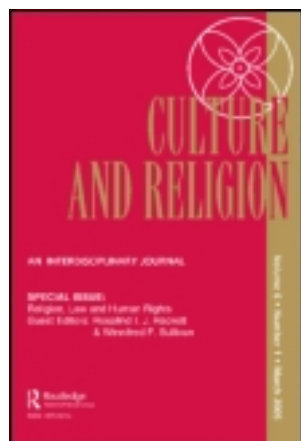




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Battered women venerating a vicious Virgin: Reconsidering Marianismo at a Bolivian pilgrimage shrine

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Battered women venerating a vicious Virgin: Reconsidering *Marianismo* at a Bolivian pilgrimage shrine

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Scholarly literature on domestic violence in Latin America often relates it to *machismo* and *marianismo*. Within this gender paradigm, women are understood to embrace the values of the Virgin Mary as a passive submissive role model. However, these studies omit facts relating to the actual role of the Virgin in daily practices. This article investigates whether women indeed view Mary as encouraging them to passively accept gender-related suffering by relating Bolivian women's experiences of domestic violence to their daily interpretations of the Virgin of Urkupiña in Quillacollo, Bolivia. We have found that the influences of religious syncretism have been largely ignored. In daily religious experiences of battered women the Virgin of Urkupiña's association with Pachamama is of great importance. We argue that women do not accept their situation in a marianistic way. Rather, rage is a central concept in their religious experiences. As their economical, social and physical means are limited, women draw on spiritual powers, among which is the Virgin of Urkupiña. The Virgin of Urkupiña is not only venerated for her capacity to endure suffering, but also as a powerful goddess of vengeance.

Keywords: marianismo; Mary; Bolivia; pilgrimage; domestic violence

In 2007 alarming figures were published demonstrating that seven out of every ten Bolivian women are subject to physical violence.¹ Almost all cases involve violence within the marriage, conducted by a male partner. During fieldwork at and around a Marian pilgrimage site in Quillacollo, Bolivia, many female pilgrims from different social backgrounds underlined this dramatic fact. They were said to prefer having boys, as girls would only suffer from marriage and motherhood. They find themselves in an impasse. For their daughters they have other hopes, but in spite of continuing fights women rather stay married than leave their husbands and live alone with their children.²

Several studies explain the prevalence of domestic violence in Latin America and the way in which men and women deal with this by the dominant gender stereotypes called *machismo* and *marianismo* (e.g. Ellsberg et al. 2000; Flake and

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Forste 2006; Sagot 2005; Salyers Bull 1998). *Machismo* refers to the stereotypical ideal of Latin American masculinity and describes the ideal man as strong, virile, competitive and dominant. The counterpart of this ideal, called *marianismo*, introduced by Stevens in 1973, ascribes a passive and submissive role to women, who are said to embrace the values of the Virgin Mary as a mother who makes sacrifices for her child. In studies departing from theories of *machismo* and *marianismo* (e.g. Ellsberg et al. 2000; Flake and Forste 2006; Sagot 2005; Salyers Bull 1998), two assumptions are made regarding women's role in domestic violence. First, these studies assume that Latin American women have a resigned attitude towards the violence that is done to them by their partners. Second, they take the function of the Virgin Mary as a role model for women's passive behaviour for granted. This creates not just a generalised and distorted image of Latin American women, but also of the Virgin Mary, assuming that she is only venerated because of her submissiveness and passivity.

Several studies have already shown that the notions of *machismo* and *marianismo* represent a too simplistic image of the gender relations in Latin America as they define women in opposition to men, overlooking differences within these groups (Ehlers 1991; Guttman 1996; Navarro 2002; Steenbeek 1986, 1995). We thoroughly support these studies for correcting the first assumption regarding the distorted image of Latin American men and women. However, the second assumption regarding the perception of Mary as a role model for suffering and submission remains unquestioned. So far, it has not been explored how women that are involved in violent relationships actually interpret the Virgin Mary in daily practice. Therefore, this article contributes to the criticism on the concept of *marianismo* from a new point of view. By analysing how female pilgrims interpret the Virgin of Urkupiña, we show what kind of role model she actually is in daily practice. In some ways the ideas attributed to the Virgin of Urkupiña correspond with the qualities attributed to her in *marianismo*, but in others, pilgrims' interpretations are in direct opposition to it.

The veneration of the Virgin Mary is an important part of Bolivian culture (Derks 2009a; Lagos 1993; Parker 1996;).³ The devotion for the Virgin of Urkupiña, who according to the church legend appeared to an indigenous shepherd girl in the sixteenth century, in the central region of Quillacollo has increased from a local shrine into one of the biggest national pilgrimage centres. Especially, in August, when the annual *fiesta* for the Virgin of Urkupiña is held, thousands of pilgrims flock to Quillacollo by bus or by car to walk up the Calvary Hill to the shrine. Quillacollo was originally a market town in a valley of the Andes, inhabited by Quechuas. During the past decades Aymara migrants have also settled down in the expanding city.⁴

During the colonisation and catholicisation of Quillacollo, the Spaniards introduced the Virgin Mary in Bolivia. Immediately, the *indígenas* associated the figure with *Pachamama*. The word Pachamama is composed of the Quechua and Aymara words *pacha* and *mama*. *Pacha* means space and universe, as well as

time and history. In Quechua, the word *mama* means mother and in Aymara, woman (Harris 2000).⁵ Pachamama was considered one of the most important entities in the Andean cosmology presiding over planting and harvest. Therefore, Pachamama is often translated as Mother Earth. Local inhabitants saw correspondences between both figures because of their roles as protective and fertile mothers (Van Kessel 1992, 88). Up to today, elements in the veneration of the Virgin of Urkupiña that do not necessarily correspond with the Catholic doctrine are derived from the veneration of Pachamama.

In the pilgrims' eyes their characters have also merged. Many pilgrims see the Virgin of Urkupiña as a woman with a dual character, just as Pachamama, who can make the harvest flourish but is also considered capable of causing death and diseases. The perception of the Virgin as unifying good and bad within her is derived from the cosmology of the Andes in which a plurivalent attitude is adopted towards all elements in the world (Harris 2000). Within this cosmology it is assumed that nothing can exist without its opposite (Albo 1987; Berg 1990). According to the pilgrims, the Virgin Mary of Urkupiña can not only act in 'a good way', as the Roman Catholic Church assumes Mary to, but also apply 'evil' powers. This form of syncretism of a Catholic saint and a local goddess reminds of the way African and Cuban religious beliefs are mixed with Roman Catholicism in *santería* or voodoo (e.g. Gonzales 2006; McCarthy Brown 2001). The other side of the coin, the 'evil' side of the Virgin of Urkupiña, plays a significant role in the requests she is approached for. The Virgin is not only venerated for her assumed talent for passive suffering, but also because of her power and vindictiveness.

Derks investigated the practices and experiences of Bolivian pilgrims during 16 months of anthropological fieldwork in Bolivia, in 2005, 2007 and 2008. Through participant observation at and around the pilgrimage shrine, Derks established profound contacts with the vendors at the shrine, spoke to pilgrims who came to make their requests, participated in several religious ceremonies and visited pilgrims at their homes. With 25 pilgrims, mostly women, repetitive ethnographic interviews were held. From this group, five women were followed extensively during their daily activities. One of these women, Margarita, a poor Aymara woman working at the pilgrimage place, takes a central place in this article.

Contesting *marianismo*: Actively dealing with domestic violence

In scholarly literature, the gender notions of *machismo* and *marianismo* are often used to explain the high levels of domestic violence in Latin America. The term *marianismo* was introduced by Stevens (1973) to Latin American studies. She defines *marianismo* as: 'the cult of feminine spiritual superiority, which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men' (Stevens 1973, 91). According to Stevens the spiritual strength of Latin American women 'engenders abnegation, that is, an infinite capacity for humility

and sacrifice' (Stevens 1973, 94). Stevens chose the term *marianismo* because in her view the attitudes and behaviour of women in Latin America are derived from the values attributed to the Virgin Mary.

After Stevens introduced the term, numerous studies have used the concept to describe notions of femininity in Latin America (e.g. Ellsberg et al. 2000; Flake and Forste 2006; Sagot 2005; Salyers Bull 1998). For example, Salyers Bull (1998, 3) defines *marianismo* as follows:

Marianismo refers to a concept that incorporates female gender-roles. The term is derived from the Virgin Mary. Embodied in this term are the concepts of virginity, chastity, honor and shame, the ability to suffer and willingness to serve.

By using the term *marianismo*, the authors refer to women's capacity to suffer, emphasising that these characteristics are derived from the Virgin Mary as a role model for submission.

The concepts of *marianismo* and *machismo* have not only been used and reproduced, but have also been widely criticised. Stevens (1973) analyses *marianismo* in opposition to *machismo*, presenting the two as counterparts on a continuum. Hereby the concepts are reduced to a dichotomy that does not leave much space for the multidimensionality that comes to the fore in daily life (Steenbeek 1986, 1995; Guttman 1996). While certain gender roles can indeed be detected in every society, in practice there is great variety among men and women in the way these roles are applied and interpreted. Men as well as women do not always behave according to the *machismo* and *marianismo* stereotypes that were proclaimed by Stevens (Guttman 1996). In addition, Ehlers (1991, 1) notes that the stereotypical concepts of *machismo* and *marianismo* are applied indiscriminately to an entire continent, without taking cultural and contextual differences into account. In her article 'Against Marianismo' (Navarro 2002) severely criticises Stevens' work concluding that '*marianismo* is an a-historical, essentialist, anachronistic, sexist, and orientalist fabrication.'

When looking at studies that consider Latin American women's actual behaviour in marriage, we see that this is not merely passive (e.g. Ehlers 1991; Browner and Lewin 1982; Derks and Heessels 2009; Steenbeek 1986, 1995). For instance, women strategically stay with their husbands out of economic motives (Ehlers 1991; Browner and Lewin 1982; Derks and Heessels 2009) and, for instance, Steenbeek (1995) shows how Mexican women use their own strategies to resist the dominant behaviour by their men, by fleeing to their parental house. In the remainder of this section we show by means of the case of Margarita that the physical violence of men towards their wives in Bolivia is not merely accepted in a 'marianistic' way.

Margarita is a 44-year-old Aymara woman. She grew up in a village in the La Paz province, among sheep and llamas. After her father died when she was seven, she moved to a miners' town with her older sister, because their mother could not take care of them and their seven brothers and sisters. Until the age of 12,

Margarita helped her sister out by doing household chores. After that she started working in the mines. At the age of 17 Margarita moved to Quillacollo and started working as a saleswoman. Initially, she sold fruits, but then switched to selling oblations at the pilgrimage shrine earning a mean income of US\$500 per year (e.g. Derks 2009b). Since Margarita was young, she earned her own money. She valued her independent lifestyle and refused to get married.

Despite her protests, Margarita's brothers pressured her to marry. Margarita recounted:

I did not want children, so why would I want a man? I always hated men. I had seen so many examples of women treated badly by their husbands. My sister was always hit and what do you think of the numerous women who work at the market with wounds and black eyes?

Eventually, Margarita gave in to the social pressure to marry. Margarita's brothers presented a man to her, Carlos, a 26-year-old colleague of theirs, who worked as a taxi driver. Margarita married him. The marriage lasted three years and two months. During this period, Margarita gave birth to a son and a daughter.

The marriage met Margarita's negative prospects. Her husband's violent behaviour started shortly after the marriage as she remembers well:

After one month of marriage, I had to travel for the fruit sale. On my way, I passed through a village where I knew a man, Juanito. He fancied me for a long time already, but I was not interested in him. Juanito did not know that I was married. We were eating together, when my husband suddenly appeared in the doorway. Carlos asked me to come outside. I was scared. Without saying anything we sat next to each other. Suddenly Juanito approached us and hit me in the eye with his fist. He said: 'You are married!' My husband stood up to defend me and started fighting with Juanito, until the owner of the restaurant came to intervene.

Margarita laughed about it: 'Can you imagine? Two men fighting over me, whereas I preferred to be single!' She continued:

We went back to Quillacollo together, by bus. Halfway there the bus broke down on the road. I wanted to sleep alone, but all other passengers insisted that I would sleep next to him. They said: 'How can you reject this poor little boy? You are his wife.' There, on the road I experienced my first time with him. We played the happy couple. We played it all. I was so scared, but I did not dare to say no. Since then he got jealous of me.

This trip marked the beginning of the violence. According to Margarita this was caused by the fact that her husband had seen that other men were interested in his wife, which enraged him. Second, they had their first sexual experience. Margarita explained that this gave him a sense of ownership. She said: 'It was terrible when he arrived late, with the dirty smell of alcohol. "Don't come close to me" I said. But he answered: "For something you are my wife". And I could not say anything. I just shut up, so at least he would not beat me.' Margarita showed her teeth. She had only eight teeth left: 'Look, these three teeth are gone, because he hit me with a shoe. In another fight this one has been knocked out with a fist. And on the other side I also lost three because of a beating.

Most battered women refrain from ending their relationship for several reasons. First, domestic violence has long been viewed as a justified way of solving problems by men as well as women. It took until the past decade for domestic violence to become one of the topics on the political agenda in Bolivia. Only since 1995, a law has been approved that makes it possible to punish the offenders by fining or arresting them. Now, special police departments have been installed aiming to eradicate domestic violence at a local level. However, there have been problems with the implementation of this law. Women often do not know the law, they feel embarrassed or are afraid of revenge of their spouses (Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (CLADEM 2005). In addition, domestic violence is still not always experienced or reported as a crime (Defensor del Pueblo 2006).

Second, women marry and stay married to protect the respected status of themselves and their children. For example, one woman said: 'I'd rather stay with this dog, than leave him and be looked at askance by my family and acquaintances in the street.' After the divorce women have to deal with the social stigma of having failed as a wife and mother (Ellsberg et al. 2000, 1905). The social pressure is great. Even on a local bus, Margarita was pushed by unknown bystanders to lie next to her husband. In Quillacollo, many women indicated that they did not separate from their husbands because they were afraid to lose respect in the society, for themselves but even more so for their children. Afraid of being rejected by their families, they do not easily ask for help. Only in extreme cases the *Quillacolleñas* were said to flee to their relatives, usually their mothers (see also Steenbeek 1995).

Nevertheless, Margarita managed to end her marriage without losing face in the eyes of the community. Under certain circumstances separation is socially accepted. In the case of Margarita, her husband publicly cheated on her with another woman, which is considered a fair reason for separation, because he publicly shamed the family (see also Steenbeek 1995). When a separation is socially recognised in such a way, women do not lose their honour. Some female pilgrims strategically used these social conventions to frame a separation as 'fair'. At the time of research, it was ten years ago that Margarita's marriage ended. She emphasised being happy alone and being proud of having limited the suffering from domestic violence, because she had only one relationship with a man.

Subsequently, economic motives play a role in staying with a violent husband. The study of Browner and Lewin (1982, 65–70) reveals that Latin American working-class women see marriage first and foremost as an economic resource evaluating a husband's worth primarily in terms of his ability and willingness to meet the material needs of his family. Women view marriage as a way of officially binding a man to provide for the family, while they bear and raise children (ibid.). The situation described by the pilgrims from Quillacollo is comparable. Many female pilgrims have a low income and need the financial support of a husband to take care of themselves and their children.

Finally, fear plays a role in the decision to stay with a violent husband. Some women said that they were afraid of what would happen after making such a decision. For example, a market woman explained:

If he is capable of attacking me with shoes, sticks, and knives only for little things, such as not cooking what he likes. What will he do when I leave him? I am afraid my children will have to live without their mother . . .

Accordingly, there is a complex of reasons keeping women from leaving their husbands. Women find themselves in a difficult situation. They are socially expected to stay with their husbands and often, even by women themselves, violence is viewed as acceptable. Moreover, the consequences of a divorce are very large in social, economic, physical and emotional respects. But the stories of women such as Margarita show that instead of passively accepting their fate, women strategically handle social conventions. Besides, next to suffering, the word *rabia* arose time and again in their stories.

Rabia can be translated as intense anger. We found that *rabia* was also the most frequently mentioned reaction of women to the violence. *Rabia* can be compared to the Mexican term *coraje* (e.g. Behar 1990; Cartwright 2007; Heessels 2006; Steenbeek 1995). Behar (1990, 241) described *coraje* as 'part of a feminine ontology of suffering and despair.' We maintain, in line with Steenbeek (1995, 231), that *coraje* is not only about despair, it also means courage. This belligerent emotion does not coincide with the notion of *marianismo*, in which women are assumed to passively accept their suffering fate.

During an offering at the pilgrimage site one of the pilgrims recounted of the *rabia* that took possession of her and that gave her the courage to fight back against her violent partner:

This *rabia* sits inside and swallows you up. I could not go anywhere. After all, where can you go with seven children? On one occasion I have expressed my *rabia* and fought with him. He came home drunk and couldn't find his key. Then he tried to break the window with a stone and forced the door. I already knew what would happen. I despised him. At that moment the *rabia* took possession of me. I took a stick and smashed him on his knee. Normally, he is very quick, and when he hits me I fall down quickly. Usually he starts punching my face, next my belly, and afterwards I don't know because I cannot remember. This time I attacked him before he could do anything. Only one time I did this and I have had to pay dearly for it . . . Now I know that it is better to keep my *rabia* within me.

Her rage made the pilgrim fight her husband demonstrating her courage to stand up against the violence. However, she experienced the *rabia* as a loss of control. As she suffered from the consequences, physically and emotionally, in the end she did not consider it an effective strategy. Although women often stay in an abusive relationship, they do not simply accept their suffering nor consider the suffering a marianistic ideal. While they do not only fight back physically, they have also found other sources to resist namely on a spiritual level.

Spiritually fighting back

Pilgrims narrated of fighting back by spiritual means, transferring their rage to a supernatural world. *Rabia* is believed to manifest itself physically in the form of an illness (Behar 1990; Cartwright 2007). Symptoms include diarrhoea, headaches, lethargy and stomach aches. To cure these emotional and physical sensations, the female pilgrims called upon local healers known as *curanderos* or *yatiris*.⁶ Joralemon and Sharon (1993) demonstrated how most clients of *curanderos* in neighbouring Peru related their pain to strife within marital relations. They showed how visiting a *curandero* functions as a means of resistance 'providing women with a strategic means by which to hold men morally accountable for abusive behaviour' (Joralemon and Sharon 1993, 232). In addition to visiting *curanderos* with their wounds, holding men accountable for their actions through making their suffering visible, the pilgrims emphasised the powers of the spells of *curanderos* to take revenge.

The theme of *curanderos* and their powerful spells also comes to the fore in Margarita's story. The violence against Margarita ended because she called upon help from her family. In the end her brother intervened violently. He was visiting her when Margarita's husband Carlos came home with another woman in his car. Margarita's brother asked why he was driving another woman in his car. Margarita's husband answered: 'Because I am young!' Margarita's brother started hitting her husband.

Next to asking her family to intervene, Margarita did something else to protect her and her son and revenge further actions from Carlos:

When my husband was hit, a lot of blood flowed out of his nose. I drank this blood against a potential curse. People always say you have to drink the blood of an 'enemy'. So in case someone wants to perform a ritual against you, the curse does not fall on you, but bounces back to the curser. After the fight, my husband left with that other woman. Afterwards, the father of his new girlfriend, who was a *yatiri*, must have performed a ritual against me and my son. She wanted me and my child to die, probably because she did not want him to pay alimony for my son. But the curse did not fall on me. As I drank his blood, the curse was bounced and fell on my husband. After a few years my husband died.

In this case witchcraft functions as a strategy used by marginalised women to influence unequal intimate relations (e.g. Jansen 1987, 116–117; Joralemon and Sharon 1993). By drinking the blood to prevent a possible curse, Margarita protected herself from her husband, but also performed an act of vengeance, as the curse turned back on her husband.

As women have difficulties in changing their relationships, because social, economic and legal sources are limited, magic provides them with a powerful tool that operates in a different kind of logic. It gives them the power to interfere in their relationships on a spiritual level. Besides, it makes the female pilgrims feel strong in another way, not by using physical violence, but by using their wit and magic they try to establish an act of revenge.

Another spiritual source used by women to mobilise revenge is the Virgin of Urkupiña. In this context, the Virgin's association with Pachamama is central. Because many people associate the Virgin of Urkupiña with the dual character of Pachamama, they believe that she can act out of love as well as *rabia*. According to the believers, when the Virgin of Urkupiña turns her anger against you, her punishments are not mild. She can let the harvest fail or cause accidents and illnesses, even with fatal consequences (Harris 2000; Van Kessel 1992). For instance, a pilgrim recounted how she promised to come back to the pilgrimage site to give thanks for a granted request. But, she forgot to visit the Virgin. After a while, her firstborn child died. The pilgrim considered her daughter's death as a punishment of the Virgin and made sure to visit the pilgrimage site again to repay the powerful Virgin. Others spoke about going bankrupt after not completing their promises after requesting the Virgin's help with opening a new business.

The principle of reciprocity that is central to the cosmology of the Andes (Berg 1990) was transferred to the way that believers approach the Virgin of Urkupiña. They assume that they cannot receive anything without giving something in return. In exchange for Mary's intervention, pilgrims do oblations with alcohol or combustions with tobacco, sweets, coca and herbs at the pilgrimage centre. Often they promise to dedicate a mass to the Virgin, to dance for her or to return to the pilgrimage centre in the future in return for her assistance.

Another important consequence of the syncretism of Pachamama and the Virgin of Urkupiña is the fact that pilgrims attribute independent powers to Mary. Pachamama is viewed as an independent deity who does not act on behalf of a superior deity. In correspondence, the Virgin of Urkupiña is not considered a mediator between God and human beings. In the view of the pilgrims, she has the power to evaluate the situation and decide independently if intervention is needed.

In Bolivia, pilgrims approach the Virgin of Urkupiña as a woman of flesh and blood rather than a static, lifeless stature or mere representation. She is regarded as a strong, decisive woman of high class and status who can sometimes be jealous and violent in her actions. Her independent character is reflected in her image. She is portrayed as a powerful and authoritarian lady. As (Freedberg 1989, 109) notes, there is a perceived relationship between looks and efficacy. The Virgin of Urkupiña is decked with gold and jewellery; she has a crown and a sceptre symbolising her ruling powers. Her clothes, full of embroidery and brilliance, and her expensive jewellery complete the picture. Many poor pilgrims say: 'Look how rich she is! She is overloaded with gold. You have to go to her for wealth, as she has enough.' By imbuing her image with a personality, the pilgrims bring the sacred intangible world of Mary closer to their daily lives. By speaking about her as a woman with a unique personality and giving her presents in return for her help, pilgrims create a personal relationship between them and Mary.

The Virgin of Urkupiña is thus loved as well as feared for the power and violence with which she can give and take. The Virgin of Urkupiña is viewed as dominant, strong and in control. In fact, she acts according to the stereotypical behaviour of the *macho* man. In this way, the dichotomy between the two concepts *machismo* and *marianismo* is broken up, as Mary, who according to Stevens and followers is supposed to behave according to the prescribed characteristics of *marianismo*, is interpreted by the Bolivians as a feminine deity that incorporates *machistic* behaviour. The Virgin of Urkupiña transgresses female gender stereotypes of herself.⁷

Because of Urkupiña's perceived powers, pilgrims approached the Virgin with their *rabia* requesting her to intervene in their marriages. They asked her to change the behaviour of their husband, to stop the violence or to take revenge. Women who made these requests usually came alone to the pilgrimage shrine or with a female friend or relative. We do not know of women who made their requests related to their violent husbands explicit at the site.

The Virgin's 'spiritual strength' defined by Stevens (1973) as 'an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice' is not reflected in the perceptions of devotees. Instead, her strength lies in her capacities of persuasion and command. She tells people to change jobs, to make babies or to discuss their problems. The women explained that they received instructions in their sleep by means of visions or dreams. Margarita remembered a dream she had in the time she was still married:

The Virgin Mary came out of the ground near the Calvary Hill. She had the most beautiful face I ever saw. She came to me, but I was too shy to look her in the eyes. But she insisted and when I looked into her eyes, she opened her arms. I couldn't do anything else than embrace her. She said: 'Don't cry, *wawitay* –child'. When she was holding me, I saw my husband pass by on a dirty, dusty road. He carried a very heavy bag. The bag was so heavy that he almost collapsed!

This dream shows that the pilgrims believe in the fact that the Virgin can act revengeful. According to Margarita, she knew from this dream that her husband would lead a heavy life and that sooner or later he would be punished for his deeds. She ascribes his early death to her requests to the Virgin: 'Because of the Virgin of Urkupiña the curse fell on him!'

In the perceptions of the female pilgrims, Mary not only helps them to accept their suffering, because they find a place to tell her their story and experience comfort in that. The Virgin of Urkupiña is also perceived as supporting their resistance and anger, as she is viewed as an independent powerful woman. As another female pilgrim recounted extensively about her 40-year lasting marriage with a violent husband: 'I have begged Urkupiña for years to intervene in my marriage. My husband was a tailor, and now he is becoming blind. I think it is Mary's punishment for being such a bad husband all those years.' In the perception of the pilgrims, the Virgin of Urkupiña is able to exact vengeance for them, by making their partner ill.

The pilgrims thus not only ask her to help them live with their suffering as the *marianismo* construct implies, but they also actively ask for change. By making

petitions, offering and praying, the pilgrims tried to use the malignant powers of the Virgin of Urkupiña.

Conclusions

Marianismo has provided social scientists with a conceptual tool for understanding women's behaviour in Latin American contexts. However, research at and around the Bolivian pilgrimage shrine of Quillacollo demonstrates that women's submissive behaviour as well as the image of the Virgin is in fact more complex than their presentation in the concept of *marianismo*. We have found that the influences of religious syncretism have been largely ignored in this respect. In daily religious experiences of battered women the Virgin of Urkupiña's association with Pachamama, a powerful and vicious Andean deity, is of great importance.

Looking at the actual interpretations that these battered women attribute to the Virgin of Urkupiña, we see that submissiveness is not viewed as a core virtue. Instead, women view her as first and foremost as powerful. They venerate the Virgin of Urkupiña for her vengeful character and her ability to interfere violently in the lives of the women's husbands. Viewed through the lens of Pachamama, new characteristics of the Virgin of Urkupiña are enlightened.

When looking at the daily experiences of female pilgrims who are involved in a violent relationship, we see that women do not passively accept the violence. While their means to fight the violence are limited, the pilgrims draw on precious sources such as a network of relatives, broader social support for separation in certain situations and supernatural sources. On the one hand, women feel supported by the Virgin, who gives them hope and strength to endure when they are trapped in a violent marriage. As such their situation is thus maintained.

However, though their stories are full of suffering, they do not merely accept their suffering in marianistic terms, they actively negotiate their position as married or separated women. Moreover, a profound rage or *rabia* came up as a key concept in the experience of domestic violence of Bolivian women. By mobilising the supernatural world the female pilgrims show that they do not passively endure the violence or view enduring of violence as a virtue, as a marianistic interpretation implies. They fight back, literally as well as indirectly by means of mobilising spiritual resources, in which the Virgin of Urkupiña plays a significant role. The Virgin of Urkupiña also challenges marianistic values as she is believed to act on behalf of women's *rabia* and is able to take revenge on men and impose her will on women as well.

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Notes

1. Data published by the UK-based NGO Womankind Worldwide: www.womankind.org.uk, 2008 (Buvinic et al. 1999; Ministerio de Salud y Deportes 2004).
2. In 2001 more than 56% of the Bolivians of 15 years and older lived together with a man, whether or not married (INE [Instituto Nacional de Estadística] 2007, 90). In Bolivia it is common, in particular among the poor, to live together for several years without the formality of marriage in order to save for the expenses of a formal celebration. Often people state publicly that they 'have a husband or wife' after their parents legitimate the relationship in the betrothal ceremony, even if it takes years before they have saved enough money to afford their Catholic wedding ceremony and *fiesta* (Van Vleet 2008, 130).
3. Although from a theological viewpoint there is only one Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, over the world there are thousands of depictions and representations of the Virgin Mary. She is approached for a multiplicity of reasons and interpreted with a variety of different meanings. In Bolivia for instance, every region has another representation of Mary as patroness.
4. The Quechuas and the Aymaras are the largest groups of highland Indians in Bolivia.
5. In addition, the name *wirjunn* (Virgin) is used in the central Andes to refer to Pachamama (Harris 2000, 2).
6. Within the Aymara and Quechua terminology different ritual practitioners are distinguished (Fernández Juárez 2004). In Quillacollo the curers are not specified, but are referred to as *curandero* or *yatiri*. These ritual specialists master the art of sorcery with its strict rules on words, sequence, timing and ingredients (Favret Saada 1980; Mamani Bernarde 2002).
7. From these examples indirectly follows that class inequalities between the 'rich' Virgin and the mainly poor pilgrims are reproduced (for more information see Derks 2009a).

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