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Rurality, ethnicity and mountain areas: the andean referent in the "aymaras sin fronteras" project

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Abstract : In a Latin American context where indigenous populations have had to wait until the end of the XXth century to recover a certain visibility, the definition of Andean identity is still an issue. In this paper, an analysis of the various steps in a territorially based collective movement provides insights into this identity that was for so long denied or repressed on account of socio-political conditions. The possible re-assertion of "Andeanity" is very complex, as the

case study of the "Aymaras Sin Fronteras" (Aymaras without borders) movement reveals. In this movement, the territorialisation process is based on the dialectics between its rural, ethnic and mountain (Andean) components.

Keywords : mountains, Andes, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, rurality, ethnicity, identity, borders, territorialisation, territorial collective mobilisation



This paper studies changes in the status of the Andean referent through an analysis of an innovative experience in strategic and multi-scalar mobilisation that resulted in bringing together municipal associations from three distinct border regions in a South American cross-border alliance: "Aymaras sin Fronteras"¹. The process is particularly interesting in that it began in a sparsely populated peripheral zone of South America, the south of the Andean Altiplano. The regions concerned, southern Peru (Tacna province), southeastern Bolivia (the departments of La Paz, Oruro, Potosi) and northern Chile (Tarapacá region), all suffer from extreme marginalisation. This marginalisation is expressed both in the form of the domination of the central authorities over their respective states² and in the quality of their mountain rural areas where there are few regional centres (the Human Development Index of the region as a whole is 0.445, equivalent to that of the least developed countries). In this a priori disadvantaged

1 • This text is the result of several assignments in the Andes and their piedmont area, which enabled me to get to know some of the protagonists mentioned. I would like to thank them and to offer my excuses for any possible errors in the interpretation of the process analysed. My thanks also go to Ms F. Humire and H. Mamani, and to P. Pozo, Secretary of the Alliance, as well as to L. Rouvière for his comments. Work conducted as part of the ECOS / CONICYT C03H04 project.

2 • The latter only used measures of exceptionality (current free zones of Tacna and Iquique, for example).

context, the conditions for innovation in the types of governance have developed since the 1990s under a two-fold influence: the liberal decentralisation process underway in all the countries concerned (Montero & Samuels, 2004; Oxhorn, Tulchin, et al., 2004) and the politicization of the demands for recognition of their identity by indigenous populations (Morin & Saladin D'Anglure, 1995; Bengoa, 2000; Albo, 2002; Amilhat-Szary, 2006).

Our aim in this paper is therefore to examine the territorial bases used to support, and even construct, a collective movement. With this in mind, an analysis of the referents of a collective project is undertaken from a Barthien perspective using the interlocking language of signifier and signified (Barthes, 1997). These complex interrelations between signifier and signified, involve an analysis of not only the cultural context but also the interplay among referents. This means placing the determination in terms of referents within the framework of an ideological analysis of territorial discourses (Di Méo, 1998). In a dynamic vision of territorialisation, the contribution of the name comes at the beginning of the process. According to the Italian geographer, Angelo Turco, territorialisation takes place in three stages (in Debarbieux, 1997): first “denomination”, then “reification” (“transformation of natural materiality into constructed materiality”), and finally “structuring or structuralisation”, (“production of operational fields from planning and development”). Bernard Debarbieux likens this attempt to understand territorial complexity to the structuralist method.

In this study, we will therefore follow the stages in a territorially based collective movement as it rediscovers the roots of an identity that was for a long time denied or repressed on account of socio-political conditions. Indeed, in Latin America, the indigenous populations had to wait until the end of the 20th century to obtain greater visibility. The reassertion of ethnicity, and even “andeanity”, has only been achieved, however, at the cost of a complex reformulation. The case studied here, the Aymaras Sin Fronteras alliance, will provide us with insights into this reformulation.

Country	N° of communes or districts	Area (km ²)	Population (regardless of ethnicity ³ - n° inhab.)	Density
Bolivia	28	70 588	138 560	2,0
Chile	8	50 809	22 807	0,4
Peru	16	7 103	18 183	2,6
Total communes & inhabitants ; Average density	52	123 500	179 550	1,7

Table n°1: Statistics of the tri-national territory
Data source: National statistics institutes

3 • The percentage of the population who identify themselves as Aymara varies and provides no more than an indication given that it is based on optional self-designation in the population censuses.

Andeanity rediscovered?

In a continent where the adjectives “indio” (Indian) and “andino” (Andean) tend to be used, even today, as perjorative qualifiers, the analysis of identity processes must be put into context from both an historical and epistemological point of view. In Latin America, the indigenous populations were excluded from the political community during the secular construction of the states. Neither independence from Spain nor the land reforms of the 20th century managed to really reduce the inequalities that made them social and political minorities in their own countries (Hooker, 2005). The political demands of the descendents of the continent’s native populations attracted increasing attention in the second half of the 20th century thanks to a renewal of the discourse used by these people about themselves in a post-modern context that encouraged greater awareness of cultural diversity. Among the factors contributing to this renewal, there was a profound transformation of the anthropological viewpoint. Interaction of the group with its social and political environment was henceforth placed at the heart of research into ethnic identity (Barth, 1969). Another important factor was the serious questioning of colonialism that accompanied the celebrations of 1992 in Latin America (movement focusing on the memory of five centuries of struggle). These elements led to minority groups becoming more aware of their identity. The reformulation of identity was also accompanied by a renewal of leadership in these minority groups.

These factors contributing to renewal enable us to understand the development of fresh rhetoric. The discourse on identity developed today by representatives of the ethnic minorities is aimed at outsiders, and first and foremost at those who belong to the dominant culture (in the Andean countries, those populations originating from the Spanish colonisation, known as “creoles”). It is often this renewed version that now circulates in the original communities where its re-appropriation can cause problems. And yet this is the condition for their members to access this new form of political expression. Modern indigenism is thus typically a product of the comings and goings between the rural and urban worlds, so characteristic of the daily lives of the Andean mountain populations (Cortès, 2002).

Research on access to the political arena by indigenous groups, as actors on the national stage, has developed considerably over the past decade (Dávalos, 2005). By focusing on the methods of regaining access to citizenship that had been denied for so long, it was possible, in the different countries where the process was at work, to identify at what level(s) of power this phenomenon was most widespread. The municipalities appeared particularly important in this respect (Radcliffe, Laurie et al., 2002) for two reasons: it is not only at this scale that relations of proximity are promoted, it also the scale at which the map has often been redrawn in recent years, frequently resulting, in areas of low population density, in new divisions and the emergence of new communal areas. The number of associations established at this level in recent years has grown considerably, as witnessed by the setting up of “networks of networks” to discuss and debate this topic and promote good

practices⁴. This is a favoured level for political innovation (Giraut, 2000), as demonstrated by the “Aymaras sin Fronteras” movement that we will examine in more detail.

Despite making considerable progress, the indigenous groups have experienced structural difficulties in entering the national political arena. Moreover, it has become apparent that to do so they must call into question not only their discourse but also the practices of liberal democracies (Yashar, 1999). Thus, it has been observed that negotiation to obtain access to political participation does not necessarily take place at the national level. The cross-border organisation of indiginist demands takes place in conjunction with the major international organisations (UNO or World Bank) and the NGOs that underpin their action (Andolina, Radcliffe et al., 2005). The internationalisation of the political action of Amerindian and black minorities is a new phenomenon. Before the Spanish conquest, although there were complex structures for regional exchange (namely between the coast, the mountain areas, and the Amazonian forest), many of the people concerned were not in contact with one another (in 1532, Atahualpa, the Inca, did not know that Moctezuma, the Aztec, had been subjugated by the Spanish in 1520). Contact between minority organisations at the national, regional and even continental scale increased as the language of their struggle became more similar and its political impact greater.

In such a context where there were an increasing number of trans-national alliances (in the form of regional groups – Andean or Amazonian – which were rather problematical, in more open social forums, or through international NGOs such as the IWGIA (International World Group for Indigenous Affairs)), there were a few cross-border initiatives. It seems that, thanks to the multiple levels involved, they are better suited than others to identify the conditions for negotiating the political status of indigenous groups (Hooghe & Marks, 2000; Anderson, 2002). The international border now represents a doubly symbolic referent, in that it represents the authority of the state: one seeks to go beyond it to provoke the reaction of the institution, hoping that such reaction will translate into a desire for public investment, while at the same time distinguishing oneself from the nation that these limits define (defining oneself by one's ethnic belonging, which, by defining an indigenous territory, also provides one with other anthropological and political borders). A boundary situation would not only enable identity construction to be ten times more intense (Eskelinen, Liikanen et al., 1999), it would also make a territorial project more visible (Newman & Paasi, 1998). From the state's point of view, such projects can present the opportunity for certain political flexibility: they provide the possibility for negotiating the terms of territorial recognition without threatening the integrity of the country through separatist excesses (Gros, 2003; Gros & Strigler, 2006).

4 • Cf. the Learning Network of Indigenous Rural Municipalities (Red de Aprendizaje de Municipios Rurales Indígenas, Rimisp), a project designed to strengthen the capacity of Andean and Central American municipal actors with a view to improving the conditions of governance, both at the local level and in their negotiations with the national and international actors. This project is planned over 4 years (2005-2009) and supported by the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID).

This reflection on the conditions governing the emergence of a semantic referent in the territorial construction process is based on the study of an example that will be presented in detail here, that of a group of cross-border municipalities in the Andes. Its originality arises from several aspects: the capacity of local governments to develop an international policy is all the more remarkable given that the location is a zone where the borders are a subject of conflict, a century after the territorial gains of Chile from Bolivia and Peru (Amilhat-Szary, 2007). The name given to this territorial association, the “Aymaras Sin Fronteras Strategic Alliance”, suggests that this opening up of borders is based on the area’s ethnic homogeneity, which the borders, set up when the national states obtained their independence, had not succeeded in eradicating and which today it is a question of recovering. This part of the Andes is the Aymara section, one of the great cultures of the central Andes (the 3rd most spoken indigenous language of the continent), whose epicentre is situated between Lake Titicaca and the north of the present Chile. Although it is not the majority language in any of the three countries, (second ethnic group after the Quechua in Bolivia and Peru, and after the Mapuche in Chile), its respective weight in each of these countries differs considerably (1.7 million inhabitants speak it in Bolivia, 500,000 in Peru, 20,000 in Chile) (Albo, 2000).

Constructing the argument: from rural referent to ethnic and international movement

If we go back to the arguments that originally formed the basis for the emergence of the Aymaras Sin Fronteras (ASF) Strategic Alliance, it may be observed that there has since been a transfer of territorial referents. We will see here how the alliance has gone from a “rural” federator to a “trans-border” project, then to an ethnic movement, “Aymara”, with the rhetoric evolving from mutualisation (with actors hoping that their association will enable them to escape from a common handicap) to exclusion (inversed ethnic stigma in a process of self differentiation), or at least how the alliance has been constructed in the dialectic tension between these two identity poles. This evolution must be related to the Latino-American context where, throughout the 20th century, attempts were made to attribute the crisis of rural peripheral areas, and particularly that of mountain areas, to the small farmer dimension of these areas. Land reforms undertaken to address this aspect, namely in Bolivia and Peru, demonstrated, however, the failure to take into account the Andean populations in assimilating them with a socio-political category. Ethnic renewal is based on the “compost” of a quest for denied identity, the territorial component of which is essential.

The ASF was born at the instigation of the Chilean entity known as the “Association of Inland Municipalities of the First Region”. The current president of the Strategic Alliance and the mayor of Putre (commune in the hinterland of Arica in Chile), Francisco Humire, links its creation with the existence in his commune of an Andean Fair (la FERAN, Feria andina) started in 1997, which served as a meeting point between the actors concerned in the three countries, Chile, Bolivia and Peru. However, the

internationalisation of this municipal initiative is not only due to the persuasive powers of local actors, nor even to the support of their respective regional and national representatives. What makes this distant experience so relevant to other regions in the world is the meeting between the mayors of mountain communities and international functionaries of the World Bank and their ability to make the most of their convergent interests, or at least their common discourses and referents. This situation is related to the existence within the World Bank of a project division particularly focused on the development of minority groups which knew how to take advantage of the information about the Alliance project, news that did not really seem worthy of interest to the Chilean authorities.

The Association's archives gave rise, at the end of 2001, to cooperation with the overall sponsor, the World Bank, with visits from a delegation to the Aymara area, which resulted in allocation of international funds in 2002 (WB loan and donation from Norwegian government). This funding enabled both a consolidation of the discourse from Alliance members, which we will elaborate on below, and an opening up of the doors of regional government departments to these rural and indigenous mayors, who until then had had little voice. In Chile, the SUDERE (under-secretariat for regional development at the Chilean Ministry of the Interior) undertook to provide technical support for the project, taking effect from 2005. A development agent assigned to work with the Alliance helped it respond to a call-for-tender from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in 2006 concerning "Regional Public Goods". The project was accepted in 2007 under the name "Aymara cultural and natural heritage" and funding provided to help get the project underway on territory constructed by the reunion of the three associations of Bolivian, Chilean and Peruvian municipalities (cf. figure n°1)⁵.

PROJECT SEMANTICS: BORDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Based on an analysis of the objectives of Aymaras Sin Fronteras, as stated in the documents produced by Alliance itself, two distinct preoccupations may be identified. First, there is the question of carrying through the development projects aimed at improving the standard of living in the region concerned (electrification of rural areas, farming and pastoral improvements, setting up a sustainable tourism project as part of the heritagization of the Inca trails, etc.). Second, there seems to be a real desire to mediatise this poor, remote and forgotten territory, forgotten not only by the governments and sponsors but also by the media: "We must make people aware of the reality of our situation" states the first text (Proceedings of the Putre agreement, 2001), in order to "win the support of regional and national governments and sources of cooperation" (Arica, January, 2002)⁶.

5 • For more details, cf. Amilhat Szary A.-L. & Rouvière L., 2009 and Rouvière L., 2009.

It was with this aim in mind that the cross-border group was born, based on the logic of scale economies : it was a question of “making the most of the advantages and possibilities of cross-border integration to obtain common benefits which would in turn generate positive externalities in their surrounding area, thus improving levels of subsistence” (Arica, January 2002). Moreover, the foundation of the Alliance does not appear to be of a productive nature: the actors brought together in the group speak of the creation of a common framework for reflection and coordination of interaction and cross-border development initiatives, given that:

- “the Border Regions constitute economic and social units with numerous and strong possibilities/a strong and varied potential/ for common and shared/joint development;
- “the globalisation process, and with it the need to be competitive, has wreaked havoc with the traditional and craft forms of activity in our system of production and marketing”;
- “with regard to clear signals encouraging development initiatives in the poor zones and given by Multilateral Organisations, there is a concerted political will on the part of the protagonists of this alliance;
- “the resources of this south Andean region are similar in all the countries concerned, since we are united by identical characteristics such as the environment, culture and productive development;
- “We must make people aware of the reality of our situation”.

This long extract from the Declaration of Tacna (August 2001) provided an opportunity to clearly state the operating priorities of what was to become the Strategic Alliance. It also provided the basis for a possible justification of an organisation that departs from the administrative and political operation of the three countries in which it is inserted, as demonstrated in the following text prepared by the legal advisor requested by ASF to validate its statute: “neither the conduct nor the establishment of political relations with foreign nations falls within the competence of Chilean municipalities”, it states, but since the final objective of the association is “coordination with national and international institutions with a view to perfecting the municipal regime”, it clearly sets out “the conditions for setting up a space for reflection that will generate development initiatives for Andean populations”. It concludes that its legal existence is possible, but the decisions taken in it can be neither binding nor restrictive (“vinculante”) for members. Thus, the Alliance was drawn up during an event, the FERAN, and did not immediately receive strict backing from a general assembly of the Association of Commons of the Interior of the First Chilean Region (Personal communication, January 2002, by Leticia Robles Valenzuela, legal advisor).

CHRONOLOGY OF DESIGNATIONS

It should be remembered that the initial entity concerned by the process described was the “Association of Municipalities of the interior of the First Region”, a somewhat technical name mirroring a country where regions are designated by their numbers. It may be noted that the name was later changed in 2004 to the “Association of Rural Municipalities of Tarapacá” and its acronym: AMRT. With regard to the actual tri-national alliance, the first documents produced emphasized the reality of the situation of the regions of Andean indigenous populations, pointing out that: “the resources of this South Andean region are similar in all the countries concerned.” (Proceedings of Putre agreement, July 2001). Other texts such as the Tacna Declaration (August 2001) mention the south Andean situation (“tri-national agreement of mayors of the south Andean region of Peru, Chile and Bolivia), with reference to sub-regional integration initiatives undertaken at other levels in this part of the Andes, and particularly the entrepreneurs’ group GEICOS (“Inter-regional Entrepreneurs’ Group of Western Central South America), the initiator of ZICOSUR (“Integration zone of Western Central South America) (Amilhat-Szary, 2003). The first Convention of the “Alianza Estratégica Trinacional de Alcaldes Rurales Andinos de Bolivia, Chile, Perú” (March 2002) is in fact celebrated in the local press as a meeting of “Andean” mayors from Bolivia, Chile and Peru. Use of the qualifier “andino” marks a real change in representations, a form of recuperation of an adjective with a complex definition (Amilhat-Szary, 2005 [2006]), a qualifier that for a long time was not well accepted by indigenous populations given that the metisse majorities used it in an injurious manner. The document produced jointly with the World Bank seems to reveal a change in demands that may be related to a change in the identity paradigm: the text is presented as a “Strategy for indigenous municipalities: proposal for strengthening Aymara power” (“una propuesta de empoderamiento para los Aymaras”)⁷. It gives the Alliance a triple role in which the identity aspect appears essential: 1) Construct a social space to promote recovery of its identity; 2) Mobilise its institutional capacity; 3) Strengthen its management capacities in the definition and promotion of rural development strategies”. The funding authority does no more than adopt a discourse favoured by certain members of the alliance, namely the president of the FERAN, F.Humire, a certain number of whose letters bear witness to the intensity of his interiorisation of the ethnic rhetoric. He often speaks of “the hope so anxiously harboured by some of its members for an integration of the communities of this Aymara territory with a common ancestry in this border zone” (2001)⁸, and uses it as an argument to validate the maturing of the strategic project: “This document is the product of a silent and concentrated effort, like an additional contribution to the intense aspiration to Integration (the capital letter is the author’s) of the three countries concerned. The latter want to strengthen and

7 • Document title, ASF archives.

8 • Letter to a consultant, 2001 (PHDG / consultant).

develop a border regional territory involving men and women whose only motivation is to have the opportunity to feel they belong to this south Andean zone, a zone for which the common denominator is to originate from this region, to be the sons and daughters of this motherland, proud of one's Culture and Aymara origins" (2002)⁹. Such rhetoric enables him to use provocation in the way he denounces the "amnesia" of the central governments in the manner they respond to the needs of the Andean rural communities and to assert that "we do not want our communities to be converted into a second Chiapas", suggesting that the Alliance is capable of "producing a development centre for all the macro region of the Aymara world"¹⁰. The referents of the discourse, going from development centres to the Chiapas, bear witness to the universal culture of this leader from both an economic and identity point of view (the Chiapas could be considered as a turning point in the post-modern ethnic construction).

The semiology of the communication documents produced by ASF testify to this evolution (cf. figure n°2): although the three-border logo (three linked hands appearing as extensions of the flags of each of the three countries) remains a stable symbol, the referents of renewed Andean identity are also strongly represented with the notable insertion of the Wiphala, the flag of small coloured squares that has become the banner of indiginist political movements, namely in Bolivia. Old stones of Tiwanaku, old textiles and folk dances make up the attributes that are more easily identified by non-Aymarans and contribute to the effort of the Alliance to use culture in promoting economic and political aims. It may be noted, however, that the word "Chile" is shown in its entirety, in a central position, whereas "Bolivia" and "Peru" are only partially visible. This may be explained mainly by the fact that the initiative was begun in Chile, with this country assuming a greater influence in the Alliance.

Conclusions

This review of the foundations of a project territory in Latin America through an analysis of its referents provides an opportunity, it would seem, to underline the essential role of the semantic approach. The change in qualifiers used (rural, Andean, Aymara) offers insights into the cultural and political context in which the project takes root. The identity process clearly

9 • Letter of 28/12/01 from Humire to F. Vidal V., Secretary of State for Planning and Development (SUBDERE), on the agreement document signed at Putre Feran 2001: « Este documento, es el producto de un trabajo silencioso y dedicado como un aporte más a la tan anhelada Integración de estos tres países involucrados. Quienes desean fortalecer y desarrollar un territorio regional fronterizo, en donde están involucrados hombres y mujeres que solo los animan a tener una oportunidad de sentirse parte de esta zona sur Andina, con un denominador común el cual es ser originarios e hijos de esta madre tierra, orgullosos de su Cultura y de su origen Aymará ».

10 • Statements to the press by F. Humire, recently elected president of the ASF (*El Correo*, Tacna, 23 and 24/3/2002).

develops here in a continuous exchange between the collective (that which brings together) and the differential (that which differentiates). The discourse alternatively stresses mutualisation (development of associations) and exclusion (ethnicity), without becoming burdened with possible gaps between referents. In the present case, it proves to be fundamental, if the territory is to exist, to speak about this: to do this, giving it a name is indispensable. But the presence of a referent authorises the mediatisation of the territory particularly to the outside: here we are in a method of communication that is not applicable in the same way internally. Without us being able to give a detailed description of the consequences, the construction of the Aymaras Sin Fronteras Strategic Alliance is, paradoxically, unfortunately lacking in participation. Conceived by the indigenous elite who were able to renew their political discourse, it finds it difficult to muster support and involvement among the general population, owing to the fact that development projects have not materialised on the ground. This harsh observation leads one to ask whether in this case it is really a question of ethnic mobilisation or simply ethnic instrumentalisation ... in a context where the return to the use of the term “ethnic group” has nevertheless not been accompanied by its definition.

The implications of this argument, however, go beyond discursive exchange: the initial goal of the rural mayors, that of increasing people’s awareness of a marginal territory and of taking it into account, has certainly been attained. Over the years, in Chile and then in Bolivia, the regional and national authorities became interested in the Aymaras Sin Fronteras movement at the moment when this seemed to have escaped them. In Chile, at the central level, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a specific directorate (DICORE, Regional Coordination Directorate) was created in June 2000 to monitor the initiatives of the territories at the international level, and is represented at ASF meetings; the regional government, familiar with the initiative since its beginnings but without any real acknowledgement its instigators, has changed its discourse since the project was submitted to the IDB... Undoubtedly, the impact of these local exchanges on the improvement in diplomatic relations between the countries concerned should also be mentioned, given that Aymaras Sin Fronteras has participated in the strong para-diplomatic mobilisation existing on this triple border zone since the 1990s (Tapia Valdés, 2003; Paquin, 2004). The capacity for mobilisation of the mayors of these peripheral communes never ceases to surprise those who meet them, the visibility of the emerging territory undoubtedly contributing as much to enhance its recognition as the innovative nature of the process underway. Although the choice of a referent does not alone produce a territorialisation phenomenon, it may nevertheless considerably modify the status of a territory, even if it means playing on the semantic fluctuations (here: rural / Andean / Aymara / cross-border) that govern the social and political dynamics that it is meant to refer to.

Translation: Brian Keogh

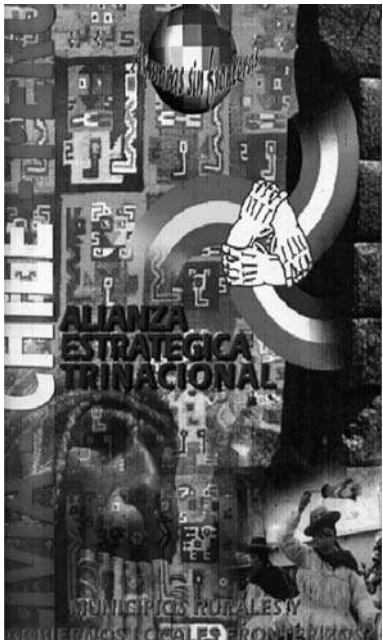


Figure n° 1 : Couverture
de pochette réalisée
pour des rencontres trinacionales, 2002.
*Cover of envelope prepared
for the tri-national meetings, 2002.*

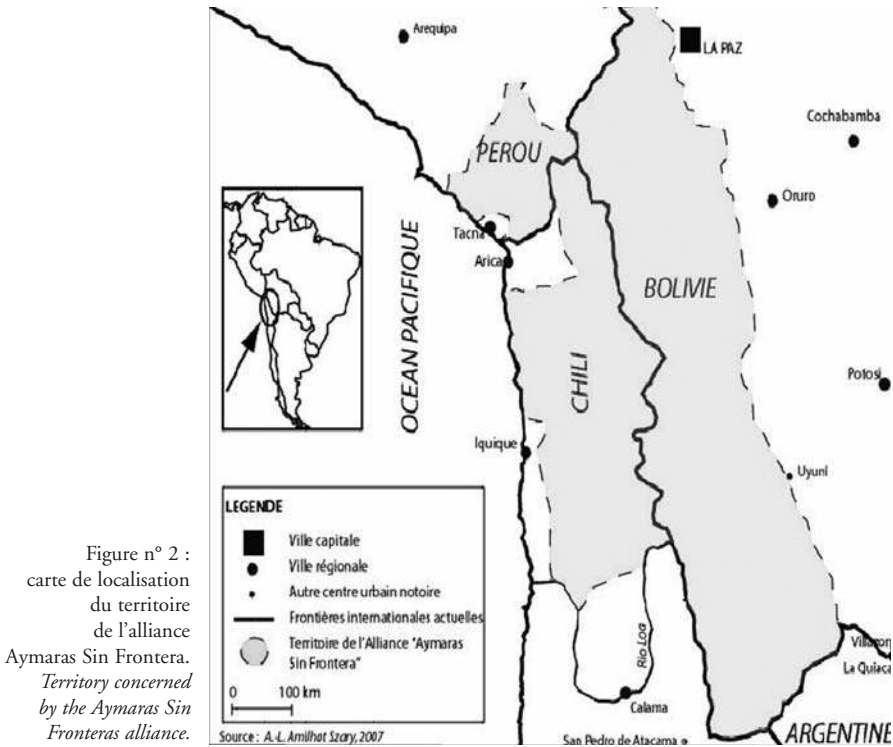


Figure n° 2 :
carte de localisation
du territoire
de l'alliance
Aymaras Sin Frontera.
*Territory concerned
by the Aymaras Sin
Fronteras alliance.*

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