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Rendered visible. A photographic document

Hecho visible. Un documento fotográfico

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Since photography was invented in 1839, it has been used to record, narrate, and convey specific ways to understand the world and its fleeting moments. Whilst the camera has changed from the earliest cumbersome complex instruments, its function largely remains the same. Even since relatively early on, following improved processing and printing methodology, it is known that an image could be manipulated to suit purpose. But largely speaking, since the photograph was first used to bring images to the masses via newspapers and other printed media, it had the reputation of bringing true accounts, reports and records of what had been experienced. It was clearly understood the responsibility the reporting from any journalist, scientist, researcher carried with it, however inevitably biased the result could be. To be discredited if an image was found to have been manipulated to support a story, finding, or research, could have been disastrous for any of the above. The eye of the photographer was then considered as a view point that was human in its individuality as much as in its capacity to convey a shared symbolic universe.

From January 2012 to February 2013 Michael Wildman-Niño and Carolina Borda-Niño-Wildman conducted fieldwork in the city of Sucre, Bolivia, judicial capital of the country and location of its main psychiatric hospital (Instituto Nacional de Psiquiatría Gregorio Pacheco, INPGP). Ours was an ethnographic study of the political economy of violence against peasant and indigenous women within psychiatric, judicial, and community settings. The locus of analysis is the relation that within these contexts is constructed between biomedical, judicial, and indigenous ways of representing humaneness in the treatment of women who have survived violence.

We participated in the everyday life activities of Bolivia's National Psychiatric Hospital for ten months, focusing in the latter part of our fieldwork on the female Intermediate/Chronic Unit. We also studied the hospital's archive, whose documents are held in the psychiatric hospital's archive (1980–2013) and in the National Archive of Bolivia (1884–1979). Later we visited the families and

¹ Scottish born photographer, and director of The Edinburgh Photography School, Michael Wildman has over his career developed a wide variety of interests, including visual anthropology and street photography, amongst others. He is currently working on the second part of a four-year project inspired by the sculptures of Auguste Rodin.

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communities of origin of some of the women who are hospitalized within the female intermediate Chronic Unit of the psychiatric hospital, where we carried out several interviews and could participate in two healing rituals related to *susto* (“the startled” complex), which were performed to heal the consequences of an incestuous relationship and were an essential part of understanding the trajectory of sexual violence from the community to the psychiatric hospital.

A photograph can support a story, bring perhaps a more tangible reality to the written word. It can drive home the main thrust of the story, and in many cases it has proved more effective than words in conveying and also in illustrating a complex reality, suiting sometimes political agendas. One only has to look at the work of, for example, The Farm Security Administration and the effect of the work done by the project’s photographers during the Great Depression in America. They brought attention to the plight of the sharecroppers to the Government and society and getting the aid they needed, but also played a vital role as producers of visual material that supported state propaganda (Library of Congress et.al, 1973).

One can also look at the work of Robert Frank, in particular the seminal project “The Americans”, which documented the tensions of a changing post-war nation (Frank, 1978). In the same vein, the photographs we have included as a document in their own right serve as that, a document, one that is as much a testimony as it portrays a political position regarding mental institutions. Whilst they are not directly referred to within the research they illustrate, the images shown below give context to and support some of what is contained within the walls of the National Psychiatric Hospital in Sucre Bolivia. On looking at the photographs they start to give the viewer an impression, an insight as to the lives that are lived there. By presenting a series of photographs we were bearing witness to the almost unbelievable events we experienced directly and indirectly (Taussig, 2011), but also rendering visible realities that words seems insufficient to convey. In addition to the photographs produced by photographer Michael Wildman, we have photographs taken by the inmates, whom thanks to Michael’s technical guidance (he lead photography workshops), conveyed through their image their view and responses to the place where they are hospitalised. We consider that their visual account added to Michael’s and Carolina’s visual documents will allow the reader to have a more profound, and perhaps more complete understanding of what it means to be a mental patient in one of Bolivia’s mental institutions.

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Entrance to the INPGP and to the St John of God's church.
Photograph by Michael Wildman





RESIDENCIA
SOR. MARCELA DECO



Exterior view of the Female Chronic Unit, INP-GP. Two inmates contemplate the corridor that leads to the male pavilion, 300 metres below.
Photograph by Michael Wildman





Sara Ramos.
Photograph by Michael Wildman

The potato store at the INPGR, located within the Female pavilion.
Photograph by Michael Wildman



“The imprisoned virgin”, according to Delia. She came to visit her once a week in the garden located within the female pavilion. Photograph by Delia Choque.



Don Facundo, the Jampiri (healer) who practises the area around Leuquepampa, in Chuquisaca, Bolivia. In his hands a bible printed in Quechua, which he chose (as well as the pose) for the photograph. Photograph by Michael Wildman



Pigsty in the rear yard at The Farm of the INPGP.
Photograph by Michael Wildman



An avenue of fruit trees at The Farm.
Photograph by Michael Wildman



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Disused store at The Farm.
Photograph by Michael Wildma



Nurses drawing an outline around Delia's and a male inmate's body during an arts festival. Delia was given the order to lie down, and so she did obey. Photograph by Carolina B.N.W



In the words of one Juana, "I am not [made] of pills I am [made] of soil". Photograph by Juana Andrade.

Main hall of the acute unit at the old "Manicomio Pacheco" for women. Photograph by Michael Wildman

