Stigma or Sacredness. Notes on Dealing with Disability in an Andean Culture[1]

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"One is not disabled, one is made disabled" ("Behindert ist man nicht. Behindert wird man"). This slogan appeared on a poster produced by the charity Aktion Sorgenkind and refers to Article 3, paragraph 3 of the German constitution, which states that "nobody should be discriminated against on the grounds of a disability". This poster campaign is supported by 85 other German organisations for the disabled and says simply that it is society's reaction which creates disability. Stigma, legitimisation and exchange value are three important concepts towards an understanding of the cultural differences in the construction of disability. Today stigma is understood as being visually marked in a *negative* way. With visible stigma an illness becomes *legitimate*. Legitimate illness leads to sympathy, consideration, help and to culturally appropriate behaviour toward the sick person. Illness can also have a profit, a bonus, an exchange value. And quite a number of sick or disabled people know how to use this bonus best and most constructively.[2] In the following text I will present some case studies of disability in the Andes and discuss them from the point of view of cultural resources for and barriers to coping with disability, as well as from the point of view of the concepts stigma, legitimisation and exchange value. The case reports are from the Kallawaya region in the Andes of Bolivia (the province of Bautista Saavedra), where I have been carrying out field research for the past fifteen years. Before presenting the case reports, however, I must first present briefly the living conditions in this area. For it is only against this background that cultural resources and barriers when dealing with disability can become clear.

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Living Conditions at a Height of Almost 4,000 Metres

The Quechua-speaking people in the Kallawaya region live from farming and livestock, at a height of over 4,200 metres, keeping lama and alpaca herds. The potato is the chief form of nourishment, there is an abundance of herbs, some vegetables at certain heights only, and very little meat. The villages, which with very few exceptions comprise 20 or 30 families, are situated at a height of between 3,500 and 4,200 metres. This mountain world is very rugged. Except for a few bumpy gravel roads, there are mostly only narrow mule tracks connecting the villages. One family's fields are often several small parcels of land spread over a large area so that working in the fields for one day means a long march east and the next a long march west. Pastures for the sheep and a few cattle are few and far between at this height and you have to go a long way to get to them. They are often a day's march away, so that the little shepherds (they are mostly children) have to spend the night outside. The families have many children and all the children are expected to work from the age of three, four or five – fetching water from the springs, looking for sticks, brushwood or dung for the hearth fires, taking the sheep to pasture, looking after younger brothers and sisters, helping in the fields. Everyone is needed, everyone has to lend a hand. The climate is harsh in the Apolobamba-Kordillere. There is the dry season when the temperature at night drops to minus ten degrees – or in the case of the alpaca shepherds to minus twenty degrees (although by day they can rise to 25 or 30 degrees), and the rainy season, which is much more unpleasant – then the temperatures are always just above freezing and it can literally rain for weeks on end. The huts are between 12 and 20 metres square. In a native hut there is no water, electricity or heating. The cooking is done over a clay hearth. Usually one single hut is used for cooking, eating and sleeping. Working, talking, loving, giving birth and dying – all take place here.

The religious life of the Quechua people who live there is very rich and extensive. Nominally they are all Catholics but in reality it is only their pre-Christian religion which is really alive. Their highest deity is Pachamama, Mother Earth. The mountains are the dwelling places of the gods, as are the places of offering of the huts. Wherever lightning strikes, a god takes his home. The gods are worshipped through sacrificial offerings and prayer. The relationship of the people here to the gods is governed by the same principle as that among the people themselves – that is to say according to the principles of reciprocity, of a balanced give and take. Giving and accepting help are two of the most common acts amongst the

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people here. And taking from the gods – well-being and health, protection and fertility of people, animals and fields – and this cannot happen without *giving* – the sacrificial offerings, the worship, the prayer. These are just some remarks on the living conditions of the Quechua people of the Kallawaya region, some of whom I would like to introduce you to in more detail later.

Case Reports from the Andes

René with the Crutch

René is about 30 years old, married, with four children. He lives in Amarete. René has polio in his right leg and drags himself about on his crutch and his one healthy leg with difficulty. He is so disabled that field work, looking after animals, hut building, the long distances in the Andes and many other normal daily tasks and demands are impossible for him. All the men join in the building of the community hut. René cannot. He keeps the list of who has contributed to community work, when, and for how long. He directs the men's food and the timing of the necessary house building ritual. He looks after the guest (myself). He keeps morale high. No house may be built in the Andes without making an offering to the most important gods so that they will protect the house and everything that will take place in it in future. This *tejsi* ritual has to be carried out by a recognised ritualist. Amongst other things a number of so-called sacrificial nests are prepared – small bowls of cotton wool into which various ingredients such as carnation blossoms, crumbs of incense, coca leaves, etc. are laid. These sacrificial nests are dedicated to particular gods and represent pleas to them for protection. There are, for example, a series of sacrificial nests for the gods of lightning so that they will not strike the village's planned community hut. There are offerings for the most important mountains of the region, which are responsible for food, clement weather, rain at the right time. If there is no food, then the people in the community hut will go hungry instead of sharing ceremonial meals. The preparation of these sacrificial nests is a long and intensive, and above all *communal* process. And the sacrificial nests themselves take in symbolically all the people's wishes and all preoccupations – this is actually made visible in their forming and audible in the accompanying prayer. It is not just the medicine man or ritualist who is active with all others sitting passively by, watching and listening. No – everyone is continually active throughout. Some of the men look for good coca

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leaves from a bag of coca, others pluck the blossoms, and yet others break up the lama tallow into small pieces. They all bring what they have prepared to the ritualist, who is always the first to fill the sacrificial nests. Once he has filled them, the other people involved have their turn – for each of the ingredients. Thus if the ritualist, for example, has just placed a number of coca leaves in the sacrificial nests he then calls the men and each of them must place some leaves in as well, praying at the same time. The same procedure is followed with the lama tallow, the carnation blossom and so on. So the congregation does not just sit stiffly by, everyone is constantly in motion, moving towards the place where the offering is being prepared, approaching, depositing and then moving back to their place.

And what of René? This continual movement backwards and forwards would be impossible for him. Would a possible solution be for him to position himself near, or indeed right next to the medicine man? That would not work. In Amarete, the village in which René lives, everybody has their own particular, predetermined position depending upon their threefold gender. Here everyone has three genders. Their multiple symbolic gender is dependent upon the gender of their fields and the official office that they hold. Here even official offices have a gender, and their gender, together with that of the fields, determines the seating plan and movement in the room. So within the context of movement allowed him by his disability, René is strongly predestined by the symbolic gender organisation of the Andean space. And according to these ritual rules he has to sit a considerable way away from the ritualist. So how should he act if he cannot continually keep hobbling backwards and forwards? In the provision of the gods the Andean culture recognises the principle of representation. A person can have himself represented before the gods. A ritual on the top of the holy mountain Esqani may serve as an example.

I have climbed the 4,800 metre high Esqani mountain several times with great effort. When I was up there for the first time I had *said farewell* to the Indians who had accompanied me. I was utterly worn out and simply could not imagine how I was ever going to manage to get down the steep, loose slates on the edge of the precipice for hours on end, carrying 20 kg and with an injured knee. Things turned out alright, however, and I actually climbed this holy mountain several times after. Up on the dizzy height of Esqani an impressive ritual took place. The first time that I was there I was amazed by the amount of hats that the people had brought with them, pulling them out of their pockets one by one to give to the medicine man, who consecrated them over the glowing

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incense bowl. They were not their hats, however. Slowly I learned to understand the representation system before the gods better. They were the hats of other people who were not able to make the climb, but who nevertheless wanted to take part in the worship of the god of Esqani mountain. They were represented by a *prenda*, a pledge: the hat. When it comes to the matter of the continual ritual libation, spraying Mother Earth with pure alcohol (first, in a ritual gesture, she is given a drink and then you take a drink of the awful, burning swill yourself), and I just do not *want* to drink any alcohol – then I make my libation and pass the bottle of alcohol back to the person who gave it to me, asking him to drink to Mother Earth – in my name. This is also being represented before the gods. Behind this system of representation lie ideas of a much broader *body-concept* than we know. A piece of clothing is a part of myself. And so an act of witchcraft carried out on the clothing of the intended person can, according to the beliefs of the Andean people, cause death through a pledge representing the person. And so the Andean culture offers René a solution. He sends his *chuspa* (coca leaf bag) up to the medicine man, having it passed along from hand to hand – or somebody who is sitting next to René takes his offering to the table. From his *chuspa*, which is a part of him, the medicine man takes the good leaves and places them in a sacrificial nest and it is René's hand which puts them in.

In Amarete everyone has to go through a long hierarchy of offices. There are certain offices – those which have to do with a lot of movement through the village, with overseeing the fields and so on – which René cannot carry out. But this can be balanced out. He contributes something which is a rare commodity in the village: the ability to read and write. For very early on he realised that being able to read and write would be a very important resource. It is true that today by law every child living here must attend school – but as the children, as I have mentioned, are needed to look after the animals, to work in the fields and to collect brushwood and so on, they only attend school on a somewhat irregular basis. And after they have left school the children, who have learnt to read and write despite the irregularity of their school attendance, then simply forget it – there is just not enough call for it. René, however, was determined to attend a school for further training and today his reading and writing are excellent, and thus he is important for the village. In his village he is not regarded as inferior, not at all, only as different. And to compensate for his being different there are rules which he fulfils. The balance of his contribution to the welfare of the village – the reciprocity – is not disturbed.

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Deaf and Dumb Nicasio

Nicasio is in his mid-thirties, single, and lives in his mother's hut together with his married brother and his six children. Nicasio has been deaf from birth. He has never learnt to speak. A small arsenal of inarticulate sounds comprise his whole vocabulary: yes and no, agreement and protest. But the sound of protest is very seldom heard. For Nicasio, my *ahijado* (godson) by ritual, has a really happy nature. His infectious laugh relaxes even the grimmest meetings and opens hearts (mine, too). Nicasio is strongly built and healthy. He is agile and hard working. He does the work of three in the fields. For his village he will go the furthest distances without complaint to carry messages or complete tasks. Of course he cannot hold any office. But he is a full member within the sphere of work from which everyone lives, the work in the fields and community work for the village – clearing paths after rock falls, clearing irrigation channels and so on. Only one thing worries Nicasio. He would like so much to marry. In the Andes marriages are still often planned and arranged. This is also the task of the *madrina*, the godmother of the person concerned. And Nicasio was very keen to have me as his godmother – with the aim of having me find him a wife. Just how he explained this to me – without being able either to speak himself or to listen to my words – gave rise to scenes which had us both killing ourselves laughing. But we understood each other. Why is it difficult for Nicasio to find a wife? Is this perhaps the punishment for disability? No. He can have a family and he can feed a family. It took a while before I understood why my third suggestion – I had found a girl who would have married Nicasio – was not accepted. His mother (a widow) wanted to keep Nicasio for herself (she confessed to me). He was such wonderful help around the house and home.

Magno from the Place of Evil Spirits

Magno died two years ago. He was eight years old, a sweet little boy with large eyes. I do not know the cause of his disability. But his parents naturally did. Magno was born in a place inhabited by evil spirits. In any event he could not stand on his legs, or only for a short time and with great pain. During a long period of rehabilitation in La Paz he had learnt to walk a little and above all to use crutches. But his little arms were affected, too, and each movement was exceptionally difficult. Despite this he did learn to go behind a bush by himself. Any growing child who cannot do this is a real everyday burden for the family, and is indeed disabled. But Magno could neither help in the hut nor out in the fields. He could not speak very well either and was mentally handicapped to a

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slight degree. But this would not have counted had he been physically fit. As it was though, the little chap was doubly disabled. I visited the family a lot, lived with them in a distant hut at a height of 4,400 metres in the dry season, where the animals – llamas and alpacas – were herded on these lonely heights for months on end to find food. When Magno was small – in other words *bearable* in the literal sense of the word, his disability posed no problems. His parents were loving, his siblings were loving. He was always given priority. He lacked nothing. But when he was no longer *bearable*, he had to stay behind in the hut when everyone else was in the fields and the pastures. Sometimes for days. Just how infinitely hard it is to be alone in the Andes can only be measured if you are familiar with the conditions there and have experienced them yourself. There is, as already mentioned, usually only one hut, perhaps 10–12 metres square. Everyone sleeps in it – parents, grandparents, children, guinea pigs, small animals and guests. There is a constant coming and going in the hut. You grow up there as a child and are never alone. And as a grown-up you are also hardly ever alone in the hut.

In my first year in the Andes a Quechua woman called Maria lived below my hut; she had no bed of her own. She always lay down to sleep at the feet of the master's bed, of the mestizos, or in the kitchen where half a dozen Indians slept. I gave her a small hut next to mine, so that she could have some space to herself and her own place to sleep. What a ridiculous idea! From that point on all the guests who had previously slept in the kitchen hut, now slept in the small hut next to my own. It was not possible for Maria to sleep alone. Being alone is a threat of the most extreme proportions. But as little Magno grew up he was often alone. When I visited the family again and asked after Magno, Isidora, my *comadre*, the mother, broke down in tears and pointed west. The graveyard where Magno now lay is to the west of the village. What happened? Nobody knows for sure. He was alone. When his father came home he discovered Magno had terrible stomach cramps. Had he eaten something bad? What happened? Nobody knows. He died a few hours later. Of course nobody had killed him. But he had been alone. He was mentally handicapped to a small degree. He was not safe. And so something happened which caused him to die, which brought about his death. This, too, is an Andean way of dealing with disability.

The Old Medicine Man Valentin Quispe

Valentin Quispe, the ancient medicine man, became nearly 100 years old. He was almost blind and towards the end could no longer move or leave his bed. Valentin Quispe is the man in the Andes, where for 15 years I

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have had my hut, whom I loved the most. He was also my chief teacher, a man of deep and extensive wisdom. His fate was not easy. It is not easy to see your wife and then each of your eight children die before you. The death of his last two sons affected him particularly strongly. Isidro, the eldest son, over fifty at the time, was also a medicine man and often worked with his father. He died a long, slow death. At least there was Pedro left, my *brother* (father Valentin Quispe had ritually adopted me, so Pedro was my brother). He was a strong, healthy man. One evening he did not feel very well, he had a stomach colic, and twenty hours later he died – in the arms of his old father. Father Valentin's grandchildren were already grown up and had their own families and huts. His widowed daughter-in-law had her own fields and animals to look after. There was nobody to attend to father Valentin. Until only a few days before his death father Valentin was mentally alert. But as far as everyday life in the Andes was concerned he was totally disabled. He was disabled because he got in the way of life. It just is not possible for anybody to stay with him, look after him. Just before his 100th year of life father Valentin slowly starved to death ...

Crippled Hands, Vocation and a Prayer from Ecarnación

For the ritualist of the Andes hands are especially important. Offerings are prepared with his hands, with his hands he lifts up the bowl of incense, with his hands he places the offerings in the sacrificial fire. When medicine men and ritualists refer to great ritualists of the past in prayer, they do not say: I am acting here in the spirit of Valentin Quispe, for example, but rather they say *Valentin Quispeq makinmanta* – that is, not in the spirit of Valentin Quispe, but *in his hands*. For all white rituals – healing rituals for people, collective rituals for the field, rituals for calling rain and so on, the *right* hand is especially important. Right is the hand for *white actions*, for good – the left hand is for black rituals. Which of you is the chief ritualist, I once asked my ritual relations in the neighbouring village. Mariano, of course, they immediately replied. *Waq mana kanmanchu*. It could not be anybody else. Why, I wanted to know. *Makiyoq, makiyoq payqa*, came the answer – that means literally that he is the owner of a hand, a very special hand. And his right hand is indeed special. The four fingers are not developed. He has a thumb and the other four fingers are joined together into an unformed *hand*. And it is this that gives him his vocation.

When, in this very village, I was present at a collective ritual which took place over the course of one day I was no longer surprised when I saw that the assistant ritualist Angel *also* had a crippled right hand. A

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pair of ritualists with a vocation if ever there were! In their actions, in the delicate movements, etc., their hand did *disable* them to a great degree, but despite this, in the Andes this is not regarded as a disability – it is a *vocation*. What is different, if devalued, is a disability. Here, however, being different does not devalue, it enhances. *Encarnación Mamani*, also one of the really great ritualists with deep and extensive knowledge, is above all a master of the hour-long, dramatic prayer to the gods (cf. Rösing/Apaza 1994). His prayers are full to the brim with allusions to something which we perhaps would term disability. Just a short excerpt: *Ankari mellizoyoq, Gloria tara zunakiyoq. Ankari chakillayoq, gloria kalulayoq, Ankari kukilluyoq, Ankari sank' ayoq, Ankari ananayoq, Gloria makillayoq* ... and Encarnación speaks this with a hammering rhythm, like a drum-roll. Two words are repeated again and again in this section of the prayer: Ankari and Gloria. Ankari is a sort of *divinity* in the Kallawaya region of the Andes – I cannot in the present context go into this important, many-faceted figure (cf. Rösing 1990a; Rösing 1992). In this prayer Ankari is used as an honorary title which is connected with a number of different invocations. In the same way Gloria – borrowed from the Catholic church – is used as an *honorary title*.

And the things that hold these titles and which are summoned by them – these are all various sorts of stigmata: crippled hands, swollen heads, liver spots, feet first births, twins. And the prayer just quoted could be translated roughly as follows: "You much honoured carriers of crippled hands, you Gloria-bearing lame, you twin births blessed by the Ankari God ...." And it really is the case that *being different* in the Andean context does not mean you are devalued, but given value, it is interpreted as a sign of vocation. This not only refers to marks on the body, but also to all anomalies to do with birth. The most significant case of *being different* to do with birth is the twin birth. Anybody in this context has a vocation – he may have a twin brother, one of his parents may be a twin, he or she may have fathered or given birth to a twin. To be within the context of a twin birth gives you a vocation because twins are created through lightning. It is the god of lightning that splits the child into two in the mother's womb. Thus lightning, twin births and vocation are all inextricably bound together (cf. Rösing 1990b).

Two Blind Brothers from Amarete

The brothers' father was blind from the age of forty on, their grandfather somewhat earlier. Marcos went blind at the age of seven. Today he is between 45 and 50 years old (in the Andes no one knows their exact age). His brother, Pedro, a little older than him, went blind four years ago. He

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has a large family. His wife Angelica is very hard working. She has given birth to twelve children, six of whom are still alive – including one son. About two years ago, two small sons, four and six years of age, died within three days of each other when an epidemic swept through Amarete leaving hardly any family untouched. How do Marcos and Pedro cope with their blindness? (Their blindness is total, they cannot even tell the difference between day and night.)

Marcos lives in a hut on a collective courtyard which several families share – a usual occurrence in Amarete. He moves freely through the hut, court, village and fields. Marcos has visited me at least ten times in my hut. Our villages are a good five hour's steady walk from each other. Marcos does have a child to accompany him on these long walks (always one of his now blind brother Pedro's children) – but no distance seems to be too far for him. In Amarete Marcos is a respected and much sought-after man. He is a medicine man, a specialist for grey rituals. Grey rituals are for purification and casting off spells. Marcos is fetched when one of these rituals is needed. Marcos is also specialised in a black healing. Black healings are rituals for depriving enemies or opponents of their power. The black ritual that he carries out is unique in the whole region.

In the Kallawaya region there are white, grey and black healing rituals.[3] The white healing rituals are healings *for* something: for health, wealth, protection etc. The grey rituals are healings *away* from something – away from mourning, contamination, witch's power. The black rituals are healings *against* something – loss of power, damage. The black healings are kept strictly secret. And so in the whole region there are no collective black rituals – that would be too public. There are extremely complicated and beautiful collective white rituals which last three days and nights, there are collective grey rituals – but no black ones. With one exception – the black ritual in which Marcos specialises. It has to do with football! The village of Amarete is divided in four. Each quarter has its own football team. The people of Amarete are passionate about their football. They play against each other during the year. And in order that no other opposing football team can beat that of the quarter of Amarete to which Marcos belongs, he carries out a collective black ritual for his team aimed at weakening their opponents. Naturally the other teams do the same. So Marcos plays an important role for his quarter. And whether there are family healings or these collective healings, the people of Amarete are all totally convinced that Marcos can see *inside* things in a particularly lucid and powerful way in which people with sight cannot. His faculty of perception reaches trans-personal dimensions – as we might say.

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For Pedro, Marcos's elder brother who went blind a few years ago, the world is entirely different. Pedro does not dare to leave the hut except to go to the pig sty, the toilet in Amarete, and then only by feeling his way along the wall of the hut. He never goes through the village. All his children have experience in leading the blind – there is not one of them that has not at some time accompanied their Uncle Marcos on one of his long walks. But Pedro will not let himself be led by his children. He does not go out. He is completely resigned, impassive, depressive and unhappy, he complains that he is useless (as indeed he is in this condition) and that everything is a burden. He is ungrateful and joyless. At this late age he has not (yet) been able to make the transition from his seeing life to his blind life.

Cultural Resources and Barriers

Having dealt with the case reports,[4] I would like to round off by suggesting a cautious interpretation under the following headings: (1) stigma and sacredness, (2) reciprocity and representation, (3) signs and disability, (4) disability and the disabled, and lastly (5) objective, subjective, social disability. I will then summarise the analysis under a series of hypotheses and end with some remarks on modernity and anti-modernity.

Stigma and Sacredness

The first observable phenomenon towards an understanding of the idea of disability in the Andes is the proximity of physical or mental stigmata – in the original sense – to sacredness. This is possibly the largest difference we can identify in the treatment of health, illness, disability, healing in the comparison between Western culture and that of the Andes. In Western culture there is no association between any forms of physical characteristics – not to mention any possible disabling characteristics – on the one hand, and any hint of culturally characterised trans-personal concept on the other. In the Andes this is completely different, as is shown by the example of the crippled hands of the *watapurichiq* (chief ritualist) Mariano and the crippled hand of his assistant Angel. These characteristics are not *disability*, but a sign of *vocation*, they must be seen in a religious context – they are the voice of the gods. And blind Marcos, to whom a very special type of trans-personal vision is ascribed, is also an example of this association: that which *disabled* him, allows him to see the unseen.

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That this association between disabling characteristic and vocation exists at all means that a large number of people with greater or lesser physical abnormalities, which are by no means disabling, also profit from this. This is made very plain in Encarnacíon Mamani's prayer where six fingers, a bump on the head, a liver spot, etc. are signs of vocation, just as other *anomalies* such as being born feet first and twins. *Being different* is first of all not negative, but *holy*. This view is a cultural resource that in Western culture is not available to anybody who is marked by being different – or disabled. That this association between difference/disability and sacredness is by no means automatic is made clear by the case of Pedro. Before this cultural resource can be exploited to the full, a number of further personal and social, internal and external resources are needed – even in the Andes. But for many partially disabling characteristics – and I would like to state this as my first hypothesis – there is initially a culturally defined, positively evaluated area of meaning which can be seen as a cultural resource.

Reciprocity and Representation

The value of reciprocity, which governs the relationship of Andean people to the gods, and also the relationships amongst the people themselves, can be seen both as a cultural resource when dealing with illness or disability, and as a cultural barrier. First of all the principle of reciprocity signifies a high level of compensatory ability. If you cultivate my field – René, the young man with the crutch might say – then I will write a letter to your daughter in Cochabamba for you – or take over your task as secretary at the village meeting. If you climb up the building and carry up stones, then I will organise the food and keep a record of the division of work. This principle of reciprocity provides a form, a pattern, an outline into which the *disabled* person can fit. Nicasio, the deaf mute, cannot hold any office in the village administration – which usually every adult man in the village must do several times during his life. Why, despite this, is Nicasio not regarded as only half a person? He compensates for his release from duty by working three times as hard in the fields and at all other work in the village. For non-reciprocity, however, the Andean culture provides no comfortable waiting room. Little Magno receives – and he can give nothing in return. Valentin Quispe, ancient, blind, almost lame and weak to the point of death, can also only receive and not give. For them there is no Andean model for overcoming their affliction. For those who cannot give, the value placed upon reciprocity becomes a barrier.

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The principle of representation which says that a person can be fully represented by something that belongs to him, particularly something made of cloth, ensures access to an extremely important Andean cultural resource: the access of even the most ill and disabled person to all forms of religious healing rituals – even the healing ritual on the top of a 4,800 metre high mountain. From the point of view of the effectivity factors of symbolic healing it is another matter entirely whether I use all my strength to climb one of the holy mountains where I then listen to prayers for hours on end and am blessed with incense dozens of times, or whether I simply send up a piece of my clothing. But from the point of view of Andean belief it makes no difference at all. And belief heals – through hope, through soothing. If we compare it with the Western culture, then the principle of compensation as a resource for illness and disability naturally does not seem strange to Western people. It is an excellent resource. This resource, however, has no fixed exchange value – and that is the difference to the Andes. Anybody who is physically disabled, if gifted, may just present himself as more brilliant. But intellectual brilliance alone will not entitle him to an exchange for physical help. He will have to attain that some other way.

Signs and Disability

We can learn from these case examples of physical disability in the Andes that *objectively* quite disabling characteristics or signs are assessed by different cultures in completely different ways. A crippled hand is *noticed* – becomes a sign (Mariano and Angel, the two ritualists), but it is not a sign of disability. In the Andes this sign is translated into a completely different language, not that of illness, impairment and disability, but the language of vocation.

Disability and the Disabled

In the Andes, or so it seems to me, the transition of disability into disabled also takes a different course. René has a disability. But in his village he is certainly not seen as disabled. He takes full part in the life of the village. Nicasio, the deaf mute, has a disability – but he is also a full member of his community. In the Andes, wherever the whole economic basis, wherever the life-preserving and life-supporting work and duties of the collectivity are not affected, there – despite having a conspicuous feature of an objectively disabling difference – you remain not disabled. It is as if the generalisation of *having* to *being*, the generalisation of one feature (he *does* have a disability) for the whole person (he *is* disabled) is not made as easily in the Andes.

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Objective, Subjective, Social Disability

All those persons mentioned here have an objectively measurable disability. They also all feel themselves subjectively disabled – each one of them – even the medicine men Mariano and Angel with their crippled hands. *Caramba, molestawan arí* – Angel cursed once: damn, this really disables me (he meant his hand). So in the objective and subjective definition we find no real cultural differences. The difference lies wholly in the social context – exactly as the slogan on the poster said: "one is not disabled, one is made disabled".

This social attribution of disability differs considerably from the Western one – as has been shown. I will summarise a few of the main differences in the form of hypotheses as detailed below:

1. In the Andes having more disablement often means being less disabled. The reasons are, amongst others, the broader space allowed for compensation within the framework of the norms of reciprocity and representation, as well as the sacred legitimisation resource.
2. In the Andes disability can lead to two attributions (disability and vocation). In Western culture there is only one. In other words, in the Andes there is a culturally positive legitimisation of disability – doubtlessly a great social resource for those affected. This is missing in Western culture.
3. In the Andes disabled persons who cannot permanently contribute to the subsistence of the group are given up. They are allowed to die through failure to help and loneliness.
4. In the Andes – as here in the West – personal resources, be they the result of personal biography or constitution, play a major role in the social attribution of disability. Pedro, who is blind, is disabled, Marcos, likewise blind, is not. Perhaps one could even say that the intra-personal resources in the Andes play a far greater role in determining the extent of an attributed disability than in Western culture because the actuality of the intra-personal resources on the basis of the reciprocity value and mutual help, together with the non-personal resources (possessions, and so on), as well as the trans-personal resources – religion and ritual – are more equally distributed, or rather more equally accessible in the Andes than in Western culture.
5. In contrast to Western culture, where each individual must search for a sense to illness and disability, the Andean culture – as a cultural resource – always and absolutely places sense at the individuals's disposal. The causes of disaster can in principle be explained: debts to do with sacrificial offerings (even if incurred in a past generation), loss of the soul (which can happen suddenly to you anywhere), black actua-

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> tions of others (witchcraft), evil spirits ... With the ability to explain the causes of each and every illness and disability, in principle the possibility to act is given: debts incurred for sacrificial offerings can be settled, souls called back, evil spirits pacified or white powers invoked as counterbalance, you can have yourself purified and released from evil spells in grey rituals. In the Andes these resources – *keeping up the ability to act* and *sense* – are not resources which must be gained individually, they are a given cultural offer.

Closing Remarks: Modernity and Anti-Modernity

According to Cloerkes and Neubert (1987) there are two distinctive positions on the theme of culture and disability: the modernity hypothesis and the anti-civilisation hypothesis. The modernity hypothesis works from the premise that with ongoing social and economic development due to the ever more comprehensive range of medical and other provisions, there is also an ongoing improvement in the situation of the sick and disabled. At the same time traditional ways of dealing with sickness and disability and the living conditions of traditional culture are regarded almost as obstacles or barriers. Modernity is seen as a resource. Most development aid takes place under these colours. The opposite thesis states that modernity makes the position of the sick and the disabled worse, and considers another aspect of this same economic and technical development: not the range of healing technologies provided, but the value or lack of value which makes these possible in the first place. And these are: maximisation of individual profit, egoism, the emphasis on achievement, activity and the ability to function. In traditional societies, on the other hand, where people are not concerned with maximising individual profit but rather with the collective wellbeing of the community and reciprocity, the sick and the disabled are in better hands. I think that if we place health, illness and healing within the broader context of resources and barriers, then we can overcome the simplistic views of these diametrically opposed positions and can ask ourselves with a greater degree of accuracy and discrimination where it is exactly that the cultural and social resources and barriers lie. It is to this view that I intended to contribute some material with the present chapter.

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Notes

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2 The whole drama of a de-legitimised illness – an illness which, if you like, is denied the status of a real illness – can be studied by looking at modern CFS, the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. No matter how ill those afflicted may feel, society regards this illness as laziness, sluggishness, sentimentality, hypochondria, as a *psycho thing*, cf. Ware's impressive study (1992).

3 Cf. Rösing (1987/92; 1988/95; 1990/93; 1991).

4 Perhaps I might insert one case history in which the disabled person is not a native of the Andes, but a man in a wheelchair from Germany, Reinhardt Rüdel, who had the incredible courage to accompany me to that inhospitable region where there is not even one single square metre of asphalt to wheel on. This person in a wheelchair is, however, totally independant, he can jump up and down flat steps, can ride the escalator, flies all over the world, can load his wheelchair into the car and so on. He can in fact do anything that a non-disabled person can – except stand and walk. How would the Indians in the Andes treat him and his vehicle, the wheelchair?

The wheelchair was initially an object which excited great curiosity. As soon as the principle had been understood, however, and the person's skill had been sufficiently observed, and once it had been established that this man could enter and leave a hut by himself without needing to have anybody continually with him, from this moment on he was accepted as a normal guest of the village (at least as far as the question of movement was concerned).

That despite this it is not easy to use a wheelchair at a height of 4,000 metres in totally impassable country without considerable help is obvious. But the particularly interesting thing about this story, and one which tells us a lot about how the disabled are treated in the Andes, is the complete and easy availability of every possible kind of help (cf. Rösing/ Rüdel 1997, a book

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which is a very concrete depiction of the way disablement is dealt with in the Andes).

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