



Investment's rituals: “Grassroots” extractivism and the making of an indigenous gold mine in the Peruvian Andes



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ABSTRACT

What happens when an Andean family finds gold on its land? As mining corporations rapidly claim surrounding properties on rugged terrain near Mount Mismi, a water-supplying deity overlooking Peru's Colca Valley, the Flores family is springing into action to beat the Buenaventura mining company to the gold that might be hidden within. The global land rush has been pronounced in Peru, whose mineral resources have largely been responsible for rapid economic growth but whose profits remain restricted to a relative few. The Flores family, many of its members underemployed, are engaged in a costly race against time to constitute themselves as an enterprise, rent equipment, formalize their title, and fulfill other rituals necessary for legitimating their own effort to access what they see as their small share of Peru's mineral wealth, against the specter of state subsoil rights and corporate power. They are simultaneously racing to seek the land's permission, via rituals like the *pago a la tierra* (offering to the earth) and the provision of spiritually infused *chicha* (fermented maize and barley). Through an ethnographic focus on the exemplary case of the Flores property and the diverse rituals essential to extracting its prosperity, this article asks how the Peruvian state's categories of legitimate land use articulate with a perspective acknowledging land as a powerful non-human agent with its own requirements for becoming investable. I argue that beyond a simple dichotomy between official and indigenous rituals of legitimation, the Flores' urgent race to render land investable puts multivalent ontologies and ethics to work together. In doing so, I further argue, family members draw on years of engagement with development projects and non-governmental organizations focused on promoting explicitly indigenous entrepreneurship. They are thus forging new interpretations of identity-based empowerment that complicate any stereotypical relationship between environmental sustainability and indigeneity.

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1. Introduction: activating land

“We may have found gold on Leonora's *estancia*, way up there by Mount Mismi,” Ricardo Flores, an elderly *campesino* (peasant) resident of a village I call “Collaguas” in Andean Peru's Colca Valley, quietly told me.¹ With wealth, status, and property lines at stake, the information had to remain secret. On that *estancia*, a high-altitude terrain forming part of the Flores family's networked “archipelago” of properties for dwelling, pasturing animals, growing crops, and ritual activity—an approach to Andean space dating to the pre-colonial era (Murra, 1972)—they could feel the global land grab's rumble. They noticed one day in 2014 that Buenaventura, Peru's largest mining enterprise, was rapidly buying up parcels of land surrounding the *estancia* property where for generations the family of Ricardo's wife Leonora would pasture alpacas. Buenaventura's looming presence was problematic, but also promising: their land

grabbing activity suggested to the Flores family that, in the words of Ricardo and Leonora's son-in-law David, “it would be ridiculous for gold not to be here” (interview 2015).

The parcel was situated in a vast zone of cold camelid pastures in the highland terrain near Mount Mismi, the region's chief water-supplying earth-being. This difficult to access area resembled typically “indigenous” terrain for many Colcans, who saw urban Arequipa as the site of state power and economic progress, despite a decade of state and non-governmental efforts to “revalorize” a long-derided Andean indigeneity through investments in identity-based enterprise (Hirsch, 2016). Yet suddenly, for the Flores family, rural land promised immense economic improvement, with mineral extraction emerging as a new form of indigenous entrepreneurship.

So the family snapped into action. In this article, I suggest that the way they did so reveals a great deal about what it means to be indigenous in two intersecting geopolitical contexts: on one hand, that of the global land rush and Peru's expanding extractive frontier, and on the other, a local paradigm shift away from

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¹ To maintain anonymity, names in this article are pseudonyms.

small-scale financial investments in community sustainability that emphasized marketing an explicit indigenous identity through tourism and organic agricultural exports. Extractive enterprises are increasingly the main regional agenda setters of development at Arequipa's peripheries, as the NGO and state project presence shrinks given Peru's emerging geopolitical identity as an economic rising star and Colca's official near-elimination of extreme poverty (Fuentes, 2011). Despite the family's title and history of working the land, their experiences with state bureaucracies suggested that they would have little power against Buenaventura once it claimed the estancia's mineral-rich subsoil.² They were wary of prior consultation laws, established to protect property rights but whose terms were usually set by the encroaching enterprises (Li, 2009; Perreault, 2015).³ They also had to be aware of the restrictions the land itself imposed, for mining could only happen by felicitously meeting an array of ritual permissions. That urgency was made clear in a list of "investments" they created in planning their first excavations: along with the cost of formalization was the equally important cost of conducting the *pago a la tierra* (offering to the earth) to ensure prosperity and safety.

To render land investable on both its own terms and those of the bureaucratic state, then, the Flores family had to begin a race against time. Or more specifically, a race against the land's quickest and most potent takers: a kind of counter-rush. This article traces the way they politically activate that land to make their case for investment (Blaser, 2013). I tell the story of the family's urgent (and as yet incomplete) efforts to legitimate a parcel for mining gold in the forms required of them by the diverse worlds organizing the categories of its authorization, from state institutions whose inconsistently applied regulations make them gatekeepers to profit, to demanding earth-beings like *Tayta* ("Lord") Mismi and the *Pachamama* (living earth; loosely, "Earth Mother"). I center on two categories of expenditure the family faced in order to prime its land for investment: the expenses of documenting their claim to the land by working it, testing excavated samples, formalizing their small enterprise, and initiating the Environmental Impact Assessment; and the expenses needed to confer the offerings that the land demands to yield gold.

I argue that rendering land investable in a way meant to fulfill the requirements of the bureaucratic state and, at the same time, to acknowledge that land as part of a network of human and non-human agents indexes the Flores family's tactical effort to engage with a maximum of ontological categories for reaping abundance. Their designating different forms of ritualized action as equally important classes of preliminary investment suggests an effort to render them commensurable together within the space of Leonora's estancia. I build on research into the political ecology of "divergent worlds" (Li, 2013; see also Blaser, 2012, 2013; Fatima and Arora, 2016; Gudynas, 2008, 2011; Yates, 2015) to argue that their race to ready the land for investment required the Flores family to render their venture legitimate in and for as many worlds as they could. I do not mean to portray these Colcans as classically rational Andean resource maximizers (Murra, 1972). Nor do I propose the existence of a homogenous or pre-given "Andean" "ontology" or "cosmology" that can neatly be opposed to that of a mining enterprise or the state. Rather, this is a study of specific ontologies, as they are articulated, applied, and ritualized through the symbolic action essential to making land meaningful. How are divergent rituals, engaged to make arguments about human-human and human-nonhuman relationality, composed and performed for similar ends? What does it mean to deploy a creative variation on market-rooted indigenous entrepreneurship as a tool of resistance?

This article analyzes the unusual puzzles that a single family faces to shed light on the symbolic interventions and deeper structural contradictions of indigenous self-empowerment at an extractive frontier. Rooting my case in a small family group makes answers to these questions inevitably partial. However, the unconventional nature of their effort draws into relief an image of indigeneity as it changes shape in the wake of Peru's mining boom. I build on the ethnographic tradition within studies of political ontology of zooming intimately into the specific experiences of a small number of interlocutors as they exemplify what it means to render their needs legible to entities that hold power over them, and as they enact more than one world at the same time (Blaser, 2012; Cohen, 2014; De la Cadena, 2015; Povinelli, 2002). Doing this yields Colcan answers to Tania Murray Li's question: "what is land?" (2014a). For the Flores family, I demonstrate, land is an ongoing relational project. Up for grabs and at stake, its ritualized priming for multiple forms of investment represents the Flores' simultaneous claim to juridical ownership of, and communion with, the land and the minerals they hope to extract.

The study draws on ethnographic research I conducted for fifteen months living with the Flores family in Collaguas in 2014 and 2015. I did this alongside a broader project focused on NGO and state-led efforts to instill an ethic of indigenous entrepreneurship, conducted over a total of two years between 2008 and 2016. This article draws on participant-observation in the family's planning meetings and site visits, along with life histories elucidating their perspectives on land and its significance. I proceed by describing the geographies of the land rush in today's Andes and the anxieties accompanying the end of Peru's uneven mineral-driven growth. I then explore how the Flores family deploys investment's diverse rituals in the race against the state, a corporation, and time to launch a mining business.

2. Extractivist anxieties and the politics of Peru's land rush

Six Flores men and two contracted laborers warmed their hands and prepared to play their roles in the *pago a la tierra* ritual, led by a *paq'o* (ritual leader) they contracted who stood at the center of the group wearing a large beige ceremonial poncho. They were gathered in the pitch dark early hours of the wintry July morning, bundled in heavy coats and drawing heat into their lungs from cigarettes that people rarely smoke in ordinary life in Collaguas. Taking the *paq'o*'s commands, they assembled items—coca leaves, wine, beer, sweetly fragrant coal, and the *iranta* (waxy fetal alpaca)—upon a tray of slate rock, their faces burned from the cold wind. Then each blew their breath on the fragrant tray while twirling it above their heads, toasting the nearby water-supplying deity *Tayta Mismi*, the *Pachamama*, and the mine. The *paq'o* asked what the roughly five-hectare plot's name was, and the men responded, "*Mina Tía Leonora*," the Aunt Leonora Mine, inaugurating their relationship with the land. This *pago* and the convivial drinking afterward was meant, in Catherine Allen's words, to forge human-nonhuman bonds that would "force the reluctant world to sustain them" (2002: 149), beseeching the terrain and its mountain overseer to share the abundance within. This was an important practice meant to create and strengthen human-human (or "*ayllu*") relationships and those between humans and the land in its care, as Ricardo Flores explained to me. It was also being conducted with waning frequency, despite local efforts to revitalize indigenous practice, which meant that the *Pachamama* was more likely to be displeased (R. Flores interview 2014).

Meanwhile, in Arequipa some 160 km away, and in Peru's national culture more broadly, the earth's reluctance to yield mineral abundance was raising the specter of economic collapse. In her piece "What is Land?", Li poses a further question to contextualize the contemporary political urgency of land grabbing: "why the

² The state owns land starting at 2 m below its surface.

³ Recently, these rules have been officially extended to Quechua-speaking communities (Grados, 2015).

rush?” (2014a: 594). A number of geopolitical answers to this question converge upon the exemplary site of Leonora’s estancia. The global land rush has been particularly pronounced in Peru, whose mineral resources were largely responsible for the country’s rapid aggregate growth in GDP over the past decade. The early-2000s rush for land to mine in Peru amounted to what Jeffrey Bury has called an entirely “new development imaginary” (2005). Mining today dwarfs Peru’s other key industries—agriculture, fishing, and tourism—to which NGO-based investment is more typically directed. But copper, silver, and gold made Peru the fastest-growing nation in South America for most of the previous decade, its rapid expansion earning it the title of Andean “tiger” (Economist, 2014; Valencia, 2012).

By the mid 2010s, however, plateauing mineral profits led many Peruvian intellectuals to anticipate economic crisis or collapse. A flurry of academic, NGO, and think tank conferences were held in the cities of Arequipa and Lima to address Peru’s future once this by-definition unsustainable mining boom inevitably ends. The years 2013 and 2014 saw books published with titles like *What can be done about Peru?* (Ghezzi and Gallardo, 2013) and *Pathways of Transition* (Makedonski et al., 2014). A chant in the People’s Summit and March, held during Lima’s hosting of the 2014 UN Conference of the Parties climate change negotiations, captured these anxieties from another perspective: “There is gold! There is copper! The people are still poor!” (“*Hay oro! Hay cobre! El pueblo sigue pobre!*”). This refrain offered a popular verdict on mining: due to its climate-altering consequences, and because its promises of prosperity had fallen short, mining should end. Wealth accumulation from mining profits has tended disproportionately to benefit economic and political elites. As I describe below, the Flores family’s deployment of the estancia pursued a different means of resisting that failure of large-scale mineral extraction to bring about equally distributed national wealth: instead of protesting, they decided to mine land themselves.

Given Peru’s anxieties over plateauing national wealth, mining enterprises are pushing farther into the country’s rural zones to extend the extractive frontier. As they do so, they deploy corporate social responsibility (“CSR”) as a tactic to fit mining, somewhat uneasily, into a broader policy discourse of frontier inclusion in Peru’s Andes (see *Fundación Tintaya*, 2016). This is an approach rooted in policymaker understandings of a need to conquer Peru’s rugged Andean geography to integrate what in Colca’s NGOs are commonly called the country’s “*últimas esquinas*,” or “last corners” into national circuits of commerce (Puma interview 2014).⁴

Through their linked promises of CSR, accountability, and environmental and cultural sensitivity, mining enterprises promise massive benefits to rural communities near sites of abundant extractable resources. These range from the direct profits of extraction, as the ritual pago described above sought to enhance, to other forms of redistributed wealth. Mineral wealth, by way of state regulation, has undergirded the replacement of more conventional small-scale entrepreneurial development initiatives used for enhancing the growth of rural economies like that of the Colca Valley. CSR programs support many forms of community institution building and, perhaps ironically, environmental and cultural sustainability projects, often promoting traditional indigenous practices rooted in the very terrains they are trying to usurp.

Peruvian national law requires the contribution of royalties to each local and regional government where mineral exploitation occurs.⁵ This *canon minero*, or mining royalty, system has become one of the key forms of backing corporate social responsibility

investments in local development, from *obras*, or public works and infrastructure construction initiatives, to NGO-style capacity-building, participatory development, and empowerment projects (Vincent, 2014). Mining royalties come from 50% of taxes that the state collects from enterprises which “title holders of mining activity pay for the use of mineral, metallic, and non-metallic resources” in the prior fiscal year (MEF, 2015). In 2015, the Arequipa region collected 370.8 million soles (\$105.6 million) in mining royalties, a five-year low, down 53% from the 2011 highpoint of 781.6 million soles (\$222.7 million). Of the 2015 amount, 1,434,629 soles (\$408,705.02) were earmarked for Caylloma, the province home to the Colca Valley (Herrera, 2015).

The *canon minero* is meant to back some form of investment in community life or regional infrastructure (MEF, 2015), which institutionalizes a mining company’s obligation to secure a community’s “social license to operate” (Welker, 2014). Indeed, the idea that mineral wealth can be rerouted toward local beneficiaries and national economic redistribution has gained purchase as part of a rejection of neoliberalism, as apparent in the neo-extractivism of neighboring Bolivia and Ecuador (Radcliffe, 2015; Yates and Bakker, 2014). In Peru, which has not embraced that rejection, the *canon minero* and its CSR programs are used to provide repayment for the potential harm of mineral extraction. But they also, crucially, create a general climate of investability in Andean land: the permission granted by these programs rooted in economic and social inclusion allows mining companies to expand extraction’s frontier.

Mining conflicts have been rife in Peru, especially over the last decade. In recent months, an at times violent conflict has been underway between communities in Arequipa’s rural Islay province and the Mexican Southern Copper Corporation. Arellano-Yanguas indicates that despite the rise in *canon* collections, Peru’s rise in mining-centered conflict is a result of the failure of adequate mineral wealth to return to communities, accumulating instead in the hands of local and regional governments (2011). Conflicts, Arellano-Yanguas explains, are only rarely over the “all-or-nothing” question of whether an enterprise like Southern or Buenaventura ought to be allowed to mine a particular terrain, which tend to “occur only when local people perceive that they do not need mining; that they have alternative, adequate livelihoods; and especially if mining is likely to conflict directly with these alternatives” (2011: 630). Because significant *canon minero* transfers do offer the potential to improve livelihoods, conflicts much more frequently center on the way companies and governments distribute a rightful share of the profits and benefits that an enterprise receives from its extraction in a given community.⁶

In the community of Collaguas, which is characterized by low employment and decreasingly abundant harvests as a result of climate change-driven drought, mining empowers and marginalizes at the same time, and has the capacity both to deplete and augment resources in its surround. In Colca as in other places in the Andes in which ecological protection and resource distribution are sites of contestation and community decision-making (Boelens, 2014; Carey, 2010; Stensrud, 2016), the promise of leaving impoverishing agricultural labor behind can outweigh values of care for the environment. It can also occasion changing interpretations of those values. Thus, the environmental destruction an adequately democratized mining potentially causes does not necessarily, although it might, violate a locality’s basic frameworks for indigenous economic life (see Cattellino, 2008; De la Cadena, 2010; Nash, 1993).

Recent scholarship on the “political ontology” of Andean land (Blaser, 2012) can help us understand how these national anxieties

⁴ Like the English “last,” the temporal dimension of “*últimas*” suggests that these corners are remote in both space and time.

⁵ Laws 27506, 28077, and 28322 set the specific rules for mining, hydropower, gas, fishing, logging, and petroleum royalties.

⁶ For recent thinking on development and the “rightful share,” see Ferguson (2015).

and local puzzles are conceptualized on the ground. A number of scholars hone into the political and economic nuances raised by mining in the Andes, suggesting that the future of investable land is directly related to the way Andean communities engage in the ongoing collective project of bringing land “into being” (Li, 2013: 399). Mario Blaser’s notion of political ontology offers an avenue for extending the site of political contestation beyond the spaces typically associated with a “reasonable” polis. “Ontological conflicts fall into the domain of cosmopolitics,” Blaser writes, “the terrain where multiple and diverging worlds encounter each other and the possibility (without guarantees) of composing mutually enlivening rather than destructive relations” (2013: 21). Marisol de la Cadena argues that mining conflicts are not simply contestations over resources and benefits, or about a community being granted a share in profits, employment, and other forms of abundance that mines promise. The stakes are even higher: conflicts stage “ontological disagreement” that “cannot be overcome,” she writes, “because the principle that partitions the sensible into nature and humanity (and divides what counts as real from what does not) is not common to all parts” (2015: 284). Imagining property and its conflicts from a political economy perspective, Wendy Wolford suggests that one way of looking at land is its status as a “social relation” or “native construct” in a constant state of active definition, in which “one person’s property is made possible by others either agreeing (consenting) or being coerced into accepting the distribution of rights and claims.” (2007: 559).

Fabiana Li brings a similar concept of land as a “natively” constituted definitional project to bear on the contested emergence of Cerro Quilish, a onetime site of mineral enterprise incursion near Cajamarca in Peru’s northern Andes, as “not just an economic resource to be defended but the embodiment of life itself” (2013: 400). The communities surrounding this mountain were threatened in the early 2000s by the attempted expansion of the Yanacocha mine, a joint venture of Buenaventura, the Newmont Mining Company, and the World Bank. That expansion resulted in protests from diverse groups in the region that ultimately led to the project’s cancellation. “By calling Cerro Quilish an Apu,” Li writes, anti-mining “protestors suggested that it was a living entity and, furthermore, that other lives (both human and nonhuman) depended on its existence” (400). This makes articulating a contestation between worlds not only a legitimate subject of political debate, but also an effective resistance tactic.

While Li demonstrates the framing of a mountain as an earth-being in order to prevent mining, the Flores’ pago ritual suggests that it is no less valid to draw politically on a claim to the earth’s sentience as a means of *initiating* extraction. Examining these understandings of contestation and legitimation together in the ethnographic setting of the Colca Valley allows us to track how “the polis is expanded” (Gudynas, 2011: 445) beyond sites of “all-or-nothing” conflict. I argue here that “grassroots” mineral extraction in the context of an entrepreneurial household-cum-small business shows the effort not to contest ontologies, or to separate and render them distinct, but to pull together ideas that are useful and legible in different ways. This aligns the Flores household with a long Andean politics of “voraciousness” (Grillo Fernandez, 1998): maximizing this family’s legibility in multiple worlds was their crucial task for rendering land investable. In his 1998 polemic against western-driven economic development models focused on modernization, the late Peruvian agronomist Eduardo Grillo Fernandez painted the Andes as a “living” world whose diverse elements offer one another nurturance:

In our living Andean world all of us who exist are alive: not only humans, animals and plants but also the stones, the mountains, the rivers, the gorges, the sun, the moon, the stars and so on. In our world we live the equivalence of the diverse, the

heterogeneous, because here the mosquito, the frog, the frost, the hail, the fox, the human, the mountain, the river, the stars are all indispensable in the delicate nurturance of our harmony; because only this, our exuberant diversity, knows how to nurture our harmony, the one that belongs here, the one which knows how to nurture us.

[Grillo Fernandez, 1998: 128]

While this passage offers an idealized take on a seemingly cohesive Andean form of life, its image of heterogeneity proposes the importance of “digesting” (144), cobbling technologies and ontologies together to meet distinct requirements as the Flores men and their hired hands did at the pago that opened this section. He elaborates on what he sees as a distinctly Andean voraciousness: “We have absorbed Christianity by assimilating Christ as a *huaca* . . . We have also assimilated the market by making of it one more arena for reciprocity—that is, to exercise the desire to give that is so typical of us” (133–34). The Flores family’s urgent bet was that a sensitive practice of mineral extraction could also be recruited and rendered Andean.

3. The puzzles of a family’s counter-rush

Given the Peruvian state’s concerns with both economic inclusion and environmental sustainability, why was it so difficult for the Flores family to receive authorization to mine a small plot of terrain with relatively low-chemical technologies and which was likely to be excavated anyway? The race to mine Leonora’s estancia—ritually rechristened as Mina Tía Leonora—took place in a regulatory context structured so intricately that it made simply holding onto land significantly more difficult for a low-income Andean family than selling it off. The additional legal burden of proving that they could mine the land with as much care for the environment as Buenaventura was also heavy. Expensive material documents were essential for rendering legible the Flores family’s unconventional bid to secure legal mining rights to their own land, indexing the cultural power inhering in the written word that has long characterized institutions in Andean communities (De la Cadena, 2015; Salomon and Niño-Murcia, 2011).

The primary task necessary for formalizing their extraction was to officially report the property as a mine to the regional government. This report (*denuncio*) would first require many other authorizing documents and a great deal of effort to measure the precise area of land to be excavated. Similar to what Gregg Hetherington has observed in Paraguay, paper-based rights themselves in Colca are often “material”: without the physical papers that certify the free use of privately owned terrain, the right is effectively not theirs (Hetherington, 2009). Because of the difficulty of proving rights when their authorizing documents have been lost to rain, fire, theft, or armed conflict, as Hetherington argues, “such documents are not just representations of legal rights—the papers are themselves the rights, and poverty is what keeps most people from acquiring them” (2009: 235). I would hesitate to call this locally influential campesino family simply “poor” (even if most members faced intermittent economic hardship), but the Flores’ structural position relative to Buenaventura indicates a clear inequality in effective land rights.

The *denuncio* document itself would cost several thousand soles to produce. It was required for the regional municipality even to consider their application to authorize exploration. Property titles may prove horizontal ownership of the land, but the Peruvian state has been exceedingly generous in engaging its subsoil ownership rights to grant concessions to mining companies like Buenaventura. This bureaucratic ontological category of land ownership did not leave room for the entire story of the Flores family’s relationship with the estancia. They had been grazing their

alpacas within the terrain's horizontal boundaries for generations; they had also, for just as long, cultivated an ongoing ritualized relationship with the subsurface earth, whose agency as a caring non-human entity did not stop at the arbitrary 2-m point where the state's ownership rights started. The substances they would offer it through their pagos and their sharing of the sacred chicha with it nourished the land to its core. This terrain was locally classified as a "*chakra*," a Quechua word for "cultivation land" that also means "space of care." For many Colcans, the term indexes a sense of communion between human workers and non-human land. But the *chakra* concept did not register in the documentary proof that would constitute a legitimate claim before the state to be laboring in its sub-soil dimension.

Was there a way around these steep bureaucratic hurdles that would preserve the Flores' relationship with their *chakra*? In part a result of the high costs of formalization, marginal zones of Peru's Andes and Amazon regions have seen what some of my NGO interlocutors called an "epidemic" of illicit artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). Artisanal miners tend not to be able to undergo the burdensome inspections necessary to be cleared for an extractive activity that poses high risks to substantial parcels of land. Despite their own marginalization, artisanal miners also often invade and degrade territories that endanger surrounding human communities (Arellano-Yanguas, 2008; Bury and Kolff, 2002; Bury, 2005). They pose clear dangers to local ecologies as well, with the 400% increase in gold mining in the Amazon's Madre de Dios region resulting in increasing annual rates of forest loss (Asner et al., 2013). Satellite mapping has revealed that a high proportion of that loss was caused by ASM (Elmes et al., 2014).

However, because of the structural obstacles the Flores family faced, they saw artisanal mining as a necessary intermediate step: though officially illegal, such excavations could demonstrate a labor investment suggesting that state authorization makes logical sense. Obligated to regulate the small enterprise's environmental practice and tax its profits, the state would have an incentive to legitimate it. Thus, the family framed artisanal mining as a smart entrepreneurial tactic, akin to the market exploration and "diagnostic" phase as Ricardo and Leonora were taught in NGO-based enterprise capacity building sessions. David, their son-in-law, said he had consulted with friends in the regional municipality. They suggested, off the record, that it was best to begin mining informally before all of the authorizations were in place. "They told us to do it like this. Once you begin, the government is going to come," he explained.

As observable in broader dynamics between formal and informal enterprise in Peru and Latin America (Cohen, 2014; Gandolfo, 2013), conducting the business in the law's bright light was extremely costly. "Our idea is to begin as informal miners," Cristina, Ricardo and Leonora's daughter who was leading the charge with David, her husband, elaborated. "Once the government finds out, they're going to come and say, regularize this, do that other thing, but you can continue working." David chimed in: yes, they will say, "formalize, do this paper, but I can keep working. If I begin to go from lot to lot, I won't be able to do that." As long as this remained modest and did not appear to be an artisanal land grab, the couple conveyed, it was tacitly permissible to mine temporarily without authorization (interview 2015). Once they turned a basic profit, they would be able to afford the remaining rituals of formalization and, thus, render the land investable in the eyes of the state.

By strategically beginning the mining process, the family was not only being entrepreneurial. They were also crafting a narrative. They attempted to compose a visible trajectory from a hopeless quest for approval of a group of powerless actors to the surprisingly empowering trajectory of an unregulated extraction that could trigger the mechanisms of a legal bureaucracy seeking to

bring them out from informality's darkness. Here, the Flores family was enacting their entitlement to the land by working it, similar to what Wolford describes as a contemporary populist framing of a labor theory of property in Brazil, in which "property rights are labor returns/rights" (2007: 556).

Securing the permission to mine was a legal ritual understood to transform their venture into an activity that could be framed as a potentially lucrative form of "grassroots development" that fits with what scholars have described as the transnationally idealized figure of the "ethnic entrepreneur" (DeHart, 2010; García, 2005; Greene, 2009; Walker et al., 2008). Such a figure has been idealized in indigeneity-focused development projects that arose throughout the Colca Valley region over the past two decades, and which are now on the wane, as one regional Desco NGO veteran suggested (Mejía interview 2015). The Flores group's creative variation on that empowerment discourse was to deploy their invented status as ethnic entrepreneurial subjects as a legible pathway to state recognition and formalization of their "grassroots" mine. While their specifically indigenous relationship with the land was not part of their documentation, in preliminary conversations with state authorities, family members like Ricardo and Cristina highlighted their rootedness in the land and their investment in the rituals it required of them as an informal testament to their capacity as environmental stewards.

David and Cristina took the lead in the venture because of their flexibility and their ability and willingness to take on risk and debt. Carla Freeman describes such subjectivity as the paragon of neoliberal "entrepreneurial selfhood" (2014). They implied to me that they also took charge because of their entrepreneurial experience in navigating between urban and rural spaces, a social mobility that their self-made local eliteness afforded them in its combination with their local roots. Having lived and worked for stretches of their lives in the cities of Arequipa and Moquegua, they described themselves as a couple not only competent at running a business, but particularly disposed to trying out promising business opportunities. Although they did not explicitly self-identify as indigenous like Ricardo, Leonora, and their other children, David and Cristina's claims to entrepreneurial independence matched a broad attitude NGOs active in Colca have long attempted to craft through their identity-based development programs. In their words, such programs often failed because the people they targeted lacked entrepreneurial capacity.

In the joint life history interview I conducted with them (interview 2015), David and Cristina took turns co-narrating the family's quest to mine gold. We began with their identification as a couple fundamentally characterized by entrepreneurship: "each day," Cristina began, "we are renewing our ideas as we search for other opportunities for our children, different businesses. We're always at the vanguard—the world is changing." Together, they work as freelance salespeople for the Claro cable and mobile phone company, claiming to be the only people to do this in Colca. This work left them with freedom that, they suggested, opened them to a constant search for opportunities. "We are like development agents with Claro," Cristina continued: "we help connect Caylloma to the world." Crucial to their self-presentation was their allergy to dependency on government aid locally derided as "*asistencialismo*," or a spectator-like "assistance addiction": as Cristina put it, "we never went to the municipality to say 'give us work,' never, never."

The potentially lucrative terrain offered another auspicious opportunity. "We have this chance to explore the mine, and it's a little bit hard, but there we were" Cristina said, continuing:

He [David] went first, alone, removing the first stone, and you don't want to come back, you want to stay there [working], but we have children here in the house and we have to come

home. But whenever we wake up, we're always thinking about the mine, thinking that we have to go up and work.

Both made clear that this was a slow process because of the presence of multiple forms of obligation, the lack of sufficient seed capital to support a rapid exploration phase, and the high stakes of going into debt with the presence of gold uncertain. So, during their occasional trips to the estancia, they took advantage of another unexpected opportunity: a vast supply of slate in the surrounding hills. David reported: "I was just speaking with an architect, and slate rock, he tells me, 'is good business in Arequipa, you could be distributors.' Oh, that's good—if that can produce, generate a little supply of money [*dinerito*]," it would allow the family to build "a little house where the workers or security could sleep" by the mine. While happy with a potential side business, they were also impatient because the Flores' windfall would only come from gold.

The family faced an additional source of urgency alongside the need to remain ahead of the fast-moving Buenaventura juggernaut. The Flores men were all underemployed aside from David, who vacillated in the amount of precarity he saw in his work with Claro. The others worked as agricultural peons, manual laborers, and in one case, as an entrepreneur who had just closed his videogame café, showing the downside of development rhetoric emphasizing the value of enterprise and individualized risk. This meant that if Leonora's estancia did have gold in its depths, this would be the optimal moment to find it.

These priorities were laid out at a family meeting at Ricardo and Leonora's home in October 2014. There, the family convened to make sure all were starting out from the same place in this race along parallel roads to prime the land for investment. The meeting was held in the Flores' usual venue for entertaining guests, an enclosed adobe structure along their small courtyard. Ten of us were in attendance: Ricardo, Leonora, three of their sons, two sons-in-law, two daughters, and me. Despite the intimate setting, the meeting took a highly formal register, with each new speaker elaborately addressing the others down the room's political hierarchy from eldest male to youngest female, using the formal *usted* form instead of the familiar *tú* for "you," and thanking the audience after they were finished speaking. The formality, I suggest, represented a tacit contract structuring the interaction, rooted in two rationales. It indexed local performative conventions of meeting talk, which suggest that even the closest of families can be sites of political interaction. It also, more fundamentally, used register to establish a collective aspirational posture toward the mining venture's legitimacy: in engaging the polite *usted* form, family members presupposed and entailed one another as professional business partners.

Together, these family partners organized preliminary plans for starting the mine, with David and Cristina running the meeting. Along with their entrepreneurial inclinations, they presented themselves to the family group as the best connected to the lawyers, accountants, municipal insiders, and state bureaucrats they would need on their side to help legitimate the enterprise. They also felt they had the capacity to learn and inhabit the financial idioms that attended some of the tools of investment and extraction. The first order of business was to make sure the whole family approved of the excavation. Expressing their overwhelming approval, the three Flores sons agreed that exploration should begin quickly because they were out of work.

David then drafted a budget for the preliminary trips the group would make to prepare the land. His budget, written in marker on a large sheet of graph paper, notably included a category labeled "investments." This encompassed the primary investments the group would need to make. They included machinery, the costs of copying and processing documents, hiring an accountant,

transportation and gasoline, a dumpster, and food. Further costs included the help of engineers and the price of analysis in the laboratory in Arequipa, which cost 50 soles (\$15) per sample. In our interview, David reported that their first several journeys up to the estancia also involved other hidden costs. The highway had flooded, so they had to dig a path for the truck, which meant investing unexpected labor time. Cristina chimed in: "we built the highway!"⁷

As David listed the costs, he deployed his authority as a competent urbane professional before the family to make clear that success in this venture would require risking all investments of money, labor, time, spiritual energy, and other support each family member-cum-business partner could give. Formalization to prevent Buenaventura's encroachment was the most costly preliminary investment. The plot, at roughly five hectares, had to be reported as a mine, which meant that the denuncia had to be preferred along with the property title. Per hectare claimed, the regional government charges \$300, which amounted to a total denuncia cost of \$1500. There were plenty of other obstacles too: "after [we report the terrain]," David explained, "everything begins for the process for an environmental impact assessment [EIA], you have to have permission to use explosives, you have to have this permission for using the water from the [local irrigation] canals, right, and then you have to have a certificate that in this area there aren't archeological remains, so there is a series of, let's say, requirements that the state asks of you." David further suggested that the EIA could cost anywhere from 12,000 to 15,000 soles (\$3425.20 to \$4281.50). "*Es carrissimo*," he said: it's extremely expensive (interview 2015).

David, Cristina, and other family members have already made a number of trips to the site lasting up to several days, where they excavated samples for laboratory analysis to attain a sense of how much gold they should expect to find. Analyses revealed the definite presence of gold, but failed to show how prevalent it would be. This prologue to labor brought the land closer to readiness for the main investment. Key to those trips was the task of rendering land investable at the supra-terranean level as well, by making the place habitable, priming it for consecutive days and weeks of labor. Much energy was required for cooking chicha, a sacred alcoholic substance meant for the land's workers and consumption by the land itself. Significant labor was also required to prepare enough food to last each trip and to keep the shelter adequately warm in the cold and hostile conditions of the high-altitude site. When I accompanied several of the Flores men to the site in January 2015, our main task was reinforcing the small shelter's old thatched rooftop with new straw in preparation for longer stays.

From the moment of the 2014 meeting onward, the family became a group of business partners. This newly christened informal entity is currently engaged in the race to prepare the report, constitute the Flores household as a formal enterprise, prove to themselves that enough gold is present to make the intensive labor worthwhile, and fulfill the other bureaucratic rituals necessary for convincing state authorities that they are legitimately entitled to mine the property.

4. Seeking permission from the land

The Flores family is simultaneously racing to render the site investable by seeking a different kind of permission: the land's. In the October meeting, David's budget category of investment also

⁷ My own experience of journeying to the estancia in January at the height of the rainy season was further evidence of transportation's difficulty: Ismael, one of Ricardo and Leonora's sons, drove us in his pick-up truck, which repeatedly got stuck, so the group had to build tracks for it out of flat slate stones atop the muck.

included the expensive ritual elements essential to any kind of labor that would use the land to cultivate prosperity. At a total of several thousand soles, this expense was considerable. Still, nobody found this to be an unreasonable or remarkable item in the investment column. This second set of tasks was key for rendering the land investable on the land's own terms. The consequences of failing to conduct these required ritual services and acknowledge the necessary obligations, or of conducting them improperly, could be grave, ranging from finding nothing where gold was anticipated, to deadly accidents on the site and even beyond it.

Seeking this permission meant drawing on a set of differently ontological practices that was significantly more familiar, but crucially, no less important, than any of the bureaucratic obstacles to investing in a family mining enterprise on their parcel. Marisol de la Cadena suggests that the structures of the state's urban lettered politics "ignores practices" acknowledging earth-beings like Tayta Mismi and the Pachamama, which "feel excessive to modern politics"; yet the varied activities involved in priming the terrain for investment index how "the experience of both, participating in the lettered world and exceeding it, is part of *runakuna* everyday life" (2015: 62).⁸

The principal ritual of seeking permission is the *pago a la tierra*, an obligation fundamental to economic life in the Colca Valley and much of the Andes. Its waning practice is often part of the story many people in these villages tell about declining harvests, a shrinking water supply, and a selection of seemingly accidental disasters. The idea of losing touch with the Pachamama sometimes comes in the same breath as worries and warnings about climate change in discussions of long-term concerns about the permanence of this way of life. As described in Section 2, the *pago* involves an elaborate process of passing around and blowing on an assemblage of materials including coca leaves, raw corn kernels, a preserved alpaca fetus, an assortment of liquors and wines, and a number of other ritual elements depending on what the *paq'o* in charge of the service requires. After receiving the breath of each member in the group, these elements get burned together in a small smoky bonfire.

A key component of the ritual is constantly supplying the participants and the land with *chicha*, nourishment that is also understood to make long days of laboring on the land bearable. Brewing *chicha* was a labor-intensive activity that exclusively occupied the women of the family and required days of preparation. This was a substance that most campesinos in and around Colca habitually took with them to their work in the fields, especially in labor involving parties of more than one person, where hospitality and reciprocity for a friend's help can be reflected in convivial *chicha* drinking. To consume *chicha*, one must always first pour out several drops onto the ground for the earth's consumption. The hierarchically senior person in the group—either the elder or the guest—must drink first, and the subsequent drinking order tends to be organized by various patterns of mutuality and value circulation.⁹

I heard many explanations for why these rituals of offering to the land were so important. One woman, as she led a service to bless the newly constructed home of friends of the Flores family, suggested that the Pachamama was indeed a mother, pregnant with seeds, crops, and perhaps, in the Flores' case, even gold. This mother is voracious, the female priest told me. The Pachamama requires ritualized forms of nourishment in order for her various pregnancies to remain healthy and her carrying capacity to remain strong. Without this supply of *chicha* ritually infused with a

group's goodwill, the Pachamama could turn against the people in its care. It is a patient nurturer and protector, but is also somebody who can grow hungry and weak, and wreak destruction when angry. This ritual leader's characterization of an earth mother was not, or at least not necessarily, a metaphor (De la Cadena, 2010; Grillo Fernandez, 1998). Another conversation I had with my neighbor in Collaguas, store proprietor Juan Rodriguez, revealed that the land was a friend, who, like anybody else joined together in a circle of drinkers, does not want to be left out of the convivial consumption.

The timing of the family's ritualized permission-seeking also demanded careful coordination. Although small *pagos* like the July one described above had to happen before any labor at the estancia, conducting a larger *pago* ceremony on the first of August was mandatory. August is the most sacred month in Colca and much of the Andes. The earth opens, making this the most auspicious time to ensure its nourishment (R. Flores interview 2014). This is also the reason why August is the month when most Colcans tend to schedule weddings. The first day of August is perhaps the holiest day of the year—and even for Collaguas' devout Catholics, it is the holiest day outside of Christmas and Easter. During my interview with Cristina and David at the end of July 2015, they were in final preparations to make their next journey up to the estancia on the first of August to conduct the latest of several *pagos* they have carried out there.

In describing their planned August trip, the urbane couple distanced themselves from this form of Andean relationality. They made clear that they knew very little about what the procedure entailed, marking that distance by repeated use of the third-person plural: "*creen*," they repeatedly said: "they believe," in the rural indigenous Andes, that these rituals are effective. But Cristina and David nevertheless recognized the *pago*'s importance and even held a reverence for what was to them its mysterious efficacy: "because if we don't do it," said Miguel, "if we don't, they say that [the gold] disappears . . . that is the belief . . . if you don't do a good *pago* then this land is not going to give. That is to say, the land gives you a benefit, a good product, and you, what are you going to give? So, it's like a give-and-take [*contra entrega*]."

This suggested that the *pago* was more than an unquestionable component of the set of tasks needed to render land investable. Ritual, rather, was a kind of exchange: here, Miguel explicitly frames ritual activity in an idiom of reciprocity and returns on investment. He conveys that it is without doubt that the land will want something in return if it is going to give up a mineral of such high value. Conducting the *pago* increased the family's odds of finding gold and avoiding disaster, becoming an activity that anchored the group's attempt to maximize the worlds, narrative frameworks, and audiences with which they could legitimate their extraction.

Cristina picked up the narrative: "We have no idea how you do it." She talked about hiring the "shaman" who conducts the service, for whom they must purchase every single ritual element. This ritual practitioner, the *paq'o*, is part of the family's investment, and is costly: even before purchasing the wine, coca, liquor, corn, candies, llama fetus, coal, and other ritual elements the leader requires, the service itself costs an expensive 400 soles (or \$115). But this expenditure was never up for debate. Despite the cost, Miguel emphasized, "it's investment, it's investment." With the aid of videos and photographs captured on their mobile phones, they walked me through the ritual process at length. They described bundling the items together and offering prayers for prosperity and safety in Quechua and Spanish. Afterward, "everything is put together and into the fire—everything gets consumed," David said. "The belief is that in the moment you put everything in, all of that, you put the coal . . . and it has to pop three times or more than three times. That indicates that the land has accepted the

⁸ *Runakuna* translates to "humans." "Runa" (singular) usually refers to an Andean Quechua speaker.

⁹ See Allen (2002) for analyses of *chicha* consumption in the Andes.

payment. It has to pop, like popcorn.” In their rituals, they heard the requisite pops, indicating felicitous communion with the land. After the burning is complete, “everything gets covered to not bother the land,” and “we light a cigarette that it’s said is for the *chinchiri* [devil figure], we light the cigarette and give the coca for the land and chicha for the devil too. Every time we go, we have to pay” (interview 2015).

5. Conclusion: ritualizing land

What, then, is land? Yes, it is a source of supplies and nutrition, the ground beneath one’s feet, a commodity, a place, a space, and a palimpsest (Li, 2014a, 2014b; Wolford, 2007). But as the Flores’ race to prime land for investment suggests, it is also a project. It is aspirational. It is a participant in economic transactions, a recipient of investment, a container and a gatekeeper. And, land is an animated agent: a mother, a drinking companion, and even a political actor (see De la Cadena, 2010, 2015; Blaser, 2012; Gudynas, 2011; Li, 2013; Rodriguez interview, 2015). Acknowledging this does not automatically take mining off the table as an option. Rather, it helps make sense of how the values of communion with animated land and small-scale indigenous entrepreneurship, in the form of an artisanal mine its caretakers hope to legalize, are deployed to resist the encroachment of an enterprise more likely to consolidate its own wealth and that of local elites than it is to redistribute returns on investment.

In this article, I have tracked the processes through which a family renders land investable by ritualizing it, negotiating a collective sense of their partially indigenous world as they meet distinct requirements for legitimating their investments. Doing so raises a related question to that which Li poses: *who is land?* This question takes seriously the idea that it would be arbitrary for some Colcans to see land as more of an abstraction, or less of an agent, than the humans in its care (Grillo Fernandez, 1998). That question also presents us with a nuanced perspective on the binary between “artisanal” or “informal” mining and “legitimate” or “corporate” mining, complicating our understanding of the plural worth of mineral abundance. Blurring those binaries allows us to see artisanal miners as not always criminal polluters, and as a diverse group that can in part consist of grassroots indigenous entrepreneurs, roles that neoliberal institutions have long instructed them to play (Cohen, 2014). These small-scale miners, we have seen, are not necessarily interested in making fast money by wreaking environmental devastation.

On the other hand, despite mines’ often elaborate promises of redistributed wealth through CSR programs, large extractive enterprises are also governed by often-unenforceable regulations that bureaucratized transparency regimes in fact do a great deal to obscure. Large formalized mines, too, ought to be analyzed with nuance (Arellano-Yanguas, 2011; Welker, 2014). They too can be ontological maximizers, respectful ritualizers, and even sources of substantive redistributed wealth. The corporate leaders of another enterprise closely connected to Caylloma Province, the large Tintaya mine near Espinar at the Arequipa-Cusco departmental border, are (however cynically) immensely invested in redistributing their profits through indigenous entrepreneurship and sustainability programs. Conflicts that have recently emerged there were rooted in the mine’s failure to benefit the public in its surround, and in its pollution, but were not about completely rejecting its presence. For Tintaya also employs a number of Collaguas residents, and makes sure to conduct elaborate displays of reverence like pagos and patron saint festivals as part of its effort to secure social license, according to a veterinarian who works in the Tintaya Foundation, the enterprise’s CSR program (Panuera interview 2015).

Analyzing mines large and small together, and in conflict, can illuminate understandings of what it means to hope for mineral wealth at an “indigenous frontier” (Li, 2014). The similarity between the two kinds of enterprises was exemplified in the final question of my interview with David and Cristina. Where, I asked, did they see the mine going in ten years?

David: “A very prosperous enterprise. Yes. A very prosperous enterprise. One that does not only bring benefit to our family but also, gives benefit to our family, to the district, to the inhabitants of the district.”

Cristina: “We want to work the mine with a great deal of social responsibility, with a lot of care for the population . . . after some years, and it’s not that far away, I want to generate employment.”

David: “We’ve invested money in the terrain, we don’t want to neglect that either. I predict that we are very close to encountering it [gold] . . . I know that we are very close. It’s nice [*Es bonito*].”

Again complicating any simple opposition between state-official-secular and local-spiritual, or legitimate-transparent-formal and artisanal-informal ontologies of legitimation, David and Cristina evoke the technical idioms of CSR, grassroots entrepreneurship, and job creation that large enterprises like Buenaventura are obligated to promise. The Flores’ urgent race to render land investable by drawing upon these mixed and ambivalent idioms brings multivalent experiences into the space of explicit acknowledgment and valuation.

We see this category blurring most clearly in David’s list of investments during the 2014 meeting. Making these dimensions of investment explicit, all together and at once, is not just a common feature of ritual as an interactional semiotic genre that highlights ordinarily tacit values (Matoesian, 2005; Richland, 2007). This is also a means of covering all of the bases, engaging with every possibly involved political and economic actor—with a maximum of ideas about what or who land is, does, and gives. To again invoke Grillo Fernandez, this project relies on the “digestion” of diverse ritual procedures, a move that exemplifies the way some indigenous-identifying Andeans, like other subalterns, smartly adapt in the face of domination without being untrue to themselves (see Comaroff, 1985). So the Flores’ project gives us more than an array of political rituals: it also tells a story of how ritualization becomes political in the space of a counter-rush to capture the depths of a terrain that just might become the source of poverty’s relief. At the time of writing, their effort is ongoing, and at least for now, Buenaventura has not attempted to claim Leonora’s estancia. The Flores family is committed to laboring in multiple worlds and to tactically combining ontological projects as they prime the land for investment. Doing this, they challenge Buenaventura, the state, and the reluctant earth by engaging and deploying the proper rituals of investment.

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