaze" that translates in reactivating an experiential memory, merging bodily and mental senses (Rivera Cusicanqui 2015, 23). As the author proposes in her pedagogical approach within a sociology of image, this should be considered an exercise in "memory of doing" that connects past-present-future through affective, situated, and place-based engagements. We believe that this pedagogy resonates well with and further informs Indigenous planning and related political struggles, emphasizing how the audiovisual—in our case film—can help shake hegemonic regimes of visibility, communicate Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, and narrate stories for more just indigenous futures.

As noted by Ortiz (2022, 13), storytelling in planning, from a decolonial approach, can act as a means for identifying and learning from "resistant texts—or strategies seeking to defamiliarize and delegitimize hegemonic ways of thinking, being and doing—"as urban actors' ways of knowing and enacting city-making practices. When these "resistant texts" are conveyed by practices of video-making (be that through documentary film or fiction), pushing further the very notion of textuality, another layer is added to those of orality and narration, requiring a deep engagement with the visual—what Jennifer Deger (2016, 11) defines as "active looking"—and somehow "projecting" the power of storytelling to shape sociopolitical and material contexts and of counter-hegemonic narratives to participate in the construction of knowledge about and in the city. Shaped by our film theme "*Raíces Adelante*" (roots ahead), these imaginations, through storytelling choices and collaborative negotiations, challenge (post)colonial representations and expectations related to the city as "white" space, indigeneity as confined to the rural, and how both should be addressed through conventional mechanisms of planning, such as mapping, surveying, or zoning. An alternative representation of Indigenous futures is constructed through film in which countryside and city are intertwined, with Aymara Indigenous peoples moving between both settings, making connections with their past-present-future, and deploying elements of both "worlds" without fully mixing them.

While alternative future articulations emerged from our video-making process, we cannot be certain about whether the final output (a film yet to be finished and screened to a wider audience) will serve as catalyst for broader sociopolitical change in El Alto and beyond. What we are certain of, however, is that film-making—at least in the context of our project—enabled Eliana, Estela, Helen, and Sol to act as planners of their own lives through representing and reflecting on past and contemporary challenges as well as articulating aspirations and visions for the future.

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Directors: Estela Maldonada, Helen Mamani, Eliana Tancara, and Soledad Tancara

## Footnotes

1. By the time of submitting our final manuscript, we were still in the closing stages of the film-editing process. The video clips included here represent rough cuts from this period. By the time of publication we have completed our film project. You can access the final version of our film here: https://vimeo.com/797441920?share=copy ↩
2. It is important to highlight here that our collaborative process has been affected by restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, with initial work occurring only remotely and in situ interactions only possible at later stages. We are reflecting on the implications of conducting participatory filming in this context elsewhere (Horn and Casagrande 2023).

Horn, Philipp and Olivia Casagrande. “Achieving Co-presence when Together and Apart: Hybrid Engagements and Multi-modal Collaborative Research with Urban Indigenous Youth.” *Qualitative Research*. Published ahead of print, May 29, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941231176942. ↩

3. There are epistemological grounds for a methodology in the social sciences that actively draws on the imagination of the participants. Fiction is currently considered a possible representation of fieldwork research and contexts with a few recurring arguments: as opportunities to mediate emotional and sensual impressions and the immediacy of lived experience; as rearrangements of events, facts, and identities that might provide a clearer image of the fieldwork experiences; and as ethical means to protect the integrity of the informants (see Sjöberg 2008, 239-240). ↩
4.

Jackson draws on the work of Hannah Arendt (1958), who already noted the power of stories in shaping the relationship between the self and others and self and collective sociopolitical spaces.

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- Olivia Casagrande and Philipp Horn are white, European, non-indigenous scholars working collaboratively with indigenous communities. We believe in the critical questioning of our research practice, and in the need of decolonizing Academia. Following this aim, and a joint effort toward more equal and relational ways of knowledge production, we have been working collaboratively with urban indigenous people in Bolivia and Chile for the last decade. This article presents findings from an ESRC-funded project (www.alter-nativas.net), involving indigenous youths as coresearchers in all stages. While written by ourselves from our own situated positionality, all contents will be discussed, reviewed, and agreed on with our four Aymara youth collaborators (Estela Maldonada, Eliana Cordero, Soledad Tancara, and Helen Marisol) from El Alto, following their priorities.

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