

# Indigenous Hats and Headdresses in the Andes

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A hat is a piece of clothing that humans use to cover their heads. It usually has a distinctive crown and brim, and besides its practical, functional use, it is a symbol of position, office, class, and regional identity. In the Andes, before the Spanish conquest, natives wore distinctive headdresses as markers of regional and ethnic identity.

As the Inca Empire became a Spanish colony, Indians were treated as property that came attached to tracts of land. Spanish landowners may have designed some kind of distinctive hat to mark their subjects in order to differentiate them from Indians of neighboring properties. This practice has remained in remote rural populations as markers of regional identity. For instance, natives such as the *Tarabucos* in Bolivia still design their hats with a singular flair. Married women's hats resemble the three-pointed *montera* that Spanish matadors wore in the 19th century. Unmarried men and women wear hats similar to those Spanish soldiers wore during the war of independence, consisting of a narrow cylindrical fabric with figures of birds, flowers, and bead designs.

These hats resemble a marching band hat but they have a flap that rests on the nape, symbolizing "immaturity or not fully developed" (*hoccoylo*, tadpole in Quechua). The helmet-like heavy leather adult men's hat seems to be a copy of a Spanish helmet, but folk stories suggest different inspirations. In *Tarabuco*, there is a mountain whose peak resembles the profile of a man. Indigenous people believe that the spirits of men who died in the war of independence turned this mountain into its present form. One version of the folk story is that the adult men's hat was designed after this profile. The other version is that it was an imitation of the Spanish helmet. The more credible version is that it was designed during the war as a reminder of how merciless the Indians were against the Spanish soldiers, *Tarabuco* indigenous people are proud to be dubbed "*sonqo micos*" (heart eaters in Quechua).

In the Andes, the hat is a conduit of social and cultural reproduction in that it transmits tradition, knowledge, and values and beliefs. It means to be indigenous, illiterate and monolingual, and distant from the mainstream culture. Unfortunately, the market economy, globalization, and the popularity of wearing the ubiquitous baseball hat are threatening to extinguish the artful designs of identity.

Figure 1 a and b

Men's and women's hat, Cañar, Ecuador. The Cañar people were one of several tribes that put fierce resistance against the Incas, and fought alongside the Spaniards against them. The hat they wore up until the late sixties had a short brim.

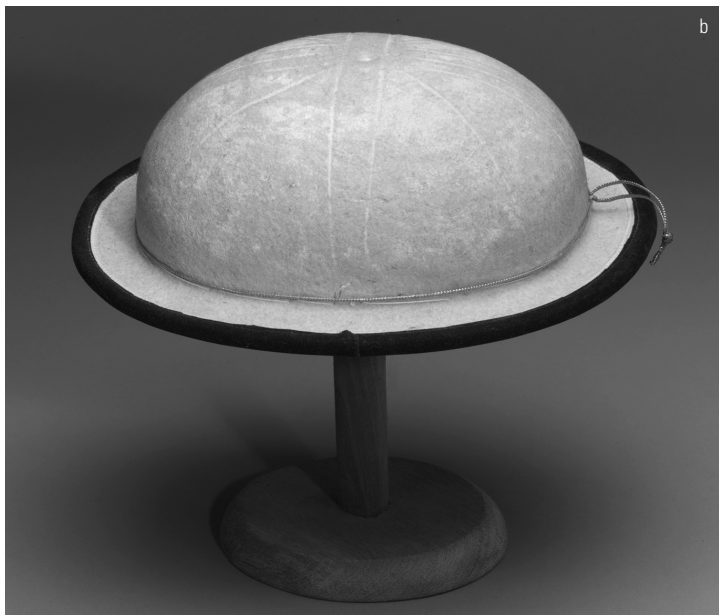


Figure 2 a and b  
Men's hat, Willoc, Cuzco, Peru. Willoc is one of ten communities that, before land reform in 1969, was a private landholding. Today, the about 800 families are subsistence farmers. Most men and boys earn cash working as porters on the Inca Trail.



Figure 3 a and b

Men's hat, Tarabuco, Chuquisaca, Bolivia.  
Married men wear a hat that is made of thick  
leather with small tassels on the front edge.  
Upon the death of the husband, the widow  
discards her hat and wears the late husband's  
hat for the rest of her life.

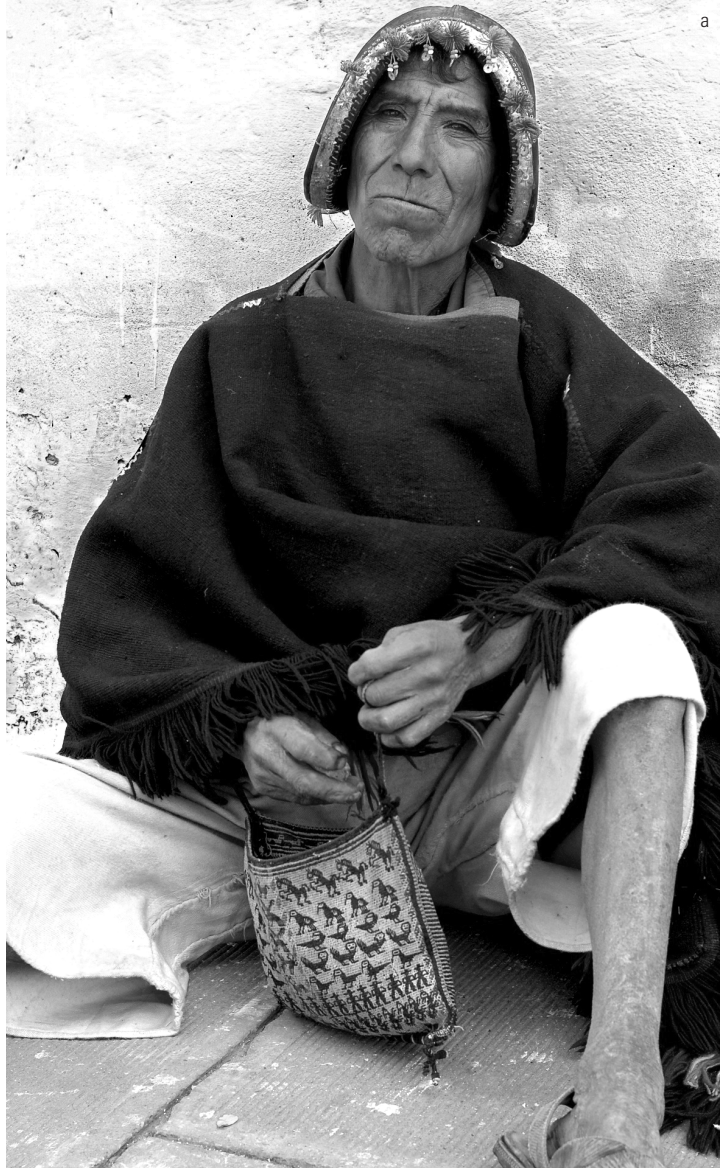


Figure 4 a and b

Married women's hat, Tarabuco, Chuquisaca, Bolivia. A few old women wear their original hats to Sunday fairs or special occasions. Older version hats had a heavy leather frame, rarely found today. New version hats, found only at costume stores, have cardboard frames.

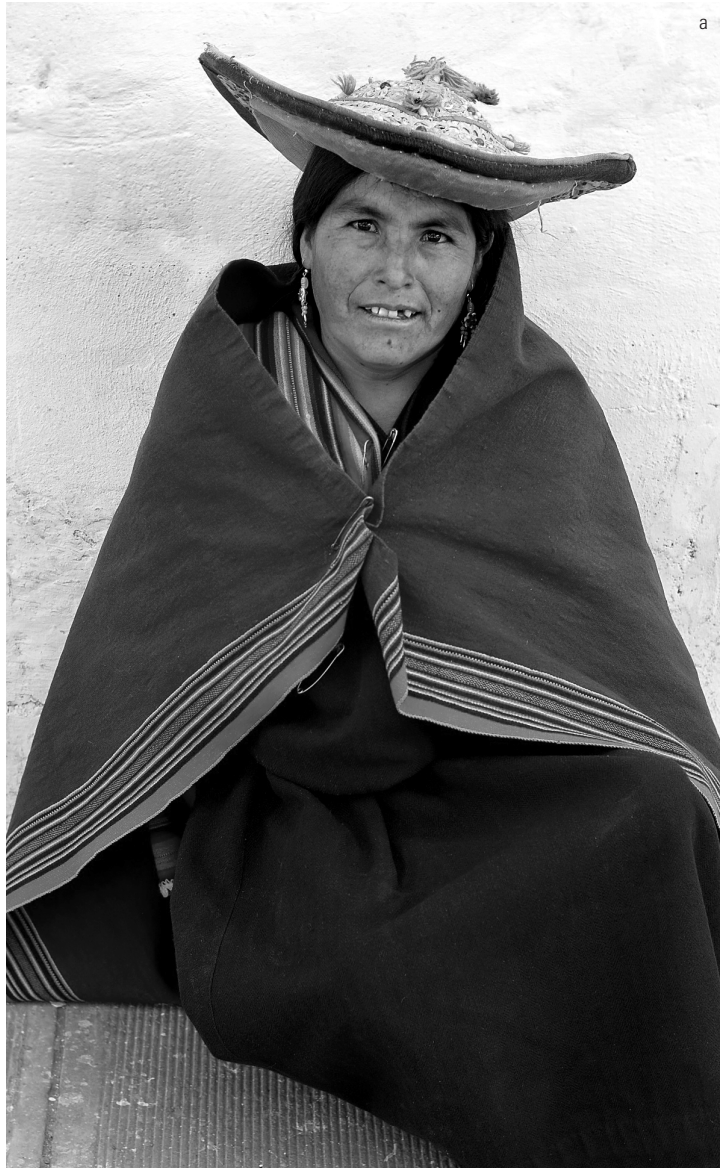


Figure 5 a and b  
Single men's and single women's hat,  
Tarabuco, Chuquisaca, Bolivia. This hat is  
called hoccoyllo (tadpole in Quechua). It  
symbolizes not being developed to an  
independent, responsible person. Not long  
ago, for young girls, wearing the hoccoyllo  
was a symbol of virginity.

