

The Enregisterment of *Colla* in a Bolivian (*Camba*) Comedy

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The years following Evo Morales's 2005 election to the Bolivian presidency have been marked by continued political polarization in that country. From many positions on the Bolivian political spectrum Morales's victory has been understood as a conquest by diverse sectors of this country's poor and disenfranchised—of urban populations mobilized against privatization in the cities of Cochabamba and El Alto (which erupted in the “Water War” of 2000 and the “Gas War” of 2003, respectively) and by Morales's rural political base of coca farmers and, particularly, by indigenous peoples. The attempts of South America's poorest nation to cure a neoliberal hangover provoked opposition from not only the US government and multinational corporations but also from their local affiliates in Bolivia, namely, those social sectors that have dominated Bolivian politics for most of its republican history. In this majority Quechua and Aymara nation, the mobilization of disenfranchised sectors carries with it racial implications for the European-descended elite. For them, the victories of popular movements and the subsequent election of Morales have raised the specter of Indian rule, or “the return of the Indian.”¹

These fault lines of race and class increasingly coarticulate with national space, divided between the Andean west of the country and the lowland east. Although the country's wealth has historically flowed from the mines of the western mountains, contemporary Bolivia's economic hub lies in the less populous, tropical eastern department of Santa Cruz. Bolivia's Quechua and Aymara majority and their descendants reside throughout the nation but historically have been concentrated in the

Andean west. The tropical east and north of the country, while having significant Guarani, Besiru, Warayu, and Amazonian populations, continue to be politically dominated by European descendants. The racial anxieties and political opposition to President Morales have congealed in the eastern departments, or the “half moon,” particularly in the department of Santa Cruz, around a political project of regional autonomy. The conflating of racial and political positionality can be heard in the commentary provided by an anti-Morales, pro-Santa Cruz autonomy demonstrator, Lindy Aguilera, who told the *Los Angeles Times* that “Evo Morales doesn’t like us because our skin is a bit lighter.”² On some occasions racialized political tension has erupted in violent confrontations. In Cochabamba in 2007 and Sucre in 2008 middle-class youth and university students attacked indigenous demonstrators (though neither of these cities pertains to the “half moon” region). Whether evidenced in acts of violence or in remarks like Aguilera’s at the proautonomy demonstration, political conflict in Bolivia has not only emerged around social and economic policies but has also unfolded around starkly contrasting, racialized models of what it means to be Bolivian.

The most salient contrasting models of what it means to be Bolivian in the Morales era are the *camba* and the *colla*. As stereotypic figures, the *colla* is an ethnically indigenous Andean highlander and supporter of Morales’s party Movement to Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*), while the *camba* is a tropical lowlander of European descent, a political supporter of what in Bolivia are referred to as the “traditional parties,” and an advocate of Santa Cruz separatism or “autonomism.” Even though *camba* identity has a racialized inflection of European ancestry, this was not always the case, and both these terms have historical roots in categories of indigeneity. The term *colla* dates at least to the colonial era, alluding to the preconquest Aymara kingdoms of the high Andean plain. Until the mid-twentieth century *camba* generally referred to an indigenous person of the lowland departments Santa Cruz or Beni. In 1676 we find the first written use of the word *camba* in the Jesuit Joseph del Castillo’s account of life in the missions of Mojos in what is now the department of Beni, to refer to “the native, who in voluntary form or not, assumed that social condition: to leave or be taken from his natural habitat to do diverse tasks in the city.”³ During the nineteenth century, *camba* was counterposed to being a good, Christian citizen in an adage of Santa Cruz high society: “Los enemigos del alma son tres: colla, cambia y portugués” (“The Enemies of the Soul Are Three: *Colla*, *Camba* and Portuguese”).⁴ By the time of Bolivia’s Chaco War with Paraguay (1932–35), or perhaps because of it and its accompanying social upheaval,⁵ *camba* undergoes a semantic shift and begins to denote European descendants and mestizos of eastern Bolivia.

For example, the president of the country shortly after the Chaco War, General Germán Busch, was referred to popularly as “el *camba* Busch.” Today *camba*, a term once narrowly identified with indigenous subalterity, now has as its prototypical representative a white, European descendant.

More than simply racial categories, both *camba* and *colla* are examples of register formations, a register understood here as, “a repertoire of performable signs linked to stereotypic pragmatic effects by a process of enregisterment.”⁶ *Camba* and *colla* emerge from repertoires of performable signs that congeal to be perceptually coherent, creating composite characterological figures. In other words, the pragmatic effect of *colla* and *camba* registers is the projection of a model social actor, which is both presupposed and/or indexically entailed through an array of signs including dress, linguistic behavior, phenotype, physical comportment, political engagement, occupational affiliation, and even culinary predilections. These semiotic fractions coalesce to create a recognizable stereotype, either a *colla* or a *camba*. While these stereotypes may or may not map easily onto biological individuals, they are models that living people embrace or reject to different degrees in their autobiographical self-conceptions. Lindy Aguilera is not just a resident of Santa Cruz, or of European descent, or a Bolivian of a particular political persuasion, she is all of these things, making her recognizably a *camba* to most Bolivians. This is likely a category she would both embrace and understand in opposition to being a *colla*. When she refers to her president, Evo Morales, it is likely that she would call him a *colla*, among other things.

The semiotic fractions that coalesce to become legible as *camba* and *colla* do not coalesce on their own but have been actively grouped together by people as meaningful through various moments of cultural production. Such a sociohistoric process through which composite signs coalesce into a category that seems “naturally” coherent and distinct from other modes of semiotic behavior is the process of *enregisterment*.⁷ Here I aim to provide an account of one phase of the enregisterment of *colla*, and to a lesser extent *camba*, as this process unfolds within a specific social domain by examining an arena where these registers become widely available and accrue meaning. First, this will be done through analyzing these registers within a set of mass-mediatised texts from a comedy series produced in Santa Cruz—*NEO*—and, secondly, through accounting for the recycling of these registers among online viewers of this comedy. The findings from a corpus analysis of these viewers’ online commentary suggest that the discourse within this social domain precipitates the *colla* as a category of abjection in which Indians are literally treated like shit.⁸

Symbolic Elites, Discourse Trajectories, Register Formation

In a study of the center-left Spanish newspaper *El País*, Teun Van Dijk discusses the representation of Evo Morales as a strange ethnic other because of the newspaper's public indecision as to whether to call him *indio* or *indígena*. Van Dijk argues that "symbolic elites" in the media and state institutions like schools are central to the reproduction of racist discourse.⁹ Less subtle in their discursive treatment of indigenous Bolivians, two members of the Bolivian "symbolic elite" who contribute to the reproduction of racist discourse are the comedians Sebastián Moreno and Pablo Fernandes. They write, perform, and produce the program *NEO* televised in Santa Cruz and distributed both in Bolivia via pirated DVDs and internationally through online media sharing websites like YouTube. Their comedy relies on performing Bolivian national and ethnic stereotypes, a genre of comedy recognizable beyond Bolivia even if the specific stereotypes are not. Like other comedians who draw on racial stereotypes for their comedy, their defense against charges of racism is that no one group is singled out but that everyone is "fair game." The text on one of their DVD covers, for example, declares that it contains "Bolivia presented by one man," promising satiric performances of many types of Bolivians.

Clearly, Moreno and Fernandes are not the only ones producing meaning through their comedy. When these performances are posted on a site like YouTube they provoke varied responses and alignments among their viewers—laughter, disgust, abandoning the website, or posting a comment in response. The affordances this format provides for leaving commentary create the conditions for a reflexive process wherein semiotic repertoires are deployed and then interpreted, evaluated, taken up, contested, rejected, and echoed. If "a register formation is a reflexive model of behavior that evaluates a semiotic repertoire (or set of repertoires) as appropriate to specific types of conduct,"¹⁰ the online interaction of performance and viewer response provides an interesting venue for examining register formation, precisely for its self-consciously reflexive participation framework.

These performances are encountered within a larger media landscape, one that also includes instances of communication unfolding in contexts not usually considered "mass media." The demonstration where Lydia Aguilar marched, for example, involved tens of thousands of participants. The politicians speaking at these demonstrations communicate messages to mass audiences collectively attending not only to the "message" but also to an array of other emblems of group membership co-occurring within the event, such as the flags and banners—green and white for the *autonomistas* of Santa Cruz, or the rainbow *wiphala* of



Figure 1. Aymaras march carrying the wiphala in Jesús de Machaca, Bolivia, 2011. Courtesy of the author

the indigenous organizations. Even the very spaces of these events may become resignified: the central plaza of Santa Cruz is itself an important emblem of *camba* identity, for example.¹¹ Whether or not Bolivians of any political orientation have attended a political rally, they will have already encountered emblems such as the rainbow wiphala flag co-occurring with other emblems of indigeneity with enough regularity to recognize it as a sign of indigenous political organization.¹² If Lydia Aguilar has come to recognize the wiphala, it is not from spending time alongside indigenous marchers (fig. 1). Even if she has never carried on a conversation with an Aymara conational, she likely would be able to provide an account of other signs she perceives to index Aymara or indigenous membership. How would Aguilar have access to such repertoires in the absence of close personal contact? It is likely that she has encountered models of what it is to be *camba* or *colla* not only through socialization in family and peer group interaction¹³ but also within mediatized contexts of print, television, and the Internet.¹⁴

If Lydia can describe “a typical *colla*” in a socially stratified society like Bolivia, it is likely that much of her ability to predicate this term (they talk like ____, they eat ____, they wear ____) comes from mediatized models of *collas*. This kind of predication of semiotic repertoires is the most accessible layer of register formations as people can typically recognize more registers than they can reproduce with any competence. One consequence of asymmetries of competence in varied registers is that using them within actual instances of interaction proves more difficult than merely describing them as repertoires of metapragmatic stereotypes (table 1). Herein lies the talent of the *NEO* team, in its ability to trope upon these registers to dramaturgical and comedic ends.

Table 1. A metapragmatic outline of stereotypic valences of *colla* and *camba*

	Colla	Camba
Region	Andean highlander	Tropical lowlander
Ethnicity	Aymara/Quechua	European descendant
Politics	MAS/Evo Morales / unions	Traditional parties/“Autonomy”
Language	Quechua/Aymara substrate Mixed <i>vos</i> and <i>tú</i> paradigm: <i>vos comes</i> (you eat) <i>vos abres</i> (you open) but <i>vos</i> in imperative mood: ¡Comé! (eat!) ¡Abri! (open!)	/s/ → [h] in syllable coda (after vowel) Full “ <i>voseo</i> ” paradigm: <i>vos comés</i> (you eat) <i>vos abrés</i> (you open) Diminutive -ingo, [pwe:]

Central to both *colla* and *camba* registers is phonolexical form. *Camba* Spanish is recognizable by a number of features: the lenition, or “aspiration,” of /s/ after vowels typical of many coastal and lowland varieties of Latin American Spanish; the distinctly *camba* diminutive “-ingo” instead of “-ito” or “-ico.” The use of “pues” /pwe:/ (English “well” or “OK”) is another salient contrast between highland and lowland speech. In lowland speech it is pronounced as either [pwe:], with a long vowel, or as [poh] as an affirmative response to polar, yes/no questions.¹⁵ In highland speech “pues” is often reduced to [-ps], suffixed to vowel final words “no, pues” → [nops]. This vowel elision is likely an Aymara substrate influence. *Camba* Spanish uses a second-person pronoun and verb paradigm similar to that used in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, known as *voseo*, where in the highlands a hybrid form is used, combining the pronoun *vos* with *tú* verbal inflection, except in imperative constructions. *Colla* Spanish, along with other Andean Highland Spanish varieties, contains other features that have been identified as Aymara/Quechua substrate such as clause final use of *pero* (but) and *siempre* (always).¹⁶ These registers are not discretely linguistic but encountered within multimodal, cotextual configurations of other signs, each with their own indexical valences of class, ethnicity, political affiliation, and regional origin (fig. 2).

The (T)Errorist *Colla*

NEO’s comedy satirizes a range of stereotypical types of Bolivians within a particular framework of addressivity. Examining the full range of characters portrayed through the scenes of *NEO*, which also includes satires of the 1993 *Blood In, Blood Out* and a drag rendition of *Titanic*, is beyond the scope of this essay. What I aim to do here is to focus in on the portrayal of the *colla* within their performances and the subsequent treatment this category receives within the discourse of *NEO*’s online viewers.

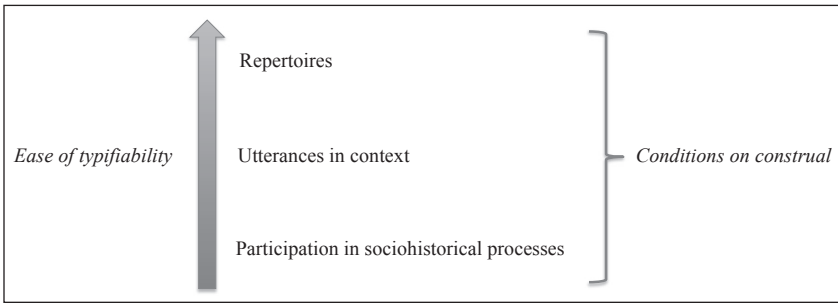


Figure 2. Three levels of engagement with register phenomena. Adapted from Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149. Reprinted with permission

The packaging of the DVD promises the audience that it is a “*camba* comedy that surprises Paceaños,” or residents of La Paz, *collas*. By virtue of being embedded within a commodity form, these promises contain a two-tier structure referencing author and audience and also seller and buyer.¹⁷ This participation framework raises some questions concerning addressivity and voicing when we read that Paceaños are surprised by *NEO*’s performance—does the *colla* buyer want to be surprised or participate in surprising *collas*? In other words, how do we understand who *NEO*’s target audience is for this performance? Examining responses to this comedy among an audience is one way of understanding who aligns with this type of addressivity. Such an analysis will follow an examination of Fernandes and Moreno’s tropic deployment of the *colla* register in a performance of two *colla* characters—members of the *Talibán indigena* (indigenous Taliban).

If satire is by definition intertextual, relying on the mimicry of a previous text, the *Taliban indigena* sketches are particularly intertextual by virtue of their embedding within actual news footage of a wrestling group and gym in the city of El Alto whose members identify as *Talibanes indigenas*. Far from being students of radical Islam, these are urban Aymaras who take on “Taliban” as an emblem of anti-imperialist, “tough guy” footing. The comedians wear shirts resembling those in the footage that read “Talibanes Indigenas.” Using emblems of highland indigenous material culture to inhabit their roles as *Talibanes indigenas*, both comedians also wear *lluch’us*—the conical, ear-flapped, knit hats typically worn by highland indigenous men, Quechua and Aymara alike—and chew coca, made visible by bulges in their left cheeks (fig. 3) and audible through an exaggerated distortion of speech “caused” from a large ball of chewed coca leaves in one’s mouth. The main “distortion” to the voice, however, is not from a wad of coca but from the comedians’ mock variety of *colla* speech, making linguistic emblems central to their diagram of *colla* subjectivity.



Figure 3. *Talibanes indígenas* with *lluch'us* and left cheeks filled with coca leaves, [youtube.com/watch?v=MpPiSb4-Gs0&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpPiSb4-Gs0&feature=related)

The appropriation of linguistic features enregistered as indexical of other ethnic groups for the purpose of ridicule has been called mock language by the linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill.¹⁸ Other-centric voicing of this sort has been examined in subsequent studies of mock Asian,¹⁹ mock Ebonics,²⁰ and “Gringa Voice” among Chicanos in the United States.²¹ As in these US examples, the Bolivian comedians draw on phonolexical difference to animate a stereotypic model of a derided other (fig. 4).

An advertisement for the “Taliban indígena” program marks the arrival of mock *colla* in this sketch. Orthographic and punctuation errors in the text index a lack of education and sophistication but also evoke a particular voice. These are not simply random misspellings, but errors paralleling deviations from standard Spanish pronunciation that can result from a speaker’s dominant language being Quechua or Aymara, languages whose phonemic inventories and grammatical systems differ dramatically from Spanish.

The announcement thanking the telephone company, Tigo reads:

Mock <i>colla</i> :	Enterrumpimos hesta prestigiosa programacion . . .
Spanish:	Interrumpimos esta prestigiosa programación . . .
English:	We interrupt this prestigious broadcast . . .

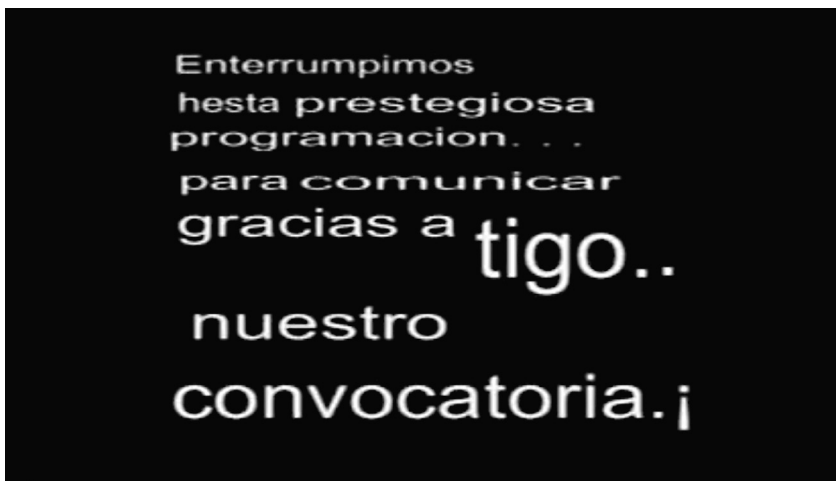


Figure 4. A mock *colla* text, [youtube.com/watch?v=MpPiSb4-Gs0&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpPiSb4-Gs0&feature=related)

Mock *colla*: **enterrumpimos** para comunicar gracias a Tigo . . . nuestro convocatoria.¡
 Spanish: para comunicar gracias a Tigo . . . nuestra convocatoria.
 English: to communicate thanks to Tigo . . . our notification.

The replacement of the *i* for *e* in “enterrumpimos” (bolded in the Spanish gloss) tropes on “interference” from Quechua and Aymara in the Spanish of bilinguals. Both Quechua and Aymara are languages with three phonemic vowels (/a/, /i/, and /u/) whereas Spanish has five (/a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/). In both Quechua and Aymara, the allophones [e] and [o], along with other allophones ([ɛ], [ʌ]), are in complementary distribution with /i/ and /u/, respectively, in postvelar environments.²² Similarly, the lack of gender concordance between the possessive *nuestro* and the noun *convocatoria* indexes Aymara and Quechua “interference” in bilingual speech. While Quechua and Aymara have lexical gender, they lack grammatical gender. Normatively, *nuestro* would be *nuestra* to agree with the feminine *convocatoria*. These “errors” are enregistered indexes of an Aymara/Spanish or Quechua/Spanish bilingual. Other elements of this text index a lack of education rather than ethnicity, including errors in punctuation (¡) and misspelling *esta* as *hesta*. Even though these last features index lack of schooling more than bilingualism, they form part of a total text configuration of mock *colla*.

In a separate sketch, phonolexical repertoire is used again to trope upon enregistered indexes of *colla* Spanish. One feature of both Aymara and many varieties of Quechua is the lack of voiced consonants and, in Aymara though not Quechua, frequent vowel elision (table 2).²³ This is

Table 2. Transcript of *NEO*, TPOC, CAP10, youtube.com/watch?v=DdZZYQ74zlc&feature=related. The national anthem plays in the background. **Bold type** = raised pitch

1 Taliban 1: Kerits cumpañerus bolivianos	Dear Bolivian comrades ²⁴
2 Taliban 2: Compañeros bolivianos	Bolivian comrades
3 T1: venemos advertir a Santa Cruz	we've come to warn Santa Cruz
4 T2: advertir a Santa Cruzzz	to warn Santa Cruzzzz
5 T1: venemos a decirle que vamos a	we've come to tell you that we'll
6 exterminar a la nación camba	exterminate the camba nation ²⁵
7 T2: abajo nación camba	down with the camba nation
8 T1: a exterminar el comité cívico	exterminate the Civic Committee ²⁶
9 T2: a todas esas mie:::rdas	all those shits
10 T1: a exterminar a todas	exterminate all
11 las oligarquías cruceñas	the oligarchies of Santa Cruz
12 T2: ya no va a ser ya	there won't be any more

replicated in the greeting of the two characters to their audience—dear comrades—that would be *queridos* /ke.ri.ðos/ *compañeros* /kom.pa.ñe.ros/ in a more standard Spanish, but is instead /ke.rits/ /kum.pa.ñe.rus/, devoicing the penultimate consonant and dropping the final vowel. The “allophonic confusion” mentioned above is performed in lines 1, 3, and 5, where /kom.pa.ñe.ros/ is pronounced as /kum.pa.ñe.rus/ (line 1, o → u), and /vi.ni.mos/ is pronounced /ve.ne.mos/ (lines 3 and 5, i → e).

In addition to the phonolexical elements of this performance, the poetic structure constructs a characterological persona that resonates with racist discourses depicting Indians as irrational. In this stretch of discourse, Taliban 2 merely serves as an amplification device for the first speaker. Recalling Goffman’s speaker roles—author, animator, and principal—proves helpful here for understanding the scope of the performance’s commentary.²⁷ Taliban 2 is an *animator* of utterances previously *authored* by Taliban 1 in immediately previous turns at talk, for example, when Taliban 1 says, “Venemos advertir a Santa Cruz,” and Taliban 2 echoes and amplifies, “Advertir a Santa Cruzzz.”

This scene also satires a televised, institutionally enabled address, making it not just a commentary on these two “Talibanes” but also the *principal(s)* behind Taliban 1’s utterances. In this sense, we could consider the principal here not the so-called indigenous Talibans but more broadly a Bolivian indigenous counterpublic.²⁸ The poetic repetition and amplification of Taliban 1’s predicates by Taliban 2 construct a character with



Figure 5. Taliban 1 (left) and Taliban 2 (right) from *NEO*, TPOC, CAP10, youtube.com/watch

an aggressive, unthinking, and irrational voice, sounding off whatever his leader has previously said, precisely in the manner that some viewers may understand indigenous people as irrational, unthinking actors merely echoing the words of “their leaders.”

In addition to the previously mentioned lluch’us and coca chewing, the comedians are in something of a Bolivian “black face” with makeup that not only makes them appear darker, but dirty and grotesque; their unevenly applied makeup creates not the illusion of darker skin tone, but of filthy skin. Taliban 1 has gold-plated and missing teeth. The camera angle is so close so as to distort their faces, making their noses appear larger than they are (fig. 5).

The nose and facial profile as Amerindian phenotype have served as one focus of racialized discourse in the Andes and as a site of racial anxiety for some Bolivians of indigenous heritage, particularly the upwardly mobile. For example, posters can be found plastered on walls surrounding the main university in La Paz advertising rhinoplasty for “problematic” and “deviated” noses. The so-called problematic “before” profiles are simply profiles of models with indigenous phenotype (fig. 6). Advertising campaigns like this one form part of the larger media landscape in which the physical, embodied aspects of *NEO*’s comedy make cultural sense.

The indigenous body also proves to be central to this sketch’s punch line. Underlying most humor is an element of surprise, shock, or the unexpected.²⁹ One element of “surprise” here is racial transvestitism, but beyond the surprise of ethnic drag, the more climatic element of surprise arrives when the camera pulls back to reveal the characters standing behind images of torsos and lower bodies painted on wood facades, the kind found at fairs for photos taken as “muscle men” and so on. While one stands behind a “muscle man” image, the camera pulls back to reveal

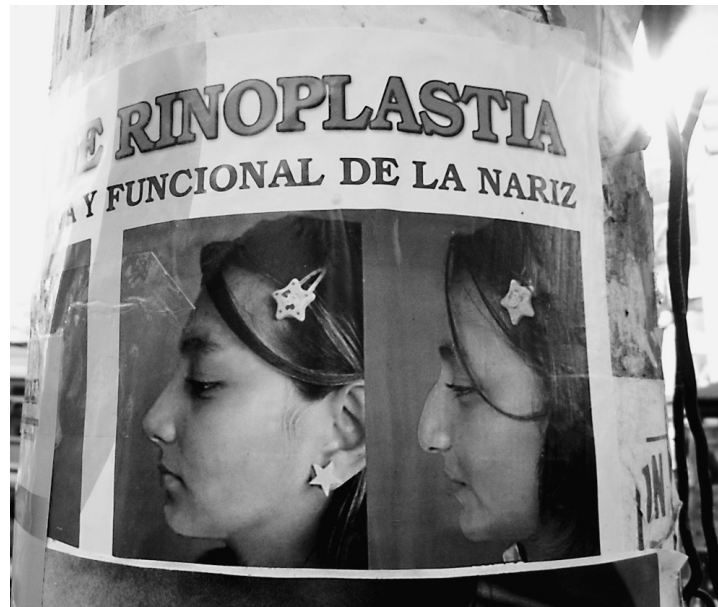


Figure 6. Advertisements for rhinoplasty in La Paz. Courtesy of the author

Taliban 1's head attached to the body of a shapely, bikini-clad woman, effectively emasculating both characters. The aggressive, hypermale bravado of Taliban 2 is shown to be, literally, just a facade, and Taliban 1 is now positioned as a woman with respect to both his *compañero* and to the viewing audience. The idea that a muscular, athletic Indian is a laughable facade relies, at best, on a stereotypical conception of weakness induced from poverty and poor nutrition and, at worst, relies on white-supremacist fantasies of *colla* biological inferiority.

Online Uptake and Circulation

Much like analogous comedians in the United States, Moreno and Fernandes deflect accusations of racism by pointing out that no social group is free from ridicule in their performances—again, “all Bolivia” is presented in their comedy, and everyone is subject to ridicule. Unlike some US comedians working within a “postracial” idiom, however, or even popular US programs like *South Park*, this comedy does not invoke stereotypes to establish ironic distance from them.³⁰ In this “equal access” to humiliation, they argue, everyone can laugh at each other and perhaps even build greater national unity—laughter as a way to lighten the ethnic tension so rife in Bolivia.

Examining all the ways that uptake of these registers occurs in

response to these performances is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, in the following section I examine one domain of discourse where uptake is relatively transparent—comments made online by viewers of *NEO* performances. I assembled a corpus of the comments responding to twenty-six *NEO* YouTube clips comprising 1,085 comments and conducted an analysis of word frequency and collocational patterns. I examined keyness within the corpus, or the salience of words within the corpus when compared to another corpus—here, a corpus of Spanish language news articles.

Laughter is unquestionably a response that these videos provoke among viewers. Of all the “words” in the corpus of YouTube responses, by far the most common were variants of written laughter. The total number of tokens in the assembled corpus was 685. In second and third place came variants of *camba* at 395 and variants of *colla* at 365. That *laughter* was the most frequent word in the corpus was not immediately apparent from a discrete word search. Instead, it became visible in undulating waves of jajaja, jijijiji, jojojo in the corpus (fig. 7).

Following these tokens of written laughter, the most frequent non-grammatical words in the corpus were *camba* and *colla*. In addition to frequency, corpus analysis can provide insights concerning these words’ semantic prosody,³¹ or the collocational patterns that emerge within the corpus between these and other words, and their keyness, or their degree of saliency when compared to other, ideally comparable, reference corpora.³² When comparing the corpus of YouTube comments to a corpus of sixty-two articles written in or about Bolivia in Spanish language press accessed from Factiva, the most salient words in the YouTube commentary were *mierda* (shit), *camba*, and *colla* (table 3). This could have been expected given the colloquial nature of the terms *colla* and *camba* and the highly stigmatized, vulgar character of *mierda*. *Carajo*, another swear word, also made the list. Another difference between the newspapers and the YouTube site is the differing participation frameworks of each format. YouTube comments are by their nature more interactive, affording different frameworks of addressivity, reflected in the keyness of the interpersonal deictic pronouns *te*, *tu*, *me*.

The most frequent collocates of *indio* within the YouTube corpus were *cara de indio* (Indian face) and then *indio de mierda* (shitty Indian). Of the eleven times that *de* appeared before *indio* nine of them were in the phrase *cara de indio*, again, pointing to the relevance of phenotype as a focus for denigration. Of the seven times *de* followed *indio*, six of them were in the phrase *indio (d)e mierda*.

What can be said about the relationship between the three most key terms in this corpus—*mierda*, *camba*, *colla*? With regard to *colla*, its semantic prosody within this corpus is unmistakable. It stinks. The first two word clusters are *colla e mierda* and *colla eh mierda*, literally *colla* of shit (shitty *colla*) written in a vernacular style with the intervocalic /d/ of “de”

Table 3. Key words in the NEO corpus

Key Word	Frequency	Keyness
Mierda	222	285.65
Camba	203	261.15
Colla	186	239.24
Te	183	207.87
Tu	160	205.74
Me	239	173.05
Cambas	121	155.53
Carajo	119	152.95
Jajaja	118	151.6 ⁷

What of the relationship between *camba* and *mierda*? The Talibanes indígenas depicted in their skit refer to the nación *camba* as “todas esas mierdas” (“all those shits”), but did a cluster search in the corpus for *mierda* result in similar treatment? No. In a cluster search for the word *mierda*, *camba* was nowhere to be found while *colla* together with *indio*, on the other hand, appears in half of them (table 5). Half of the first twelve collocates of *mierda* (excluding “marked as spam” clusters 2, 8) are some variety of *colla de mierda*. *Indio de mierda* makes the “top ten,” and there is not a single reference to *cambas*. Of *mierda*’s most frequent collocates, the first noun is *colla*, while *camba* is the twenty-eighth most frequent word, and the plural *cambas* comes in at a distant thirty-ninth place.

Table 4. Clusters for *colla* in the NEO corpus

1	<i>Colla</i> E MIERDA
2	MONTHS-AGO
3	<i>Colla</i> EH MIERDA
4	Y EL <i>Colla</i>
5	MARKED-AS-SPAM
6	ES Y EL
7	TAMBIEN ASI QUE
8	POBRE <i>Colla</i> BARATO
9	YO POBRE <i>Colla</i>
10	ES COMO ES
11	<i>Colla</i> BARATO OTRO
12	CHINO YO POBRE
13	BARATO OTRA COSA
14	<i>Colla</i> DE MIERDA
15	EL <i>Colla</i> TAMBIEN
16	COMO ES Y
17	<i>Colla</i> TAMBIEN ASI

Table 5. Clusters for *mierda* in the NEO corpus

1	<i>Colla</i> E MIERDA
2	MARKED AS SPAM
3	LA MIJMA MIERDA
4	DE MIERDA Q
5	ES UNA MIERDA
6	<i>Collas</i> EH MIERDA
7	<i>Colla</i> EH MIERDA
8	AS SPAM MIERDA
9	INDIO E MIERDA
10	MAMON DE MIERDA
11	E MIERDA TE
12	<i>Colla</i> DE MIERDA
13	<i>Collas</i> E MIERDA
14	<i>CollaJ</i> E MIERDA

Powers of Mediatization and Histories of Horror

Julia Kristeva's discussion of abjection and the French writer Céline's anti-Semitism serve as interesting, if tragic, parallels to this discussion of anti-Indian racism in Bolivia.³⁴ Like the European anti-Semite, *NEO's* *camba* recognizes the *colla* as Bolivian but is filled with disgust and horror by him, recognizing in him an abject element of the national body, inescapably Bolivian but radically excluded, pushed out as an antimodern, irrational, terrorist subject. *NEO's* comedy provides an instance where publicly circulating signs become diagrammed into visible measures of contempt for *collas*. Similar to Céline's denigration of Europe's Jews, Fernandes, Moreno, and their fans online treat *collas* like shit.

Abjection need not only provoke disgust, however, and we see here that it can also be funny. Children are scolded for having "potty-mouths" yet many people, children and adults alike, prefer jokes when they're dirty, and many Bolivians, *camba* and *colla* alike, find humor in these performances. Still, for many Bolivians of indigenous descent, this relegation to a category of abjection is hardly a laughing matter. For those who internalize this denigration, the consequence is serious enough to seek surgery to alter the very body serving as the target of mockery and derision.

It may be that the "target audience" of Fernandes and Morales's comedy is not *collas* but other *cambas* with whom they aim to consolidate some sense of solidarity. In her discussion of white racist language and joking in the United States, Jane Hill discusses the consensus-building work capable in such humor of affirming the negative presumptions about the humor's target rather than questioning or contesting them.³⁵ Hill's earlier formulation of covert racism in the other-centric use of Spanish in US public discourse tied this practice not only to mockery but to a category

of abjection—refuse, garbage—by terming it *junk Spanish*,³⁶ the “trash” here being not only linguistic but ultimately human material, categories of persons radically excluded, pushed out. The distinction between direct and indirect indexing of the racial other in speech is a crucial element of Hill’s analysis. With *NEO*, we are firmly in the realm of direct indexicality as, unlike the cases discussed by Hill, it would be difficult to label these depictions of indigenous Bolivians as covertly racist.³⁷

The establishing of solidarity and shared assumptions among European-descended Bolivians in this moment of the “return of the Indian” has a particular potency also because of their decision for the *collas* they satirize to be Talibanes indígenas. On the one hand, it is clear that the performers are riffing off actual wrestlers’ reappropriation of the Taliban figure, yet the association between indigenous political mobilization and terrorist violence is nothing new in Bolivia. The violence, irrationality, and terrorist associations of the mock *colla* register as performed by *NEO* resonate with the historical anxieties of European-descended Bolivians. Whether they describe the eighteenth-century rebellion led by Tupak Katari, the role of the Aymara batallions of Zárate Willka during the 1899 civil war, the uprisings in Jesús de Machaca and Chayanta in the 1920s, or the many other mobilizations throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, urban, mestizo accounts have consistently depicted indigenous political mobilization as mindless, violent, and with the threat of cannibalistic savagery ever looming.³⁸ While recognizing the centrality of Aymara military might to their victory in the civil war of 1899, urban Liberals were terrified by the prospect of an independent Aymara organization, viewing them as bloodthirsty savages. The following comments from the La Paz newspaper *El Heraldo* published in 1899 reflect this view: “The Aymara is fierce, chews the limbs of his victim, drinks his blood, and laughs viewing contortions of agony.”³⁹ Referring to the uprising of 1781 in his history of Tupak Katari, Sinclair Thomson writes, “The eighteenth century political violence left its mark in the minds of elites and ethnographers, and the colonial discourse about Aymara savagery that arose in 1781 has persisted, with modern racist accretions, into the late twentieth century.”⁴⁰

NEO draws on precisely the tropes to which Thomson refers, evoking powerful historical anxieties among certain social sectors in the wake of the past decade’s social struggles and the subsequent election of Evo Morales to the presidency. When these Talibanes indígenas say they plan to exterminate the comité cívico and the nación *camba*, this is not meant metaphorically. While the figure of the Taliban indígena is the latest iteration in a series of semiotic linkages tying the *colla* to tropes of violence, irrationality, and abjection, it is also powerfully situated within the contemporary moment—situating “the return of the Indian” within a “global war

on terror” and intertextually linking one supposed enemy of civilization, the uppity Aymara, with another, the fundamentalist Muslim.

Comedy or laughter can be one way for alleviating anxiety and fear and, while not the first to note this, Kristeva remarks that “laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection.”⁴¹ But not all *cambas* fear “the return of the Indian,” nor do the overt denigration in this comedy and the discourse it provokes online uniformly succeed in establishing a sense of solidarity from other *cambas*. For example, one viewer, who identifies as “d3bruno” and also as *camba*, responds on YouTube to a *NEO* clip of the “Taliban indígena” performance as follows:

me da lastima ke haya programas ke se burlen de *collas* ellos tambien son bolivianos tienen sentimientos yo soy *camba* pero no nazi. así ayudan a dividir la nación. . . ke pena!!!⁴²

I’m ashamed that there are programs that ridicule *collas*. They’re also Bolivians. They have feelings. I’m a *camba* but not a Nazi. This is how you’re helping to divide our nation . . . what a shame!!!

D3bruno rejects the denigration of *collas* while aligning himself with a *camba* identity, yet within a footing that positions other *cambas* who would enjoy this performance (and by extension the performers themselves) as Nazis. While this viewer identifies as both *camba* and as antiracist, the overall contour of the comments left on the website ultimately amounts to a wave of anti-Indian racism.

D3bruno is not alone as an antiracist *camba*, and, similarly, it would be wrong to generalize from *NEO* alone that Bolivian television and film uniformly denigrate highland indigenous peoples. Bolivian national cinema has provided a few notable representations of stereotypic models of regional types of Bolivians connected to very different political projects. One of the most successful films in recent Bolivian cinematic history, Rodrigo Bellot’s 2006 cross-country cocaine caper *¿Quién mató a la llamita blanca?* (*Who Killed the Little White Llama?*) drew much of its humor from regional stereotypes, including a character who was simply named “the *camba*.”⁴³ Unlike *NEO*, however, this film had an explicitly antiracist message of national unification. The narrative of another road trip film, Paolo Agazzi’s 1982 *Mi Socio* (*My Friend*), similarly relies on regional stereotypes while conveying the value of Bolivian national unity.⁴⁴ The *NEO* case was examined not for being typical of Bolivian media but typical of Bolivian anti-Indian racism. These comedians’ stylized contempt of their Indian conationals becomes both visible and audible through their use of enregistered signs. The subsequent circulation of their performances through the Internet and through other circuits left unexamined here—the circulation of pirate DVDs, the telling of jokes among friends—all become arenas

for enregisterment in an open-ended process of semiosis where the social categories of *camba* and *colla* may be subject to redefinition and change, particularly during a period of dramatic social upheaval and change like Bolivia experiences today.

Certainly these comedians would fit within Van Dijk's definition of the "symbolic elite" mentioned earlier. But what of the commentators of the YouTube site? In what sense could they be considered "elite"? Does access to the Internet serve as a sufficient barrier to presume that the commentators belong to upper-income brackets? This might at first seem reasonable, but as in other parts of Latin America, computer and Internet access is not restricted to the wealthy.⁴⁵ Storefront businesses providing Internet access at very low cost in even very poor neighborhoods and small towns in relatively remote places are booming businesses in Bolivia.

While the notion of a "symbolic elite" may have descriptive value, it also poses a danger of exaggerating what Nick Couldry has called "the myth of the mediated center," that discourse begins and ends with the media actors themselves, operating as a mechanical process between sites of discourse "production" and points of "reception."⁴⁶ This model creates an illusion of both linearity and exaggerates differential agency between media producers and audiences. If this was an inadequate model for earlier media regimes, it is even less appropriate for today's increasingly decentralized digital media regime. Aside from the issue of who is or is not elite, we can see that, while intervening in the larger trajectory of *colla*'s enregisterment, and in ways profoundly anchored to the contemporary moment, it is not within *NEO*'s performances alone but in the complex and refracting participation networks oriented to them where both these registers continue to circulate and accrue meaning. The viewers of *NEO*'s comedy do not merely "receive" but actively recontextualize and recycle these mediatized models of Bolivian personhood. To point this out, however, is not to celebrate what goes on within the process. These commentators generate a domain of discourse where *colla* congeals with indexes of poverty and abjection, all anchored to an indigenous body that is a target of derision and humiliation, a process, it should be added, unfolding amid waves of laughter.

Notes

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1. Nancy Postero, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007); Sinclair Thomson, *We Alone Will Rule: Native Andean Politics in the Age of Insurgency* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Sinclair Thomson and Forrest Hylton, *Revolutionary Horizons: Past and Present in Bolivian Politics* (London: Verso, 2007).
2. P. J. McDonnell, "Duelling Rallies Spotlight Bolivian Split," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 December 2007.
3. "Ya se usaba dicha palabra para referirse al nativo, que en forma voluntaria o no, asumía esa condición social: salir o ser sacado de su hábitat natural o parcialidad étnica para hacer diversas tareas en la ciudad," cited in Gustavo Pinto Mosquera, "Cronología de la Palabra *Camba* y la Cultura *Camba* Actual" ("Chronology of the Word *Camba* and Contemporary *Camba* Culture"), nacioncamba.net/index.php?dir=noticia&id=79 (accessed 15 August 2011).
4. Gabriel René Moreno, *Catálogo del archivo de mojos y chiquitos (Catalog of the Archive of Mojos and Chiquitos)* (La Paz: Librería Editorial Juventud), 1888.
5. Mosquera, "Cronología."
6. Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 80.
7. Asif Agha, "The Social Life of Cultural Value," *Language and Communication* 23 (2003): 231–73; Agha, *Language and Social Relations*.
8. It should be noted that in October 2010 Bolivia passed *Ley 045 contra racismo y todo forma de discriminación* (Law 045 against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination). This law addresses discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, age, gender, and gender expression and includes sanctions against media outlets found to promote discrimination. Because the law was passed since the initial drafting of this article, the artists examined here have not been tried. While important and related to this discussion, full examination of this law remains beyond the scope of this article.
9. Teun A. Van Dijk, "Racism and the Press in Spain" (preprint), *Discourse in Society* (2006), discourses.org/UnpublishedArticles/Racism%20and%20the%20press%20in%20Spain.htm.
10. Agha, *Language and Social Relations*, 147.
11. Bret Gustafson, "Spectacles of Autonomy and Crisis: Or, What Bulls and Beauty Queens Have to Do with Regionalism in Eastern Bolivia," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (2006): 351–79.
12. Since the initial drafting of this article, the wiphala has become an official Bolivian flag alongside the republican tricolor (green, gold, and red) flag.
13. Don Kulick and Bambi Schiefflin, "Language Socialization," in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. A. Duranti (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 349–66.
14. Asif Agha, "Large and Small Scales of Personhood," *Language and Communication* 31, no. 3 (2011): 170–80.
15. A. M. Stearman, "Language as a Mechanism for Social Discrimination and Class Distinctions: The Case of Lowland Bolivia," in *The Aymara Language in Its Social and Cultural Context: A Collection of Essays on Aspects of Aymara Language and Culture*, ed. Martha J. Hardman (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1981).
16. Richard A. Laprade, "Some Cases of Aymara Influence on La Paz Spanish," in Hardman, *The Aymara Language in Its Social and Cultural Context*, 207–35.
17. Agha, *Language and Social Relations*, 147.
18. Jane Hill, "Junk Spanish, Covert Racism, and the (Leaky) Boundary between Public and Private Spheres," *Pragmatics* 5, no. 2 (1995): 197–212; Jane Hill, "Language, Race, and White Public Space," *American Anthropologist* 100

(1998): 680–89; Jane Hill, “Mock Spanish, Covert Racism and the (Leaky) Boundary between Public and Private Spheres,” in *Languages and Publics: The Making of Authority*, ed. Susan Gal and Kathryn Woolard (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2001).

19. Elaine Chun, “Ideologies of Legitimate Mockery: Margaret Cho’s Revoicing of Mock Asian,” *Pragmatics* 14 (2004): 236–89.

20. Maggie Ronkin and Helen Karn, “Mock Ebonics: Linguistic Racism in Parodies of Ebonics on the Internet,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3 (1999), 360–80; see also Mary Bucholz, “You da Man: Narrating the Racial Other in the Production of White Masculinity,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3, no. 4 (1999): 443–60.

21. Lauren Mason Carris, “La Voz Gringa: Chicana/o Performances of Linguistic Authenticity,” *Discourse and Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 474–90.

22. Willem Adelaar and Pieter Muysken, *The Languages of the Andes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Rodolfo Cerrón-Palomino, *Lingüística Aymara* (Cuzco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Bartolomé de las Casas, 2000); Martha J. Hardman, *Aymara* (Munich: LINCOM Europa, 2001).

23. Adelaar and Muysken, *The Languages of the Andes*; Cerrón-Palomino, *Lingüística Aymara*; Hardman, *Aymara*.

24. *Compañeros* can be translated as *companion* or as *comrade*. I am choosing comrade because here it indexes, like “comrade” in English, participation in radical politics.

25. *Nación cambia* literally means “*camba* nation” but is also the name of the paramilitary organization of the Falange Socialista Boliviano, a fascist organization that together with the youth organization of the Civic Committee, *Unión Juvenil Cruceñista* (Santa Cruz Youth Union), has organized attacks on peasant and indigenous organizations and other political rivals. See Gustafson, “Spectacles of Autonomy.”

26. The “Comité Cívico” in Santa Cruz is akin to a chamber of commerce in the United States but more political, having been the main protagonists for departmental autonomy in Santa Cruz; see also Gustafson, “Spectacles of Autonomy.”

27. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

28. Marcia Stephenson, “The Impact of an Indigenous Counterpublic Sphere on the Practice of Democracy: The ‘Taller de historia oral Andina’ in Bolivia,” Working Papers of Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WP_S.shtml (accessed 30 July 2012).

29. D. J. Glick, “Some Performative Techniques of Stand-Up Comedy: An Exercise in the Textuality of Temporalization,” *Language and Communication* 27 (2007): 291–306.

30. I’m not going to make any claims here about how successful *South Park* or US comedians are in this effort.

31. John Sinclair, *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

32. Paul Baker, *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis* (London: Continuum, 2006), 121–52.

33. Khantuta Muruchi Escobar and Andrés Calla Cárdenas, *Fronteras Identitarias: ¿Quién Colla? Quién Camba? Territorialización y Racismo en la Ciudad Santa Cruz de la Sierra* (Ms. La Paz: Universidad de la Cordillera, 2008).

34. Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

35. Hill, “Language, Race.”

36. Hill later described this practice as “mock Spanish” instead of “junk Spanish”; see Hill, “Mock Spanish.”
37. See Hill, “Junk Spanish”; Hill, “Language, Race”; Hill, “Mock Spanish.”
38. Yuri F. Tórrez, *El Indio en la Prensa: Representación racial de la prensa boliviana con respecto a los levantamientos indígenas/campesinos (1899–2003)* (*The Indian in the Press: The Bolivian Press’s Racial Representation with Respect to Indigenous/Peasant Uprisings [1899–2003]*) (La Paz: Centro Cuarto Intermedio, 2010).
39. Tórrez, *El Indio en la Prensa*, 57.
40. Thomson, *We Alone Will Rule*, 14.
41. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8.
42. d3bruno, comment on Taliban indígena, www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=MpPiSb4-Gs0&page=1 youtube.com/watch?v=MpPiSb4-Gs0&feature=related (accessed 30 July 2012).
43. “Who Killed the White Llama?” (review), imdb.com/title/tt0945505 (accessed 11 May 2012).
44. See also Jeffrey Himpele, “Packaging Indigenous Media: An Interview with Ivan Sanjinés and Jesús Tapia,” *American Anthropologist* 106 (2004): 354–63.
45. Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).
46. Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (London: Routledge, 2003).