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## CAPRICHO AVOIDING FEAR IN ENCOUNTERS WITH SPIRITS IN THE ANDES

In every household of the Quechua-speaking people of Coipasi (Potosí, Bolivia) stories are told about experiences of encounters with evil spirits.<sup>1</sup> All spirits, as I show in detail below, are divided into two main groups: *saqra espíritus* (bad spirits) and *k'acha almas* (good souls). Encounters with the former are very diverse, although both kinds tend to occur in similar contexts and follow the same general scenario consisting of the following elements. First, they usually happen when someone is moving alone, normally at night, in areas close to the village, and frequently when this movement involves some kind of transgression. Second, a spirit can appear in a ravine, a river, at a crossroads, or on a bridge, making a person uneasy with its mere presence. Third, this uneasiness can then be manifested as varying degrees of alteration of consciousness and a series of bodily disorders. Fourth, people muster up their courage and confront the spirit in different ways. Fifth, after this show of bravery, they come out of the state they have fallen into and can return to the security of the village and home. It is generally assumed that even though the afflicted person is usually made ill, at least his or her bravery has staved off death.

This article<sup>2</sup> aims to describe how the Coipaseños manage these encounters, with particular attention to the fourth element mentioned above, which in Coipasi

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<sup>1</sup> Coipasi is a small farming community in the Chaquí municipality, central Potosí, Bolivia. It heads the ayllu (a set of communities forming a historic network of product exchange and in particular of the family relations established among these communities) of the same name. Its inhabitants cultivate well-irrigated vegetable gardens on the outskirts of the village, even though, as in the rest of the country, emigration has been a constant factor in recent years and more and more land has been abandoned.

<sup>2</sup> The paper is based on research conducted within two projects funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain: “Indigenous communication and cultural heritage in Latin America: Conservation, revitalisation and creativity” and “Indigenous creativity in the face of environmental and health crises: cultural expressions and globalisation of knowledge”. The research was carried out during different stays in Coipasi between 2011 and 2023. The testimonies used here are the result of extensive research in various periods from 2010 to the present. The excerpts used here are the product of some of the many interviews recorded and transcribed with the permission of the persons involved. The testimonies selected are those that contain information or content related

is described as being a person with *coraje* (courage) and having *capricho*. Having *coraje* and *capricho* is the way in which Coipaseños deal with the unknown and it seems necessary to avoid succumbing, at any point, to the state of fear (*manchakuy*).

I shall therefore consider the emotional and sensitive processes by means of which the people of the Andes, and specifically those referred to as *runa*,<sup>3</sup> deal with encounters with spirits. I question the idea that it is largely fear that drives those encounters, instead, I argue that it is rather the absence of it, or the local mechanisms put in place to prevent it, that allow Quechua peasants to survive disruptions of their daily lives by spirits.

The condition of being *corajado* (brave) implies an attitude that is necessary to face challenges of many different kinds. *Capricho*, on the other hand, is a response, a way of acting, which appears at the moment when these challenges occur and whose main purpose is to identify the spirit and its potential danger. For the Coipaseño, *coraje* is a condition that is deemed essential for facing a possible encounter with the *saqra espíritus*. However, if *coraje* exists, it is *capricho* that allows a person to identify the spirit and relate to it properly (or at least in the most appropriate way possible, given the situation). This process of identification brings into play a set of perspectives, or “points of view” (Viveiros de Castro 2012) that requires recognition of the non-human other. This subjectivity, identification and recognition of the spirit, which I present in detail below, is the principle by means of which the Coipaseños manage to avoid fear. Hence, this article aims to analyse the forms that *capricho* takes.

In order to understand how *capricho* identifies the spirit, it is necessary to explore descriptions of relationality between humans and non-humans, which has been a prominent concern of the regional literature in the last few years (e. g. Bugallo and Vilca 2016; Canessa 2012; de la Cadena 2015; Muñoz 2020a; Rivera Andía 2019; Salas Carreño 2019). Drawing on his theory of semiotics as the main relational principle between beings, Eduardo Kohn has suggested that “[...] relation is representation. That is, the logic that structures relations among selves is the same as that which structures relations among signs” (Kohn 2013, p. 83). In other words, relationships are built on networks of shared meanings. Subjects are diluted and relational principles emerge. According to the main idea presented by Holbraad and Pedersen, which is based on the theories of Marilyn Strathern (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017), and adopted for the purposes of this study, the difference between representation and relationality is that, in the latter case, entities are shaped in relations. They are not *a priori*.

I will begin by reflecting on the notion of fear that has been predominant in the Andean anthropology in order to highlight the differences with what we find in Coipasi. In the following part, based on ethnographic research, I describe encounters with the *saqra espíritus* and their consequences. In particular, I investigate the

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to the purpose of this text. The names of all interlocutors have been anonymised in this text in order to protect their identity.

<sup>3</sup> *Runa*, the term used by Quechua speakers to refer to themselves, is usually translated as *gente* (in Spanish) or ‘people’ in English.

set of attitudes called *capricho*, that the *runas* adopt in these encounters to identify the entities they are confronted with, and I present the mechanisms of subjectivisation of others, that is, of identification, building relationships with and social and cultural recognition of the spirits.. Finally, I detail the importance of the absence of fear and how it presents itself not only at the time of the encounter, but also in the expressions the experience takes on when it is conveyed.

#### ABOUT FEAR

According to local ethnographic literature, *sajra espíritus* are characterised by their association with the devil and thus with conscious, deliberate evil. Pablo Cruz has this to say about the term:

The word is nowadays used to identify a domain in space: the *saqra pacha* which includes the underworld (*ukhu pacha*), the spaces of the earthly world that communicate with it (*punku, qaqa, puqyu*, etcetera), and also other wild, exuberant spaces like the lowland jungle. Moreover, *saqra* refers to the particular force emanated in these spaces, which can take the form of defined diabolical entities (the *Saqra*, the *Supay*, or the Devil, and so on) or undifferentiated ones (*supay, saqra, devils, souls, chullpa*, etcetera), or it might possess weaker entities like human beings (Cruz 2016, p. 173).

Usually in literature the *saqra* has been described as encompassing everything that is considered dangerous. Danger in turn is always associated with the idea of evil and, by association, with that of the devil. This meaning of *saqra* has given rise to a generalised lack of definition of the entities to which these characteristics are attributed. I believe that, in general, the idea of *saqra* attributed to territories and places (Cruz 2006, 2012, 2016; Fontes 2020; Muñoz 2011; Ortiz Rescaniere 1986; Rivera Andía 2005) has been better defined than that applying to entities, which are understood in a more ambiguous, non-specific way and frequently, as we have seen, under the generic heading of devil.

The perception of these ambivalent realities is determined by a Judeo-Christian association because, like the sixteenth-century notion of hell, it keeps relating these entities with spaces identified with the devil and other malign figures of imagination (Estenssoro 2003; Gareis 2008a). As Iris Gareis has shown, evil as a notion is always connected with a power deemed to be 'supernatural', which is usually expressed by means of religion and, in the western tradition, represented in the figure of the devil (Gareis 2008a, 2008b).

Thanks to this association with Satan, the world below the ground is seen as the place where some of these entities dwell. In the Andes this underworld, the *ukhupacha* in Quechua or *manqhapacha* in Aymara, has been portrayed by anthropologists as the place inhabited by several kinds of beings, especially those believed to be dangerous or malign (e.g. Gose 2008; Martínez 1983; Ortiz Rescaniere 1986).<sup>4</sup> The "power of

<sup>4</sup> For example, one finds cases of *Tío* (Absi 2005) or of the *supay* (Cereceda 2016; Cruz 2016; Stobart 2016) in the Andes. Henry Stobart suggested that sirens (*sirinu*, a being, seductive by nature, that is

the sacred” has always been characterized by ambivalence has (Gareis 2008b), and understood as a dangerous gift, capable of “the baneful, the evil, and what causes suffering” (Dasso 2004, p. 20). This association between *saqra espíritu* and the devil tends to assume an emotional state that is close to fear when Indigenous people of the Andes encounter the former. But is that really what happens? Is it fear that governs relations between humans and non-humans?

In general, it might be said that the interest in fear has been determined by two circumstances: first, in sociology and politics as well as in anthropology, there has been considerable interest in fear as a political tool (Antón Hurtado 2015; Boscoboinik 2016); and second, in psychoanalysis there is a focus on what could be called ‘fears’ or, in other words, factors that produce fear rather than the feeling as such. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis is not as interested in real fears, by which I mean those that can objectively cause distress,<sup>5</sup> as in what has been called ‘dysfunctional fear’, which is the “emotion that occurs without one’s personal integrity or life being in danger but with disproportionate magnitude if it is” (Moscone 2012, p. 57). In the case of peasants in Bolivia, Francisco M. Gil (2014, p. 375) describes such fears as ‘reasonable’ in the former case and ‘imaginary’ in the latter.

It is mainly these fears or, in other words, the factors that can cause the emotion, but not the emotion itself, that have interested anthropologists as well. In the case of the Andes there is extensive literature on the fear instilled by some non-human entities people might come into contact with, whether they are *runas* (Quechua) or *jaqis* (Aymara) (see Canessa 2008; Fernández Juárez 1998, 2008; Gil García 2008, 2014; Martínez 2015; Rivera Andía 2008). In the more classical works, fear is referred to as the inevitable emotion following those encounters. For example, Gerardo Fernández Juárez describes encounters of Bolivian Aymara people with *anchanchus*:

*Anchanchu* seeks encounters with human beings, taunting them in the darkness of the night with shouts and whistles to which the traveller must never respond if he does not want to be beguiled by the perfidious character who will lead him to enchanted places among the *apachitas* (rock pile shrines) (Fernández Juárez 2008, p. 134).

The consequences for those who go looking for them are described by one of Fernández’s (2008) informants in the following words:

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associated with water and characterised by its relationship with sound and music) in the Andes “are almost always classified as a form of *supay* or devil, demon or Satan (*satano*): powerful, ambiguous, and creative beings that dwell in the hidden realms of *ukhu pacha*, inside the earth (...) In Kalankira the term *satano* (Satan) was sometimes used when I would have expected that *sirinu* would be used” (Stobart 2010, 194). Gabriel Martínez, too, emphasised that, among the Jalq’a of Chuquisaca (Bolivia), a good number of the Andean entities, especially ‘the mountain gods’ and Pachamama, are ambivalent by nature and associated with the devil (Martínez 1983, p. 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Ricardo Moscone defines this as the “emotion that appears if one’s personal integrity or life is in danger, when one has been frightened or when an unexpected sensorial stimulus is strong enough to cause fright, or when it is perceived in another person or group. It depends on one’s ability to deal with life and leads to the adoption of appropriate measures to protect oneself” (2012, p. 57).

The more time they spend crazy on the rocks, the more they lose their minds. In order not to go really mad they have to undress (...). That's how they get back to themselves and the *anchanchus* disappear (2008, p. 134).

Among the Aymara, the *kharisiri* is said to cast spells that lull a person into a deep sleep. While they are unconscious, the *kharisiri* extracts their fat. Upon waking, the victim remembers nothing but is overwhelmed by a deep and lasting fatigue, which causes a slow death (Canessa 2008, p. 101; Fernández Juárez 2006; Spedding 2005). Although numerous accounts of this phenomenon exist, detailing them falls outside the scope of this study.

Fear arises as a feeling of anguish in the face of the unknown but, above all, when we are confronted with what we think is dangerous or may cause different degrees of distress. I am reminded here of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's statement that Indigenous people fear the very things that Pierre Clastres claims they laugh at, namely "jaguars, shamans, whites and spirits—that is, beings defined by their radical alterity". As Viveiros de Castro mentions, this fear "necessarily implies the inclusion or incorporation of the other or *by* the other (*by* also in the sense of through), as a form of perpetuation of the becoming-other that is the process of desire in Amazonian socialities" (Viveiros de Castro 2012, p. 29). It therefore implies, as I show, the subjectivity of the other, which means recognition not only of his or her identity, but also of the important social role they play within the Indigenous cosmos. In short, Viveiros de Castro affirms that fear is necessary, because in order to lead a good life, it "is first necessary to enjoy living on the edge" (Viveiros de Castro 2012, p. 29).

I believe that, although the inhabitants of Coipasi do not live in daily tension because of fear of confronting evil spirits, they are aware of their continuous presence. I have not found that the usual state of Coipaseños is one of alertness, even when they walk at night or in the wilderness. This is perhaps because they know how to face these experiences: how to avoid fear and recover a balance broken by the external action of a spirit. Regardless of the specific conditions required for the presence of different spirits, fear does not appear to be an essential component. Unlike among the Lohorong of Nepal, where fear (or at least a type of fear called *kisimalu*) is an inseparable part of relations with the dead or spirits and it is necessary to have this fear (understood as something close to 'respect') when walking alone, or at night (Hardman 2000, pp. 244–246). In the Andean context, Francisco Pazzarelli's reflection on his experience of getting lost on a hill in Jujuy, Argentina, seems relevant to the experiences of Coipaseños. Pazzarelli explains fear (something that is not allowed among the local peasants) as the result of an impossibility of solitude / a constant awareness of an unwelcome presence:

Fear on the hill is the visceral certainty that there is no such thing as being alone and the terrible certainty that you will not always be the one who chooses who to be with (2022, p. 192).

Viveiros de Castro says that "the context par excellence for experiencing fear in indigenous Amazonia...[is] entry into a 'supernatural' regime" (2012, p. 36). In

his study, Viveiros de Castro invites us to recontextualise the term ‘supernatural’ in order to better understand the world of spirits among the indigenous people. But he does not invite us to rethink the term ‘fear’. What I am interested in pointing out is that just as we reflect on one convention (‘supernatural’) we should reflect on the others (Wagner 1981). Viveiros de Castro resorts to the recursivity that takes the native point of view seriously (Holbraad 2012) and I thus propose to extend it to the notion of fear. The aim of the following description is to investigate fear in Coipasi and to show how its mention is not synonymous with its presence. In the community it is evoked to explain how its absence is produced.

#### ENCOUNTERS WITH SPIRITS IN COIPASI

In Coipasi, all non-human beings that share the space and a good part of everyday life with the *runas* are called *espíritus* (spirits); they fall into several categories and there are specific ways of referring to particular spirits, as I shall discuss below.

As I have indicated elsewhere (Muñoz 2020b), the Coipaseños distinguish between two kinds of spirits, the *k'acha almas* (good souls) or *k'acha espíritus* (good spirits) and the *saqra espíritus* (bad spirits)<sup>6</sup>. Both can be said to have the same origins, namely deceased humans. The humans who after death go through the customary process, which is to say the usual farewell from their relatives and entry into the world of the dead—though what that might be is not very clear—are the *almas*. By contrast, those who, for a variety of reasons, have been punished and do not undergo this process remain wandering round the world to become *saqra espíritus*. They appear in many different forms, from the living dead known as *condenados* (the damned) through to remains of inhabitants of ancient times, called the *chullpas*, which can take the forms of shadows, dogs, ants, or any other. Any Coipasian may have two or three encounters with some of these evil spirits during their lifetime.

It is important to specify that the encounters I describe below are limited to these *saqra espíritus*, since encounters with *almas* are not seen as dangerous and thus do not cause physical or emotional reactions in Coipaseños. Similarly, there are encounters with human beings who are beyond the bounds of the social, for example, *layqas* (sorcerers), or *liquichiris* (fat stealers). In some exceptional cases, *almas*, *layqas* or *liquichiris* can make *runas* fall ill, but this is not usual. However, meetings with *saqra espíritus* always frighten people and cause *susto* (Spanish term) or *mancharisqa* (Quechua term). Both refer to a spiritual discomfort after the loss

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<sup>6</sup> A ritual specialist or shaman, says about it: “Of course bad people say that. That’s why people who were bad, anything. That’s why once they touch you, they kill you right there. With a single blow... They are bad spirits”. He refers to the fact that bad people in life are transformed into bad spirits after their death.

of the soul by shock, the area's most common illness which is caused by loss of their most important soul entity, the *ánimo*, after an unexpected encounter.<sup>7</sup>

### Type of spirits

The *sajra espíritu* can appear in any context but most encounters are described as happening at night, on the way from or, most often, to the village. In all the stories I heard<sup>8</sup>, the following circumstances were mentioned: they were men, walking alone, coming home from a party, or from stealing something, or simply a gathering of friends<sup>9</sup>.

Two peasants told me about these bad spirits and their encounters with them.

*And also round there was a payaso. I saw him when I was going to rob some water for a garden patch at night with my older brother. He looked like a priest coming in his cassock, like this, from here. Well, this one was a payaso.<sup>10</sup> These guys really walked, they went away when they died, right?*

*Drunk. Down river to Konapaya I went. I went there, and just at the corner I got a fright. A noise, a sound. Throwing more dirt ... splaaaaat! And there was nothing there.*

Nevertheless, these encounters do not always happen at night or after some wrongdoing. In the case of a *condenado*, it almost always happens during the day. The key factor is that the person must be alone for the encounter, unless it happens during childhood, in which case it occurs in the presence of a group. Most commonly, the spirits appear before adult men when they are alone at night. On several occasions, people said, they had been walking with relatives but were left alone, resting somewhere along the way. Only then did the spirit appear. I recall that on several occasions, at night, when I had to go back to my house, which was just past one of the ravines that was considered *saqra*, my companions insisted on coming with me

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<sup>7</sup> There is a considerable range of literature about *susto* in the Andes. See, for example, Absi (2005), Cáceres Chalco (2008), Castaldo Cossa (2004), Fernández Juárez (2004; 2019), Greenway (1998), Lanata (2007), and Neila (2006), among others.

<sup>8</sup> The stories presented were told in various contexts and situations: some were solicited by the anthropologist; others were told an informal way on walks in the mountains or in the vegetable gardens; others in a family context after a meal. On most occasions they were narrated in Spanish, although some were also in Quechua and have subsequently been translated.

<sup>9</sup> Such stories are mainly passed on by men. Women are also victims of spirit encounters, but they don't usually talk about them, or at least I did not have access to them except on a couple of occasions. Where women have recounted these encounters, the idea of bravery or capricho is more diluted. All of them recounted how they subsequently became ill or suffered bad pregnancies or childbirths. It would seem, then, that there is at least a particularly masculine mode of capricho.

<sup>10</sup> The *payaso* is a *saqra espíritu* that cannot be recognized as the spirit of a particular deceased person and, as such, poses a potential danger. *Payaso* refers to spirits of the past, from some four or five decades ago when some of the dead were buried in a black shroud. Hence, they are also referred to as 'negros' (blacks).

so that nothing would befall me. This escort, if possible, consisted of two people so that no one would have to come back alone through this place.

It is very important, in the context of the encounter, that the person concerned can identify the spirit that appears. He must know if he is faced with a *condenado*, a *payaso* or *negro*, or any other of the *saqra espíritus*. This, as we shall see, is essential because it is through such subjectivisation that one can confront them.

Subjectivisation of spirits in this context requires two actions: recognition of the kind of spirit one is faced with; and the post-encounter narrative in which the spirit is named. I draw on Michael Lambek's notions of 'bestowal' and Victor Turner's 'experience' to explain this. In his ethnography in Mayotte (Comoro Archipelago) Lambek (2009) states that local spirits acquire identity by bestowing (announcing) their name. Moreover, people can only refer to a spirit because it exists, because it has an identity, and this identity is acquired through the act of naming. Turner (1986) states that something (an event) or someone (its protagonists) only exists when it is narrated, after the experience. The experience is real only if it can be articulated subsequently in a narrative or ritual form.

In Coipasi, the first action mentioned above refers to the experience itself, that is, to the instant when the encounter with a spirit takes place, during which the spirits are not bestowed with a name (Lambek 2009) but present themselves under recognised and subjectivised characteristics and conditions. In other words, at this early stage the spirit does not acquire a name, for it is identified by its qualities. Here the spirit already presents an 'identity' which is confirmed and completed in the next moment; in a second step, the transmission/narration of the encounter—or experience—takes place. This transmission is mainly, but not only, oral. Although this is not always the case, sometimes even the bravery and lack of fear is conveyed through certain elements of humor in the narrative of the encounter. We could say that showing this relaxation through laughter is part of *capricho*. Also the protagonists of the encounters present a series of consequences that are known to the rest of the community and that are part of the experience itself. This is what Turner refers to as the 'expressions' of that experience (Turner 1986), which endow them with qualities associated with certain common names.

### Physical sensations

The Coipaseños give detailed descriptions of the sensations they have at these times. All the accounts refer to a kind of confusion that can sometimes be very slight, like feeling disoriented, but on other occasions it is much more serious as it can result in loss of consciousness.

*[After an encounter with a condenado] I went back to the high ground where I was coming from, but my head was kind of [...] and I lay down there and then I went to sleep. Suddenly, I took fright. But*



*my head, it didn't, no it didn't [...] it was kind of crazy<sup>11</sup>. Then I went down, and further down, and I got sleepy again, and lay down. I must have slept for a long time there. From there, I went down to where I left my brother. There was an ox there, and the other ox was sleeping there, and I lay down in the middle ... shit!!! I'd gone to sleep there in the middle, right there, and I was sweating. Then my younger brother came and woke me up [...] The sun was still shining. Then I had a headache. It was unbearable.*

On most occasions, this feeling of bewilderment or loss of consciousness comes with lack of control of the body, which starts to be felt in strange ways. We see two examples of this in the following testimonies.

*Then, I only wanted to get out of there. I was walking very sloooooowly. But my body was like this. In my mind it was [and he makes a gesture of being fat]. My hat was like this, tipped up! I wet my mouth. Nothing. Not even a whistle. Nothing. Just screaming [...]. Then, I couldn't, I couldn't even speak. Nothing at all. It nearly made me piss.*

*I saw it as if it was a person, like a priest. But the eyes were shining, and it made me piss, it made me shit, yeah? I don't know who that man was. A person or not a person.*

The *sajra espíritu* made people lose control of their bodies, with severe physical sensations such as loss of sphincter control, or of having a body that is not one's own, may be accompanied by loss of consciousness and inability to stay upright, or even awake and calm.

### Subjectivity

Coipaseños are aware that they must get out of these critical situations since it is evident that their lives are in danger if they are unable to regain control and “go back to normal”. This can be found in the village and, more specifically, in the protection of the home (Rivera Andía 2000, p. 278), but in order to get there, one has to make an effort, and regain some control over one's body and mind, which, as we shall see, may remain unbalanced for a long time.

In those moments, *capricho* appears, which could resemble what we usually understand as courage or bravery, although I believe it is important to qualify this association. The phrase ‘with my *capricho*’, frequently mentioned in these accounts, refers first to the ability, despite the confusion, to recognize what kind of entity one is confronting and to respond accordingly. In other words, it enables what I have previously mentioned as subjectification of the *sajra espíritu*. Lambek showed that in cases of spirit possession in Madagascar, in order to relate to spirits it is necessary to ‘objectify’ them, in particular ‘bestow’ a name on them, “because their embodiment is contingent and unstable” (Lambek 2009, p. 127). Guillermo Salas Carreño

<sup>11</sup> He refers to the fact that he was disoriented and ill. By speaking of the head in these terms, he refers to the state of general disorder in which he was left after the encounter.

has demonstrated that in the Andes subjectification of the non-humans with which one lives is equally essential; giving them a name and an essence, that is, identifying them, makes it possible to relate to them (Salas Carreño 2019, p. 131). As Cristina Fontes makes a similar claim for the communities in Quebrada de Humahuaca, Argentina, it is essential to immediately identify the entities (*dueños* [like a proprietor spirits], goblins and devils) one encounters. For example, around schools, it is common for a goblin “with the face of an old man” to approach children and invite them to play: “only those who are quick enough to identify the new playmate can flee in time and return to where they were” (Fontes 2020, p. 12). In the Amazonian case of Ávila (Ecuador), Eduardo Kohn speaks of ‘intersubjectivity’, in other words, the need for all ‘selves’ to be able to recognise the souls of other ‘selves’ (2013, p. 117). Kohn thus proposes that the animism of these societies is only possible through the recognition (‘objectification’) of the soul of the other and that, moreover, this is not a simple process (2013, p. 17). What interests me about Kohn’s argument is that he states that this recognition of the other is absolutely necessary in order to remain oneself, i.e. to maintain a correct state of mind.

Hence, when a Coipaseño is immersed in one of these encounters, *encapricharse* (mustered up *capricho*) makes it possible for one to have some knowledge of who or what one has encountered and, especially, of how to act. When this does not happen, the consequences can be lethal, since recognising the spirit is not only a matter of identification, but also of preventing its harmful behaviour. The *saqra* spirits (except the *condenados*) cannot speak, although they can emit certain sounds such as wailing. However, they communicate mostly via looks, gestures and ways of acting. This physicality (Descola 2012)<sup>12</sup> is also determined by the clothes that the spirits wear, as the body is also considered in the community to be made up of these clothes. Therefore, gestures, movements, clothing, looks, sounds, are all part of a physicality that defines the ontology and communication of the spirits.

Speaking about an encounter with one of these spirits, a friend says:

*I was looking at the negro and my hair went like this: “kà, kà, kà”. Yeah, stiff. My face went still, my bones went [rigid]. Then I got my capricho and started moving. I came back with my capricho.*

A community member also told me the story of the time his father came across a *condenado*. His father confronted it by shining a light on it with a mirror he was carrying.

*And he [his father] says, “When I lit it up like that” he’d mustered up his courage. The mirror must have protected him, right? “I looked at it” he says, “I looked at it”. And “the condenado bent down, by himself”, he says, “wham, and he went sssss”. It wasn’t for him, let’s say. Kind of like fingertips, like*

<sup>12</sup> “The set of the visible and tangible expressions that the dispositions of any entity take on when considered as resulting from the intrinsic morphological and physiological characteristics of that entity” (Descola 2012, p. 183).

*this, psspsps [referring to how it left as if levitating] it went quickly to the other side and was lost from sight. And my dad, braver with the mirror, watched till it crossed to the other side.*

In general, what the Coipaseños emphasize is that once they become aware of who or what they have encountered (recognizing the characteristics of the spirit and thus identifying it) they must know how to act. This community member knew he had to take out the mirror to confront the *condenado*. In other cases, one gathers the courage to stand up, walk confidently, and leave the ravine or the road one is on.

### The consequences

As I said, the common result of these encounters is the ailment known as *mancharisqa* or *susto* (Quechua and Spanish terms respectively). It is a spiritual disturbance caused by loss of the *ánimu* or life force after suffering a serious shock (Muñoz 2017). This disturbance leads to a wide range of illnesses of varying seriousness (Absi 2005; Cáceres Chalco 2008; Thomas et al. 2009). The *mancharisqa* can be caused by falls, upsets, arguments, bad news or, as we have seen, encounters with spirits. In the latter case, the consequences of the *mancharisqa* are more serious. The cure for this kind of *mancharisqa* is similar to that for other ailments though it entails more elaborate ritual, with higher risks and greater uncertainty of its success. Those who have been cured from the *mancharisqa* contracted after encountering malevolent spirits can be recognized by with a black and white bracelet, a *lloque*, made of thread and worn on the left wrist.

Our interlocutor met a *condenado* when he was young and describes what happened.

*I got here, home... and my mama, she cried. But then I wanted to leave, go out. That night I slept tied to the bed. They tied my feet, my hands, and tied me here, and I slept like that all night long. Well, I wanted to go out. My papa, he cried. Then he went to my uncle over there. They made him prepare remedies, and mate. They filled this and gave it to me, and I drank it. That made me react. And then they drew blood from here [his temple]. And that's how I was cured.*

Being affrighted (*asustarse*) is a condition that tends to be mild and curable when one is young, as in the case described above, but it presents more difficulties for adults. The success of the specialist ritual cure, or *jampiri*, depends on how much the affrighted person can remember about where it happened and who caused the fright, since the cure is largely based on this knowledge. It is therefore very important to identify the spirit one encountered.

### CAPRICHOS: AVOIDING THE FEAR

*Capricho*, as I say, is a stance of boldness that is necessary for dealing with an adverse situation. The term is used in other contexts as well that include family

and political clashes, confrontations between communities, and several tense situations. However, I mostly heard it when people referred to these encounters with the *saqra espíritu*. Moreover, in this regard, the use of the term tends to come with an account of the action.

*Encapricharse* (mustering up one's courage) when confronted with a spirit has an essential aim: avoiding fear. The reasoning of the Coipaseños is that, in this situation, they were not afraid because they *encapricharon* (mustered up their courage). Not being afraid means that, despite the state of semiconsciousness one might be in because of the action of the *saqra espíritu*, one can get up, confront the spirit in some way (even if it is simply by fleeing the place), and return home. This saves one from total paralysis and truly disastrous consequences. The imperative of staying safe when one has an encounter with a spirit is not about avoiding illness because this is deemed to be almost inevitable; the aim is to avoid death. Our interlocutor offers some clues for understanding this.

*I wasn't afraid, not at all. I wasn't afraid. Why wasn't I afraid? Because you die, don't you see? Like me, you die, for this little while [he is referring to his dazed state and the physical consequences when faced with the condenado] ... You don't want to be dead, don't you see? On this occasion, being a kid, de corajudo (being brave), I got out of that. I wasn't scared of it at all. I wasn't afraid. And to this very day I'm not afraid either. I go wherever I want to go, alone at night. I go alone. I'm not afraid.*

Xavier Ricard Lanata argues that in the Ausangate range in Peru, experiencing fear (*mancharichiy*) is dangerous because it leads to illness. Similar to practices in Coipasi, the ritual specialist must identify who caused the illness and where, as the cure is performed at that location (Lanata 2007, p. 191). Fontes also observes that in the Quebrada de Humahuaca, fear increases the risk of being trapped by various spirit entities (Fontes 2020, p. 11).

By contrast with what seems to be common among the shepherds of Ausangate (Lanata 2007), Coipaseños constantly strive to make it clear that they are not afraid. Fear is not part of these encounters because it is understood that *capricho* is necessary to fight them. And, our previous interlocutor mentions, having no fear is fundamental for ensuring that you will not die after encountering these spirits. In Coipasi, as in other places, people spoke of a weak *ánimo* that could easily be affected by a *saqra espíritu*. It is thought that women and children, as well as old people and people who abuse alcohol have this weakness of spirit and in consequence they must be more careful.<sup>13</sup> Men can have a weakened *ánimo* when drinking heavily, but also at night, or when returning from committing some wrongdoing like theft or adultery. These are all times when one needs *capricho* or courage to face adversity.

Gerardo Fernández Juárez mentions that, in the Aymara case,

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding spirit essences in Pampallacta (Cuzco, Peru), it is said that women have seven souls, and this makes them more caprichosas, which Valerie Robin translates as 'headstrong' (Robin 2008, p. 51). Palmira La Riva also refers to the presence of these seven souls in women (La Riva 2005, p. 83).

(...) the main weapon against the *susto* (fright) is boldness, courage, the soul, the explicit expression of human 'shadows' in life's situations. The discourse on the illness of the *susto* particularly refers to the importance of courage among human beings. The guardian beings of the *altiplano* threaten the autonomy and independence endowed on the Andean people by courage. They long for this human characteristic that allows them to relate with themselves (Fernández Juárez 2004, p. 293).

The *ánimo*, spiritual strength, is thus inevitably associated with braveness. It should not be forgotten that the word *mancharisqa*, which is translated as 'affrighted' is, in many cases, accompanied by other words like *manchachikuy* ('be afraid') or *manchakuy* ('fear'). Hence, being affrighted (*mancharisqa*) necessarily implies a direct relation with fear and weakness of the soul. In some studies on violence in Peru demonstrate that having lived through a *ManchakuyWata* (years of fear and terror) makes people vulnerable and constantly susceptible to the illness of *susto* (Malvaceda 2010). Although the view that the *susto* is the result of a person's emotional imbalance was criticised decades ago (O'Neill 1975), many studies still take it as a vantage point when analysing the various kinds of Indigenous traumas caused by social and political violence (Greenway 1998). My ethnographic experience has led me to believe that, while this might be true in some cases, encounters that cause *mancharisqa* are generally sudden and can affect anyone. However, the contexts in which these encounters occur are clearly defined, as I have previously mentioned.

The Spanish word *susto* is translated into English as 'fright' with mention even of 'magical fright' or 'frightening experience' (O'Neill 1975, p. 45), thus emphasising the more terrifying aspect of the experience. However, being affrighted is not the same as being afraid of something. As Francisco Gil García says, in the community of Santiago K, in Lipez (Bolivia), "no one is afraid of the entities although sooner or later, and to a greater or lesser degree, they affright people" (Gil García 2014, p. 376).

What the Coipaseños show us is that a person is not scared of being affrighted, because the *susto* is an inevitable thing. One cannot avoid it because it happens unexpectedly, whether it is a sudden fall, a loud noise, or a *saqra espíritu*. What characterises the *susto* is precisely its inescapability. The key is to maintain awareness of what is happening and to muster up enough courage to escape the situation and go home, where the healing process will begin. I then asked a villager to define *capricho*, he answered: "Well, more courage. I get braver. And that's how (...) I get around alone. That's why nothing happens to me, and I don't have any of this." By adopting the stance of courage serious damage, and probably even death, can be avoided.

As I have tried to demonstrate, a good part of this ability to confront the spirit, or at least escape from it bravely, is being able to identify it and being aware that it is giving you a fright (loss of consciousness and strange bodily sensations). On one occasion, a fellow villager began to behave oddly. Not only did he go out at night to wander round the hill, but he was also rather "crazy" and violent. The community's *jampiri* determined that he had been *asustado* (affrighted) on the hill without realising it. This complicated the healing process because he needed to know where the *susto* had occurred and who had affrighted him because the affected man had not

been able to recognize and subjectivise the spirit (Viveiros de Castro 2012, p. 35).<sup>14</sup> Even though the cases where one does not get the chance to see the spirit are less common, they are, for this reason, more challenging for the healer.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In Coipasi, then, fear of spirits exists but the aim is to avoid it and, according to witnesses, this is achieved on most occasions. This is why Coipaseños say they were not afraid when they ran into *condenados*, shadow figures, or *payasos*. Although this might be a case of what Francisco Gil García identified in Uyuni as ‘denied fears’ or ‘dissimulated fears’ (2014), in Coipasi its absence has been secured by putting in place appropriate mechanisms (*capricho*) have been put in place for it. *Capricho*, in short, refers to the set of attitudes that appear in a moment of need and which depend on the person possessing *coraje*. These attitudes must be verbalised and transmitted afterwards; thus the expressions of experience become part of the *capricho* as well. It is not only important not to have been afraid, but also to show and make it known that one was not afraid.

As we have seen, it is common in the ethnographic literature (not limited to the Andean region) to emphasize that the subjectivisation of spirits is essential for confronting them. However, less commonly discussed is the emotional, cosmological, and practical framework that is put in place to carry out this subjectivisation. The main objective of this text was to describe how it is done by the peasants of the Quechua community of Coipasi, Bolivia. To achieve this, it is essential to face the danger with what is called *capricho*. For a person to *encaprichar* it is necessary to be able to identify the context and the spirit that has been encountered. Subjectivisation of spirits is achieved by means of normalising these entities but, above all, their presence and coexistence. Giving them an identity enables people to know how to interact with them. As Viveiros de Castro said, “every apparition demands a recipient” and, therefore “a point of view”: “Every appearance is a perspective, and every perspective ‘deceives’” (2012, p. 33).

In Coipasi, fear only appears when there is an absence of *coraje* and *capricho*, which is an admission of not being able to manage the situation. It is essential to know how to deal with the spirits and to demonstrate the ability to escape the situation (Fontes 2020, p. 8). *Capricho* is thus presented as a way of dealing with the

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<sup>14</sup> The conversation I had with the healer about this case shows how dangerous it is not to see or recognise the spirit that gives you the fright.

FP: He [my friend] always wanders round at night. So, the bad spirits are watching him.

Óscar: But he says he doesn't remember seeing them.

FP: Of course. What do you think he'd see?

Ó: Of course, you don't realise.

FP: He doesn't realise because he doesn't see the spirit [...] He doesn't see it but it sees him and attacks him. Wham! It's powerful.

deception inherent in the perspective, in the encounter. It seems necessary to identify and clarify, in the midst of the confusion of these moments, who one is confronted with. I would go so far as to say, then, that the Andean people's "point of view" in dealing with spirits is *capricho*.

Although Coipaseños are cautious and prefer not to tempt fate by chancing such encounters, there are many occasions when they cannot be avoided. Walking in the dark through places considered to be *sajras* is common, as happens, for example, when a person goes to the *chacra* (smallholding) before sunrise or comes back from it at night, or when one must use a path when returning from a journey or festivities in a nearby village.

The many spirits the Coipaseños live with are part of their daily lives and, therefore, it is necessary to articulate mechanisms for relating to them. In this case, the relationship with the spirits is based on avoiding the harm they can inflict and, to this end, various behaviour and actions are established to identify the spirit they are confronting and determine the most appropriate course of action.

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CAPRICHO AVOIDING FEAR IN ENCOUNTERS WITH SPIRITS IN THE ANDES

**Key words:** Spirits, Avoidance, Fear, Subjectification, Quechua peasants

This article analyses encounters of Quechua peasants in the Potosí region of Bolivia with *sajra espíritus* (evil spirits). In order to ensure that these spirits do not cause them too much harm, they must not be afraid and this fearless state is achieved by means of what they call *capricho*. This word refers to a set of courageous actions during the encounter, which mainly allow the waylaid person to recognise the spirit and therefore to know how to deal with it. But this whole process must be shared and verbalised. Thus, *capricho* extends beyond the event and is also present in the transmission of the experience.

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