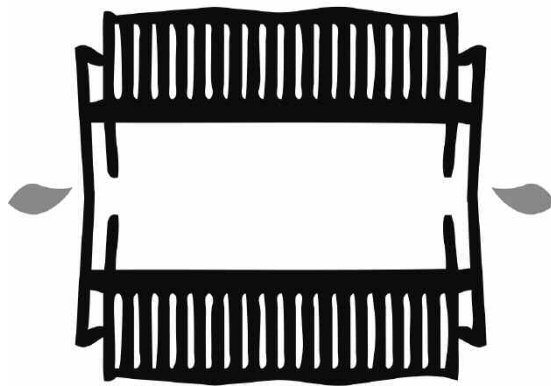


*Peasantry and Agrarian Capitalism
from below: The Peasant Communities
of the Bolivian Southern Highlands
under the Quinoa-boom*



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Peasantry and Agrarian Capitalism from below: The Peasant Communities of the Bolivian Southern Highlands under the Quinoa-boom

Highlights:

1. The evolution of the quinoa market is contributing to incorporate into the global agro-food chain new production complexes.
2. Peasants may embark on a path of social differentiation fueled by a form of capitalism 'from below'.
3. Land and labour, are a space of expansion and proliferation of agrarian capitalism.
4. Crystallized community authorities indirectly favour land concentration in the Bolivian Altiplano.
5. Agrarian capitalism "from below" may develop without the formalization of private land titles.

Abstract: The peasantry is often seen as a homogenous and undifferentiated body representing a common 'other' to, and within, the expansion of capitalism on the agrarian ground. Despite this widespread vision – frequently supported by a reality in which a modern latifundia system develops at the expense of a peasantry channeled into a course of proletarianization – the peasants themselves can be promoters of a form of capitalism 'from below'. This article, drawing on the Marxist discussion on the origin of capitalism, presents the case of the quinoa producing communities of the Bolivian Southern Highlands. Here, in the wake of the growing international demand for quinoa, peasants give shape to a process of social differentiation. The analysis is conducted by taking into consideration the evolution of the control over two key-elements: land and labour.

Keywords: Land, labour, commodification, agro-export market.

Campesinado y capitalismo desde abajo: Las comunidades campesinas bolivianas del Altiplano Sur frente al quinua-boom

Ideas clave:

1. La evolución del mercado de la quinua está contribuyendo a incorporar nuevos complejos productivos en la cadena global agroalimentaria.
2. Los campesinos pueden embarcarse en una vía de diferenciación social alimentada por una forma de capitalismo 'desde abajo'.
3. Tierra y trabajo forman un espacio de expansión y proliferación de capitalismo agrario.
4. Las autoridades comunitarias cristalizadas favorecen indirectamente la concentración de tierra en el Altiplano boliviano.
5. El capitalismo agrario "desde abajo" puede desarrollarse sin la formalización de títulos de propiedad privada.

Resumen: Casi siempre el campesinado ha sido presentado como un grupo homogéneo e indiferenciado, como un común 'otro' contra, y funcional, a la expansión del capitalismo agrario. Aunque esta visión puede ser ampliamente aceptada, ofrece una imagen empírica donde el sistema del moderno latifundio pone al campesinado en un proceso de proletarianización, los campesinos mismos pueden ser promotores de capitalismo 'desde abajo'. Este artículo, basándose en la discusión marxista sobre el origen del capitalismo, presenta el caso de las comunidades productoras de quinua en el Altiplano Sur de Bolivia. En este escenario, frente a una intensificación de la demanda internacional del grano andino, los campesinos locales han incentivado un proceso de diferenciación social. El análisis se enfoca en entender la evolución del control sobre dos elementos clave: tierra y trabajo.

Palabras clave: Tierra, trabajo, mercantilización, agro-exportación.

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1. Introduction

Over the last three decades the development of the global food system has undergone a process of progressive globalization which is currently contributing to incorporate – into the global agro-food chain – new production complexes. Nonetheless, the integration into the global market has proceeded in connection with processes of commodification of the production cycle that, on the one hand, have detached the product from the territories of origin in a sort of dynamic of fetishization, and on the other hand, have fostered the restructuring of the agrarian ground. The article aims to define this last trajectory by focusing on a specific case study regarding the analysis of the social impact of the international quinoa boom in the Bolivian quinoa producing communities. The contribution is based on an empirical research carried out in the area of three rural municipalities of the Bolivian Southern Highlands (*Altiplano Sur*). Empirical data are here interpreted through the lenses of the Marxist debate about the origin of capitalism. Drawing upon the reconstruction of the traditional way through which the Andean communities have historically organized themselves in order to provide the peasant households with sufficient access to land and labour – as to satisfy their reproduction needs¹,

1• By reproduction is meant “the general form of permanence of the general conditions of production” and control over the factors of production (Althusser and Balibar, 1968, p. 259).

the article aims at specifically showing how the peasant communities may embark on a path of social differentiation, fueled by a form of capitalism 'from below', when the productive forces and macroeconomic sphere – in which they are embedded – change. In this respect, here the element of macro-change is individuated in the shift of quinoa from subsistence crop to cash crop favored, mainly between the early 2000s and 2014, by a surge of the international quinoa price which shifted from 1.259 USD per metric ton in 2000 up to 6.600 USD for the same amount of product in 2014.

Since the 1970s, two elements have contributed to change the profile of the local peasant economy (Chayanov, 1966): firstly, the mechanization of agriculture through the introduction of tractors and disc-plows and then, the increase in an external demand for quinoa. In the 1970s this demand came chiefly from Perú, while, in the 1980s and 1990s, the national production was mainly absorbed by the fair-trade circuits in USA and Canada and the emerging organic markets in Northern Europe. Nonetheless the real international boom arrived during the last two decades in the wake of the growing diversification of consumers' preferences on conventional markets.

Currently, Bolivia is the second world's largest exporter of quinoa and almost 90 % of the total national production intended to export derives from the Altiplano sur, an area in the southwestern part of the country characterized by extremely poor soils and low rainfall (Geerts *et al.*, 2006). Since the early 2000s, given the international attention to what the Food and Agriculture Organization defined a super food, both, the promotion of innumerable scientific investigations recognizing a significant importance of quinoa in fighting food insecurity, and a massive request for healthy foods coming mostly from the urban Global North, made the Altiplano experience a trajectory of market-dependency and a consequent agrarian restructuring (FAO, 2019). This scenario has been the object of a number of studies which have tried to analyze the economic, environmental and social impact of the growing production on the equilibrium of the local rural communities (see for example Carimentrand and Ballet, 2010; Jacobsen, 2011; Avitabile, 2015), however – in the group of the studies focused on the social impact of the quinoa-boom – only a few of them (i.e. Ormachea and Ramirez, 2013; Neri Pereyra, 2017) – connect the micro-level analysis with a wider analysis regarding the evolution of modern capitalism between local and global exclusionary relationships to control productive resources, that determine agrarian changes territorially contextualized.

Accordingly, in order to strengthen the focus on the discussion and presentation of emerging mechanisms of capital acquisition that led to a redefinition of the local mechanisms of social reproduction, this research tries to articulate the contem-

porary debate on the advancement of capitalism in the peasant communities of the Southern Highlands by focusing on the two factors of production of the peasant economy: land and labour, two elements that usually are considered as residual within the analysis of modernity and post-modernity (Borghini, 2012). Nonetheless, land and labour, and consequently the peasantry, are not in what Chakrabarty (2000) called the *antechamber to modernity* but are in a space functional to capitalism, a space of expansion, assimilation and proliferation. In the light of this, it is a study that analyzes the effect of agro-export on the evolution of the peasant economy in the Altiplano Sur by reasoning, at the micro-level, on the changes in the land-access system and agricultural labour organization. At the same time, it is essentially a study on today's articulation of agrarian capitalism and its development. Capitalism is interpreted not only as an economic system but as a historical process that – as Streeck (2012) points out – moves making economic relations flow into social non-economic relations. Although the results of this process of expansion which is far to be linear and stable, are not obvious or always adaptable to solid predictions, the following sections, by referring specifically to a path of 'capitalism from below' look at the peasantry not as a homogeneous body but as a body that – differentiating itself – may trigger and fuel the origin and consolidation of agrarian capitalism. The concept of peasants adopted by this article identifies them as those who have not necessarily a private property title to land but as those who have control over the factors of production, as a group that can access the land they work on, as tenants, smallholders or common users. Moreover, they are identified as those agricultural producers that may also be pluriactive (both in the countryside and in urban areas), who, first, use family labor, and thus the household as production unit, to produce primarily for subsistence and, second, depend also on non-commoditized relations (e.g. labour exchange) for the household's reproduction (Forrest and Donaldson, 2010).

The article is divided into four main sections: it starts with the delineation of a specific theoretical framework that offers an overview of the Marxist perspective about the origin of capitalism and agrarian class differentiation; then it moves to the presentation of the case study referring to geographical scope of the research, territorial contextualization of the land access system and work organization, and methodological aspects of the fieldwork; the third part, building upon the emerging empirical evidences, presents the results finally discussed, in the light of the theory, in the last section.

2. *Theoretical framework*

In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx triggers a discussion which is still ongoing within the modern political economy's debates about the origin of capitalism: by developing a comparative analysis concerning the origins of industrial capitalism, he individuates two different trajectories that the transition from pre-capitalist modes of production (amongst which we find also the peasant mode) to capitalism could have undertaken (Marx, 1981). The first one is a path of capitalism 'from below' that proceeds through a movement of social differentiation of the petty commodity producer (peasant or artisan) into, on the one hand, merchant and capitalist manufactures and landlords, on the other hand, wageworkers and a bulk of rural proletarians. The second one, 'from above', advances through the transformation of merchants into industrialists employing wageworkers: in the agrarian ground, this last trajectory is projected onto the consolidation of the power of an old/feudal landlord class tending to retain and preserve pre-capitalist productive forces and labour processes (Mooers, 1991; Post, 1999). Marx saw in the first path a 'really revolutionary' trajectory that could have led to a rapid and radical transformation of the productive forces. Looking at the British case of capital(ist) emersion, he asserts that England embarked on the first course since capitalism emerged out of the ranks of the petty commodity producers. Nonetheless, "later on, these same producers had fallen victims to the technique of dispossession and enclosure they themselves had pioneered as landlords began to consolidate large capitalist farms" which consequently originated a trinity of landlords, tenant farmers and rural proletarians, hence allowing primitive accumulation to assume its classic form (Mooers, 1991, p. 81)².

Correspondingly, years later, in *Development of Capitalism in Russia* and *The Agrarian Program of Russian social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905-1907*, Lenin (1907; 1956) corroborates the Marxian analysis by better delineating the two different trajectories of capitalist emersion: the first one, the American path, originates 'from below' through the differentiation of the peasantry into an agrarian bourgeoisie and rural proletariat, while the second path, the Prussian path to capital-

2• By primitive accumulation is meant the "historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production" (Marx, 1976, p. 874-899).

ism, proceeds 'from above' through the transformation of feudal lords (i.e. authoritarian Junkers) and other pre-capitalist land-owning classes "into a rural capitalist class that transforms its dependent peasants into wage-workers" (Post, 1999, p. 282). The Prussian landlords dominated in a context of impoverished domestic markets, on the contrary, the American peasant-turned-capitalists proliferated on flourishing domestic markets and agrarian substrates characterized by a growing availability of wage-labour and unleashed productive forces (Lapavitsas, 1999).

In the late 20th century, Byres (1996) building on the analysis of a wider secondary bibliography, corroborated the Leninist vision on the development of capitalism in Prussia but disagreed with the American one. Accordingly, he specifies that the 'American path' was composed of different internal trajectories which led to a fragmented scenario. For example, in the South, there has been a shift from slavery to sharecropping to rural labour market since the landlord elite tried to maintain previous (pre-capitalist) surplus extraction mechanisms without triggering relations of capitalist matrix. In fact, a system of capital-labour relations and wage labour arrived in the Southern agricultural sphere only in the mid-20th century when the sharecropping system became unable to provide sufficient surpluses for dealing with the activation of new forces of production. On the contrary the North moved from an "aborted feudalism to market-directed family smallholdings" while the West shifted from "the open frontier to homesteading", such that capitalist farmers and wage workers did not rise 'from below' (Lapavitsas, 1996, p. 184).

Following Byres (1996) a movement of 'capitalism from below' builds upon a demolition of the previous status-quo requiring the destruction of the social, economic, and political power of the landlord class—and the concomitant transformation of the state. It also requires sustained class struggle on the part of the peasants. Still, the outcomes cannot be foreseen in advance—there could be emergence of a capitalist class out of rich peasants, but there could also be rise of market-oriented 'family farms', as in the USA, or even a persistence of small peasantry, as in France. It all depends on the configuration of particular class forces and influences. 'Capitalism from above', a landlord-led agrarian transition, on the other hand, has seemed to many the more likely outcome in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In Peru, Bolivia, and Chile the 'landlord road' to capitalism seems probable [...]. However, Byres makes the important point that in the absence of state intervention (especially taxation) the 'landlord road' is more likely to lead to outcomes more reminiscent of the American South than Junker Prussia (Lapavitsas, 1996, p. 185).

When referring to Latin America, Byres (1996) points out that the regional capitalist agrarian transition developed – and was developing – following a landlord

route. In hindsight, and in the light of the agrarian changes of capitalization and land concentration which – especially since the neoliberal period – have been strongly affecting the Latin American agrarian structure, this consideration appears widely valid (Spoor, 2000). Considering the Bolivian case, this becomes extremely visible, for example, in the consolidation of a new class of landlords who, under the massive orientation to agro-export channels, are now controlling the soybean complex in the tropical lowlands as on a continuum with – and legacy of – the latifundia domination (Urioste, 2012).

However, this vision of capitalism from above – often generalized – blurs local dynamics of transition to capitalism in contexts that do not present similar background elements, first and foremost in the system to access the land and control over the organization of the agricultural labour. Therefore, taking into account the recent explosion of the Bolivian quinoa-export market, mainly supplied by the peasant communities of the Southern Highlands, the following sections develop a reflection on the transition to capitalism of this specific productive context, in which – given its isolation and extreme territorial conditions – neither the hacienda system nor the neoliberal enclosure system had never expanded their predatory frontier.

3. *Materials and methods*

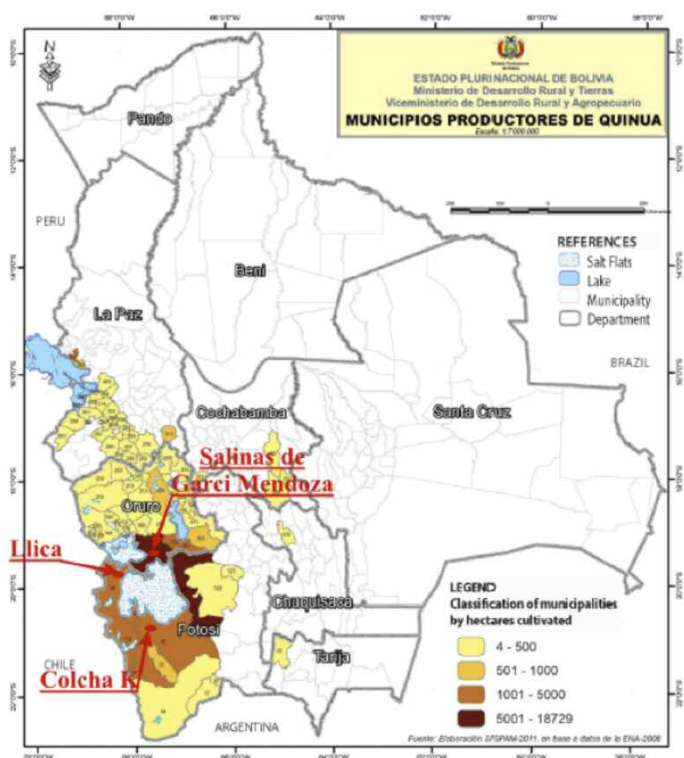
3.1. Geographical scope of the research

Currently Bolivia is the second largest quinoa producer in the world after Peru, with 67,000 tons produced in 2017 (FAO, 2019). On average, productivity in Bolivia is relatively low, 600 kg per hectare in 2017, while Peru, during the same year produced 1200 kg/ ha (Ibidem), however, Bolivia is the country that exports most organic quinoa, whereas Peru exports most conventional (Alandia *et al.*, 2020). Almost the totality of the Bolivian quinoa is marketed in the form of raw product (mainly in grain) which is then processed and transformed into processed products directly by external buyers.

The empirical part of this article draws on a fieldwork conducted between November 2017 and March 2019 in three municipalities of the Bolivian Southern

Highlands in the Departments of Oruro and Potosí, namely Salinas de Garci Mendoza (Dpt. Oruro), Llica and Colcha K (Dpt. Potosí). These municipalities have been selected given the greater extension (in comparison to the rest of the country) of arable land cultivated with quinoa (fig. 1.1). According to CABOLQUI (2020), the main production department is Potosi, with an area that – in less than five decades – has grown from 10,580 hectares (1980) to about 50,000 (2020) hectares. Given this scenario, currently in the Bolivian Southern highlands, quinoa is the main export crop, hence it becomes extremely important to the 70,000 small farmers who grow it on small plots (usually from one to six hectares of cultivated land) (Canales *et al.*, 2020).

Figure 1.
Quinoa-producing municipalities (by hectares cultivated with quinoa)



Source: <https://www.ruralytierras.gob.bo>, accessed January 20, 2021.

The region of the Altiplano Sur is divided into three agroclimatic micro-zones which, traditionally, have determined the geographical distribution of the productive activities. Before the expansion of the quinoa economy, the *pampa* or *planicie* – a flat area more vulnerable to the risk of droughts and frosts – was chiefly dedicated to pasture for sheep and llamas grazing; quinoa cultivation was confined in the *ladera* or *serranía*, namely the first complex of mountainous parcels which preceded the area of volcanic peaks, that was instead used for extensive llama breeding (Laguna, 2011). In almost the whole territory, the crop is produced under rain-fed conditions and subjected to extreme meteorological events and variability (e.g. El Niño & La Niña) that affect productivity levels (Alandia *et al.*, 2020). Due to these territorial conditions, the altiplano remained largely far from the expansion frontier of the Spanish hacienda; paradoxically, the regional extreme environment served to create a protection of the territory and preserve a space of autonomy where collective resource management, local self-sufficiency and reciprocity were at the basis of the peasant organization of the production activities (Kerssen, 2015). On the contrary, in more temperate areas, Spanish conquerors were able to impose a reorganization of the peasant indigenous productive systems in order to support the growth of the mining centers.

Land access system and work organization

In the altiplano the land is owned collectively (*propiedad comunal*), this means that no one of the community members has private titles, therefore the land, cannot be sold as a commodity (Ormachea and Ramirez, 2013). The collective ownership was formally recognized in 1953 with the launch of the Agrarian Reform promoted by the government of the MNR (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*) (Fornillo, 2012): through the reform the State guaranteed the communal property in the highlands but, at the same time, identified in the work the basis to provide each community household with land availability in the wake of the motto 'the land belongs to those who work it' (*la tierra es de quien la trabaja*) which dominated the implementation of countless Latin American agrarian reforms since the period of the Mexican Revolution (Colque, 2007).

Community members (*comunarios*) have a direct access to the land: it can be acquired by (1) inheritance (*herencia*), (2) distribution (*repartición; dotación*), and (3) self-attribution (*apropiación individual*), however by using the term direct access, it must be clear that at the basis there are not private property rights but family usufruct rights recognized by the community to each *comunario* who respects community norms (i.e. *norma comunal*) and demonstrates to have a direct lineage within the community (i.e. *comunarios originarios*) (Vassas, 2016). The access by inheritance

entails the transmission of the usufruct on the family land plots from generation to generation, usually by patrilineal inheritance. On the contrary, through the distribution way, the community assigns the land to each household according to family labour force and availability of arable land in the community's territory. This means that the more mouths to feed and more arms to work there are, the greater the extension of land that will be attributed by the community to the family. In doing so, the right to use the plots is not permanent, hence, all families can access the land in a given period. Such mechanism reflects a logic of demographic differentiation within peasant communities (Chayanov, 1966), according to which the farm size grows when consumption needs and family labour increase. Therefore the greatest extension of the peasant farm and access to the land occurs when consumption needs increase to a maximum level but, at the same time, the ratio between consumption and labour must be supported by the entry of the children into the labour process; subsequently, when children abandon the native family, this is no longer able to invest sufficient work on the land, and with reduced consumption needs, the community assigns the land to other families. This mechanism is locally called *acceso por repartición*; it identifies a type of access by distribution, however it is also accompanied by another type of access by distribution called *acceso por dotación* through which the community assigns virgin or uncultivated lands to new families. Taking into account the third case, under the access by self-attribution a community member accesses to communal virgin lands without previous assignments of the plots by the community authorities. The occupation of the land and its extension depend on the willingness to invest personal work on the parcel.

It is the investment of work that lays the foundation for the community recognition of the land access right. Communities, by reason of a local custom, the *usufructo de las tierras roturadas* which literally means the 'usufruct of the plowed lands', recognize the family usufruct on parcels which had been cleaned, worked and made cultivable by the community families. In this regard we have to take into account that agriculture, until the 1970s, was an activity intended only for self-provisioning, therefore it was exclusively labour-intensive without the use of agricultural machinery. Consequently, the occupation of the land – and its extension – depended on the family's needs and effective family willingness to cultivate this extension by hand. We can therefore deduce that the extension could not be expanded in an uncontrolled manner as it implied an increase in the intensity of the family labour. As written by Dorian and Villca (2009, p. 36) "the regulation of the access to the land was then self-realized since no one could grab too much surface, simply due to the lack of manpower". Hence, the community has always tended to accept it through the convergence between the traditional costume of

the usufructo de las tierras roturadas and the general rule 'the land to those who work it'. Last but not least, both comunarios and external actors (i.e. people who do not have direct ancestry in the community) only in one case can have access to the land through an indirect access system, precisely in the case of the use of the sharecropping system, locally called *aparcería*. However, this land tenure system is almost always limited to an annual production cycle.

Until the 1970s, the national agricultural statistics pointed out that quinoa production was mainly intended for local family consumption; its tiny commercialization was limited to few urban markets, mining centers and village fairs (Camacho *et al.*, 1980). The absence of agricultural machinery and the poor profitability of quinoa on the market – which limited investments in technological capital – made quinoa cultivation a labour-intensive activity. Agriculture was not dependent on capital-labour relations since the labour was provided by the peasant households while – when there was a greater need for labour force as during the harvesting period – this lack was faced with the *ayni*. The *ayni* is a form of short term reciprocal exchange of labour (for agricultural works, building works, food preparation, ceremonial tasks, etc.) between community households (Allen, 1988). It is a symmetrical form of reciprocity since it implies an equal exchange of goods or services. Reciprocity in working the land was a common feature of the peasant organization in the Andes, and the *ayni* until the early 1970s has been always felt as a community obligation that kept family harvests abundant and relieved fatigue (Zoomers, 2008).

3.2. Sample, data and methodological tools

Data have been collected through the use of semi-structured interviews³ (tot. 40) and the administration of a questionnaire to a sample of 60 quinoa producers residing in a constellation of rural communities of the aforementioned municipalities among which, it is worth mentioning: the communities of Rodeo and Irpani for the municipality of Salinas de Garci Mendoza, Cahuana for the municipality of Llica, Santiago K for the municipality of Colcha K. The questionnaire was structured into five main sections through which the questions were aimed at collecting quantitative data regarding: respondent profile (e.g. age, sex, etc.), household profile (e.g. composition,

3• To protect anonymity of the respondents, in the transcription of the interviews reported by this article, all of them have been assigned a pseudonym.

income level, income diversification, etc.), family production complex (e.g. hectares of total land, hectares of cultivated area, average yield per hectare, ownership of farm machinery, presence of hired labour, etc.), consumption habits (e.g. domestic consumption of quinoa), economic and environmental impact (e.g. variability in soil fertility, household purchasing power, access to credit, etc.). Likewise, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were aimed at guiding the construction of respondents' personal representation of the boom in order to collect qualitative data mostly concerning the social impact of the new quinoa economy (e.g. frictions between producer groups, adaptation of the community norms to the new market economy, etc.). Respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method.

All the questionnaires were administered between November and December 2017 while semi-structured interviews were conducted in November–December 2017 and March 2019. The respondents to the questionnaire were 60 quinoa producers, of which 28 males (46.7%) and 32 females (53.3%), with an average age equal to 52 years old and 57 years old respectively. For the SSIs, the sample was composed of 23 females (57.5%) and 17 males (42.5%) with a total average age equal to 54 years old. Most of the respondents (85%) were quinoa producers while 15% of the sample was composed of *jornaleros* (daily agricultural workers) interviewed at the end of March 2019 during the beginning of the harvesting season.

4. Results

Emerging global markets and agrarian change

As stated in the introduction, the mechanization of quinoa cultivation has been one of the two main elements that have driven the growth of the quinoa economy, however the ownership of the farm machinery did not have a homogenous distribution. Most of the owners were producers who had incomes coming from non-agricultural activities and (to a lesser extent) producers with a double residence in urban and/or mining centers and in the communities (i.e. *comunarios residentes*).

The increase in agricultural machinery led to the expansion of the agricultural frontier into the area of the *planicies* (*bajada a la pampa*). Accordingly, many *comu-*

*narios estantes*⁴, who owned cattle, encouraged by the easing of the work and the first slight increases in the quinoa price, opted to reduce the grazing area and replace llama and sheep breeding with quinoa cultivation, which had less need for labour and (since the mid-1980s) a greater profitability on the market (Kerssen, 2015) (fig. 2).

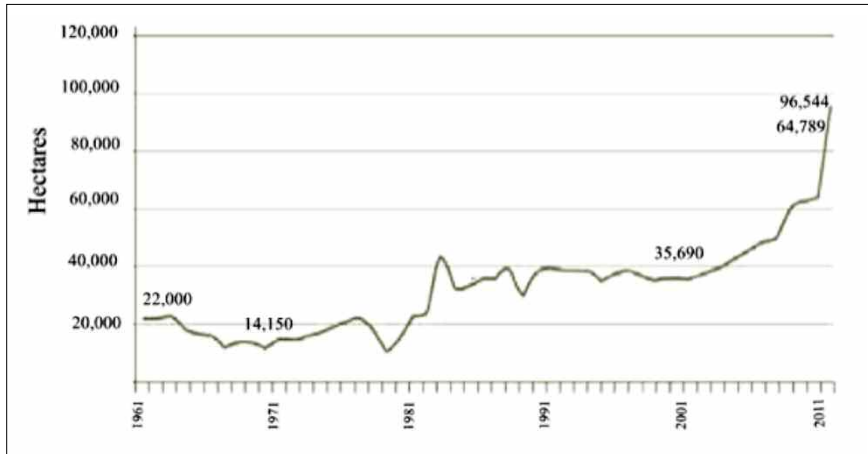
In the 1980s, those who had more livestock units, and a respective dominant access to land for pasture, could – through the sale of animals – accumulate sufficient capital to buy agricultural machinery, automatically transforming their usufruct for grazing into usufruct for cultivation. They maintained their advantage of accessing the land, which turned out to be significantly more profitable compared to the previous use, despite the land had been recognized by the community on the basis of a different land use system. Likewise, pluriactive families who had off-farm incomes or external remittances from cities or mining centers invested in the purchase of tractors and started to occupy communal pastures and virgin lands under the slogan 'the land belongs to those who work it' (Puschiasis, 2009).

"people began to cultivate in the flat parcels of collective use that extended near the family parcels in the "ladera". They [the parcels] had to be cleaned ["destholadas"], but they gave a lot [in terms of yields] because nobody had ever used them before" (Esmeralda, community member of Rodeo, SSI conducted in Rodeo – Salinas de Garci Mendoza, November 2017).

In this context, although land tenure had never been a priority for the communities under study, since its access was normally recognized to each family in reason of their reproduction needs and their ability to satisfy them through labour investment on the land, with the increase in quinoa prices, land underwent a process of concentration. It did not enter a real dynamic of commodification, but a new *indirect exchange-value* overlapped with its original use-value. Even if a price was not directly attributed to it, the trend in the international quinoa price influenced the social perception of its value such that the occupation and concentration of the land increased in parallel with the price. This was also demonstrated by the fact that from the 1980s onwards the direct access to the land depended exclusively on family-inheritance and mostly on self-attribution while the redistribution system was completely eclipsed.

4• Community members that live permanently in the rural communities (without a double residence).

Figure 2.
Evolution of quinoa cultivation area (1961-2011)



Source: Ormachea and Ramirez (2013).

Metais (2011, p. 66) highlights that the household's capital availability became the "main factor in the determination of the rights to use of the land. With more capital, families could equip themselves better (buying a tractor) and thus increasing their [...] land grabbing force", hence capital was introduced as a 'new factor of power' into the local social organization. Nonetheless, although there were inequalities in accessing the land, between the 1980s and the late 1990s, they were not a direct or relevant source of dispute between community members, therefore, they were collectively accepted in accordance with the principle of the *tierras roturadas* (Colque, 2007).

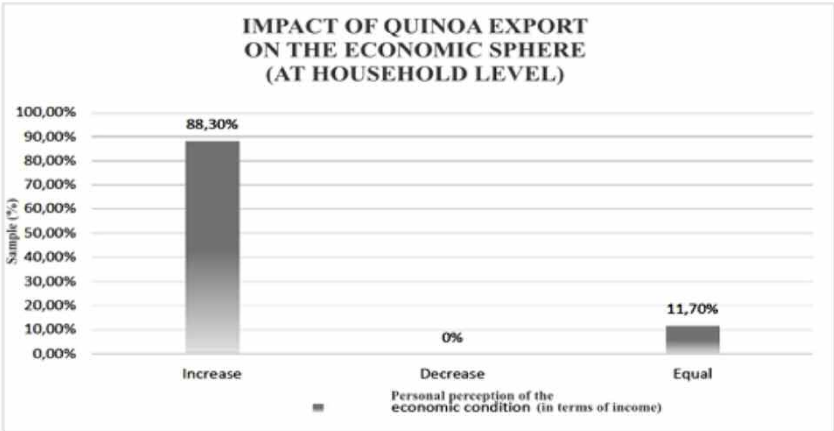
4.1.1. Land question

Although in many Latin American countries 'the land belongs to those who work it' has been the rallying cry of countless struggles for access to the land, in this case – under a differentiated access to mechanization – it has concretely converted into 'the land belongs to those who have the capital to work it'. Besides the possibility of cultivating large land extensions, the owners of tractors began to rent or sell agricultural machinery services to those who did not have the economic availability to invest directly in technological capital. The diversification of the agricultural income allowed the owners of agricultural machineries to maximize the profit deriving from agricultural work and agricultural services. This resulted in a scenario characterized by

a higher accumulation of capital compared to those who did not have the ownership of machineries; a scenario which – during the last twenty years – has been further exacerbated by the exponential increase in the price of quinoa.

Undoubtedly, over the years, the quinoa boom has brought an economic benefit to the whole region. As emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire, 88,30% of the respondents affirmed that there has been an improvement in their economic condition thanks to the explosion of the quinoa market. By contrast, only 11,70% reported that their situation remained unchanged⁵. No one registered a decrease in income (fig. 3).

Figure 3.
Personal perception of the economic impact of the quinoa export (at household level/in terms of change in income).



Source: personal elaboration.

Between the 1980s and 2014 the agro-export growth has been “inclusive” in farm and land dimensions as the characteristics of these dimensions did not affect the possibility of entering the market; namely any producer, regardless of how much land

5• Probably this result (of unchanged situation) has been partly influenced by the fact that, when the questionnaire was administered, there was a negative perception of the price that (in 2017) could influence the general perception of the economic impact of the quinoa boom.

he owned, thanks to high prices, has been able to enter the market by selling quinoa through producer organizations or local intermediaries. However, although up to the end of the 1990s the boom did not cause relevant frictions between the comunarios – since they were all benefiting from the market – in the 2000s, due to the saturation and environmental degradation of the planicies, it started to create discontent within the communities.

Focusing on the current situation we can notice the discrepancy in the access to the land between the group of owners of agricultural machineries and the group of producers without agricultural machineries: the total sample under study had – on average – an usufruct on the land equal to 14,3 ha; 18,3% of the sample was composed of owners of tractors and – on average – they had 32,72 ha of land, equal to 128,8% more than the total average (14,3 ha). The percent variation rises further if we consider not the total hectares of land but only the hectares intended for quinoa cultivation. In this case, the entire sample, in 2017, had an average of hectares cultivated with quinoa equivalent to 6,6 ha, while in the group of tractor owners it was equal to 19,27 ha, 192% more.

Ormachea and Ramirez (2013) and Laguna (2011) argue that the importance of the new figure of the *tractorista* (tractor driver) has encouraged the concentration of land and agricultural services in the hands of a few families of owners. During the emersion of the quinoa economy, they have operated under a privileged condition as they could count on the availability of off-farm incomes, which, progressively, allowed them to expand their control beyond the mere agricultural services, over the local system for quinoa processing and regional transport services.

"When people migrated, those who had the opportunity, brought machinery and now control the land, they did not respect anything. [...] They wanted to take everything [adueñarse de todo]. [...] now they are the ones who have transport [flotas] or who bring tourists here to Alcaya or to the Salar. and we also pay them thirty bolivianos we pay them to go to Oruro. Yes, they want to eat everything" (Gilda, community member of Viroxa – Salinas de Garci Mendoza, November 2017).

According to Vieira (2012) and Colque (2007), nowadays, the community authorities do not have the power to 'expropriate' the lands of a family and redistribute them to others.

"As authorities we cannot do much, here in the area of Salinas everything is already occupied, many producers go to cultivate in Pampas Allaguas, they take

land under sharecropping [al partir]" (Don Silvestre, corregidor [community authority] of Irpani – Salinas de Garci Mendoza, March 2019).

Even if there are inequities in land tenure, their obligation – in accordance with the traditional *usos y costumbres* – is to guarantee the access to the land for the satisfaction of family needs; therefore in terms of land tenure the community are now trapped by the *usufructo de las tierras roturadas* which has not been adapted and reinterpreted in the light of the technical and socio-economic changes brought by the mechanization.

4.1.1.1. Indirect access and further land concentration

The scenario described so far, presented dynamics of agrarian change affecting mainly the sphere of the direct access to the land, however, it must be pointed out that, during the last thirty years, the sharecropping system has spread considerably in the highlands as an additional catalyst for land concentration and consequent social differentiation trajectory. First of all, its use has been increased mostly due to the out-migration flow since many comunarios residentes – from the cities – have been able to preserve and crystallized the access to the land in their home-communities by investing on it the labour of tenants locally called *aparceros*. Currently, the nature of the tenant can be twofold: on the one hand, there is a group of *aparceros* who has a limited access to the land (due to the saturation of the available parcels) or who has no direct access to the community's land (e.g. families with members *comunarios no originarios*) that hence can work it only through an indirect access, and on the other hand, the group of tractor owners who – by offering mechanized work – can expand their land access frontier. In this last case, the sharecropping allows tractor owners to overstep the limits of their home-communities and access land in others which would otherwise be impossible to access with a direct access system. For example, in the municipalities of Salinas de Garci Mendoza and Colcha K, the concentration of more agricultural machineries in the hands of a few families has created a real business that – by employing hired tractor drivers – allows the owners to offer sharecropping services in those communities where there are still no tractors or where these are too few to cover the producers' needs. Usually, the tenant assumes responsibility for the entire production process and its financial expenditures; the product of the harvest is then distributed 25% to the usufructuary and 75% to the tenant (Vassas, 2016).

4.1.2. Capital-labour relations and reciprocity

In the previous section, by discussing the relation between *aparcero* and usufructuary, the article partly shifted to the second sphere within which this study traces the profile of the local agrarian change: the labour sphere. However, in order to understand how the agricultural labour organization has changed under the quinoa boom there is the need to understand how the traditional system of labour reciprocity and family-labour provisioning have evolved in front of a process of commodification of the product. As already said, in the Andean agricultural system, the exchange of reciprocal work has always been a means to cope with the growing lack of manpower, as well as a system for strengthening family ties within the communities of the highlands but, even if reciprocity still represents "a pump at the heart of Andean life" (Allen, 1988, p. 93; Walsh-Dilley, 2013), the new orientation towards the global commodity chains brought an erosion of the community organization of the labour. The practices of *ayni* in agriculture, have been progressively eroded because, first and foremost, the mechanization of the agricultural work has resulted in a capitalization of it, since a price (i.e. exchange value) started to be attributed to mechanized agricultural services (e.g. the price per hour of tractor) and its exchange became hence bonded to capital-labour relations. In so doing, the forms of *ayni* which are practiced today, mainly concern manual work. Furthermore, the growth of the quinoa sector within a context characterized by a massive outflow of family labour resources attracted new agricultural wage-labour (*jornaleros*) required and concentrated in particular tasks of the production cycle and specific periods of the year (e.g. harvest season, from March to the beginning of May).

In the sample, 96,7% declared to have contracted *jornaleros* during the last production cycle. These workers are contracted in the periods of most need and, in some cases, – especially when the household is composed only of two or one person in old age – they almost completely replace both the labour supply of the family and that of the community. Despite the fact that during the harvest period part of the family often returns to their rural villages, many interviewees reported that the fact of being involved in activities in urban centers does not allow rural migrants to conciliate working time with production times. This mostly happens when family members have positions as professional workers in the cities. For example, a producer from the community of Paso de los Lobos states:

"Here the price is 100 bolivianos a day. [...] Of course I have to pay, if not, what can I do? I cannot do it alone. My sons are professionals. They are in Santa Cruz, they have family there [...] they cannot come back whenever they want"

(Juana, community member of Paso de los Lobos – Salinas de Garci Mendoza, December 2017).

The fieldwork makes emerge that those who have limited land extension tend to concentrate contracted labour and purchase of agricultural mechanized services during the preparation of the soil (*barbecho*) and the harvest, then providing family or community labour in other secondary phases (e.g. threshing, winnowing, etc.). On the contrary, those who have a greater access to the land tend to make all the production cycle dependent on capital-labour relations, often contracting other producers of the same community and neighboring communities with less or no land. Nonetheless, the practices of *ayni* are not completely collapsed but they are used almost exclusively for manual activities. A tractor owner during an interview in Salinas de Garci Mendoza reported that the *ayni* was no longer practiced as much as before; nowadays for him it was "*not convenient since the tractor has a high cost and many expenses* (SSI conducted in December 2017). The *ayni* appears awakened by the strengthening of direct relationships between labour and capital, however when the labour market is uncertain or is unable to supply all the resources needed by the community, as for example in the case of the most distant rural communities where there is a lower arrival of wage-workers than those closer to the municipal capital, or when there is a high need for labour concentrated in a specific limited period and there is not all the wage-labour required, the communities still organize collective form of *ayni* to face this uncertainty and scarcity.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The presented case-study makes emerge an agrarian substrate in which the agro-export boom has been drove by peasant production units while, on the contrary, most of the development of the regional Latin America agro-export sector has been, and still is, driven by the presence of big external landowners (Kay, 2015). Moreover, while in the regional scenario, agrarian capitalism and social differentiation have been fostered by the revision of the national constitutions and the formalization of private land titles (De Angelis, 2004), in the highlands, these processes have been indirectly supported by the presence of inert community authorities, imprisoned in their inability to adapt traditional principles (e.g. *tierras roturadas*) to the

current changes. It shows an almost unknown nuance of the regional agrarian capitalist transition by revealing a movement 'from below' that – contrary to what was asserted by Byres (1996) – has not required the demolition of the previous status-quo but simply its inertia. This happens because agrarian capitalism does not generate its own conditions for existence and reproduction *ex nihilo*, but finds pre-existing relationships of production, property, and policies which are used for a new different scope: the expansion and the reproduction of capital (Clarke, 1991; Tomba, 2015). "The expansion of capital and its constant attempt to subsume different forms of production into the global market generates a multiplicity of temporal frictions, asynchronies, and anachronisms that on the one hand capital uses on its own advantage, and on the other hand give rise to a multiplicity of conflicting elements and possibilities for the re-orientation of the trajectories of modernity" (Tomba, 2015, p. 287). Resultantly, in the altiplano, the new configuration led the community – as institutional body – to have its previous and original redistributive role eroded by its indirect endorsement of market-logics. This is currently causing situations of land scarcity and related social discontent rising from the group of *comunarios* with little land or from new families which – given the saturation of the agricultural frontier and the growing soil degradation – have no access to it or have access only to unproductive parcels.

Therefore, even if we are usually accustomed to seeing the peasantry as an always-homogeneous body, as a 'common other' against the expansion frontier of agrarian capitalism, the predatory behavior of capitalism can develop also 'from below' by using and adapting pre-capitalist agrarian conditions and configurations to profit logics. Today capital is undoubtedly making the difference in the extension of land the *comunarios* can access to, as a consequence the Chayanovian demographic differentiation has been widely eclipsed by a social differentiation trajectory. However, the exacerbation and future results of this process are neither obvious nor linearly predictable since a growing claim for a new effective communal regulation is arising from the bottom, from small usufructuaries and almost landless families who constitute the diversified face of the local peasantry. It is only focusing on this just emerged demand for the role of the community authority, asking for land redistribution and sustainable management of the commons, as a way to alleviate social tensions and resource depletion, that future studies will be able to understand how agrarian capitalism evolves in its non-linear course between global dynamics and local peculiarities.

6. References

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