



COCA AND IDENTITY IN ALISON SPEDDING'S *EL VIENTO DE LA CORDILLERA*

Dorian Lee Jackson*

Abstract: *The article examines the treatment of region and ethnicity in Alison Spedding's 2003 novel, El viento de la cordillera: un thriller de los 80, to show how the articulation of the Yungas region crafts a distinctive Bolivian narrative of narcotrafficking and traditional coca production in the 1980s. The analysis highlights the narration of the tension between contemporary cocaine paste production and traditional coca leaf cultivation in the Andean region. Further, the study examines how the presence or absence of "outsiders" in the Yungas help produce an example of Bolivian narcofiction. Finally, the study examines Spedding's creation of a strong female indigenous protagonist as a form of resistance and subversion of the foreign demand for illicit drugs.*

Keywords: *Narcofiction. Bolivian identity. Yungas. Coca Production. Alison Spedding.*

Resumo: *O artigo examina o tratamento de região e etnia no romance de 2003 de Alison Spedding, El viento de la cordillera: un thriller de los 80, para mostrar como a articulação da região dos Yungas traz uma narrativa boliviana distinta do narcotráfico e da produção tradicional de coca na década de 1980. A análise destaca a narração da tensão entre a produção contemporânea de pasta de cocaína e o cultivo tradicional de folhas de coca na região andina. Além disso, o estudo examina como a presença ou ausência de "estranhos" nos Yungas ajudam a produzir um exemplo de narcoficção boliviana. Finalmente, o estudo examina a criação de Spedding de uma forte protagonista indígena feminina como uma forma de resistência e subversão à demanda externa de drogas ilícitas.*

Palavras-chave: *Narcoficção. Identidade Boliviana. Yungas. Produção de Coca. Alison Spedding*

*Roger Williams University,
Bristol, RI, USA

Assistant Professor of Modern Languages in the
Department of Modern Languages, Philosophy, and
Classics

E-mail: djackson@rwu.edu

DOI: 10.19177/memorare.v4e3-I201768-90



REVISTA
MEMORARE

 UNISUL
www.portaldeperiodicos.unisul.br
ISSN 2358-0593

1. Introduction

During the 1980s, Bolivian composer and songwriter José Jach'a Flores penned the song "La Mentirosita" in the morenada style of his home state of Oruro, famous for its traditional Carnaval celebration and parade. The song gained immediate popularity, and continues to be covered and recorded today, primarily due to its engaging chorus, boldly stating, "Coca no es cocaína / Coca no es cocaína / Es la hoja sagrada." In these lyrics, Jach'a Flores synthesized one of the most complex political and cultural conflicts occurring in Bolivia, one which continues to polarize the Bolivian state and the international community. The affirmation that coca is not cocaine and that it is instead a sacred object is the battle cry for supporters of traditional cultivation of the plant, including current president Evo Morales, himself a former coca farmer.¹ Jach'a Flores' message came in response to the threat traditional cultivators of the coca leaf faced from anti-narcotics operations executed by the United States that initially sought to eradicate all cultivation of the plant.² Through continual presentation of the song at festivals, clubs, and on the radio, Jach'a Flores was able to provide an important cultural counterpoint to the dominant rhetoric of the American war on drugs, one which was grounded on the traditional role of the coca leaf in the Andean region.

Despite the popularity of Jach'a's message, the narrative of the contemporary Bolivian cocaine trade is continually associated with the cultivation of the coca leaf, resulting in a circulation of vastly different spaces and identities. The Bolivian trade encompasses a network of primary nodes of production and distribution of coca for either traditional use or as raw materials for cocaine paste production, which includes the Yungas region outside of the capital of La Paz, the eastern lowlands of the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, and the Chapare of Cochabamba. Outside of the drug trade, these differing sites also carry equally complex ethnic situations. Regional

¹ Morales' rise to power is closely linked to the *cocalero* (coca growers) movement. Before becoming a leading political figure for the Movement for Socialism (MAS) party in Bolivia, Morales was heavily involved in coca activism, including serving in various secretary positions within the Cocalero Union.

² In 1988, the Bolivian government enacted the Law 1008. This law tried to end illicit cocaine production by demarcating specific regions of the country as traditional zones of production and exempting these areas from persecution. The law also stipulated that all other zones of production be eradicated or subject to crop substitution. American forces used this law to provide military support for eradication efforts through training of Bolivian forces and participating in raids to rid the region of the raw material for cocaine production.

and ethnic differences in narco-trafficking have garnered increased attention from fiction writers wishing to portray the narrative of the trade in cultural production, including Alison Spedding, Hugo Carvalho Oliva, and Tito Gutiérrez Vargas, among others. Some of the better-known works of Bolivian narcofiction by these authors are the novels which evoke the “boom” years of the drug trade – the decade of the 1980s – and highlight the most emblematic moments in Bolivia’s narco-history. Academic work in the social sciences has made it possible to trace Bolivia’s role as a producer of coca for the Incan empire and Spanish crown and, later, of raw materials for cocaine paste production in the contemporary drug trade. Studies that explore the fictionalized representation of these trades have been less visible, stemming from the difficulty in asserting the presence of a dominant tradition of narcofiction in Bolivia, comparable to that produced in Colombia and Mexico. Yet there do exist novels that incorporate the historical and cultural reality of the Bolivian drug trade in their plots which merit further review.

This study focuses on Alison Spedding’s novel from 2003, *El viento de la cordillera: un thriller de los 80*, to show how the treatment of region and ethnicity in the story create a uniquely Bolivian narrative of the local drug trade in the mid 1980s unlike that produced in other areas of Latin America. Spedding’s focus on the Yungas region of Bolivia highlights the conflict between traditional cultivation of coca in a historical context and the growing contemporary tension between coca leaf and illicit cocaine production, threatening to destabilize the area. This study of Spedding’s novel focuses on the three elements that recast it as a uniquely Bolivian narco-narrative. These are the *ayni* as a guide and witness to the changes in the Yungas, the “Outsiders” (i.e. Gringos and Police) as the purveyors of the cocaine trade, and the *Satuka* as a symbol of resistance. This final element, the presentation of the *Satuka*, provides a rich narration of the negotiation of the traditional and illicit applications of coca, present through the descriptions of *Satuka*’s home and fields as well as the network of exchange within the community. Further, the analysis examines how the movement of characters in the novel highlights the political and economic relationships between the rural Yungas and urban La Paz during the peak of the drug trade in the 1980s.



2. Alison Spedding, Coca, and the Bolivian Yungas

Alison Spedding originally arrived in Bolivia from Great Britain to conduct her dissertation research on coca production. Her ethnographic work examined the impact and importance of coca cultivation in Yungas communities. Her work, *Wachu Wachu: Cultivo de coca e identidad en los Yungas de la Paz* (1994), helped establish her as one of the foremost authorities on the subject. Spedding reveals how coca is a vital component for identity in the Yungas. Among its many definitions, coca is linked to cultural, spiritual, economic identities for these communities. Spedding's critique of the Bolivian government's repression against coca farmers in much of her academic work and public appearances, prior to the rise of the Evo Morales regime, has led to personal persecution, even resulting in a false drug conviction in 1998, which resulted in 2 years of incarceration.³ Through all of this adversity, she has shown an unwavering commitment to chronicling the world of Yungas coca in her fight for equality, justice, and accurate reporting on the realities of the coca farmer.⁴ In addition to this work, she has written extensive fiction on the topic, including a trilogy of novels. In her novels, Spedding stands out as the only foreign-born (British) fiction writer exploring the complexities of the lives of the coca growers in the area.

Alison Spedding's Andean Trilogy consists of *Manuel y Fortunato: una picaresca andina* (1997), *El viento de la cordillera: Un thriller de los 80* (2003), and *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* (2004). These novels are published after more than two decades of anti-narcotics operations in Bolivia, which focused efforts on supply-side reductions with the consent of the Bolivian government, where operations often targeted the Yungas and Chapare regions. By creating a trilogy of fiction novels centering on the topic, Spedding explores the historical and cultural archeology of coca identity across centuries and transnational borders. The discourses present in this trilogy resonate many of the arguments in favor of traditional coca cultivation found at the local level, but come into conflict with the official State discourse surrounding such cultivation, specifically at the time of the novels' publications.

³ For a brief write-up of Spedding's prison ordeal, see the following article from *The Guardian*, December 8th, 1999: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/dec/08/bolivia.simonhattenstone>

⁴ Some of her other studies include *Chulumani flor de clavel: transformaciones urbanas y rurales, 1998 – 2012* (2013), *Kawsachun coca: economía campesina cocalera en los Yungas y el Chapare* (2004), and *En defensa de la hoja de coca* (2003).



The shift in Bolivian production of coca from traditional use to raw material for cocaine production represents a relatively small chapter in the millennial history of coca, but has had the most enduring impact on the livelihood of traditional coca production. Outside of the Yungas, the development of coca as a raw material for paste production can be viewed in relation to the drastic changes that took place with the rise of Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) political party during the 1950s agrarian reform. The National Revolution of 1952, often referred to as simply the *Revolución Nacional*, promised sweeping changes in democratic participation of all citizens, agricultural reform, and education, as well as the nationalization of many of the nation's natural resources, primarily in the mining sector. The MNR assumed control during the revolution and would remain in power until 1964, when a coup d'état brought down the regime. One important component in the MNR's agricultural reform was the colonization of underutilized regions of the country, including the Chapare region of Cochabamba. This region was to be the centerpiece of the MNR's national project of internal colonization and economic development.

Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, foreign aid propped up the MNR-controlled government settlement projects, agricultural initiatives, and the development of a transportation infrastructure in the eastern departments such as Santa Cruz as well as the Chapare.⁵ These elements, combined with low rates of prosecution and incarceration of known cocaine producers, generated an environment in which cocaine production boomed in the newly colonized settlements (GOOTENBERG, 2008, pp. 295-296). The landed class and traditional cattle bourgeoisie of the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, ethnically and geographically distanced from the Andean communities of the North, increasingly invested and participated in the growing illegal trade, purchasing coca plantations and processing labs across the Chapare in the neighboring department of Cochabamba. With better roads connecting the Chapare to the lowlands of the East, combined with increased demand for cocaine from Brazil and abroad, the Eastern departments became hubs for transport and sale of cocaine paste, completely removed from the traditional concept of Andean coca (GOOTENBERG, 2008, p. 285).

⁵ The MNR has historically been one of Bolivia's most powerful political parties. Following its loss of authority in 1964, the party would return to power by supporting the rise of the dictator Hugo Banzer in 1971. In chapters 6 and 7 of Paul Gootenberg's *Andean Cocaine* (2008), the author provides an in-depth study of the development of Bolivian cocaine production and the involvement of government officials, including MNR party members.

While traditional cultivation and use of coca in the Yungas region remained consistent during this same period, the appeal of the fast wealth generated by cocaine paste production resulted in increased participation of Yungeños in paste production. With the peak of production and commerce of cocaine paste occurring throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, increased military presence and training from the American war on drugs during this time ushered in a new era of Bolivian anti-narcotics enforcement.

The most damning enforcement came in 1988 with the enactment of the Law 1008. This law intended to bring about an end to illicit cocaine production by demarcating specific regions of the country as traditional zones of production and exempting these areas from persecution. The law also stipulated that all other zones of production be eradicated or subject to crop substitution programs. Additionally, the authorities established a limit on the amount of coca (in tons) which could be produced in the traditional zones (SPEDDING, 2004, p. 73). Immediately after its enactment, the Law 1008 proved unfit and ineffective for the Bolivian coca reality for numerous reasons.

The main problem with the process of demarcation is that no accurate mapping of the zones of production existed, resulting in almost arbitrary distinctions between what is considered a traditional zone and that which is not. Traditional producers, existing beyond the legislated zones of acceptable coca production, have been unfairly persecuted by the restrictions and eradication programs of Law 1008, putting into jeopardy the continued survival of this part of Andean life. Further, the law did not account for the growing traditional consumption of coca which had also spread beyond the traditional zones. Throughout Bolivia, including the tropical Eastern departments, consumption of coca leaf had increased tremendously, resulting in amplified demand for raw coca leaves well beyond the weight restrictions set forth by Law 1008. In summary, Law 1008 came about as a stop-gap measure meant to show some progress in controlling the illicit drug trade and assure continued military and financial support from the United States in the war on drugs. However, the administrative measures it enacted revealed a bureaucratic arbitrariness completely devoid of any conscious understanding of the function and importance of coca in Bolivia and neighboring countries. It is during this era of ambiguity and conflict, as the paste production boom collided with the push for control from law enforcement during the decade of the 1980s,



that Alison Spedding situates *El viento de la cordillera*. This novel is the second installment of Spedding's trilogy set in the Bolivian Andes.

Spedding's emphasis on the plant as a key to understanding Andean identity is not unwarranted. Among Quechua and Aymara speaking communities alike, the coca leaf has been a central element in conceiving and accessing mystical life, as well as an essential component in the formation of an Andean identity. In *Manuel y Fortunato: una picaresca andina*, the first novel in the trilogy, Spedding integrates the creation myth of the coca leaf into her fiction, as one protagonist explains to his son-in-law that the coca leaf was a gift from the heavens, sent to alleviate starving and fatigue for a family that had fled to the mountains for protection from invaders (SPEDDING, 1997, pp. 103-104). Here, not only is coca seen as necessary for physical survival in the harsh environment, it becomes a crucial symbol of identity and resistance for the people of this region. The chewing of the coca leaf is a fundamental part of funeral proceedings, as leaves are distributed during a wake to those who have come to pray for the dead, assisting in the collective mourning of the community. The coca plant itself is seen as a living being passing through stages of life, not unlike a human; young plants require close and constant attention, like a human baby, until their first pruning, at which point they are able to produce independently like a young adult (SPEDDING, 1994, p. 226). Outside of the spiritual realm, coca has formed part of the Andean economy for centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. In the 17th century, coca was one of the first Andean products to circulate freely throughout the colonies in open mercantile exchange, forming the base for the economy through trade and payment of tributes.

In the 18th century, large colonial plantations were maintained and continued to contribute to the Andean economy throughout the independence movement (SPEDDING, 2004, p. 190).⁶ For the early Spanish and Catholic authorities in the colonies, the prosperity of the coca trade created a schizophrenic relationship with the plant, as officials openly condemned the worship of coca by calling it idolatry, but reaped tremendous profits through the collection of tithes and tributes from the coca plantations and commercialization (SPEDDING, 2004, p. 57-67). The economic significance of coca was essential for negotiating power with the Spanish authorities as

⁶ Citing María Rostworowski de Diez Canesco's 1989 essay, "Plantaciones prehispánicas de coca en la vertiente del Pacífico," Alison Spedding references archeological evidence showing coca leaf deposits along the Peruvian coast as early as 1000 B.C. and traces its history in the Yungas.



well as establishing the early labor and trade markets. From farmers to miners to merchants, millions of laborers consumed the leaf as part of the everyday work life. The physical, biochemical ability of the leaf to mitigate hunger and fatigue during work allowed for laborers to do well even under the harshest of conditions (i.e. mining and farming) while the combined spiritual / religious aspects helped establish and maintain the value of the leaf as an important economic commodity across the centuries and across national boundaries. The geographic and regional differences of the sites of production carry equally disparate political histories, well before the boom in the cocaine trade hit this country. The fact that all three of Alison Spedding's novels in the coca trilogy center their narratives on the community of the Bolivian Yungas is not born of mere coincidence or convenience. Spedding highlights the necessity of linking traditional coca to this specific region as a center point for her "archeology" of coca, fed by both her academic expertise and cultural knowledge of the Yungas.

The Yungas region itself differs geographically from much of the rest of Bolivia. Situated just 50 miles from the Bolivian capital of La Paz, the Yungas has warm year-round temperatures, abundant rainfall, lush vegetation and rich biodiversity. The Yungas' tropical valleys form part of the Southern Andes, yet offer a stark contrast to the typical Andean images, especially when compared to a city like La Paz which is flanked by the snow-capped Illimani peak and the rugged, dry Altiplano. These valleys have long been associated with the production of the highest quality coca for chewing. This small, sweet variety of the leaf was always highly coveted for both personal consumption and religious purposes. Traditionally an agricultural zone, the Yungas continued to be the main coca region even as other cash crops, such as coffee and citric fruits, were introduced. However, due to the region's geographic isolation and a climate prone to producing illnesses such as malaria, steady laborers were a difficult commodity to obtain, often requiring workers to be brought in from the Altiplano or other urban centers, in turn sparking a pattern of internal national migration. To compensate for this labor shortage, temporary or transient laborers were often lent out between plantations through an exchange known as *ayni*. Here, one valuable commodity (i.e. coca) is exchanged for an equally valuable commodity in the community (i.e. laborers). The *ayni* helps maintain a balance of commerce and community harmony through the exchange of labor (SPEDDING, 1994, p. 17). While this practice began centuries ago,



ayni continues to be an indispensable economic component in the Yungas in the cultivation of coca, one which would also be adapted during the move to the production of cocaine paste.

3. The Andean Trilogy

Written over the span of a decade, the novels in this trio incorporate the factual findings of her research as an anthropologist to accurately depict the many cultural practices encountered in the field. Themes of resistance, survival, and tradition contribute to an overarching thesis in the trilogy, praising the richness of the Aymara of the Yungas across multiple generations while also distinguishing their keen ability to adapt to changes in society and politics. What results is a panoramic retelling of the story and life of coca through fiction. This deliberate turn from academic to fiction writing, especially in the case of a foreigner trained in formal academic writing and research, cannot be glossed over. That Spedding would actively seek out different genres of fiction (i.e. the picaresque, the thriller, and science fiction) speaks to the complexity of the issue. The turn to fiction enables the author to account for the intricacies and nuances which lie beyond the strictly anthropological or ethnographic gaze. Though Spedding had dabbled in fiction writing prior to the Andean trilogy, this was the first fiction project to tackle such intensely cultural, political, and ethnic subject matter.⁷ Throughout the three works, Spedding grounds her stories using informative descriptions of the actual, traditional role of coca in the Yungas borrowed directly from her research. What results is a project which praises and defends coca in Bolivia as time-honored tradition, but also recognizes the temptations and ambiguities created by the market for cocaine paste. Another unifying element between all works in the trilogy is the reappearance of a strong female protagonist known as Satuka as well as a focus on the varying roles coca plays in the communities across history.

The first of the series, entitled *Manuel y Fortunato, Una picaresca andina*, is published in 1997 and presents a historical fiction adopting the style of the Spanish picaresque novel. Set in the time of Spanish colonial rule, Spedding traces the rise of

⁷ Alison Spedding's previous work includes the *A Walk in the Dark* trilogy, a collection of speculative fiction consisting of *The Road and the Hills* (1986), *A Cloud Over Water* (1988), and *The Streets of the City* (1988).

Manuel as cacique of his community of Oyune through the transregional and transnational exchange of coca for commerce and tribute. The story also focuses on the tale of Fortunato, the picaro or rascal of the novel, an orphan who navigates the social order of the day through a blend of manipulation, street smarts, and curiosity, eventually courting and marrying Celestina, Manuel's daughter. Satuka is at the crux of both tales, helping Manuel fully assume his given role as cacique and grow the coca business and, later, accepting the union between Celestina and Fortunato due to the young man's ability to read and write.⁸ Even when faced with increased pressure from the colonial and church authorities to abandon their traditions, a pressure culminating in the public burning of the community's mummified ancestors, the resilience of the Aymara perseveres.

The final novel in the trilogy, *De Cuando en Cuando Saturnina*, released in 2004, is a science fiction work that speculates on the possibilities of an Andean nation completely ruled and inhabited by indigenous people, embracing centuries-old traditions in a hypermodern realm. Here, the reader encounters a Bolivia in which all white citizens of European-descent have been exiled and the eastern, tropical portion of the country has been granted autonomy. International embargoes from the Chinese and the United States, now referred to as the "Estados Jodidos," or Fucked States, prevent free trade and movement, both international and intergalactic, for everyone except those pertaining to a trade organization of highly skilled pilots. Again, Satuka's role in the novel is essential, as she is one of the few pilots pertaining to the organization and possessing the authority to navigate the troublesome embargoes and political obstacles.

El viento de la cordillera: un thriller de los 80, published in 2003, provides the most realistic contribution to Spedding's trilogy. As the title implies, the novel is written in the style of a thriller. While classical crime fiction relies on the reason, methodical processes, and the intellectual capacity of a detective or officer to solve a crime or mystery (i.e. Sherlock Holmes), the thriller, as dictated by the style of the "King of the Thrillers," author Edgar Wallace, presents "a reassuring world, for the hero always wins in the end, crime never pays, love finds a way, and the heroine is always saved from worse than death... [starting] a story, stopping at a climactic point and

⁸ During the Colonial Period in Latin America, cacique was the title given to indigenous leaders in the communities ruled by the Spanish.



starting another, apparently independent story,- story chains would alternate until a resolution occurred” (*Mystery and Suspense*, 1998, p. 945). We are introduced to Narciso; a young resident of the city of La Paz, who escapes to Satuka’s farm in the rural Yungas as a way of fleeing from hitmen following a failed drug deal. Narciso is taken in as a hired worker, or ayni, by Satuka, a local matriarch and plantation owner. Initially helping maintain Satuka’s crops, Narciso later becomes involved in the production of cocaine paste on a neighboring plantation. The action scenes in the book come by way of police chases and raids, as Narciso flees from anti-narcotics police raiding maceration pits and, later, when Satuka and her daughter Celestina hitch a ride on a truck transporting cocaine paste fleeing from the police. As an ayni, Narciso becomes our guide in the Yungas; showing the intricacies of traditional coca leaf production and agriculture, while also revealing the growth of the production of cocaine paste fueling the drug trade of the 1980s.

4. The Ayni

Throughout the Andean region, the tradition of ayni has been practiced for centuries, creating an essential system of collective labor exchange. Though originally a resident of La Paz, it is through ayni that Narciso becomes a fully-integrated member of the Yungas community. It is also in this role that he becomes our guide in the novel. Through Narciso, the reader is able to access Satuka’s home and farm, as the story begins with his escape from La Paz to the Yungas. Narciso opens the novel riding on a truck and telling an unknown interlocutor the story of an apparent problem at a bakery, which leads to his present troubles. Upon reaching Satuka’s home, Narciso is housed, allowed to rest, fed, and then put to work. Narciso’s role as a gatekeeper for the reader is activated as it is through his immediate work on the plantation that the normal, agricultural activities of the Yungas are highlighted.

Satuka’s home and the surrounding farm are all narrated from Narciso’s perspective. He is presented as a novice at hard labor, requiring the close supervision of Segundino, his interlocutor on the truck and Satuka’s main laborer. This agricultural apprenticeship parallels the reader’s own sense of inexperience in the Yungas and reliance on Narciso’s narrative filter to enter this world. He must be initiated into the

labor, as Segundino guides him to the fields; “El camino subía en un zigzagueteo de zanjias, piedras, lodo y mala yerba, y subía y subía. Narciso no veía casi nada más que las abarcas... y los pantalones arremangados del Segundino, trepando interminablemente delante suyo” (SPEDDING, 2003, p. 8). There is a sense of childish rebellion in this trek, as Narciso’s pampered city ways seemingly frustrate both his assimilation into the wilderness and his submission to Segundino’s domain over this rocky labyrinth. The same frustration reemerges after completion of the first few days of work, consisting mostly of removing weeds from various plots, when Narciso expresses that “Parecía que había bastante por desyerbar en los Yungas. A veces Narciso pensaba que no había más que desyerbar” (2003, p. 9).⁹ What emerges is a Yungas community strongly tied to the hard labors of agriculture. This direct connection to the land and the desire to maintain agriculture on small landholdings form the first facet of Yungueño identity. With the work completed, both the reader and Narciso cross the first threshold into the community and Narciso’s worth and initiation are evaluated during a brief dialogue between unknown speakers; “-¿Y cómo va ese joven que han traído de La Paz? –Trabaja nomás. - ¿Avanza grande? – Chakra será pues todavía. – Si, chakra está todavía” (2003, pp. 9–10). As explained in the footnotes of the text, *chakra* in Aymara means a novice or someone who is incompetent and without having acquired experience. Spedding’s use of Aymara in the dialogue and the incorporation of an Aymara-Spanish glossary and footnotes in the novel provide an important identity marker for the community being portrayed. In this sense, the lack of knowledge of the Aymara language makes the reader just as “*chakra*” as Narciso.

Throughout the novel, Spedding continually incorporates words from Aymara into the narrative. At times, entire sentences of dialogue are left in Aymara, forcing the non-Aymara reader to rely on the author’s translation for full comprehension of the text. Spedding’s use of these native words reinforces the construction of a Yungueño identity. The authenticity of language is stressed further through the incorporation of the spoken accent of the region, as sentences are transcribed in the text to maintain the sonority of the sentences as they would be pronounced in the Yungas. Just as Narciso’s

⁹ While common to most forms of agriculture in the region, the clearing and weeding of the land is particularly important in preparation for planting coca plants. For a complete description of the process, see Alison Spedding’s essay, “The Coca Field as a Total Social Fact” in Léons and Sanabria’s *Coca, Cocaine, and the Bolivian Reality* (1997).



role as the ayni provides a physical, visual access to Satuka's community, the use of the native language provides a cultural, linguistic, and even aural access to this world. The reader must participate in an active reading of the text, physically gazing at and referencing the footnotes and glossary, to complete the narrative. This use of language in the novel allows the reader a heightened level of accessibility to the Yungas community and later adds to a greater understanding of the many facets forming identity in the region.

While Narciso's spontaneous move to the countryside provides humor and physical descriptions of the Yungas, his role as a laborer provides insight regarding the movement of temporary labor populations to the Yungas. The practice of ayni accommodates the pool of workers fed by migrants fleeing the shortage of job opportunities in cities like La Paz. This exchange of workers occurs in both the formal and informal markets of the Yungas. Narciso comes to represent this pool of laborers, as is evident when Satuka lends him out to Don Freddy, a neighbor, for the purpose of working in a maceration pit for processing coca into cocaine paste. Narciso's first visit to the pits with Segundino occurs through a coordinated exchange of labor, in which Satuka and Don Freddy discuss and agree upon having the two men help in the pits (2003, pp. 17-21). However, Narciso and Segundino's later attempt to create their own pit for foreign, American clients goes against the concept of ayni, as it is driven by greed and addiction and lacks the balance of exchange within the community. It is an action not mediated by the community but rather outside entities, highlighting how the boom of the cocaine trade of the 1980s created divisions within the community.

As a celestial punishment, Narciso's attempted trade results in a raid from the anti-narcotics police. Spedding uses the foreign clients to introduce a commercial, capitalist demand for drugs that superimposes itself on the traditional community in the Yungas. However, their presence and way of doing business is out-of-sync with the local economy and society, leading to their eventual arrest and also the corruption of Narciso and Segundino. Spedding's depiction of contemporary ayni reinforces a regional identity of the Yungas community in the novel as one which is able to adjust to the changing social, political, and economic conditions surrounding coca production. The ayni becomes an ambiguous modern labor, equally employable in the production of traditional crops or in the production of cocaine paste.



Returning to Narciso's role as a guide, it is through him that the matter of local drug consumption is introduced into the narrative. When describing his previous life in La Paz to Segundino, Narciso describes himself as a "satuco," which in Aymara translates to someone who is addicted to cocaine paste, this in contrast to the word "Satuka," which is slang for cocaine paste. Prior to leaving the city, Narciso openly smoked cocaine-laced cigarettes along el Prado, one of the city's main boulevards (2003, p. 13). He goes on to describe his crew of fellow users and the details of La Paz's "Yungas" street, the neighborhood where drugs were easily available. Later in the novel, the two travel to La Paz and there, in Narciso's hometown, he becomes the teacher and Segundino the novice apprentice in navigating this other "Yungas."

Spedding's wordplay in this section is a playful, yet direct assessment of the drug problem in Bolivia. The real Yungas does not have such a visible, explicit trade and consumption of cocaine, whereas the "Yungas" street in the heart of La Paz is a primary zone of drug consumption and abuse. The underbelly of the city seduces Segundino, through the physical high of the drug and the economic potential of the seemingly endless demand for the product by the "gringo" tourists he and Narciso encounter on the street. As Narciso reveals the metropolis to both the reader and Segundino, the capital city is cast not as the capital, a center of culture, and prosperity, but rather a bleak landscape of urban moral decay and vice through its drug pushers and users. This account counters the popular discourse of the war on drugs, both locally and internationally, which focuses solely on producers in Bolivia without taking into account the foreign demand that also creates local markets for the consumption of these drugs.

The humor present in this chapter is an important element in Spedding's work. The literary banter in the use of satuco / satuka and the Yungas street / Yungas valley provides enough levity in the text to prevent the discussion of cocaine in 1980s Bolivia from becoming too heavy and trite. While Spedding's assertions about the production of cocaine paste are accurate and deliberate, she still manages to find humor in the problem as well. In a comical scene from their trip to La Paz, Narciso teaches Segundino how to snort cocaine, stating:

"He sacao mis llaves, he abierto el sobre. Lindo pollo, che, brillando. He metiw la llave como pala, uno, dos. El Segundino me miraba. '¿No sabes jalar siempre?' ley dicho. 'Bueno. Tapáte la nariz, de un lado... yo te voy alcanzar... ¡mierda!' Justo cuando yo estaba acercando la llave cargada el



cojudo había estornudao! Se ha volao de la llave, la mitad del sobre más ¡Carajo! Ley reñiw. ‘Disculpa, Disculpa,’ decía. ‘A ver esta vez no lo voy echar...’” (2003, p. 35)

The guide Narciso awkwardly initiates Segundino into the world of recreational drug use in the national capital, but the countryman has trouble assimilating. As with the wordplay, the scene of Segundino sneezing away the cocaine provides just enough humor to keep the story light and entertaining while still presenting the realities of the contemporary drug situation in Bolivia. With Narciso’s introduction of the many aspects of the Yungas coca trade complete, it is now possible to examine these foreign elements in the novel.

5. The Outsiders

Strangers and foreigners in *El viento de la cordillera* are presented as threats to the peace of the Yungas community, either by introducing illicit activity or through violent interventions intended to stop this illicit activity. In particular, the American drug addicts present in the novel represent the outside demand for the cocaine paste fueling the boom in production. For example, during Narciso and Segundino’s visit to La Paz, a pair of “gringos” are the ones who initially provide them with the cocaine for Segundino’s first experience with drugs, but then immediately turn the tables on the pair upon learning of their connection to the Yungas, asking “¿No sabes donde hay satuca?” (2003, p. 36). Soon after, the four agree on a deal where the gringos will provide the money needed to produce cocaine paste and Narciso and Segundino will provide the product. Demand and consumption for cocaine paste stems from foreign entities. While there is an element of local drug consumption present in the work, as evidenced by Narciso’s retelling of his tumultuous past, the bulk of the problem comes from abroad. Upon meeting up at a hotel to deliver the order, the older of the two gringos makes his drug addiction obvious, as just moments after Segundino brings him a small sample of the paste he begins rolling cocaine cigarettes. The gringo’s ravenous, exaggerated demand for cocaine reveals Spedding’s challenge to the rhetoric surrounding cocaine in Bolivia, which focuses on the issue of production rather than consumption. Here, the US demand prompts production, with the gringos willing to

travel all the way to the rural Yungas to satiate their addiction. These encounters highlight an important discursive position in the novel.

Aside from associating cocaine paste production to foreign demand, the foreigners in the novel in no way connect to the traditional use of the coca leaf. Whereas American authorities make little distinction between coca and cocaine, *El viento* clearly tries to distance the two by establishing a new rationale; cocaine is noxious and equated to US consumers whereas coca is healthy and essential to the balance of life in the Yungas. Even when cocaine paste production is present in the Yungas community, it is only successful when it is in harmony with the traditional values and labor systems of that community (i.e. the appropriate use of *ayni*). The fact that local, traditional coca growers in this community would choose to enter the drug trade using traditional labor systems serves as an example of their ability to adapt to market conditions and take advantage of a business opportunity, ensuring the survival of their livelihood using local methods. More than just an identity characteristic, this adaptability is an economic survival tactic developed over years of experience in the market of coca production.

The other “outsiders” in the novel are the anti-narcotics officers who raid the maceration pits and later chase the gringos through the Yungas. While absent throughout most of the novel, when the authorities do appear, they do so with violence. After escaping the raid under the cover of night, Narciso observes the interrogation tactics used by the soldiers against a friend:

Arrastraron al Lagarto hasta hacerle arrodillar al borde del río. Le alumbraron con dos linternas. El teniente contaba ‘Uno, dos... ¡adentro!’ Dos soldados agarraron al preso, le echaron adelante y hundieron su cabeza debajo de las aguas. El Lagarto pataleaba furiosamente. Dos más lo agarraron por las piernas. Arqueaba todo su cuerpo. Burbujas salían a la superficie. ‘Sácale’, dijo el teniente. Alzaron al Lagarto chorreando agua y boqueando. ‘¿Ya has recordado donde están los dueños?’ (2003, p. 50)

The soldiers employ a modified version of waterboarding as torture against Lagarto in order to obtain information about the owner of the pit. The cynical repetition of the question regarding Lagarto’s memory exposes a dark cruelty and penchant for violence by the authorities. The Lieutenant’s later insistence on Satuka being the owner of the pit leads to an illegal search of her estate. The police disregard individual and



community rights by violently forcing their prisoner to provide false testimony and by invading Satuka's unattended home, revealing a tendency to operate outside of the law. As with the gringos, the outside elements associated with the drug trade, in this case law enforcement, come off as harmful to the community and bearing no relation to the traditional structures long-present in that environment.

Satuka's home and farm are ransacked and her valuables are stolen, serving as an attack on her livelihood. However, as with Narciso and Segundino's transgression against the community order, the Lieutenant is later punished for upsetting the balance as he is bitten in the face by a snake protecting Satuka's property (2003, p. 52). The absurdity of a snake, Satuka's hidden pet, biting an official in the face reveals another moment of macabre humor in the novel, as the death of the Lieutenant seems to be the only way to detain the halt the violent incursions made by the police. The soldiers do not function as representatives or enforcers of the law, but rather violators not only of the laws of the state, but customs and rules that underlay Yunga society.

While the death of the Lieutenant may balance the offence made against Satuka in her community, the action also creates a crisis for her; she is later charged with owning and operating the pit as well as being responsible for the soldier's death. Now, Satuka is forced to engage the State on its own terms by hiring a lawyer and navigating the judicial system. Through law enforcement and the judicial system, the war on drugs is presented as a broken system, prone to just as much, if not more, corruption and collusion than the drug trade it is supposedly suppressing. The novelty of Spedding's narrative of the trade lies in the resistance and opposition she provides by way of the many local Aymara practices associated with coca production. In order to answer for her charges, Satuka is taken to the capital to stand trial. By transporting this character to the capital city, Spedding inverts the role of the outsider. Here, Satuka becomes the outcast in the judicial realm and must find a way to subvert that system for her own gain and survival.

6. Gender and Ethnicity in the Yungas

Across Spedding's Andean trilogy, the Satuka character presents the most nuanced representation of the Aymara of the Bolivian Yungas. This strong, sharp-



witted female protagonist most effectively encompasses the various facets of the Bolivian countryside while also challenging the contemporary political and economic environment. In the novels, Satuka is firmly grounded in the traditions of her people yet also displays a future-facing gaze and foresight capable of adjusting to an ever-changing society. Further, her business savvy and movement (both commercial and geographical) in *El viento de la cordillera* stand out, as it is through her very livelihood that Spedding disputes the growing cocaine trade in the Yungas, complicated by the ambiguity surrounding Satuka's own dubious participation in the production and sale of cocaine paste. Through these elements, Satuka's character becomes a metaphor for the coca leaf itself.

Throughout the Andean world, women's participation in daily commerce is highly visible. For example, a common fixture in many markets in the Bolivian highlands is the figure of the chola-woman tending the market stall.¹⁰ Female commercial participation beyond this ground-level market role, though less visible, is an important component to Andean economic life. In her 1997 essay, "Cocataki, Taki-Coca," Spedding highlights growing women's participation in coca commerce by serving as "capitalist" traders, those who build up capital through coca accumulation and reinvestment in local agriculture and transport. She notes that these "capitalist" traders include many women and that increased access to the capital needed to purchase vehicles has increased the quantity of goods these women capitalist traders can transport to market, thus increasing overall income (SPEDDING, 1997, p.124). Spedding's observations bring to light several key changes which influenced women's economic mobility through coca. First, the technological changes in transportation did away with the hard labor needed to physically transport the product from farm to market, an occupation traditionally dominated by men. Then, the increased capital and accumulation of wealth created by the coca trade allowed women traders to purchase and control these new means of transportation. What results is a new network of commerce founded on a traditional agricultural product, dominated by women, and incorporating modern technology to fuel further growth. Returning to *El viento de la*

¹⁰ The word *chola* stems from the old Spanish word *chula*, which was used to refer to women from the neighboring towns of Madrid. In Bolivia, the word often refers to the indigenous women of the mountainous regions of the country. For more on *chola* identity, see Gonzalo Iñiguez Vaca Guzman's *La chola paceña: su dinámica social*.



cordillera, it is precisely this type of independent businesswoman that emerges in the figure of the Satuka, narrated with even more complexity than the “capitalist” traders observed by Spedding in “Cocataki.”

As previously stated in the discussion of Outsiders in the novel, Satuka owns the plantation Narciso is brought to work on, with coffee and citrus trees covering the hills surrounding the main house and drying areas and shelling machinery on the property (SPEDDING, 2003, p. 8). With little other description offered of Satuka at this point, it becomes immediately apparent that this commercial agricultural component is one of the essential elements in her character construction. On this initial plane, the Satuka appears to be simply a producer of cash crops desired in the capital of La Paz (coffee and citrus fruits), highlighting one, legitimate source of income and wealth. Throughout the novel, it is also revealed that Satuka participates in the coca exchange, producing and trading coca leaves for traditional chewing, also contributing to the gains derived from participation in the local agriculture system. By casting her as a land / plantation owner, Spedding establishes a female protagonist which contrasts the stereotypical patriarchal oligarchy of the past. In order to fully subvert this structure, however, it is not suffice to limit the Satuka to agricultural production. For this reason, Satuka’s transportation and trade networks are disclosed in conjunction with the description of her plantation:

El carro salía y venía. Como unas dos veces a la semana iba a La Paz y volvía. Traía harina; al contrario de la ciudad, donde Doña Satuka no faltaba el pan. Al volver del trabajo muchas veces hicieron desvíos para cargar leña rajada para el horno... Tampoco faltaba coca y cigarro, o los eternos platanitos cocidos y pescaditos. (2003, p. 10)

Ownership over, and participation in, this steady commercial trade with the capital city are the elements that provide Satuka with power and economic mobility in her own community. In fact, the entire novel is marked by a rhythm created from the constant movement of the Satuka between the cities. More so than any other aspect, it is this access to commercial mobility that challenges the traditional patriarchy of the Bolivian business environment.¹¹ Her plantation produces the agricultural goods which are coveted in the urban capital (in particular, the sweet variety of Yungas coca

¹¹ In the three books which compose Spedding’s Andean trilogy, the Satuka figure is constantly linked to commercial transport and it is through this link that she establishes her power in the novels. In *Manuel y Fortunato*, Satuka’s marriage to the cacique provides this link, whereas in *De cuando en cuando* it is her role as a pilot which facilitates this movement.



previously referenced in this chapter), yielding great profits, while the goods she transports back to her Yungas community from La Paz are equally scarce and lucrative. The description of the wide availability of bread, tobacco, and coca in the Yungas community emphasizes the prosperity of Satuka's business venture. It should be stressed that Satuka's production, trade, and transport of coca is presented as common place, fitting perfectly into the Yungas economy without sensationalism or disruption to the community. Recalling the millennial history of coca in the Andes, the commercialization and movement of the coca leaf were an essential part of everyday life in the region, well before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers. Satuka is maintaining this historic commercial tradition alive in the modern day Yungas.

This transport is not limited to commercial commodities. Each trip described in the novel also underscores the movement of people, where the vehicle stops along the way to pick up and drop off passengers, showing that Satuka's vehicle is both freight and public transportation. In this sense, Spedding reveals her protagonist's second main source of income and wealth. The ability to transport goods and people is closely linked to her livelihood, both physical and economic, with interruptions in the trade marked by deadly or near-death experiences. For example, recalling the death of her husband, Satuka explains that he dies as a result of a curse placed on him when an occult offering is placed in the wheel well of their car (2003, pp. 27-28). Jealous of the couple's success, an unknown assailant employs occult powers on the car to halt the couple's prosperity and physically harm them. Later in the narrative, Satuka's car dies during a run to the capital, nearly killing all passengers, the driver, and herself when the vehicle's brakes and transmission fail (2003, pp. 38-40). The vehicle only avoids sliding off a cliff due to the driver's craftiness behind the wheel. Finally, Satuka and her daughter unknowingly hitch a ride on the truck carrying the gringos and the cocaine produced by Narciso. Again, the vehicle crashes, this time as a result of a high-speed police chase, and the mother and daughter narrowly escape death when they jump from the rear of the vehicle prior to impact (2003, pp. 41-42). These instances of disruption of transportation occur following lapses in Satuka's traditional Aymara responsibilities in the community, serving as a quasi-cosmic penance. The death of her husband follows a temporary lapse in Satuka's responsibilities related to the care of a snake which was given to her as a holy gift from her spiritual godmother. When properly



cared for, the snake promised to bring good fortune to Satuka (2003, p. 26). The two later car crashes also appear to result from moments of negligence, as both follow Narciso and Segundino's turn to cocaine paste. Returning to the concept of the coca life cycle cited previously in this section, both Segundino and Narciso are presented as immature and inexperienced chakra, requiring close guidance or "pruning" just like a coca plant. In this respect, Satuka provides them with too much space to grow on their own, resulting in poor decisions and unnecessary dangers to their persons. As a consequence for this slip of judgment, Satuka's transportation and commerce are halted.

Redemption for Satuka's transgressions comes as she uses the ill-gotten gains of her underlings to reestablish a sense of order in the community and renew the transportation network. While it is never stated outright, there is a strong implication that she uses the funds from the sale of cocaine she removes from the second crash to finance the purchase of a new vehicle for herself (2003, p. 58). Firmly connected to the traditions of her community, Satuka's ability to take advantage of this lucrative business opportunity reveals her adaptability. This characteristic is taken to its highest degree with regard to her own participation in cocaine paste production. When charged with being the "intellectual author" of Narciso and Segundino's operation, she vehemently denies participation in drug trafficking and is eventually acquitted of all charges. Yet the reader perceives that the beginning and end of the novel include scenes with Satuka lending Don Freddy (her neighbor and, later, her new husband) coca for the specific purpose of paste production (2003, p. 8, p. 85). Satuka's ability to navigate change at multiple levels allows her to serve as a symbol of Aymara resistance. All of her actions help her return to her ideological core, circumventing the imposition of external, harmful forces in her community. In her commerce, she likewise helps the community resist these forces and reinforces the traditional values of Aymara in a modern context.

Spedding's critique of the coca/cocaine debate centers on this dubious involvement in illegal activities. As a traditional coca merchant, Satuka amasses great wealth and creates a fluid network of trade which is in harmony with the Aymara, the Yungas region, and its agricultural economy. Likewise, the production and trade of illegal cocaine paste is only fruitful when it adheres to these traditions, in particular that of ayni. The turn to paste production by the local community, on the part of both Satuka through her supplying raw coca and Don Freddy by organizing the maceration



pits, is a reaction to a change in the local economy prompted by outside, foreign entities. Spedding chooses to include this element of ambiguity to show how Satuka creatively, and responsibly, adapts to the incursion of cocaine demand from abroad.

7. Conclusion

Instead of simply lamenting a social or political trauma resulting from the boom of cocaine paste production in the 1980s, Spedding creates a balanced narrative from within the Yungas community, fully employing her ethnographic research to articulate the nuances of modern Andean coca production. The novel's critique of the American war on drugs is skillfully woven into the action and adventure of the story's thriller elements. As a work of narcofiction, Spedding's narrative breaks from a tradition of novels portraying misery and violence as the primary byproducts of this conflict.¹² This purposefully less spectacular facet of the novel, coupled with the detailed Bolivian context, becomes a significant political message. The work stands in opposition to the stereotypically violent images and narratives of the drug trade used to sustain the war on drugs in the 1980s.

The author's greatest achievement by the end of the novel is that it is difficult for the reader to pass negative judgment on Satuka, in spite of her participation in the illegal trade. The importance of this indigenous female protagonist cannot be understated, as it is through her character that the reader is able to question the moral divide regarding coca production. In this sense, the conflict in the novel is not against the legal status of the drug production or its sensational presentation, but rather the cultural and traditional significance of the coca plant among the Aymara. The emphasis on location when narrating the trade reveals the complexity of the various roles and spaces present in the community with relation to the production of coca for traditional use and for the production of cocaine. The use of the ayni, the "outsiders," and the Satuka in Alison Spedding's *El viento de la cordillera* contribute to the creation of a uniquely Bolivian narco-narrative, which is firmly planted in the coca reality of the Yungas region and the Aymara people.

¹² Notable works of narcofiction exemplifying this trend towards violence include Fernando Vallejo's *La virgen de los sicarios* (1994) and Franco Ramos' *Rosario Tijeras* (1999).

Referências

BLEILER, R. "Wallace, Edgar (1875-1932)." In: **Mystery and Suspense Writers: The Literature of Crime, Detection, and Espionage**. Ed WINKS, R.W.; CORRIGAN, M. Vol. 2. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998. p. 943-955.

GOOTENBERG, P. **Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug**. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

SPEEDING, A. **Wachu Wachu: Cultivo de Coca e Identidad en los Yunkas de La Paz**. La Paz: IPCA (Cuadernos de Investigación), 1994.

SPEEDING, A. "Cocataki, Taki-Coca: Trade, Traffic, and Organized Peasant Resistance in the Yungas of La Paz." In: **Coca, Cocaine, and the Bolivian Reality**. Ed. LEONS, M.B.; SANABRIA, S. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. P. 117 -137.

SPEEDING, A. **Manuel y Fortunato: una picaresca andina**. La Paz: Aruwiwiri, 1997.

SPEEDING, A. **El viento de la cordillera: un thriller de los 80**. Tarija: Editorial Gabriela Moscoso, 2003.

SPEEDING, A. **Kawsachun Coca: Economía campesina cocalera en los Yungas y el Chapare**. La Paz: Fundación PIEB, 2004.

Submetido em: 10/10/2017. Aprovado em: 20/10/2017.

