

TO DEFEND OURSELVES

Ecology and ritual in
an Andean village



Billie Jean Isbell

Belle Jean Shelly

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Ecology and Ritual in an Andean Village

by Billie Jean Isbell



Prospect Heights, Illinois

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Cover: A young woman is being courted during one of the major village rituals, the *Yarqa Aspiy*.

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9 8 7

Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Guide to the Pronunciation of Quechua x

Notes: 1985 xi

1. Introduction 3
2. The Village in the Context of a Changing Nation 19
3. The Social Classes of Chuschi 67
4. The Political Structure of Chuschi 83
5. The Structures of Kinship and Marriage 99
6. Three Essential Rituals 137
7. Private and Public Reciprocity 167
8. Migrants' Construction of an Urban Identity 179
9. A Final View Through the Andean Kaleidoscope 197
10. Postscript—Four Years Later 221

Appendix 247

Glossary 249

Bibliography 259

Index 273

Figures

1. Obligatory Progression in the Prestige Hierarchy (1967) 86
2. The Civil-Religious Hierarchy (1967) 87
3. Indigenous and Bureaucratic Hierarchies (1967) 88
4. *Ayllu-Karu Ayllu* 106
5. Contributions of the *Kuyaq* 173
6. Temple of the Sun in Cuzco, after Pachacuti Yamqui 208
7. The Upper World, Hanan Pacha 212
8. The Upper World, Hanan Pacha 213
9. The Upper World, Hanan Pacha 215

Tables

1. *Ayllu* Terms of Address 101-103
2. Affinal or *Awra* Terms of Address 104
3. Transmission of Names in Chuschi and Quispillaqta (1661-1685) 111
4. Endogamy and Exogamy in Chuschi 133
5. Residence of Non-Chuschino Spouse by Sex (1950-1966) 133
6. Residence of Non-Chuschino Spouse by Sex (1661-1685) 134
7. The Annual Cycle According to Guamán Poma 204
8. Major Elements in the Drawing by Pachacuti Yamqui 209

Plates

1. On the Road to Chuschi 5
2. Exploitation of Andean Vertical Ecology 44
3. Market Day in Chuschi 50
4. The Pampas River Valley 53
5. Alpacas 54
6. The *Qichwa* Zone 56
7. The *Varayoqkuna* 92
8. Prospective Newlyweds 118
9. Yarqa Aspiy 142
10. Santa Cruz 148
11. A Powerful Wamani 152
12. The Herranza 160
13. Communal House-Roofing 169
14. Women Preparing a *Kuyoq* Meal 172
15. 7 de Octubre Invasion Settlement, Lima 186

Maps

1. Map of Peru Showing Central and South Andean Departments 42
2. Department of Ayacucho 47
3. Province of Cangallo 48
4. District of Chuschi 52
5. Zones of the Pueblo of Chuschi 58
6. *Yarqas* of the Pueblo of Chuschi 140

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GUIDE TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF QUECHUA

Consonants (those in parenthesis are borrowed from Spanish)

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Postvelar	Glottal
Voiceless stop	p	t	č*	k	q	
Voiced stop	(b)	(d)		(g)		
Fricative	(f)	s				h
Nasal	m	n	ñ			
Lateral		l	l̪*			
Simple trill		r				
Multiple retroflexive trill			(r)*			
Semi-vowels	w		y			

*Orthography: /č/ ch, /l̪/ ll, /r/ rr

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

Notes: 1985

Dear *Comadre*

Chuschi has been burned. The village is almost abandoned. We have not planted crops this year. What are we to do? Your god-children and your *comadre* are here in Lima, but there is no work for us. We cannot return to Ayacucho.

May God help us,

Your *Compadre*

(an excerpt from a letter

March 1985)

The *Sinchis* (the civil guards' counter-insurgency troops) arrived in Chuschi in the middle of the night and made everyone come out into the plaza. Five people were arrested and taken away. Then the *Sinchis* tied a bomb to an old man's stomach and blew him up... They just blew him up, that's what they did. The captain in charge said: "Look you Indian savages that's how terrorists die." The grandson of the old man was rumored to belong to the leftist guerrilla movement, Sendero Luminoso, and the old man was said to have harbored him in Chuschi.

Chuschi has been accorded a place in history because it was the locale of the first public action by the leftist guerrilla movement; on May 18, 1980, Sendero Luminoso, known as "The Shining Path" of the Communist Party of Peru proclaimed that they "...set burning the invincible and ever growing flames of armed struggle, of guerrilla war..." "by burning the ballot boxes of the first election in Peru after twelve years of military rule. The initial torch was lit in Chuschi. Since then Sendero Luminoso has claimed over four thousand armed actions throughout Peru; however, the epicenter of their actions remains in six provinces of the department of Ayacucho: Cangallo (where Chuschi is), Huanta, La Mar, Huamanga, Victor Fajardo, and Lucanas. Guerrilla activities have intensified in the two neigh-

boring departments of Huancavelica and Apurimac. The Law Against Terrorism, Decree 046, was passed in March 1981 and this region was thereby declared a national Emergency Zone which resulted in the suspension of all civil liberties. The Peruvian navy has had a force of 2000 marines engaging in counter-insurgency operations along with an estimated 6000 soldiers of the civil guard and military in the Andean Emergency Zone.

According to Amnesty International's *Peru Briefing* (Jan. 1983, 1435) alleged guerrillas were reported killed in military clashes by the Peruvian Ministry of Interior. In the first six months of 1984, 1200 civilians and 600 alleged guerrillas have been reported killed. Amnesty International has carefully documented a pattern of night raids on homes of alleged terrorists and sympathizers by hooded, heavily armed military personnel dressed in civilian clothes. As of January 1985 they had documented 1005 cases of disappeared persons after detention by Peruvian authorities. Even the innocent act of entering military or civil guard quarters to inquire about relatives or friends who have been arrested carries with it the threat of detention, torture and perhaps death. Secret detention centers and human dumping grounds and mass graves of unidentified bodies have been documented by Amnesty International within a three to twenty kilometer radius of the two major cities of the Emergency Zone, Ayacucho and Huanta.

One hundred and fifty-two bodies have been reported in this small region near Ayacucho and Huanta. Two garbage dumps, Paracuti and Infierillo, near Ayacucho have been the sites of frequent dumpings of tortured victims since 1983; however no estimates of numbers of bodies are available because government troops patrol the sites carefully. The official numbers of unidentified bodies found in the rest of the Emergency Zone is close to two hundred. The level of murders by government forces may never be known. While official claims declare that the deaths are of terrorists, Amnesty International has uncovered numerous instances of religious leaders, members of the teachers union, reporters (SUTEP), labor union leaders, and peasant community leaders who have been identified among the dead.

What has become clear in the five years of conflict is that the Quechua-speaking peasantry are sustaining the major mortalities at the hands of both sides: they are caught between the revolutionary torches of Sendero Luminoso and the fires of hatred of the government's special counter insurgency forces. Sendero Luminoso are practicing summary executions of informers and village leaders suspected to be reactionary. The government's counter insurgency forces are committing senseless atrocities that appear to be motivated solely by hatred of the Indian culture. For example, they murdered forty-seven men, women, and children in the village of Soccos when the community denied entrance to a group of drunken marines who tried to crash a wedding party.

Five percent of the combined populations of the two villages of Chuschi and Quispillaqta appear on Amnesty International's list of documented "disappeared persons." On May 21, 1983 in the village of Quispillaqta, forty-two adult men

and one woman were arrested; they have not been seen nor heard of since. Six men have similarly disappeared from Chuschi in 1983 and 1984. The disappeared from these two villages range in age from fifteen to seventy-four. It is likely that old land boundary conflicts between the two villages are being brought into play during the current upheavals of violence. The two villages have a long history of violent interactions; the first conflict that I was able to document was in 1593 (see pages 65-66). I think that it is very possible that the massive arrests of Quispillaqtenos on May 21, 1983 was motivated by accusations lodged by Chuschininos as a means of attacking their old enemies.

In 1975, I wrote a postscript to this book in which I quoted members of the community who said that: "To defend ourselves is to defend our traditions." I concluded that whether they will be able to do so in the future depends on the outcome of the dialectical process between structural principles and historical events (page 246 – the last page of the book). I was aware of dramatic changes taking place ten years ago but I was hopeful that Andean culture would withstand those changes as it has in the past. Now I am faced with the stark reality that the structural principles of reciprocity, communal labor, bilateral kinship, parallel inheritance, and dual moiety organization did not withstand the destructive impact of the global historical events of the past ten years. The tenacious structures that I studied and admired have not withstood the results of an armed struggle between the counter insurgency forces of the Peruvian state and a small leftist movement that grew out of the city of Ayacucho.

Sendero Luminoso has declared that they are prepared for a fifty year struggle in order to destroy the existing government and institute a new order. The peasants, on the other hand, are concentrating on preserving their lands and their way of life but they are also transforming their communal structure by participating in a market economy. Sendero has attacked communities who have attempted to deliver produce to markets; they have also executed community leaders who have not supported Sendero Luminoso's ideology. Nevertheless, peasant communities like Chuschi and Quispillaqta are suffering more at the hands of national troops who appear to be motivated by hatred of the Indian culture even though the actions of Sendero Luminoso are more prominent in new reports.

One of the most alarming revelations for me as I write the preface to the reissue of *To Defend Ourselves* is the realization that my anthropological perspective blinded me from seeing the historical processes that were occurring at the time. While I documented many of the tensions that were developing that led to the birth of a leftist movement and I saw the increasing polarization of the Quechua-speaking masses and the national culture, I was unable to see clearly the degree to which that process would lead to such widespread violence against the peasantry because I did not place the events of the ten years that I studied Chuschi into a proper global historical perspective.

As George Marcus has observed in his review of Fabian's *Time and the Other: How*

Anthropology Makes its Object (in the American Anthropologist, Vol. 85, No. 4, 1984: 1024): "Symbolic analysis reduces the anxiety of the anthropologist by attributing ambiguity and conflict in social life to symbolic processes rather than historical processes." *To Defend Ourselves* was written ten years ago with a symbolic, structural, and interpretive framework; however I did not adequately place Chuschi in a world system in which increasing violence and the breakdown of nation states in the third world are becoming commonplace.

Anthropologists have to begin to learn to share moments of history with those we study. This will necessarily move us away from the social science paradigms that prevailed in the 1960's and 1970's and into direct dialogue with our former subjects. Establishing such a dialogue will permit collaborative examination of the global political processes that are currently impinging on peasant and tribal peoples around the world. If the decade of the 1980's is characterized by such a dialogue, then the praxis of anthropology will be transformed. My own next step will be to engage in such a dialogue with my former anthropological subjects in order to place the violence that is occurring in the Andean Emergency Zone in historical and political perspective. While I have had to abandon my somewhat romantic view of Andean continuity, I still want to believe that Andean culture can defend itself against this present onslaught. However, we must ask ourselves if this current rip in the fabric of Andean life is a new phenomenon that has few historical roots or whether the current upheaval in Ayacucho (which in Quechua means: "the corner of the dead") is yet another *Pachacuti*, a world turn, that Andean culture will survive.

Billie Jean Isbell
July, 1985

I affectionately dedicate this book to two women
whose faith and encouragement made its completion possible:

In memory of Dee Furst

and

To my mother, Mildred Richerson