

Chapter 2

Suma Jakaña

This chapter focuses on Suma Jakaña, ‘the good life’ at the household level, also providing some details on the importance of having harmonious relations with kin and with neighbours. The main aim of this chapter is to emphasise how the household (la casa) is seen as the core of ‘estar bien’—being well. Harmony or the lack of conflict within the household constitutes the basis for ‘the good life’, which can only be pursued through co-operation among different members of the household and sometimes with kin who do not necessarily live under the same roof. By touching on the division of work as well as the organisation of the household, I shall also analyse gender roles within the domestic sphere.

Household kinship and neighbourhood relations were identified by my Senkata and Amachuma informants as very important to them and inextricably connected with ideas of ‘the good life’: to sustain harmony constitutes a fundamental value, that of living well together. This living well together takes place in the house (when living under the same roof), and with kin and neighbours in the neighbourhood. These relations frame everyday interactions.

In contrast, Senkata and Amachuma residents often stated that a ‘bad life’ is when ‘you have conflicts with your husband/wife or your children’. Marriage, or more generally forming a couple or generating a new household although sometimes the couple becomes part of an already existent household, is identified as an important step towards becoming a Jaqi, a person. In Amachuma, I observed a tendency to marry or to begin to live together in the teen years, at around 16 or 17. On the other hand, in Senkata, marriage or cohabiting was delayed until the 20s. Senkata residents always emphasised the importance of becoming professional (obtaining some qualifications), adding that marriage or cohabiting had to be delayed in order to pursue a career.

In El Alto younger generations aspire to social mobility and a better quality of life than that of their parents. Married life, which is inextricably connected with the importance of having children, is not always easy and conflicts within the household were often described by my informants as the main cause of ‘estar mal’ being unwell. José from Amachuma, told me that a good life is ‘when you live in peace with your children and you have a good understanding with your wife’ (Calestani 2009a), adding that a young couple should always consult a diviner (yatiri) before getting married to read their luck (suertes), and see if they are compatible or not.

Each household member has a specific and defined role: for example, older siblings have to be an example to inspire their younger brothers and sisters. By looking at the role of children within the domestic sphere, I aim to shed light on issues of sacrifice and responsibility. In fact, individual commitment to the household is fundamental to achieve family harmony and is part of the moral duty to get ahead (*'sacar la familia/los padres/el parentesco adelante'*). Household members have to put lots of effort and commitment to have positive influences on the well-being of the household. Yet, there are also cases when a preference is given to individual aspirations or desires rather than household ones (Calestani 2009a). Moments of conflict emerge as a consequence. This chapter will shed light on a few examples that explore this individual-household tension, engaging with individual well-being and the complexity of issues emerging in cultural contexts in which relations become the cell of *'the good life'*.

I am going to focus on three different families and their approaches to well-being. I have selected these particular families to illustrate different orientations and situations, providing a sense of everyday household life in El Alto. These three case studies also provide a valuable insight into the tensions among individuals, and between individual desires and the needs of the household: the first example contributes to an account of the kinds of conflicts that occur within the household, while the last two are examples of co-operation among household members and kinship to overcome problems that may arise in the neighbourhood.

Sometimes an individual tries to break away and acts without consideration towards other household members, but the same individual comes around to behaving appropriately in the end (Calestani 2009a). The same cannot be said of the first example in this chapter, in which the fracture in relationships leads to tragic consequences; not everything can be solved and sometimes individuals have to move away because of the breakdown of household relationships. For instance, in Amachuma, I remember that one of the few people who told me that she was very unhappy was a single mother (I will call her Marta) living with her brother, her sister-in-law and her mother.

Apparently, her brother mistreated Marta and her child, because she did not have a partner. Marta got pregnant after a fiesta (religious celebration) in the neighbourhood; she knew who the father was, but he never took responsibility for his child, saying that he was too drunk when he slept with her. Marta often expressed the desire to leave Amachuma for good with her child. Finally, she managed to find a job in La Paz as a domestic worker and never came back to live with her brother. The model of household harmony is not always attained in practice, and some individuals have to leave the household for good to survive and give a better future to their children.

However, there are also examples of household members who co-operate to overcome the difficulties of everyday life, and do not mistreat each other. For instance, the second and third case studies show how a solution to problems can be found through household collaboration and kinship solidarity. In particular, the third case study shows how family can help to provide an income and a better future for all the households involved.

As the second example demonstrates, kinship appears to be fundamental for the economic as well as the social organisation of the family. Kinship can also be created through the establishment of relationships with a child's godparents, known as *compadrazgo*, literally co-paternity, as the third example demonstrates. Through the creation of these bonds, there is a formalisation of previous friendship ties and the beginning of a new relationship based on mutual economic and social support. It can be established between people of the same class position or with someone of higher status or class than the parents (Lazar 2002; Bolton and Mayer 1977; Mintz and Wolf 1977; Long 1984). All the three case studies are important to show not only how the household is considered the core of 'the good life', but also how the well-being of the household is inextricably connected with kin and neighbours' relations.

2.1 The Household in the Andes

In the Andes, the household is the basic unit of social and economic organisation (Bourque 1995), and it is through material practices that gender roles and age identification are determined (MacCormack 1980; Harris 1980). The extended family and wider relationships constitute forms of community/communities which frame everyday life, such as the Junta Vecinal or local residents' committee and the Junta Escolar or parents' association for a school. Broader kinship relations and ties within and between households are maintained through producing (working) or consuming (commensality) (Bourque 1995). Through work people do not only produce material objects, but they also produce their own identities (Bourque 1995; Harris 2007), defining who they are within the household and the community/communities. My ethnography shows that it is not only through work that identity is reproduced, but also through individual commitment and effort towards the household. Effort and commitment in all relations are fundamental and constitute the core of each chapter of this book.

As Vulpiani (1998) has also shown, the individual is inextricably correlated with his or her social context in the Bolivian altiplano. The pathology or illness of one of the household members is often extended to the entire household, sometimes affecting the larger community as well. Individuals are affected by tensions or unresolved conflicts between the household members or the people of the community, including supernatural forces. Health, harmony or, I would say, Suma Jakaña could be reacquired only through a secret ritual involving the sick person, the household and the spiritual world. Usually, this takes place inside the house.

The inside of a house is considered to be private and opened only to the members of the household. One of the first things I learnt during my fieldwork was to enter a house only if invited. When visiting a family in Amachuma, I had to stop in the courtyard in front of the house and shout to attract the attention of the household members. It is not considered polite to stand in front of the main entrance of a house. On the other hand, in Senkata, I had to wait in front of the entrance that leads to the courtyard. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was mainly invited to

sit in people's courtyards. By the end of my time in the field, I was often invited inside the house by the various families I got to know well, illustrating how my role changed throughout the year I spent there.

The house with its different spaces also represents the oppositions and complementarities of men and women and their work activities (Arnold 1997). Usually, the floor or the bottom section of the house is indicated as the female sphere (women work in this part of the home), while the upper section of the building or roof is identified as the male sphere (Arnold 1998, p. 36). These oppositions and complementarities are also reflected in the way the roof is built: in the countryside the straw used to cover the upper part of the roof is lighter and placed on the outside of the building. On the other hand, the straw put on the bottom part or on the inside of the house is heavier and mixed with the eaves of the roof. The former stands for the male component, while the latter stands for the female one. Finally, the male and female spheres join together at the top of the roof (*ibidem*, pp. 62, 95).

Andean spatial and temporal organisation is often compared to the idea of '*un anidar de cajas, una dentro la otra*' (Arnold 1998, p. 37). Literally, this means that reality is conceived as a 'nesting' of different boxes, one inside the other. Each structure appears to be part of another bigger structure; all the structures are connected. They are all part of the same unique universe and they influence each other, in a constant and mutual relationship. The individual house is part of a wider system and it is seen as a symbol of '*envolturas anidadas*' or 'nested wrap' (Arnold 1998, p. 87). It is compared with a mother who protects the new-born baby and wraps him/her in her blanket, and is identified as a female sphere.

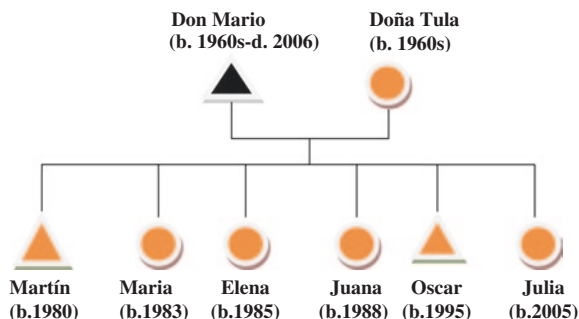
However, at a level of higher spatial organisation than the house, there is the patrilineal household, the male sphere that permeates, and thus 'wraps' the female one. After this dimension, there is a female sphere, which is personified through the idea of the '*madre comunidad*'—the mother community—, which includes the entire *ayllu* (highland community of extended families that owns some land in common and that serves as an administrative unit). On the other hand, at the national level of the modern State, the male sphere appears to be the one that is embracing the female one.

Consequently, the organisational structure of the Andean community appears to be a 'nest' of concentric and gendered 'wraps' (Arnold 1998). Each wrap has a certain degree of authority over the one embraced. The *chachawarmi* or man-and-woman (heterosexual couple) 'wrap' their children; each wrap is connected to the next one, constituting mutual influence, embodying the core of 'the good life' through connection and harmonious relations.

2.2 The Quispes

The Quispe family moved to Senkata to the 25 de Julio neighbourhood in 1994. Before that they lived in the area of 16 de Julio, one of the oldest areas of El Alto. Don Mario was a first generation migrant from the Aroma province, while Doña

Fig. 2.1 Quispe household diagram, *Black* = Deceased, *Orange* = Living under the same roof



Tula is from the neighbouring province of Gualberto Villaroel, also in the department of La Paz. They both came to El Alto to look for work and met in the city. Don Mario committed suicide at his home in April 2006. Since I was not there during that period, it is difficult to understand the reasons for his action. Rumours among the neighbours suggest that his suicide was connected with debts and family conflicts. This tragic event took place after my fieldwork and this section is based on material collected during 2003 and 2004 (Fig. 2.1).

After Don Mario and Doña Tula married at the end of the 1970s, they had their first child, Martín, who was born in 1980. 'It's bad luck when the first child of a couple is a boy', Martín told me once. I asked him to explain why and he added that the economic situation of the couple will never be stable and that the household will always have difficulties in securing its livelihood.

As Mamani Bernabé (2000, p. 58) also writes: 'a baby girl as first child means full house (...), a baby girl means fertility, abundance and good luck'. 'The woman is taqe, that is to say larder: she is a being that accumulates things, takes care of them and stays in the house' (ibidem, p. 154). This idea of good fortune associated with the birth of a baby girl as first child appears to be connected with the division of labour within the domestic sphere and the fact that a girl will always help her mother with domestic duties. A boy's role is different because of cultural taboos on the roles of men and women. Therefore, a female first child will allow the mother to spend more time on the working activities outside the household and can also care for younger siblings.

A corollary of this is that although there are no differences in terms of educational opportunities, boys usually have a higher degree of freedom than girls. Martín admits that his mother allows him to stay out as late as he wishes and does not impose any restrictions on his free time. On the other hand, his three sisters, who were also born in the 1980s, have to stay at home or help in the family business, and are not allowed to stay out for long. 'It looks like my house is like a convent. Sometimes I ask my mum to give my sisters a little bit of freedom', Martín commented one day.

Interestingly, male dominance and authority in the households of El Alto are reproduced with the support of women, who are the ones who decide the division of labour among their children, as in the case of the Quispes. Since women in

El Alto are usually outside the house, working in the markets or in the shops of the area, daughters are in charge of the domestic activities (Guaygua et al. 2000). So brothers have more time to relax and to study, and contribute to the welfare of the family by earning money through occasional jobs.

Doña Tula, as many other women in El Alto, was in charge of the household, since Don Mario used to come back home only for one or two nights a week. He worked in the nearby neighbourhood as a porter in a parking lot. The Aymara house is always seen as a feminine space (Mamani Bernabé 2000; Arnold 1997). When Martín speaks about the role of fathers and mothers, he says: 'The dad has to go to look for a job to support the children and the mum has to go to sell to take home a bit of money'. Despite the fact that both women and men work to support the household, there is a distinction between the importance given to their work outside the home. In Senkata and Amachuma, men's contributions are considered to be much higher than those of women, who just take a little bit of cash home. Also selling in the market is identified as a 'light' job that only women can do. Men have to do other heavier activities in order to support the family.

Doña Tula started to work in the market of Senkata when she moved to the area in the mid-1990s. She said that you need capital of 1,000/1,500 bolivianos (125/188US\$ in 2004) to start selling in the market. Until she had her last baby, who was born in May 2005, she sold personal hygiene products (soaps, toothpaste and washing powder) almost every day of the week. Usually, one of her daughters helped her to carry the goods to the selling place and to arrange the merchandise on the piece of cloth on the ground. She was out of the house for the whole day, going back home only for her meals. The preparation of meals, the cleaning of the house, the laundry and the care of younger brothers and sisters were duties of the older daughters, Maria and Elena.

On the other hand, like most men, Martín had to look for a job outside the household. He gave all his income to his mum who was the one that decided how to spend it (all the money of the household was managed by Doña Tula). For a while, Martín worked in a workshop, repairing televisions and radios. He often emphasised that it was very important to have 'a balanced household without economic problems'. 'When there is a conflict within the house it is always due to lack of cash. The most important thing is harmony and peace among the members of the household', he admitted. He also said that he would love to go to university, but there was no money to study. Since he is the older brother, he has to contribute to the family income as well as give an example to his siblings. Therefore, as in the case of Maya (Calestani 2009a), Martín must suppress his own desires and aspirations for the well-being of the house.

In 2002, Don Mario and Doña Tula were the sponsors for the Morenada group for the religious celebration (fiesta) of the 25th of July. Martín had to help them, because there was not enough cash. Apart from his job in a repairs workshop, he had to ask for a bank loan in order to open a *tilin*—penny/amusement arcade—very close to their house. He received 500US\$ (4,000 bolivianos in 2004) from the bank and with that money he rented a shop and bought eight machines with various video games. He was supposed to finish repaying the loan with the interest in March 2006.

Since he was usually busy working during the day, the penny arcade became the responsibility of his three sisters, who took turns to work in the house and the arcade. Martín went back every evening to the penny arcade and usually slept there, since he was worried about thieves. He said that if something was to happen to the shop, he would not be able to pay back the bank loan and he was always very worried about it. Martín wished he had the chance to go to university and to get married. However, before this could happen, he had to support his family and make sure that his sisters were married.

The Quispes had less economic security than other families in the area. Neither they had only one house and no car, nor did they own the shop. Their Suma Jakaña had in part relied on a larger number of children, material investment in new businesses and the creation of capital/cash through labour that helped the support of the family as well as the creation of urban-based social relations through their participation in the religious celebration (fiesta) as dancers and sponsors, since they were Catholics.

Whether Don Mario's suicide was due to economic instability, or conflicts with the other members of the household, it was definitely a moment of ill-being, desperation as well as failure. This shows how success in the urban context is not automatic, and how difficult it is to accumulate resources and to prosper. Success is also a difficult aspect to measure, since there is always a subjective dimension that eludes universal definition. Even in the dramatic case of Don Mario, no one can say that the ultimate reason for committing suicide was economic instability or conflicts within the family. Don Mario's suicide reveals the complexity of ideas relating to this topic and represents only the tip of an iceberg.

Later, in 2006, residents' rumours were communicated to me on the phone and they suggested that Don Mario had serious problems with his wife. For a while, they had been sleeping in separate rooms, and the night before his suicide they had a serious argument. Apparently, Don Mario was waiting for his daughter Juana in the Extranca (the centre of Senkata) for a very long time. Juana was at the time working in downtown La Paz and came back home every evening when it was already dark. Don Mario used to go to pick her up, because at that moment of the evening, walking around on your own could be dangerous. However, on the evening before his suicide, Don Mario waited for a long time, while Juana was already at home, since she had finished her work earlier. None of the members of the family had thought of going to the Extranca to let Don Mario know, and he waited in vain. When he returned home, he was furious and he had an argument with his wife. In the account of their neighbours, the conflicts in the Quispe couple were identified as the main causes for his action.

The suicide of Don Mario is the expression of a clear dissociation from the other members of the household. Instead of looking for a group solution as in the case of other families (Calestani 2009a), Don Mario opted for an individual one. Resorting to such a dramatic action implies that Don Mario did not feel part of the household anymore and, therefore, made public and explicit what was considered secret and private. Before, the conflicts menacing household and community harmony were kept behind the house walls in absolute silence; now, with

Don Mario's suicide, they came to surface and became visible. Rumours began soon after and some relatives of Don Mario, especially his brother, called the police to ask for an investigation into the case, provoking fear, worry and shame among the household members. Don Mario's action also suggests his loss of hope for the future. Thus, there is an emphasis on his personal conviction that it was impossible to aspire to Suma Jakaña in the near or distant future. The kind of ill-being experienced by Don Mario was not considered normal, containable and predictable, becoming definitely dysfunctional and leading him to extreme action.

While I write about this case study, I think about the movie *The Secret Nation* by the Bolivian director Jorge Sanjines. The main character, Sebastian Mamani, a rural migrant who moves to La Paz and decides to change his name to Maisman to conceal his indigenous origins, is exiled by his rural community after some corruption issues during his mandate as community leader. He is not only separated from the community, but also from his mother and wife, who take the decision not to follow him to the city. He is left completely on his own and lives in a constant state of unhappiness and ill-being, since he is away from his wife, family and community. He decides to go back home to die after participating in a dancing ritual. In the movie as well as in the case study of the Quispes, when Suma Jakaña is denied for different reasons, individuals resort to extreme actions to avoid solitude and loneliness, and to change their lives. The centrality of the heterosexual couple and ideas of gender complementarity have played a very important role from Inca times (Silverblatt 1987) until the present (Carter and Mamani 1989; Abercombie 1998; Harris 2000).

2.3 The Choques

Don Juan was from Amachuma, but he had been living in Ventilla, El Alto, since the mid-1990s. He had been married twice: some years after his first wife died, he married a younger partner, Doña Carolina, who was also from Amachuma. They lived in Amachuma for 19 years, working as farmers, and then they decided to move to the neighbourhood of Ventilla on the Oruro highway, just beyond Senkata. The reasons for moving to Ventilla, which is only 15 min by car from Amachuma, were mostly connected with their need for a cash income. They told me that they liked living in Amachuma, but there they had only chuño (freeze-dried potatoes) and potatoes to eat. Therefore, Doña Carolina decided to open a small shop selling food supplies at the Cruce in Ventilla, as well as a comedor popular (very cheap restaurant). During my fieldwork, the restaurant was frequented by regular customers who came for lunch almost every day. In the majority of cases, they were minibus drivers on the route from Ventilla to La Ceja or from Ventilla to Amachuma. At that time lunch costed 5 bolivianos, less than 1US\$ (in 2004) and included soup, main meat dish and bread (Fig. 2.2).

Doña Carolina started to cook at 6 am every morning, because at this altitude the large quantities she needed to prepare took a long time to cook. Vilma, a

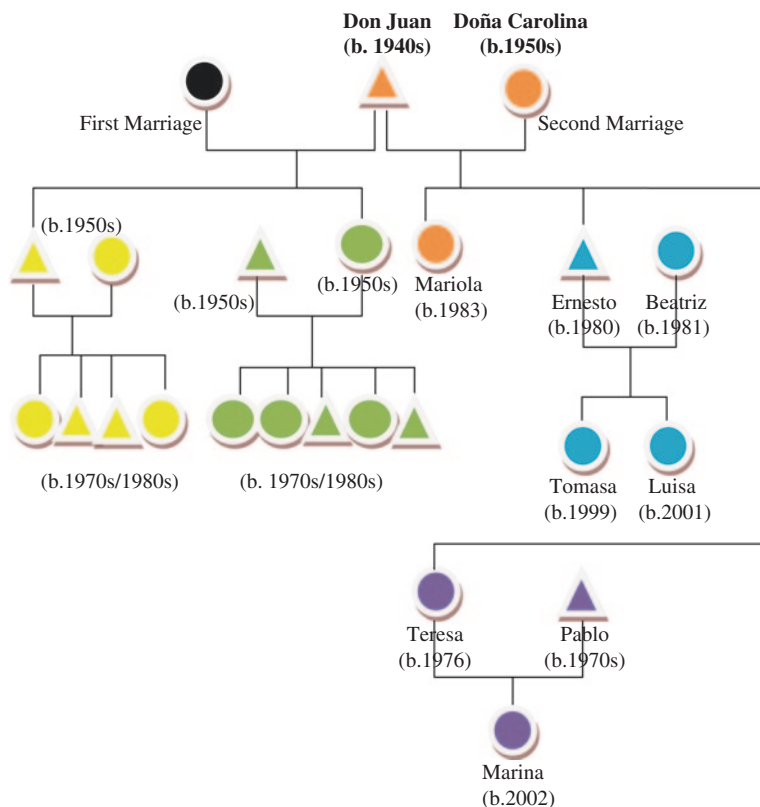
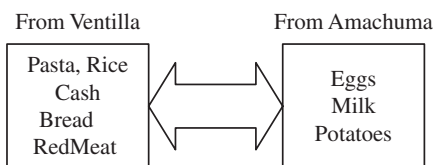


Fig. 2.2 Choque household diagram, *orange* = living under the same roof in Ventilla, *Green* = living under the same roof in Amachuma, *purple* = living under the same roof in Villa Fatima, *light blue* = living under the same roof in Amachuma, *yellow* = living under the same roof in Amachuma, *black* = Deceased

cholata who lived in Ventilla, came to help her. For a while, I worked there too in exchange for my daily lunch, washing dishes and serving customers. The restaurant remained open until 2 pm with the highest concentration of customers coming around 11.30 am and 12 pm. Doña Carolina and Vilma worked between the kitchen and the courtyard in order to prepare the meals, and sometimes they had to work in the shop as well. This was often the case when Doña Carolina's younger daughter, Mariola, was busy with her studies. At that time, Mariola was attending a course to become a secretary and 3 days a week she had to go to La Ceja for her classes. Sometimes Don Juan worked in the shop, but he had recently had heart problems and needed to rest. Doña Carolina closed her restaurant only in August (the month of the Pachamama), when she used to move to the Waraq'o Apacheta on the carretera Oruro. She usually worked and lived there with Vilma until the beginning of September. Doña Carolina owned a small kiosk in the Waraq'o Apacheta, which she converted into a small restaurant during the Pachamama month.

Fig. 2.3 Products exchanged**Products exchanged between Ventilla and Amachuma**

The Choques represent an interesting example of a strategy that spans different alteño districts—this is very common in El Alto. In Amachuma they still owned some fields and a house, where at the time their son Ernesto was living with his wife and daughters. They were in charge of agricultural production and caring for the livestock (3 cows, 5 chickens). More specifically, it was Doña Beatriz’s duty to take care of the livestock and of the milk production: every day a van from the PIL—milk factory, came to Amachuma to collect the milk, so she had to wake up at 5 am to milk the cows. She was the one responsible for the household and the children: Don Ernesto worked in the city as a bus driver and, when he finished very late, he spent the night at his parents’ home in Ventilla, where he also went to have lunch every day. Don Ernesto was also a local leader on the residents’ committee of Ventilla, although he lived in Amachuma. When it comes to the organisation of agricultural work, it is important to note that all the household participates in the various phases of the production cycle: Doña Carolina, Mariola, Don Juan (when he was in good health) often returned to Amachuma for the harvest or the planting to help their son and daughter-in-law.

The Ventilla cell was just an extension of the one in Amachuma. While the Amachuma household unit had to focus on the production of food and the sale of milk, the Ventilla one had to intensify the commercial activity (for instance, through the shop and restaurant) in order to generate a cash income (the profit from the restaurant and the shop was around 9US\$ a day in 2004). They were in constant contact and exchanged their products on a regular basis. Don Silverio and Don Ernesto travel by car to Amachuma or Ventilla to exchange products and cash.

There was a sense of generalised reciprocity between the different units; that is to say that there was a long standing and established connection and exchange. This also took place in relation to specific needs, for instance, if the roof needed fixing or a new cow needed to be bought. In Fig. 2.3, it is possible to observe the main products exchanged by the two sites. The products from Ventilla were usually bought, while the ones from Amachuma were part of local production.

Normally, younger generations would be expected to leave Amachuma to go to the city to work. However, in the case of the Choques, the opposite was true: the older generations left Amachuma to live and work in Ventilla. Selling is considered to be a ‘lighter’ job and this is why it is left to elderly people or women. In addition, I suspected that Ernesto’s parents also moved to Ventilla because of Don Juan’s health, to be close to hospitals and health centres.

The rest of the Choque household was not really involved in this daily exchange pattern, although sometimes there were occasional gifts—food and work: Marina lived far from her parental family and she tried to visit them once every second week. On the other hand, Don Juan's children from his first marriage lived in Amachuma, but they were closer to their affinal families, with whom they had developed daily collaborative strategies and exchanges.

The work marks the roles of the members of the household and allows them to plan long-term survival strategies together. The Choque household had two houses, and two main sets of economic activities around which work roles were organised between the city and the countryside. This could imply a redefinition of the term household, where movement, interchanges, and different locations would appear as fundamental factors in delineating it, especially in El Alto, where, as mentioned before, this is quite common. Co-operation is fundamental for the survival of the different household units, who are also very much involved in the celebrations of the community/communities.

The Choques, as Catholics, enjoyed participating in the different celebrations that took place in Amachuma. In Ventilla, their relation with other residents was tense and difficult in 2004. When I asked why, they answered that other residents were envious of their wealth and of their access to agricultural products. Other residents in Ventilla wished they had the same exchange opportunities and possibilities. But they lived far from their communities of origin, while the Choques were only 15 min away by car from Amachuma. This was a great advantage that helped them to overcome the difficulties of urban life and to survive in times of hardship.

The tensions with other residents arose when the Choques claimed a piece of land that they had bought a few months before and that the Junta Vecinal (local residents' committee) had decided to sell to new buyers. As the work of Lazar (2002) has shown, the Junta Vecinal and the Junta Escolar (parents' association for those who have school-age children) are the main local community authorities in El Alto. Adult residents are represented through the local committees that meet every month and that take the most important decisions concerning the area: which works to carry out, how to improve the zone, how to organise community events, such as social protests and religious festivities. Residents get together at these meetings, which are usually well attended. Having issues with the Junta Vecinal or the decisions taken by the community/communities can be problematic.

Conflicts arise in the household as we have seen in the previous examples, but they can also arise in the community/communities, as in the case of the Choques. Both cases are seen as examples of everyday ill-being. In August 2005, when I returned to Ventilla, the Choques were so worried about these community tensions that they decided it was time to move to Tarija, another city in the far south-east of Bolivia. The situation had become unbearable: physical assaults, oral abuses and fear of being affected by the evil eye. The Choques felt they had lost their Suma Jakaña, since they felt vulnerable, unsafe and insecure. Also, they felt isolated from the rest of the community, and took the decision to leave.

They could have gone back to Amachuma, where they always had excellent relations with the other members of the community. However, the prospect of

returning was not considered, because going back meant to fail, and the Choques did not wish to be associated with failure in their community of origin. They wanted to maintain their image as successful migrants. Another important factor in their decision not to go back was Don Juan's health: his heart was weak and he needed to live at a lower altitude. Doña Carolina saw Tarija as a possible new place to develop her restaurant. Last time I was in Bolivia, the Choques were still living in Ventilla, but their hope to move to Tarija was a driving force for the entire household. They were all collaborating in saving money to fulfil their dream, looking for a collective solution to their present ill-being, so that the latter could be containable and not dysfunctional.

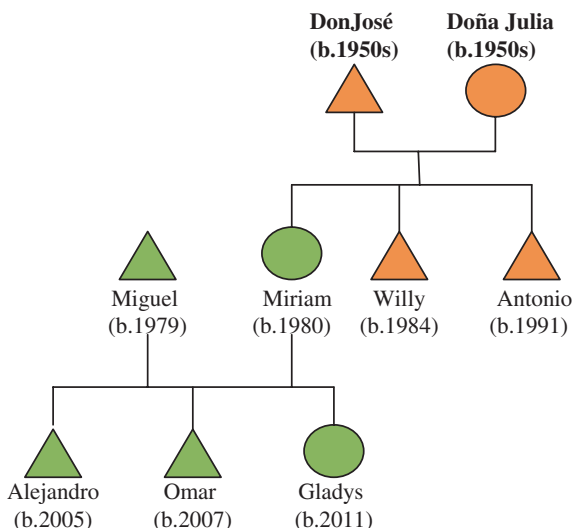
2.4 The Mamanis

Don José and Doña Julia arrived in Senkata at the beginning of the 1990s after living in 16 de Julio, another area of El Alto. They are both from Loayza province to the south of La Paz, from the communities of Cairoma and Huchambaya. In 1996, the couple and their youngest son migrated to Argentina for a period, while their eldest daughter and their other son continued to live in Senkata on their own. In Argentina Don José learnt how to sew. They lived in Buenos Aires for 6 years and worked in a garment factory. However, after the Argentine crisis in 2001, they decided to return to Bolivia. Nowadays, Don José has a small workshop in his house, based on the skills learnt in Argentina. He owns two knitting machines with which he produces sweaters that his wife usually sells in La Ceja or in Oruro. Doña Julia travels once or twice a week to Oruro, especially during the winter, because she says that it is colder there and there is more demand for these clothes. Their household is organised around this productive and commercial activity (Fig. 2.4).

Willy, the second child, studies mechanical engineering at the UMSA (Universidad Mayor San Andrés, the public university of La Paz). Antonio has recently begun to work in a hotel in La Paz and attends university too as a part-time student (computer science). On the other hand, Miriam gave birth to three children between 2005 and 2011, so she had to interrupt university where she had been studying for a degree in economics. She met her husband (Miguel) at university and once she got pregnant with their first child, they both had to withdraw from their courses due to lack of income. Miguel now works as a minibus driver in El Alto. Miriam moved with Miguel to Villa Tunari, another area of El Alto, but often comes to visit her family and spend days with them, especially at the weekends.

Don José has always been willing to expand his business and often asked me how to develop it. More specifically, he was interested in seeing whether it is possible to export his products abroad. However, he admits that this is very difficult and that he does not have money and contacts to do so. Expansion of commercial activity is a common topic of conversation, especially among the members of the extended family.

Fig. 2.4 Mamani household diagram, *orange* = living under the same roof in Senkata, *green* = living under the same roof in Villa Tunari



As a good friend of Miriam and Willy, I was chosen as the *madrina*—godmother, of baby Alejandro and Omar, who were respectively born in February 2005 and in July 2007. Miriam often says that she wanted me to be his godmother, since they believe that godparents pass on their personalities to their godchildren. As well as potentially passing on character traits to their godchild, godparents have the moral obligation to take an ongoing interest in their life, contributing to the general well-being of the child and to that of their parents. As godmother, I was first of all asked to be their *madrina de bautizo*—godmother of baptism, and therefore I was expected to contribute to the expenses of the religious ceremony. The ties of *compadrazgo* are first established informally, when the parents ask the godparents if they want to accept this duty. Once they have accepted, the tie is officially announced through a formal lunch.

The Mamanis prepared a *watya* for me, a special lunch cooked in an earthen oven in the courtyard of their house, and invited some of their neighbours. I was given the biggest portion, because the lunch was in my honour and it was a welcoming ritual as a new member of the family. My dish was full of potatoes, yam, salad, chicken and pork. Food and its preparation are always central markers of an event and the degree of involvement of both the guest and the host; production and consumption of food are fundamental among household members (see also Bourque 1995) and important in ties of co-paternity when the household gets extended. The abundance of food is a metaphor for future prosperity in the exchanges between godparents and parents, but also a way to thank the godparents in anticipation of their future contributions.

As Alejandro and Omar's godmother I paid for the religious ceremonies of their Catholic baptisms. For Alejandro in 2005, I spent 25 bolivianos—around 3US\$; I also bought a white dress for the baby, some clothes and toys plus the decorations

for the Church. I did the same for his brother a couple of years later. On the other hand, my compadres were in charge of the reception. Another waya with abundant beer was offered to all the guests, other compadres of the family and friends. Two weeks later, I was asked to cut baby Alejandro's hair for the first time, becoming *madrina de rutucha*.

Although this ritual is usually carried out when the child is around 2 or 3 years old or even a little bit later on, I was asked to do it before I left Bolivia, when baby Alejandro was only 6 months old. This was because they believe that only the godmothers can cut the children's hair for the first time to wish them good luck. They also were not completely sure about the date of my return. Therefore, they thought it was better to do it immediately, in case I was not able to come back soon. There was also another important reason. Before the *rutucha*, girls and boys have the same hairstyle (Spedding 1998, p. 126), but after it they are taken to the hairdresser to get a cut appropriate to their gender. This was a very important issue for Doña Julia, my godsons' grandmother. She said that the baby looked like a baby girl and she wanted to be able to take him to the hairdresser to have an appropriately new 'masculine' hairstyle.

During the *rutucha* ceremony, every time I cut a wisp of the baby's hair, I had to say 'para que tenga suerte' ('for good luck'). The hair has to be conserved and the godmother has to leave some money with it in order to increase prosperity, good luck and economic stability for the godchild and the family. Relatives and neighbours can also be invited, but, on this occasion, the Mamanis decided to have a quiet ceremony. This is understandable since they had recently invested so much effort in the baptism and in the formal lunch they prepared for me. Even the Choques (the household described above in Sect. 2.3) decided to do the same with Ernesto's daughter, Tomasa, who was born in 1999. Her aunt Marina, who was also her godmother, cut her hair at home on a Thursday afternoon after the small restaurant had closed. A few members of the family and I witnessed the event and were offered a few glasses of beer to celebrate. As Spedding (1998, p. 126) has also demonstrated, the degree of elaboration of the ritual and the celebration can vary considerably and can go from small domestic events to big parties that involve all the community/communities. In this last case, participants have to contribute a sum of money, proportionate to their social status.

This is considered to be a form of *ayni* (reciprocal gift), and normally people take note of the amount of money guests have given. Later on, at other *rutuchas*, the family of the child needs to participate with the same sum of money that was donated by each participant in each different party. It is not only the bond between the child and the godparent that is important, but what assumes relevance is the bond between entire households. It is the creation of a larger community that lives in harmony, providing an escape from vulnerability, insecurity and isolation. Indeed, harmony within the extended family guarantees Suma Jakaña.

The different case studies have revealed how harmony within the household and to such an extent with the kin and the neighbours constitute one of the most important aspects of well-being in the here and now, but also as an aspiration for the future. Conflicts with children, partners, kin or neighbours are identified as

forms of ill-being. Ill-being becomes dysfunctional when it is not possible to find a collective solution, when the individual feels isolated and lonely, unable to be reintegrated in the various social networks of which he or she is part as the examples of Don Mario (case 2.2) and of the Choques (case 2.3) have shown.

In the descriptions of the three case studies presented in this chapter, the household unifies aspects of mutual feeding, collectivity and authority (Guaygua et al. 2000), as can be seen in the roles played out by its members. The household is an everyday community, source of collaboration and harmony, but, as in all communities, also of conflict and ill-being. All the household members have to compromise and sacrifice for the common good. A successful household is a household that lives in harmony. The condition of well-being has always to be fed, because change and ill-being in forms of conflicts and illness can always affect the security, the safety and the harmony of everyday life. Thus, the creation of fictive kinship through co-paternity is often adopted as a form of consolidation of harmonious relations within the neighbourhood and with the Junta Vecinal, so that situations of conflict such as the one shown through the Choques' case can be avoided.

Social status and economic stability can affect the Suma Jakaña of a household, but it is not automatic that the household members will live in harmony if they are wealthy. On the contrary, prosperity can be identified as a source of envy, and envy by other neighbours or supernatural forces is considered to be one of the main sources for ill-being (Calestani 2009b). This is why secrecy is always required when engaging with household matters (this can be extended to the kinship in case they need to ask for help), whether it is in relation to the amount of money owned or when there are other important issues at stake.

Individual desires and aspirations should be kept secret as well; they have to be suppressed unless approved by the other household members (see the examples of Martín and Don Mario). This is considered a moral stance that should be adopted by all with no exceptions in terms of gender or age differences. If an individual decides to follow his or her desires and aspirations, and if these are not compatible with those of the other members, then he or she is often expected to give up his or her aspirations or to leave the household for good. This sheds light on how the idea of Aymara personhood is relational, correlated to the household and defined through obligation or work within it (Harris 2007).

The individual has to conform to what is required from him or her: unless he or she does so, he or she will not be considered as a morally sound person. And if you are not morally oriented, you cannot live 'the good life'. Relations with other household members and neighbours are so important that individuals have to put a lot of effort into 'feeding' them through work, exchanges, food and appropriate decisions, as the three households described in this chapter have shown. There is a moral obligation to contribute to the well-being of the household, a contribution that is projected in the long term (Bloch 1973; Carsten 2004) and that affects the harmony of the household (Engels [1884] 1972) as well as the community/communities' social order (Fortes 2006 [1969]).

Women tend to work closer to home in order to facilitate combining the tasks of selling goods and caring for the family, whereas in at least two cases the man

travels so far for work that he may not return to his home to sleep at night. The wife is responsible for the education of children, and for the division of labour within the domestic sphere. Daughters have less freedom than sons and need to stay at home to take care of younger siblings.

Parents from El Alto usually give preferences in terms of investments to younger children and, more specifically, to the youngest boy (Guaygua et al. 2000, p. 47). This is due to the fact that the younger boy is seen as a source of investment for the future; he will support his parents in their old age, so he is the one who is allowed to continue his education, because education is considered as one of the primary means of upward mobility out of the working classes (Nash 1979).

The decision-making process within the household is indicative of the system of dominance and authority. Usually, parents, that is to say the older generations, decide how to allocate resources and how to spend the money. Sometimes the refusal to spend money for the consumption of certain goods becomes a form of punishment of the younger generations who are thought to lack respect towards their elders. In my experience, this was true in the case of the fiesta (religious celebration). Young people would ask their parents for the money to pay the fees to rent the dancing costumes. They would receive the money only if they behaved properly towards the head of the household, who is also in charge of the decision-making process. Gender does not play a crucial role in the decision-making process, since both husband and wife make such decisions together. Yet, when the husband is away because of work, the wife is in charge of all household decisions.

In this chapter, I have tried to show the complexity of issues when engaging with relations that affect the household and the kinship, providing an insight into three different case studies of El Alto everyday life. While the first one has addressed common conflicts within the households of El Alto, the last two have shown widespread situations of co-operation with kin and household members in Alteño neighbourhoods. Yet, some fractures are unavoidable, and some individuals leave for good.

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