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# The Aymara's oral history as a philosophy of life

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# Introduction

## Two areas of research

(1) Family setting  
Asunta Tapia de Álvarez  
(1937-2022)

Yupampa Community,  
Mecapaca Municipality,  
Murillo Province, La Paz  
Department, Bolivia

- recordings of life stories and  
oral tradition (tales)

(2) The Andean Oral History  
Workshop (THOA)  
collaboration since 2003

- study group about the suma  
qamaña (good living) (2012)





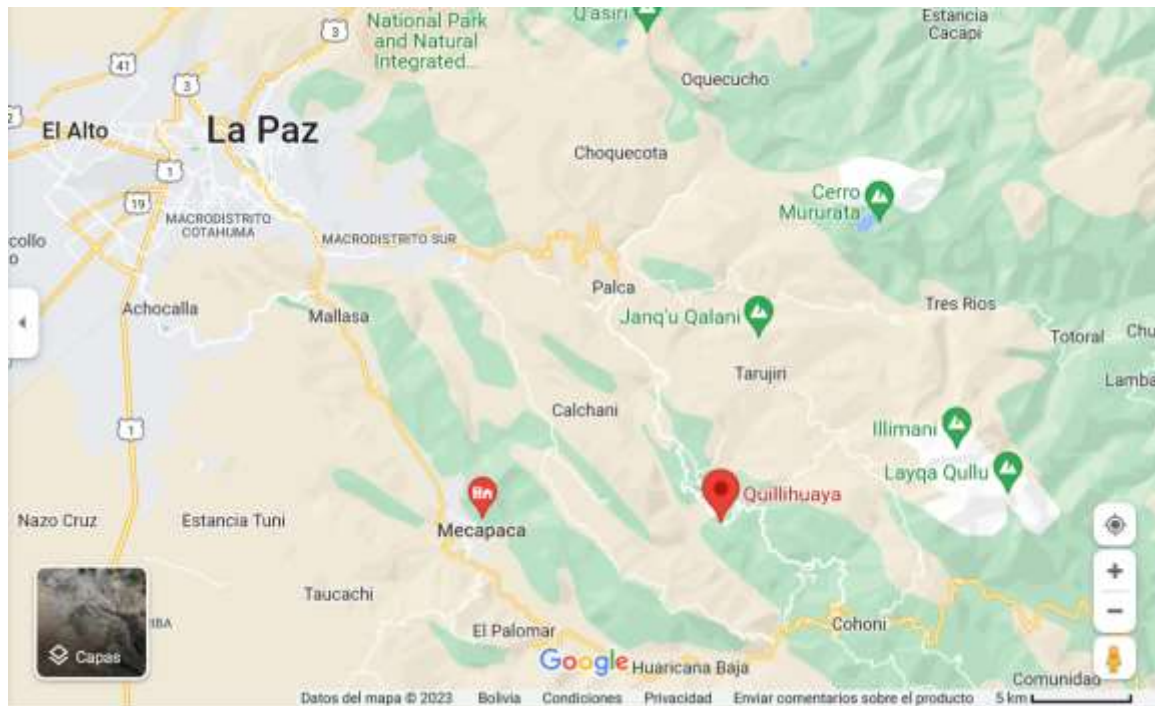
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# Introduction





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# Environment of the thought of living from the Aymara language

An interrelation of concepts





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## **Utjaña, jakaña, qamaña, sarnaqaña: Different conceptions of “life” in the Aymara language**

- Starting point: Filomena Nina Huaracacho’s proposal from THOA about the necessity of interlinking various verbs in Aymara that mean “live”: *utjaña, qamaña, jakaña, sarnaqaña* (Nina 2010)
- Background: Albó (2011) differentiates *jakaña* y *qamaña*, positions *jakaña* in contrast to *jiwaña* (die), and explains that *qamaña* means quality of life or “energy and vital strength to live and share with others”.

Albó, Xavier. 2011. “Suma Qamaña = Convivir Bien. ¿Cómo medirlo?” En Ivonne Farah H. y Luciano Vasapollo coords. *Vivir bien: ¿Paradigma no capitalista?* La Paz: Posgrado en Ciencias del Desarrollo, Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (Cides-UMSA), Sapienza, y Oxfam, pp.133-144.

Nina Huaracacho, Filomena (2010) “Suma Qamaña: El vivir bien en los Andes de Bolivia.” Ponencia presentada en el Laboratorio Internacional Estrategias Alternativas al Desarrollismo, Buenos Aires, 12-14 de abril.



## **Utjaña, jakaña, qamaña, sarnaqaña: Different conceptions of “life” in the Aymara language**

Emerging perspectives from the study group in the THOA

- “**utjaña**” denotes existence, and therefore, life.
- “**jakaña**” means being alive, also as a noun it means placenta  
→it does not only means being alive, but also creating and nourishing life
- “**qamaña**” denotes spending time sharing  
**Sum qamart’awayañani jichhürux.**  
(We’re going to have a good time today.)
- “**sarnaqaña**” means experiencing, and therefore, developing activities throughout time in multiple spaces.  
**Qhip nayr uñtasis sarnaqapxañani.**  
(Looking behind(=future) and straight ahead(=past) we will walk.)  
... THOA’s motto



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## ***Utjaña, jakaña, qamaña, sarnaqaña:*** **Different conceptions of “life” in the** **Aymara language**

- **Qamaña** also denotes the energy flow and the nourish of life  
qamasa: (1) the way of being, (2) the value, the spirit, the courage  
(Albó 2011)  
**qamani/kamani**: denotes a community charge responsible of rites  
for the growth of each agricultural product (Patzí 2017)
- **Ukhamaw kullakita Estela, taqini ukhama qamasipxsnaxa  
jakäwisax kusapunispawa.**  
(Exactly sister Estela, if we all can live like this, our life can always  
be good.)  
Facebook post of Sonia Siñani Callisaya of the Radio San Gabriel,  
August 29, 2023, answering the following post of Estela  
Maldonado:  
**Qaritäskasa llakistaskasa, k'uchikipuniw uñjitata.**  
(Feeling tired, feeling such a sorrow, you will always appear  
happy.)  
qamaña like the way of being, while jakaña refers to life in general.

Patzí, Janet (2017) “El cargo de kamani, su papel cultural en la comunidad y su función en el círculo agrario aymara. Estudio realizado en cantón Santiago de Llagua, Municipio de Colquencha, Provincia Aroma, La Paz.” Tesis de grado, Carrera de Antropología, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Mayor de San Andrés.



## Generics and their interrelations

- **Jaqjam sarnaqañani..... Ukhakirakiy suma qamasiñas utjixa...**  
(We are going to walk like people... Only there, life is good.) (Calle 2010)  
quality of being people (*jaqi*) interlinks with the sweetness and good quality (*suma*)
- The complex field of meaning of *sarnaqaña* it's similar to the complexity that the word *puriy* shows in Quechua (Mannheim 2015)
- The importance of understanding the conceptual thought through its interrelations...“generics” (Mannheim 2021)

Calle Vallejos, Godolfredo (2010) ... *Esto es ... jaqjam sarnaqaña ukäya ... o, son un conocimiento de vida, una ética, son opciones de-coloniales, un horizonte de la razón. En tanto, es un proyecto de vida ...* Aypa Yauruta, Pacajes: Publicación personal.

Mannheim, Bruce. 2021. “The Social (and Cultural, and Syntactic, and Semantic) Life of Generics.” *Language in Society*, Vol.50, No.4: 605-618

Mannheim, Bruce. 2015. “All Translation is Radical Translation.” In William F. Hanks and Carlo Severi eds. *Translating Worlds: The Epistemological Space of Translation*. Chicago: HAU Books.





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## Oral history of mama Asunta Tapia de Álvarez





## Sarnaqaña / experiences (1)

Recording: August 28, 2011

- “Uka paqallq marañit ukan trawajwayta ukat..., padrinuxax wali qhurünw... janiy, marinaxa wali qhurünw , parinuxa suma jaqinw, wali suma jaqinw.”  
(I had been seven years old, I had worked some time then ..., my godfather was someone bad... no, my godmother was someone bad, my godfather was someone good, someone really good.)
- Her parents leave her in the care of a japanese merchant with his bolivian wife in the city of La Paz, as they were friends:
- “Uhm... shrrimps, you call them?, that’s what they gave. (Mamoru: shrrimps?) U, he sold that. “Ay qullu [to indicate that something is not going to happen], It’s... laq’urakis akaxä” [it’s like a worm] I know how to say. They are laq’itus,, they’re called shrrimps. Like I in aymara used to say, “laq’urakis akaxä” saying it like that. My godfather always says, “we’re going to eat this, it’s tasty” he said. “Taste it” he said. He gave me one, “like this [raw, not coked] taste it” he said. I ate very good and delicious”
- There they go, the “yira (war)” to overthrow the government of Gualberto Villarroel (1946)



## Sarnaqaña / experiences (2)

- After working for some time in La Paz, she goes back to her hometown Quillihuaya to work as an assistant for the landowner Gumercinda Mendizábal Palacios.

Oppression of the aymara people (jaqis) in the hacienda

- “I have worked like that, yes, with the boss, after the misses got sick, misses Mendizábal..., Gumercinda, misses Gumercinda... (Fujita: the landlady?) the landlady, Mendizábal. (Fujita: Is she the boss' wife?) She was only a miss, only a miss, her husband had been... had been of the black people, and he lives in a... town, where is that?(Fujita: black people?) no... in the other country. *Kuna sutinis ukä nigrunaka khaysan utjixa, kuna...* [What name do the black people have that live in...?] (Beatriz: Africa?) Africa, It was Africa, he was african, a bad man!, they have killed his jaqis [ aymara people], they have killed a lot, a lot of his jaqis,... he worked for his misses.” (recording of December 27, 2009)

She also vividly remembers the big party the landowner threw before dying.



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## Jakaña y qamaña (1)

When hail started falloing:

- “Pasxam pasxam Mururataruw  
Pasxam pasxam Mururataruw”  
(It’ll go, it’ll go to Mururata / It’ll go, it’ll go to Mururata)  
So that the hail goes to the other side so it does not damages the plants.

When chewing coca (akhullicar):

- “Kunturmamani, akhullt’asim.”  
(Condormamani, akhullíquese.)  
registered November 27, 2011  
It shares with the condormamani, the town’s guardian

When calling the soul (when a kid suffers of being “scared” and their soul leaves their body):

- “Ajayus animus kurajis ch’iwis kawkhanktasa. Mecapacanktach jutxam jalantxam jalantxam. Lulila jalantxam lulila lulila.”  
(The soul, the spirit, the strenght, the shadow, where are you?  
Could it be in Mecapaca? Come, come flying, hummingbird, come flying, hummingbird, hummingbird.) recording July 31, 2010



## Jakaña y qamaña (2)

- *kharikhari* (also *kharisiri*): takes the fat out of human beings

Recording: March 3, 2013

- Her older son has suffered *kharikhari* when traveling between the highlands and the Yungas:  
“My son has told me, “ha(w)ía I’ve been sleeping” he says, “I had been sleeping, in the table I had been sleeping” he says. Later, “I had been sleeping and I...” (Fujita: It was in Coroico, wasn’t it?) U, Coroico. Later, I had worken up [fast], “noooooooooo” he said, people were already standing there, a black man, people were there” he said.”
- Healing:  
“When he... healed, there was healing, that until now I’m saving, it is saved. (Fujita: Ah, yes, how can you heal that? ) With a bottle like this, like this, it’s really small. And one has to make them drink it like this, like this.  
“I will go to the doctor, you don’t want to take me, I will go to the doctor, he will give me a shot.” We do not have to use the shot, it is using *kharisiri khari* , we do not have to use the shot, being that fast... a shot can kill. [Fujita: Kill.] Kill. Yes, you have to know, shot kills.”  
There is a strong distrust to western medicine to heal the *kharikhari*.



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## Jakaña y qamaña (3)

A dream that seems to indicate how her life is going to end

Recording March 6, 2016

- “(Fujita: Samkamaxat wastat kuñt’itay aymarata.) Ya. Samkaja kunjamasä... rawas... (Fujita: Mä lunis...) Rawasiyakayätw. Waljanipini rawajit samkan waljanipini, warmis chachanak warminak ukjam rawasipkayätw wali... mä jach’a pampanakan, jawir pampana.”
- Translation: (Fujita: Tell me again about your dream in aymara.) Ok. When was my dream... (Fujita: A Monday...) We would work, always together in the dream, women, men, we were working ok... in a big in a big pampa, a river pampa.



## Jakaña y qamaña (4)

Later a man with a beard dressed in white approaches her.

- “Ä wast, wali jayaw rawajtax, jumax wastan trawajtax. Janiw rawañjamäxiti. Yast has terminado de trabajar. Janiw rawañjamäxiti jumax” sasa... ukham situw, ukat yast “tukuyä ukat jutäx, tukuyxä trawajañ ukat jutxä, samarxä ukhaw jutä” sasaw sist. Nada más, eso estawa ahícito sentada, qunusiskän yast, se aparece nomás por sí, ü, chhaqhawayxakiw ukharukiw. Ukhamaw.”
- (Translation: Oh enough, you’ve worked for a long time, for a long time. I don’t think you have to work. It’s done, you’ve finished working. I don’t think you have to work.” he said... that’s what he told me, then “I’m going to finish and then I’m going to come here, and I’m going to finish working, and then I’m going to come back here, I’m going to rest and then come back here” I said. Nothing more, I was there sitting alone, he was sitting there too, he would appear like that and then disappear. Like that.)

She knows that the end of her life is close, she is negotiating her moment, as well as the communal and the christian aspect.



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## Conclusions





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## Conclusions

- What mama Asunta has told me happens throughout the years in her life means that: (1) the experiences of various moments in her life in different places, and (2) hot to protect, heal, and nourish life, communally sharing.
- This organization with its narrative implied, seems to have resonance with the interrelations of the different terms denoting “life” in Aymara, analyzed and debated in the THOA setting, mainly with *sarnaqaña* y *qamaña/jakaña*.
- It seems like it indicates the potential of exploring the connexion between generics and the organization/repertoire of oral narratives of each narrator.