

## **De-Colonising the Body and Social Work in the South: the practical experience of COMPA in Bolivia**

by COMPA\*

### **Abstract:**

COMPA is a project that has developed because of the particular needs of Bolivia's marginalised indigenous population. It promotes the processes of self-empowerment by working through the relationship of colonisation and oppression of individuals ('tied bodies'). The method and philosophy of COMPA's community oriented social work is based on the concept of De-colonisation of the body, which aims to strengthen the community, facilitate local leadership and create individual well-being. This article presents the concept of De-Colonisation of the body and shows the context in which this idea has emerged. Methodologically, the concept has roots both in western ideas of liberation and progressive arts approaches such as the theatre of the oppressed or the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. Philosophically, De-Colonisation of the body is based on the *Cosmovision* of the Andes and the concept of ›Buen Vivir‹ (good life), which seeks balance between the social, the individual and nature.

### **1) The Colonial Framework**

When we (COMPA) talk about social work in the South we have to consider the colonial framework in which our work takes places. Bolivia is a society that is still influenced by the colonial regime that was imposed upon the country and its people in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. After the victory over the Inca Empire, the colonising Spaniards established an apartheid regime that forced the indigenous people to live at the margins of society. The colonial masters' central interest was the exploitation of gold and silver. Through the centuries, millions of tons of silver and

\* COMPA is an acronym for "Comunidad de Productores en Arte" which translates as "Community of Producers in Art". This article has been assembled by Thomas Guthmann on base of texts from Iván Nogales Bazan and Coral Salazar Tórrez. These texts base upon collective knowledge of COMPA of many creative bodies. Copy editor has been Ann Kathleen Matthews who helped to bring the text in a good shape. More information about COMPA: <http://compa.blogspot.de>

other precious metals such as gold, tin and zinc have been extracted. Bolivia's abundance of raw materials was one of the factors that made primary capital accumulation in Europe possible. For over three centuries silver was exploited from the Cerro Rico (the rich hill) region of Potosí. The local population paid a high cost; around eight million indigenous mine workers lost their lives in the Spanish mines. To finance the colonial system German bankers, such as the Fuggers, financially supported Charles V, King of Spain and Emperor of Germany (c.f. Walter 2001), making the Conquista an European enterprise from its very beginning. In his book, ›The Open Veins of Latin America‹, Eduardo Galeano describes the situation of the Cerro Rico as a destination of no return, »The Indians, including women and children, were torn from their agricultural communities and driven to the Cerro. Out of every ten who went up into the freezing wilderness, seven never returned« (Galeano 1997: 39).

While the ›Indians‹ died in the mines, Potosí, the city at the foot of the Cerro Rico, turned into a prosperous city. In 1650, it had a population of 160.000 and was bigger than Paris at that time. The Altiplano, the Bolivian highlands, was one of the first regions of the new world capitalist society to be developed. The profits made through mining were exported by the Europeans who controlled Potosí, while the local people who wrested the silver from the Cerro had to live at the margins of the city. Potosí was an early peripheral hot spot of the growing ›world economy‹ (Wallerstein 2011: 336). Immanuel Wallerstein states that the modern world system developed with the colonisation of the Americas and other parts of the world. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a new economic geography was created in which Europe became the centre and other parts of the world were defined as periphery. The Bolivian city of Potosí was one of the first peripheral locations which was fully integrated in this growing capitalist world economy; the city was an early centre of an emerging global capitalist mining industry. Racism became an important ideology to justify unequal conditions of trade, ownership and work. In Potosí, Europeans, the white people, controlled the mining industry and dominated cultural life. Local indigenous people lived on the outskirts of the

city, as an army of work-slaves existing under poor conditions, with neither political nor cultural rights.

With the »emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuit« (Mignolo 2009: 29) a new cultural order was established. The Latin American people were the first to suffer the consequences of the formation and expansion of Western civilisation: »one of these consequences was the dismantling of the communal system of social organisation« (ibid.: 30). It was a completely traumatic experience for the indigenous people in the Americas. With the end of the Inca Empire, the Tawantinsuyu<sup>1</sup>, cultural achievements like the Khipu<sup>2</sup> system was extinguished by the new masters. The conquest was a destructive act and aimed to exterminate local culture. This destruction of the culture is important as it created a condition that transformed local people into working slaves, creating human beings with no self-esteem. The new order excluded the indigenous population from political decisions and banned all prehispanic cultural practices from public life, which made them invisible. The term ›Indio‹ was created as a semantic reference to name the new underclass in the viceroyalties of Peru and Mexico. The local population was pushed to an inferior status (cf. Alcántara Granados 2014). The semantic figure of the ›Indio‹ points at a double inferiority. The term ›Indio‹ was a signifier for both an underclass and an inferior race.

The indigenous Bolivians, attributed as ›Indios‹, were caught like a fly in a spider's web (cf. Holloway 2002). We, COMPA, as indigenous Bolivians ›Indios‹, say that we lost our Ajayu<sup>3</sup> with the colony, meaning that we lost our soul through colonisation. The spider's web is the colonial framework that turns the majority of the Bolivians into ›Indios‹. ›Indio‹, therefore, has more in common with a submissive ascription than with an ethnical description. The definition was

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1 Tawantinsuyu is the name of the Inca Empire in Quechua. It refers to the four regions of the Empire: North, West, East and South. The Collasuyu (o Qullasuyu) was the southern part of the Empire.

2 Khipu system (›quipu‹ in Quechua: ›knot‹): A knotted-string based, mnemonic numeral and narrative communication system in Andean civilizations.

3 El Ajayu or animu (Quechua) is similar to soul but not the same since the idea of the relation between soul/spirit and individual is different. Ajayu has to do with creativity or motivation. If the Ajayu gets lost there is ›will to live‹ left (cf. Estermann 2009: 239).

created at the moment when the population was stripped of their culture and they were placed in a position without origin. The idea of the uncivilised ›Indio‹ still exists as an ascription for everyone who is poor in Bolivia today. It was the European Conquistadores who destroyed the culture and cut us from our origins. In the process of colonialization we were turned into people with no origin.<sup>4</sup> Colonialism is the framework where we are caught in the web and the spider is telling us that there is no possibility to resist, and no need for change. But there has been always our cry, our discontentedness, our restlessness. The cry is an important source of our power. It gives us inspiration and ability to develop tactics of resistance to the spider's mantra T.I.N.A. (saying reiteratively: There Is No Alternative). The cry is the initial point of our activities, our artistic work, our social work. This is the theoretical context in which we, COMPA, put our activities.

## ***2) Social Work, Liberation, Human Development***

Before we start to discuss our practice in Bolivia, we need to point out a problem that is linked to the colonial framework. When we discuss social work and human development, we are discussing concepts that were developed within modern science. Modern science itself is a product of European thinking, which has its roots in the colonial age. It established an epistemology that made European knowledge the only valuable and considered knowledge. It created an exclusive epistemology by introducing the concept of development as a key concept to divide inferior and superior cultures (Hall 1994, see below).

On the one hand there were the 'developed people' that lived in a civilised world, and on the other, there was 'underdeveloped humanity', which lacked refinement and lived an uncivilised life. Despite critiques of postcolonial and also feminist activism, the idea of development as a linear process from an existence in deficit to a developed existence is strong and is still a strong paradigm of contemporary

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<sup>4</sup> The colonisers demolished the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) and built the cathedral at its place as well as they demolished the palace of the Incas in Cusco and built the palace of the viceroy of Peru at its place; it was in those moments of destruction and rebuilding that the cultural practices of the indigenous population were cut.

modern thinking.<sup>5</sup> The basis of this paradigm is the idea of linearity. The colonised people are stripped of their ›lines of transmission‹ (Turino 2013: 10) by the imposing colonial power, prehispanic cultures are destroyed and our underdevelopment is manifested. We are excluded from their idea of linearity, of linear progress, by being uncultured in their terms and therefore are categorised as underdeveloped / lacking. The concept of development in this correlation becomes an important tool of oppression. Being underdeveloped means being less civilised; and civilisation is never attained by the underdeveloped. We concur with Stuart Hall, who states that Western Civilisation is an epistemic master concept which places the rest in inferiority (cf. Hall 1994). COMPA believes that any people, any culture is a developed culture. This follows Claude Levi-Strauss (1952) opposition of any notion of superiority based on an ethnocentric or cultural basis. Human development (progress, innovation ...) is part of any culture and social work has to facilitate that human development within a cultural context. Social work is not automatically committed to these ideas. In its tradition, major reference points are the ideas ›to help‹ and ›to discipline‹ (see Melter 2006: 89). To help means to improve someone so that they live in a better or right way. This can also mean to bring civilisation to the non-civilised. On the other hand, discipline can mean purging the nation from dangerous elements and maintaining social hygiene (see. Guthmann 2003: 93). We have to consider these points when we discuss social work, liberation, human development and therefore we need to have a critical point of view on it.

### **3) *The Reality of the Lost – Starting Point of COMPA***

COMPA questions these concepts of human development and social work that refer implicitly or explicitly to a hierarchy between cultures and mark them as techniques of domination. The concept of COMPA has a different reference point, which does not come from a technical perspective, nor has a scientific background, and is therefore not approved by a ›powerful manner of speech‹ (c.f.

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<sup>5</sup> Silvia Rivera (2010) indicates the exclusive and brutal character of the colonial system and also points out alternatives; Donna Haraway (1991) emphasises the Western science system's racism as an ideology which plays an important role.

Haraway 1995). The bodies of excluded street children developed the concept by acting and performing street theatre and COMPA emerged from this experience. There is a gap between the experience of COMPA and the scientific apparatus.<sup>6</sup>

The work of COMPA results from an intervention in a rehabilitation centre for street children. It was a search for new perspectives with the children's input and used art as a tool to expand the scopes of possibility for the children. It resulted from a derivative of other practices and measures taken by the institution and it was more a negation of the existing, an expression of the cry and a reaffirmation of what the rehabilitation centre offered the children.

The children detained in the borstal founded the first Teatro Trono. The Throne Theatre has roots in an antagonism against the normal idea of theatre: as an expression of high (civilised) culture. The children who formed the nucleus of Teatro Trono were anything but bourgeois; most of them had lived on streets or in the reformatory. Many were addicted to glue and alcohol and lived as beggars or thieves. They were seen as the rubbish of Bolivian society. They named the borstal 'throne', scoffing at reality, the establishment and their own poor existence. The detention centre, they said, gave them shelter and food without having to do anything in return. ›We live like kings‹ they said ironically. ›We have a bed, food, personal security, there is no lack of anything‹. This sarcasm helped the children to survive. The Throne theatre went beyond sarcasm; they used their imaginations to make their lives more comfortable. You cannot live a life if there is only misery.

The institution's psychologists and social workers did not approve of the children starting the theatre. They thought that imagining lives and worlds beyond their own would deepen the children's wounds and would lead to identity problems. Therefore, the theatre was seen as something that could not contribute to a healing process. The theatre was seen as something uncontrollable that could

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<sup>6</sup> Postcolonial ideas do exist in this apparatus, but as Prada Alcoreza (2014) states, it aims to succeed a epistemic rupture. COMPA works on social transformation and body liberation, and is in this aspect more comprehensive.

hinder the social work that was done in the institution. In the institution's eyes, the children should learn to be realistic and be able to face the harsh reality of their lives with realism and rationalism. The psychologists and the social workers in the borstal did not perceive the street children's situation in a political and colonial context; they recognised it as an administrative problem. As individuals, the children were dysfunctional if they broke the institution's rules, which were to take no drugs, to work hard and to obey orders. The artistic intervention by Iván Nogales, to encourage the kids to play theatre, was considered as an interference that endangered the structure of the established social work and was objected to by the personnel of the institution, since they believed that being imaginative disturbed the order.

Despite these reservations, the theatre group managed to continue. This group of outlawed and marginalised kids were the starting point of COMPA's practice. The work emerged from, and is rooted in, these beginnings, though these methods were rejected by the professional world. The kids started against all odds and they succeeded. Seven children and Iván Nogales started living independently in El Alto and started their theatre. This popular form of acting and performing opened a haven for themselves and for others. They started to act out pantomimes and performances in the streets. They lived together in one single room. El Alto, where the theatre was based, is the poor twin of the city of La Paz. It is a forgotten slum and the poorest city in the poorest country of South America. Within this lost place there was a group of lost children (see: Nogales 2013: 62). Both the children and the city have been not only noticed as a problem, as something that should not be there. And this is a situation where one would not normally expect anything good to come from? In fact, something amazing was born in this moment: COMPA.<sup>7</sup>

It was born out of the refusal to accept their situation: the children's refusal to accept that they were lost humans; the refusal to accept that dreaming and being imaginative was only for well-established children; the refusal to accept that no

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<sup>7</sup> For the complete story of Teatro Trono / COMPA see *La Mañana Es Hoy* (Nogales 1998).

cultural innovation can come from a place like El Alto, where the whole world only saw poverty; the refusal to accept that the forgotten and the damned have no voice and no possibility to articulate themselves as free and empowered subjects. Teatro Trono became a voice that arose from this oblivion. It was both a group and an idea, something that was founded ›in vivo‹: suddenly it was there. It was a natural expression. The principles were clear from the beginning. It was about the body and not the intellect and it was about liberation. The beginning was about feeling not analysing. Let the body speak. The kids had no formal education; they did not know of Bertholt Brecht, Dario Fo or Agosto Boal<sup>8</sup>. They had no concept of the epic theatre or the theatre of oppression, but they had an idea of their own reality and they felt that their imaginative approach could help them make their own lives better.

This is the starting point of COMPA as a practice and also of the concept of De-Colonisation of Bodies and the idea of Cultura Viva Comunitaria (living community culture). At the beginning there was no concept, just the refusal to let the spider tell us that we could not change anything. We refused to be caught in a web where any action but subordination was hopeless. Refusing to accept this, to play theatre to construct new worlds with the body and empathy was an expression of the cry, proved that the group existed without knowing what »we are not yet« (Holloway 2002: 7). It showed the power of doing, the creative power of humanity (ibid.: 27). It showed also the power of community. You can create with others in equal and modest communities.

On the basis of this experience, COMPA began to weave a web of other relationships on the principles of the primary experience and creating new forms of relationship between the body and the mind, something more egalitarian, less

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8 We mention these theories/concepts of theatre since we are often confronted with them when we talk about De-colonising bodies. ›Does the concept concurs with the concept of theatre of oppression by Agosts Boal or with the epic theatre of Bertholt Brecht?‹ we are many times asked when people want to know where the methodology of De-Colonising bodies comes from. If we look at the starting point of De-Colonising bodies there was no theory but experience. That means if you want to theorise De-Colonising bodies you have to work by the principles of grounded theory (cf. Glaser/Strauss 1998). Everything you need for modeling the theory you find in the field. So the principle work is the work with the body.

rational and more sensitive. With the acceptance of one's own body and existence and cessation of self-hate, new relations with others became possible. Of course, the experience of COMPA cannot be understood without the context of the resistance of indigenous peoples all over the Americas and the resistance of the peoples in Bolivia in particular (c.f. Raúl Zibechi 2008). The forgotten place of El Alto, the home of the ›Indios‹, was something like a natural environment, a place where COMPA could flourish, grow and get connected with the people.

#### ***4) Call of the Ajayu for the Return of Bodies – COMPAs Philosophy***

The origin of COMPA is linked to the situation of the poor in Bolivia. It is linked to the cultural values of the people of the Altiplano who were made invisible or were not developed because they were deemed inferior under the Spanish colonial system, and later, under the idea of western modernity when Bolivia became a republic. The marginalised communities (defined as ›Indios‹) in the Altiplano could only survive under this regime by strengthening community and collectivise power relations. The idea of the ›Buen Vivir‹ (good life) is based on a living culture with its own communication with nature, social relations and idea of leadership; the idea of ›Buen Vivir‹ sees the social in relation with the whole Pachamama (mother earth).<sup>9</sup>

This indigenous culture is then inscribed upon the trauma of an event: colonisation! As we stated, the Spanish conquest did not only involve the occupation of territory, but as a result of this, the conquest involved severing prehispanic life from the experience of the population by the complete destruction of the culture and occupation of the bodies. Enrique Alcántara Granados (2014) describes the creation of the stigma ›Indio‹ as a process of description and ascription. The people of the Americas were first described as ›Indios‹. A person

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<sup>9</sup> Pachamama is a term that combines the Quechua/Aymara term of Pacha with the Spanish term of Mama. Nowadays it is used many times as central term to name Andes Cosmovision. The Andes Cosmovision is a philosophical perspective on live. The central idea is the idea of pacha as source that embraces time/epoch, space, nature, individual and community (cf. Estermann 2009: 155).

who was identified as ›Indio‹ had certain characteristics. An important characteristic was the insufficient intellect. This idea of inferiority was taken by the ›Indio‹ subjects over the time.

In the Altiplano there is a saying: If a child gets frightened the Ajayu (the soul) gets lost. It disappears. The parents or the community have to search for the Ajayu; it is necessary to restore well-being. If the Ajayu does not return with the parents or neighbours' help, a Yatiri (a priest/healer) has to perform a ritual ceremony to summon the Ajayu. Through colonisation, we say that, we moved into a state of shock; we collectively lost our Ajayu and this in turn made it possible for us to accept our inferiority as a people. We have lived many years in fear of ourselves, in the darkness. Named as ›Indios‹ we deemed ourselves ugly, unintelligent and worthless. We have never played an important role in politics or in cultural life, as TV stars or rock stars. Colonial communication / speech brought our bodies into a certain existence within the discourse though the place where we, the ›Indios‹, were positioned in this discourse was »no place« (see Butler 1997: 4). We were excluded. The interpellation as ›Indios‹ has made us submissive, and obedient and voiceless. For a long time this was the only kind of experience we had. Over centuries, external communication formed our body. Our Ajayu was gone and we hated our bodies, since it was the body that limited our possibilities. We were positioned as servants in the colonial web. The only assertion we could get was the role as inferior subject within the society. Our bodies were bound to this identity; bound by a communication that did not recognise us as humans. The kids from the streets, with their experience of life and theatre, showed us that our body has a potential that goes beyond the colonised definition.

The experience of Teatro Trono opened a horizon which showed that we could go beyond the limitations of colonial discourse. This discovery is an important aspect of our idea of De-Colonisation. It has to do with what we are made of and how we can change things. To find our Ajayu, we have to travel and rediscover our body in a different way. It is the premise for a social change and the first step

of the De-Colonisation of the body. While our body is the basis of communication, we have to restore good communication by first migrating to the centre of ourselves. The point is to find the immense dimension we have. The journey inside our body is a discovery of the multiple dimensions every one of us has. It blasts the chains and liberates the body that was subjected to colonial order.

The journey within is the beginning of a process of healing and the restoration of the Ajayu. It is a personal process for everyone that is subjected to colonial rule. At the same time, it is a subversive act since it challenges the existing order. It dismantles the colonial chains and opens spaces for different encounters. The next step that follows the journey within is the search for the other, which will establish new communications or, to use another term, to recreate new life. By knowing our body, not only as submissive and worthless, we have the opportunity to challenge life and start creating new relationships. The second step of De-Colonisation is therefore the search for the other.

This search puts the social on the table; the second step in the process of De-Colonising the body. Social relations are framed by colonialism; as long as we adhere to our role as servants, colonial communication will work within social relations. The process of De-Colonising the body questions the existing forms of communication and asks what kind of social relationship can be created to construct social worlds that are beyond the colonial framework. The meeting is a meeting of bodies; the method is to feel and not to think. The body allows different ways of encountering. Our experience shows us that theatre, body work, performance and clownery are tools that allow us to experiment with new body experiences *and* sample new forms of social relations. COMPA calls its theatre ›workshops of De-Colonisation‹; they are liberated territories, protected spaces that make experimentation possible which creates blueprints for other forms of experience of the self and more egalitarian forms of social encounter.

The third dimension of the De-Colonisation of the body we call ›wandering to the centre‹. The colonial world is a world of centres and fringes. The colonial centres,

the big cities, absorb the world at the fringes. The centres consume/conquer / absorb the ideas/imaginations/dreams of millions of migrants and benefit from the creativity of all the people who want to migrate there. Everybody wants to go to New York, Berlin or Paris. The promise of the better life there is communicated everyday through the TV-channels or the internet. Our ›wandering‹ looks for alternative types of centres: the centre of a community based culture, a multiple centre where the marginalised are also centred. Here, in the world of the excluded is our centre. Far away from the glamorous spots like Times Square or Potsdamer Platz we construct our centres. We have our experiences of the social in our everyday living: in colectivos (communal taxis), in community markets where local merchants sell regional products. We don't believe in shopping malls, high gloss commercials and exclusive forms of transport.

That means to see the world as a whole and not in hierarchic borders which separate people, the North and the South, the civilised and the non-civilised. Setting the body in the middle, we ensure the return of the entirety as the fourth dimension of the De-colonisation. Our territories where we exercise this are spaces that supply us with a collective sense of being; these can be workshops, cultural centres or groups. They are the core of our resistance and the fifth dimension of De-Colonisation of the Body.

### **5) *Re-Reading History – Children of the Mine***

One example to illustrate the idea of De-Colonisation of the body is the mine that exists in the cultural centre of COMPA in El Alto: We are all children of the mine. Bolivia in general and El Alto in particular have a strong history of mining. The miners have always been the heroes of the nation. But the miners are also ›Indios‹. If you ask kids in El Alto who their idols are, they state: Eminem, Shakira, Keyra Knightly, Justin Bieber or they say Superman. Almost none of them would name a miner as their idol. Miners are tragic heroes; many of them live in poverty and because of the bad working conditions their life expectancy is short. It is no wonder that they are not heroes that the kids can identify with. Still

the personal history of the kids and their actual appearance is closer to the miners' lives than to any Hollywood star.

›Somos Hijos de la Mina‹ (We are children of the mine) is a project which aims to change the children's perspective on their own history – to re-read and re-write it.<sup>10</sup> ›We are children of the mine‹ is delivered as a real experience; a performance of history. At the same time, it is re-written and re-lived by the acting children. In other words, it performs history and within the performance it starts to tell a different history. The children get a different feel for their history.

The children enter a mine that exists in the basement of COMPA's cultural centre. Before they enter the mine (which is at the same time the stage of the community theatre in El Alto) each child is invited to choose his/her idol. Photographs of stars from television and cinema and well-known musicians hang on the wall in the foyer along with pictures of indigenous leaders like Tupac Katari. Before the performance, the kids almost always choose idols they know from television or the internet. The others, though more similar in appearance to the children, are usually ignored.

After choosing an idol, they enter the performance area where the Teatro Trono actors await them. The performance starts with a ritual ceremony in Aymara, the language spoken by the indigenous people of the Department of La Paz / Bolivia. The play opens with a ceremony on the day before Pizarro comes to conquer South America. The day before the tragedy begins. The children are given traditional clothes to wear and while the ceremony is going on an actor dressed in Spanish Conquistadores' uniform enters the room. He disrupts the gathering with a sword in his hand. He starts with the story of the appropriation of the land and all lives on it and the times when ›Indio‹ children were sent to work in the mines. During the performance, the kids are accompanied by actors and led to the mine. They play (and somehow relive) the whole process of colonisation and

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<sup>10</sup> The Canadian pedagogue, Giroux, defines re-writing as a technique that produces »new spaces in which teachers and students can reimagine their senses of self and their relationship to others« (Giroux 2000: 72).

mining in the Bolivian high lands. As ›Indios‹, they are forced to pay tribute to and to work in the mine. They get badly paid and work in severe conditions, but they also try to organise protests. In the end, a rock-fall causes a rebellion. The kids and the actors liberate themselves from oppression and celebrate their victory.

When the kids leave the mine/stage they re-enter the foyer and face the wall of idols for a second time. Who do they choose now? The majority choose Juan Minero, Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa, the legendary leaders of major struggles of the Bolivian people, those who fought against oppression in Bolivia. They leave with a smile and talk about heroic deeds and the solidarity of the community they witnessed in the performance.

›Somos Hijos de la Mina‹ (We are children of the mine) is a collective catharsis. It is a process of awareness and of healing. The participants experience another version of history in the performance, a version where they are actors and not spectators. They perform the history of their ancestors. By reliving it they are able to give value to their history and start to cherish it. They also become aware that community can provide strength and well-being.

## **6) *Creating New Social Relations***

As we have already mentioned, community is an important aspect in our work; as well as the tension between the individual and society. COMPA has several cultural centres in El Alto and groups which are active in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. We cooperate with other organisations in Bolivia, such as Waina Tambu, and are involved in other Latin American networks. An objective of COMPA is to facilitate individual De-Colonisation and create new social relations. This is the social work we do which makes (our) human development possible.

The emphasis on community has a long history in Bolivia. In the Andes, *Cosmovision* of the community is at the core of societal relations. Individualism takes place within the community; therefore, anybody whether artist, political leader or sportsman for example, is part of the community. There are no heroes

or divine personalities. A political leader has to reflect the views of the community. A Member of Parliament is subjected to the will of the community which has sent him/her to be the represent the community in parliament. If he/she does not serve the community, he/she cannot continue to be a representative. The Zapatistas called this form of representation ›leading by obeying‹ (mandar obedeciendo) (cf. García Augustin 2007). We see examples of this in our daily lives in El Alto. The leader, the authority, is obliged to do everything he/she does for the benefit of the community. He/she serves the community. The post does not come with privileges but with responsibilities; it is seen as a service to the community. The community can hold an assembly at any time and ask the leader to justify what he/she is doing. If the work is not good the authority is replaced. The idea of authority basically works by rota; anybody in the community should know what it means to be in charge and bear the burden of the post.

This idea of social organisation puts the communal over the individual. The well-being of all, of the community, is more important than privileging a few, though this does not mean that individualism is not recognised. Any human being is seen as an individual. It prevents the privileging of a few and the repercussions and cost of this on the community. The idea of community first is a core issue of the social work of COMPA. The social is an important issue in the idea of De-Colonising Bodies. De-Colonising does not work as an individual act; it has to be seen as a social issue. We will not change the world as individuals. Maybe we can change our individual position, become rich, change our gender by putting on different clothes or change our nationality. But individually we are not able to change the perception of gender, class or race. COMPA participates in the Latin American movement of the living culture (Cultura Viva Comunitaria). Cultura Viva Comunitaria is a movement that seeks to strengthen community culture. Core issues of this idea are: to strengthen particularly vulnerable groups and communities (like street children for instance); to support and create community structures to facilitate solidly united forms of living, promoting a culture of peace

and a democratic culture that is based on consensus instead of competition; to recognise plurality and cultural mixture; and to protect public goods and nature. Cultura Viva Comunitaria wants to initiate processes of transformation by working with art.

## **7) *Going North***

Whilst we have discussed Bolivia and the colonial situation, we need to discuss the concept of De-Colonising Bodies in the North. Since 2011, COMPA has had a presence in Berlin, Germany. This departure came about because we are convinced that De-Colonising bodies is also an important issue in the North. The colonial framework is valid for subjects all over the world. Any one of us is subjected to this framework, and we have to recognise that a real change can only be achieved by changing the colonial relationships globally. We see that people in the North need resilience to enable them to overcome their addiction to consume, and to broaden their outlook through alternative experiences and also to acknowledge themselves as consumers. Bodies in Europe are also bound to a certain form of existence which limits their possibilities. As long as they are limited, a global change seems more difficult. Therefore, we have felt it necessary to intervene in a colonial centre, in Berlin. The domination and submission of bodies works differently in Europe. There are no ›Indios‹ such as we have in Bolivia. Individualisation is more prevalent and the ideology of supposed possibilities is very strong. Failure is seen in terms of individual breakdowns and as an individual inability to take the opportunity to make a fortune. These bodies are caught in the spider's web but in a different corner: you are damned for your career and your successes and if you fail, you are guilty of your own individual collapse. We believe that the idea of De-Colonising the body, putting the body in the centre, discovering other aspects of the body by migrating to the centre and starting to construct social relations and community that comes from the body, is an important issue for building global awareness in the North; and therefore an important aspect of social work in the North. Since COMPA wants to strengthen community life worldwide, we want to take on some of this

responsibility and to contribute to this task.

## **8) Conclusion**

De-Colonising the Body is an idea that cannot be seen separately from the social. We concur with Judith Butler's analysis that the recognition of the other is changeable, but change needs the capacity to develop in relation to what already exists. This depends »on a capacity, invariably collective, to articulate an alternative, minority version of sustaining norms or ideals that enable me to act.« (Butler 2004: 3) The individual and the social are linked together. Change needs an alternative articulation. Alternative articulation needs space. We see this space in our bodies and in the theatre work we do. Therefore, our primary territories of liberation are our bodies and the spaces we meet in as bodies. The body is the bearer of change. Since a body »exceeds the speech it occasions« (ibid. 1997: 156), it remains more than this and can never be totally dominated by social techniques of control. Here, we see the nucleus for changing unjust social relations. For our social work which opposes colonial relationships, the body is the key for creating new relationships.

## **9) Literature**

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