Remapping the Vertical Archipelago: Mobility, Migration, and the Everyday Labor of Andean Development

By

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Resumen
Este artículo examina los vínculos contemporáneos entre la movilidad y la inmovilidad en la región de Arequipa, en los Andes del sur del Perú. Basado en observación participante y una recopilación etnográfica de “cuentos de movilidad,” un género narrativo en el que se relatan los momentos clave en la vida de las personas con atención a cómo y dónde se mueven, yo conecto los estudios Andinos sobre el “archipiélago vertical”—la idea de que se puede explotar las tierras próximas cuyas alturas varían para lograr la diversificación de recursos—con estudios actuales sobre movilidad, migración, y desarrollo. El artículo analiza los elementos andinos de la movilidad, las personas y las cosas que lo unen, y las vidas que lo configuran. Yo sostengo que la movilidad es una forma de labor que utiliza valores regionales del desarrollo simultáneamente económico y personal, en un espacio que requiere la circulación entre niveles de alturas para generar valor. [Los Andes, Antropología, desarrollo, migración, Perú]

Abstract
This article analyzes contemporary relationships between mobility and immobility in the Arequipa region in Peru’s Southern Andes. It links scholarship in Andean studies on the “vertical archipelago” model—the idea that proximal land at varying altitudes has been exploited to achieve resource diversity—with current research on the technological and affective dimensions of mobility, migration, and development. I draw on participant observation and an ethnographic corpus of mobility stories—in which people recount the key moments of their life trajectories by chronicling how and where they have moved. This article presents an inquiry into what is specifically Andean
about mobility, the people and things it connects, and the lives it configures. I argue that mobility is a form of labor that puts regionally valued notions of simultaneously economic and personal development to work in an Andean space that tasks its users to generate value by moving between elevations. [Andes, anthropology, development, migration, Peru]

Shortly before we reached Taya, a stray stone struck one of the tires of a government development project’s Toyota Hi-Lux. We were winding along the Andean mountainside in Peru’s Arequipa region from one field evaluation of project-supported, culture-based entrepreneurial associations to the next. This was a new road built of packed tessellated stones—part of a rare effort to improve rural transport infrastructure. One came loose, resulting in a flat tire as fifty participants waited at the next site. As one form of development reached out and pierced another, the ensuing cascade of delays exemplified some of the key structural relationships between mobility and immobility that characterize life in Arequipa.

In the cabin of the truck, which belonged to the Sierra Sur development project, was a stalled cross-section of actors whose labor depended on mobility (see Figure 1): along with project staff Rafael and Yeny, in tow were Elena, an indigenous-identifying entrepreneur from the prior evaluation, and another campesina (peasant) transporting heavy potato bags, who needed rides to Taya. After Rafael replaced the tire, we rushed the passengers to Taya and journeyed up narrow paths along the Ampato Valley’s walls to Lluta, the next site, arriving after dark. The participants had been waiting all day, elegantly costumed and ready to greet us with Lluta’s kachi kanka (roasted salt) cocktail. They were prepared for the staff’s failure to arrive, routine for projects in rural Peru. Rafael explained our tardiness as beyond our control, urging that we begin because time was short. He then announced that the project’s regional fair would be held in Chivay, the provincial capital, in four days, and attendance was mandatory. To complaints about the cost of moving the entire team, Yeny told them to see it as an “investment” in their development.

This article analyzes how mobility and immobility in the mountainous Arequipa region (see Figure 2) configure the way actors locate their economic lives, forge their aspirations, and learn their place in a class hierarchy. Here, the bottleneck of inconveniences, asymmetrical valuing of time, and failures of physical mobility within a steep topography—all taking place in the context of a state development program rooted in the promise of upward economic mobility—suggest that mobility’s promises and disappointments materialize in an intricate layering of geographical and social conditions. This scene, in particular, illustrates that project staff mobility relies on the Lluta group’s immobility: their need to wait hours
reproduces their subordination, while Lluta’s vertical and horizontal distance from Chivay is exactly what makes it a boon to the effort to cultivate entrepreneurship by commodifying highland indigeneity. In what ways do mobility’s failures and triumphs matter as actors traverse variegated Andean terrain to generate value?

I answer this question using two points of departure: the presence of wide variations in elevation in close proximity in the Arequipa region; and my finding that people frequently framed their life stories as narratives of their mobile itineraries. I argue that mobility is so important to Arequipeño lives today because of the way it puts current public concepts of development—which institutions seek to secure through indigenous empowerment, self-realization and market success—to work in an Andean space that tasks its users to generate value by moving vertically between high and low elevations. Users must also make sense of the paradox that mobility in some contexts requires or creates immobility in others.

Key to this argument is its context: the Arequipa region’s “multitiered world” (Paerregaard 1997:23), where the local notion of putting agricultural resources and other forms of capital supplied by distinct elevations to work, builds historically elaborated economic habits into a national context of rapid growth. The Andes has long been a site of seemingly improbable adaptations (Murra 1972,
John Murra suggested that the very reason the Inca Empire could emerge was its exploitation of altitude: although it was difficult to cultivate diverse crops at any single elevation, the dense mountains offered many altitudes in close proximity, resulting in adaptive networks called “vertical archipelagos” (1984:124). Today, for the growing population of Arequipeños who no longer subsist on agriculture, it is difficult to get by without constant intraregional—and
thus vertical—migration. For the region’s agriculturalists, moving rapidly between elevations remains essential to daily life.

Many studies of mobility take a horizontal, map-like point of view. This article, instead, prioritizes Andean mobility’s vertical orientation: the contemporary effort to achieve intraregional mobility is a form of class-based labor rooted in forging new vertical archipelagoes of production, exchange, and affect. Arequipeños make these efforts in a context in which initiatives such as Sierra Sur define development as the twin achievements of psychological and economic growth, embodied in the self-realized figure of the entrepreneur. The way they center their lives on vertical journeys by foot, beast, truck, bus, and air suggests that ethnographic attention to the yaw, pitch, and roll that make up their “poetics of movement” (Rockefeller 2010) is vital to the study of Andean development today.

The case studies analyzed here draw from what I term mobility stories: a narrative genre in which people convey their life trajectories by chronicling how they move. I recorded these stories during two years of fieldwork in villages and project offices in Arequipa’s rural Caylloma Province between 2008 and 2015. Here, I place research on Andean verticality into dialogue with literature on mobility and migration to situate the vectors of contemporary development in Arequipa. I then juxtapose mobility stories and scenes to suggest the contrapuntal emergence of subjectivities through vertical motion. First, I analyze mobility stories from the top of the rural class hierarchy, narrated by two urban-based professional migrants who remain connected to the city. Next, I draw on participant observation to parse the way spaces of public transportation organize concepts of self-development. I lastly turn to a second set of stories, examining the opposite form of aspiration from the first pair by following the movements of indigenous identifying entrepreneurs out of the village of Yanque.

Vertical Mobility in the Arequipa Region

The contemporary importance of movement in Arequipeños’ lives urges closer dialogue between historical studies of Andean verticality and recent research on mobility, migration, and exchange. Contemporary studies of mobility parse the way transportation technologies “flatten” geographies between origin and destination (Adey 2006), reflecting the idea from Marx’s Grundrisse (1973:539) that capital “drives beyond every spatial barrier,” with “communication and transport” accomplishing “the annihilation of space by time.” Yet, the Andean socio-environmental context makes clear that movement tends to entail active and exhausting labor that also goes beyond the horizontal transit of capital, as actors forge and rework class, professional, and kinship subjectivities in variegated space and time. Far from being a site of sedentary isolated peasants, Andean Peru has historically
been characterized by dynamic internal migration and rural–urban connectivity (Altamirano 1984, 2003; Matos Mar 1986; Millones 2008; Seligmann 1995). The labor of mobility in today’s Andes emerges from histories of movement between vertically differentiated lands (Mayer 2001; Murra 1984; Ødegaard 2010), encompassing strategies of agricultural terracing (Wernke 2013; see Figure 3), kin circulation (Leinaweaver 2008), and “multisited dwelling” (Peluso 2015). It is also a result of differential access to mobility established through the colonial reducción (population consolidation), in which Spanish leaders resettled indigenous subjects into dense villages, immobilizing them to facilitate roving visitas (inspections).¹ While Andeanists have long documented migration, notably in Caylloma Province’s Colca Valley (Paerregaard 1997), the present analysis roots contemporary mobility and the value and subjectivity it generates in the historically persistent vertical orientation of Andean motion.

Studies of pre-Hispanic and colonial uses of the Andean environment shed light on the contemporary importance of vertical mobility. From the start, it was apparent to Spanish colonial inspectors in the Andes that “the landscape . . . imposed its own rules on society” (Mumford 2012:3). To acquire subsistence

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Figure 3  Terraces in the Colca Valley: a condensed example of the vertical archipelago strategy in contemporary agriculture.

*Photo by author. Yanque, November 2013.*

[This figure appears in color in the online issue]
goods population “nuclei could not produce,” writes Murra, Andeans controlled “vertical archipelagos” of terrains at diverse elevations, “facilitated . . . by the relative proximity of very different tiers, each with its own agricultural calendar” (1984:123). Mumford elaborates on this image:

> In an environment where no single place produced all the necessities of life, communities often controlled scattered elements dedicated to producing specific things: llamas and alpacas on the high plateau, potatoes at a lower elevation, maize below that, vegetables and coca leaves in the hot lowlands. The vertical landscape encouraged a model of community that was not compact but a network of linked settlements. (2012:3)

The scope of many communities’ territorial control and interaltitude mobility was dramatically reduced as part of the colonial effort to condense the population. However, Murra suggests that aspects of the model endured: “Even today . . . it is common to find households whose members are familiar with environments radically different from their native homes” (1984:123–124). To historicize Murra’s work, researchers have traced the influence of colonial and republican political–economic structures on Andean exchange (Harris 1995) on which this analysis builds. Harris describes the importance of locating vertically oriented Andean exchange “within a precise historical and economic context . . . to show how nonmercantile forms of circulation . . . were complemented by market distribution” (1995:353). She notes as an example the nineteenth-century trade in wool in Caylloma Province, where indigenous classified vendors’ movements connected rural highlands with urban Arequipa.

Postcolonial regional labor migration networks in the Andes build on select elements of the vertical archipelago model. Brush (1976:162) has suggested that they see widespread contemporary use. He observes late twentieth-century agriculturalists linking settlements over large distances, which can mean regular cycles of migration between ecological zones, and the establishment of “satellite” communities. The “colonization” of distinct “levels” also extends beyond pasture, grove, and field: Lund Skar suggests that vertically oriented movement characterizes modern gendered networks of interdependent exchange between elevations (1993:28). If interdependency characterizes the connections between network or *ayllu* (roughly, “community”) members at linked sites, racialized and classed identities are also interdependently maintained between distinct circuits of exchange, often emerging through intersubjective interactions mediated by mobile technologies that structure differential relationships with the earth (Orlove 1998). Caylloma Province, too, roots a scholarly tradition documenting contemporary vertical forms of cultivation and population distribution (Benavides 1994; Manrique 1986). Paerregaard’s analysis of migration in the Colca Valley community of Tapay suggests that periodic labor migration between valley and city, especially
among men, has long characterized the making of subjectivities there (1997). He describes one tapeño who “brought the exploitation of the ecological ‘levels’ to perfection. Besides his possessions in [the] puna and [the] valley of Tapay, he owns houses in Arequipa and Lima” (1997:120 n. 13). This more extensive “exploitation” has become increasingly important across the Arequipa region as job opportunities emerge in mines, NGOs, and temporary construction projects. These opportunities often require spreading a home over distant physical sites.

The intention here is to further examine the way contemporary mobility extends and adjusts Arequipa’s historically vertical orientation. This requires updating the above-mentioned research—a necessary task in a place that, as former local NGO director Aquilino Mejía explained in 2015, has rapidly “taken off” since 2000. Here, household-based agriculture occupies fewer families, electricity and running water are now taken for granted, and development projects focused on indigenous empowerment capture the public imaginary—for which aspiring entrepreneurs have financial advisors and Facebook pages.

Vertical mobility both traces lines of class and offers the possibility of overcoming them. I thus build on research into the relationships among self-making, exchange, and mobility. Munn illuminates how economic actors transform themselves through Kula and other exchange practices on the island of Gawa, where value is placed upon “the capacity to develop spatiotemporal relations that go beyond the self” by accumulating fame and influence over other actors and distant sites in the Trobriand island network (1986:11). Although she focuses on individual distinction, Munn’s notion of “intersubjective spacetime”—a situated trajectory of self–other relations, whose expansion is the goal of exchange (1986:10)—asserts that entanglement with others is essential to Gawan self-making. For the Andes, this idea raises questions of class. Trobriand fame and Andean class maintenance are interdependent processes; in the Andes, class mobility depends upon vertical diversification and three-dimensional physical mobility within and between exchange sites. Grillo Fernandez’s polemic on Andean personhood echoes that sense of interdependence. He opposes the autonomous western individual to an Andean self cultivated through reciprocity, nurturance, and community: “In the Andean world there are neither powerful nor self-sufficient beings; everyone needs everyone else to live” (1998:221). This suggests that an Andean’s ability to expand her capacity to accumulate material resources is coextensive with her ability to strengthen intersubjective bonds.

The way people move and the reasons they circulate—commerce, obligation, love—have received a flurry of attention in the social sciences. This “mobility turn” (Urry 2007:12) has focused on movements people make in search of various forms of development (Adey 2006). From “flows” (Chu 2010) to “hops” (Ferguson 2006), mass mobility is being explored as “a key trope in projects of capitalist development
and modernity” (Chu 2010:4). Mobility reveals much about the endurance of the technological and territorial dynamics that underwrite structures of place making (Rockefeller 2010). Chu’s work on mobility in China, and the studies of Leinaweaver (2008) and Rockefeller (2010) in the Andes, argue that actors’ mobile itineraries can strengthen the idea of home, even if they also require the “affective labor” of separation (Kwon 2016). For aspiring migrants in Fuzhou, “home” is not merely an origin point: rather, they understand “the necessity of mobility and travel to the experience of emplacement” (Chu 2010:53–54). In Andean Peru, vertically rotating children between materially strained rural families and higher status benefactors is a form of care (Leinaweaver 2008). Rockefeller’s study of the dialectical relationship between emplacement and translocal connection in the Bolivian Andes highlights the intersubjective crafting of personhood that happens as Quirpinis “scale up” their ambit of potential action (2010:28).

Altamirano describes a version of this scaling-up in Peru, suggesting a reciprocal urbanization of rural life and ruralization of urban life (2003). Today, dispersing family members throughout the Arequipa region as a form of generating income has meant a high presence of rural-born workers in the city and urban-based professionals in rural communities. Pressures toward intraregional migration in Arequipa also emerge from a policy of national decentralization, in which regional governments and municipalities are meant to have more autonomy (Vincent 2014). In practice, this has configured a rigid structure of hubs and spokes. Hubs like Arequipa city have gained decision-making authority with respect to Lima, but within their own regions remain concentrated foci. This institutionalized arrangement also means that different economic actors, from peasants to merchants to technocrats, must frequently commute between the hierarchically marked spaces of villages and provincial and regional capitals. Thus, many Caylloma families maintain an archipelago of homes, terrains, businesses, and social networks at different levels of altitude traversing urban and rural Arequipa. The following sections analyze the way people conceptualize the journeys up and down the region that make up the three-dimensional labor of mobility.

**Mobility Stories, Part 1: Archipelagic Urbanites**

This section analyzes the mobility stories of restaurant owner Yeny Huánuco (not Sierra Sur’s Yeny) and development NGO staff member, Luz Marina Rosas. These two professional women migrated against the grain of urbanization and conventional upward mobility to Caylloma, 150 kilometers away from, and roughly one thousand meters higher than, Arequipa (see Figure 2). Their stories trace the everyday labor of mobility required to survive in vulnerable class positions, which
entail negotiating particular trajectories through, and forms of immobility within, vertically oriented space, as they augment their horizontal mobility.

Yeny’s mobility story, narrated between 2013 and 2015, began with a move in 2002 with her infant son Renzo from urban Arequipa to rural Yanque, where her parents were born, to escape her abusive ex-husband. For Yeny and her current husband Dante Bayona, another Arequipa city-born migrant she met in Yanque, the village afforded an opportunity to begin life anew. Their jobs in schools and hotels allowed them to enjoy comparative wealth in campesino-dominated Yanque while moving with regularity between village and city. One of Yeny’s first jobs was as a school aid in Lari, a village 15 kilometers west and across the river from Yanque. She had to journey on an unreliable combi (small vans that run from the Chivay hub to Caylloma’s village spokes) route to what she called the “desolate” Lari early in the morning, returning late, which kept her away from her child for too long. The work quickly became unbearable. Yeny left Renzo in Yanque with her mother, who journeyed from the city to look after him. The income and self-extending social capital Yeny gained through professional work at a horizontal distance spread the family too thinly, and given her base of kin and material resources, Yeny decided she would never again work at a distance from her family. Thus, upon migrating to Yanque, immobility was something she was in a class position to choose. When she heard Rafael’s story of leaving his daughters with his parents in the distant town of El Pedregal to work for Sierra Sur, Yeny admonished him, stating, “parents should be with their children.”

Yeny approached her new highland home as a fresh laboratory for upwardly mobile entrepreneurial activity. She began as the proprietor of a small grocery store. Later, she sold food from a tray in the plaza. Yeny eventually found an opportunity to use both her cooking ability and the entrepreneurial aptitude she had cultivated through capacity-building sessions with Desco (the Center for the Study and Promotion of Development, an NGO). In 2004, in her mother’s old Yanque house, she opened Restaurant Willariy. She still displays her Desco entrepreneurial course certificate, signifying validation from the province’s most powerful NGO.

Yeny maintains a vertical network of producers. For meats and vegetables, she has relationships with vendors and farmers in Yanque, Chivay, and other villages. The rootedness of each producer at different elevations along Colca’s slopes ensures product diversity, from avocados in lowland Tapay to alpaca meat from highland Callalli. Her network includes vendors in Arequipa city, from whom she buys fish, cakes, and items to mark special occasions on her periodic visits to maintain kin and business connections.

Willariy quickly cornered the small market for construction workers, migrant laborers, backpackers, and other short-term visitors across the class spectrum who did not have a permanent local home. The various technocratic professionals temporarily visiting Yanque, including Sierra Sur and Desco staff, also frequented
Willariy. The enterprise has won awards from Desco for its success. Dante assisted when not working as a bartender at a high-end resort on properties just outside of Yanque, although in 2015, he left to work as a mine laborer.

For many Andean families, women become “anchors,” with men the more mobile gender, as agricultural and wage labor often forces men to stay in distant settlements for days or months at a time (Lund Skar 1993). In escaping the personal danger and economic limitations of urban Arequipa, Yeny temporarily abandoned that anchorage model by working in Lari. She then returned to a version of immobility she determined was necessary for motherhood, which simultaneously offered a form of anchoring her family and an opportunity to achieve entrepreneurial success. In so doing, she drew in large part on Desco’s pedagogy, transforming desperation into simultaneous economic and personal development.

Luz Marina Rosas, education specialist for Desco from 2013 to 2014 and a former primary school teacher, was based in Arequipa and stationed in Desco’s Chivay office. Her story illustrates the class-inflected complexities of vertically oriented mobile labor. Like other displaced professional parents I interviewed, Luz Marina insisted on basing her children’s lives in Arequipa because of Caylloma’s under-resourced schools. In contrast to that personal decision, which highlights how class configures vertical and horizontal ambits of potential action, she worked on a Desco project that prioritized rural immobility. The project’s goal was to invest in a cohort of young local entrepreneurs, motivating participants to extract a homegrown advantage from maintaining their purportedly fragile Caylloma indigenous roots and not moving to urban Arequipa like most of their peers. There, according to NGO staff stereotypes, rural youth tended to fare poorly as dependent urban laborers and were exposed to criminal delinquency. Accentuating a dark image of urban Arequipa, Desco’s program staff defined “authentic” emplacement as staying in Colca, with exclusively rural circuits as the authorized indigenous sites of vertical exchange. Such projects reveal the differential pressures of intraregional migration for people in distinct class statuses: for Luz Marina, mobility from urban to rural Peru as a professional laborer was an obligation that sometimes became oppressive.

Desco’s intervention entailed contrapuntal self-definition evocative of the dialectical transformations Munn observes (1986:20): in a counterpoint to the rootedness their participants were required to signify, a key commitment of initiative staff was their own mobility between participant communities. Exemplifying Urry’s “mobility/mooring” dialectic (Adey 2006:85), and redolent of the colonial visita project, staff mobility was only generative if their subjects were immobilized. Their mobility was essential to the empowerment package: the ability to traverse the province’s high valleys and its vast network of villages to make its visitas (the same term was used for colonial visits) has become the lifeblood of site-based development work. A superior intraregional roving accessibility is key to the
reproduction of development as a publicly recognized economic engine, especially in its current form, which favors a focus on psychological development based on face-to-face encounters. Project staff deploy mobility between elevations to forge relationships with their diverse participants and to judge participants’ progress through evaluations constantly measuring their performance as emplaced indigenous entrepreneurs.

One afternoon during a Desco visita to Lari, Luz Marina and I sat on a bench in the village’s overgrown plaza as a light March rain fell. We were stranded: the NGO vehicle, a Mitsubishi pick-up driven by an assistant named Germán, was delayed in the downriver community of Cabanaconde. As we waited, Luz Marina told her mobility story, which began with her being stranded. In a different way from Yeny, her narrative exemplifies the agony entailed in negotiating Arequipa’s mobility/mooring dialectic, in which certain forms of mobility are coproduced with other immobilizations, and are together shaped by the region’s vertical topography. Luz Marina began by defining her life by where she was not—urban Arequipa—and whom she was not with—her children and husband. She epitomizes a situation typical of Arequipa’s professional class: because of the dearth of teaching jobs for which she trained, she repeatedly had to make the painful decision to disperse the family. She described lonely weekdays at work in Chivay, where she rented a bare dormitory. Her children lived with their grandparents in Arequipa, where she returned some weekends. Her husband Raúl was an administrator at the Tintaya mine in the highlands overlooking the valley, separated from Chivay by a steep mountain road. Luz Marina characterized her marriage as a perpetual long-distance relationship. They began with jobs in different regions, planning to be together soon. “Twelve years later,” she lamented, “here we are, still apart.”

With Germán’s Mitsubishi nowhere in sight, she described her time a decade earlier when she lived in a hill settlement about a two hour hike on foot from a rural village, itself an hour’s vertical drive from Quillabamba, an urban center in Cuzco’s low-lying coffee-growing region. Working as a teacher, she only saw Raúl five days a month: their time together was brief because he had to make the arduous journey from Tintaya, taking multiple modes of transportation to arrive in the village, and then hiking on foot up to the house. Their ability to see one another depended upon the functioning of various technologies of connectivity. Sometimes they failed, cutting into Raúl’s precious days off. Luz Marina was otherwise alone with her first child; a cousin occasionally visited to help with childcare. Her only leisure activity was an occasional hike with her daughter, picking fresh fruit from the trees.

While pregnant with their second child, Luz Marina started to bleed uncontrollably during one of Raúl’s visits. Their struggle to reach the nearest hospital in Quillabamba, in her telling, lays bare the vertically distributed risks of maintaining middle-class employment. They slowly hiked down to the village, where they found no combi available. They eventually found a private car owner willing
to drive them, but that day coincided with a massive regional transit strike. With many roads blocked, and limited sympathy for her emergency, the driver could only take them to the city’s edge. By a combination of slow walking and hitchhiking, they finally found the hospital, which was closed, its staff also on strike, and had to search out other urban connections to contact a private doctor they had seen once before, who mistakenly diagnosed her with a minor infection. Spending the night in Quillabamba, they returned to the hospital the next day and found it open. Tests showed that she was on the verge of a miscarriage. She stayed in the hospital for a week, and then left her job as a teacher to return to her parents’ home in Arequipa, where she convalesced, immobilized, until giving birth.

These regionally networked actors, Yeny and Luz Marina, negotiate between the value of making a home and maintaining their hold on, and coping with, a sometimes vulnerable class identity. This negotiation is textured by the difficult labor of moving between distinct altitudes. Vertical network users, whether in emergencies or not, relied on a smooth connectivity that often failed, as its operators and transportation technologies navigated the difficult, variegated topography.

Scenes in Motion: Public Transportation in Arequipa

After long queues and a 30-minute delay, the rickety Señor de los Milagros bus, filled with passengers, luggage, merchandise, and farming equipment, finally pulled out of the massive Arequipa terminal and into urban traffic. I was a passenger; this 2013 journey was part of my move up from coastal Lima to highland Caylloma to begin the rural phase of my fieldwork. As soon as the bus was moving, beginning its ascent out of the urban center into the surrounding altiplano, a man stood to address the passengers: “Pardon me,” he began. “I don’t want to bother you. I just have a quick message about the importance of reading.” This well-spoken, professionally dressed man offered his captive audience a lecture on how essential it was to read to children and teach them to read for their intellectual and social formation, repeating the refrain that “culture begins at home.” He passed out copies of informational picture books, announcing that the low price of 10 soles each, or two for 15, was a great deal: one set detailed the human body, and another profiled ferocious animals. He walked down the aisle, collecting cash from several purchasers, before disembarking at the city’s outskirts.

This scene of entrepreneurialism in motion illustrates how movement between points on a map and between elevations creates a relational space for diverse forms of self-development and class aspiration, constituted here by framing passengers as a captive audience. This was a familiar scene on public bus journeys between Arequipa and its provinces, which occasioned the opportunistic convergences of actors engaged in diverse forms of labor and entrepreneurship. Near cities and

Remapping the Vertical Archipelago 201
toll stations, people boarded the bus for short journeys, selling snacks, sodas, and newspapers, spending their workdays zigzagging back and forth and up and down along bus routes, selling their wares. On other journeys, hiphoperos (hip hoppers) offered their audiences rhymed requests for spare change. Public buses were public spaces: they were sometimes moving auditoriums; at other moments, long rides and waits became fora for debate about regional politics and for complaints about greedy drivers and poorly maintained roads.

The passengers forming these occasional publics were agriculturalists, teachers commuting to four-day stints in Chivay, and other mobile actors laboring to bridge the gap between hub and spoke. Most passengers had reserved seats. Those who caught the bus at the last minute, or who could not afford the full 15-sol (about $5) ticket, stood, crouched, or attempted to sleep on the cold floor.

That labor of bridging hub to spoke is an unwaged effort of enduring the physical hardships of the wait and the ride—often cramped, overcrowded, and, given the many hairpin turns and narrow roads next to deep gorges, filled with potential danger. The rough texture of mountain roads meant that bodies squeezed together would knock into each other, creating social tensions that required active work to navigate. Being a passenger also involves weighing risk against the urgency of arriving quickly. The Flores bus line, for example, is notorious for its high speed and deadly accidents. Due to safety concerns about the steep Chivay–Arequipa route, in combination with a regional effort to promote entrepreneurship, smaller Mercedes and Renault vans operated by new enterprises have taken over an increasing market share of the route.

Many Cayllominos (permanent and temporary, of professional and campesino classes) spend a significant portion of their working lives riding on or waiting for public vehicles, and modifying their routines to accommodate those waits. A perk of Rafael’s job was his rare access to the private Sierra Sur vehicle, which conferred upon him the power to be the moving agent for whom others waited. The local combis are, like the regional bus system, sites in which classes converge. Few people own cars and trucks, so farmers, bankers, and teachers alike must crowd into those small vans, which for most of Caylloma’s villages circulate only once or twice a day. Proximity to Chivay is indexical of access to transportation infrastructure: the province is characterized by a “concentric” gradation of mobility amounting to a geographically “differentiated citizenship,” and a close correspondence between immobility and indigenous identification (Orr 2016:241). In these mobile “minisocieties” (Huayhua 2013), motion and immobility configure moments in which the parameters of public life emerge, as class and race differences are thrown into sharp relief. Although I rarely witnessed the overt racism between urban-based professionals and locals that Huayhua encountered on her Cuzco commutes, Caylloma’s urbanites frequently received deference from locals for seats when vans filled up, often by forcefully arguing that they had to reach the return bus to Arequipa.
Instead of the abundantly referenced “flows” in mobility studies, an ethnography of and in motion reveals that mobility so often happens in bumps and jerks, rushes and delays, lateness and embarrassment, as Rafael’s passengers and his Lluta audience can attest. These textured snags index the enduring influence of the landscape’s dense altitudinal variation, as well as contemporary sites of intersection and interdependence between distinct circuits of vertical mobility. Spending time on, enduring rides within, and awaiting public vehicles is essential to regional actors’ labor obligations. Whether a teacher or a farmer, time spent on public vehicles is not the empty time of compressed, annihilated space; it is the full, eventful time of exchange and intersubjective self-extension.

Mobility Stories, Part 2: Indigeneity’s Ascent

This final ethnographic section examines the mobility stories of actors that began their life trajectories in the community of Yanque and who sometimes identify as indigenous. Liliana Suni’s story offers an example of social mobility from what she implicitly considered a lowly indigenous campesino status at birth to an unusual height of professional accomplishment. Liliana’s marginality as a “moving” child through Andean and coastal terrains (Leinaweaver 2008) created the conditions of possibility for her upward social mobility. She was born to a large Yanque campesino family, with eight children surviving infancy. When her parents could not care for her, a teacher temporarily stationed there took her in. Liliana enjoyed basic provisions and lived a short walk from her family for several years, but when the teacher decided to start her own family, Liliana was circulated down the mountains of the Arequipa region and out along the coast to Callao, Lima’s gritty sister city, to live with her godmother. With much of Peru’s wealth concentrated in its coastal cities, sending children up the class hierarchy often meant their physical travel to a lower altitude. The deprivations of this new arrangement were a key turning point in Liliana’s life story:

I went to live with my madrina, who I was with until university. She had just one son, so together we were a family of four. So I was another child for her—in the emotional sense, but not in the economic sense, because economically, she gave a lot of support to her son, but to me, no. (Suni, interview, 2014)

Despite the opportunity to study in “one of Callao’s best schools,” she had no money to buy her schoolbooks, uniform, or other necessities. So in a moment that became pivotal for the development of her “entrepreneurial self” (Freeman 2014), Liliana bought a box of chocolates from the market and began to sell them, “growing like this, little by little”—she says this gesturing upward—until she became the de facto campus sweets vendor, lugging two backpacks full of candies to school each
day. In her telling, teaching herself to be an entrepreneur generated diverse forms of value: selling candies was crucial to her ability to complete high school and enter university, which led to her certification in psychology. It was also a key moment of self-realization, allowing her to attain the political skills, autonomy, and social capital that would lead her to become an influential community actor in Yanque.

Liliana, at 28, circled back to Yanque as a licensed psychologist working on a number of projects with Desco, most recently alongside Luz Marina on the entrepreneurship project. Despite her psychology degree, Liliana’s core expertise, in her telling, was the cultivation of entrepreneurial selves. Her life of inter- and intraregional circulation thus allowed Liliana to cultivate her “outward focus” through consistent attention to effecting transformations in others (Munn 1986:xiii).

Liliana put the entrepreneurial acumen she attributes to a youth characterized by unsettled mobility to work for Yanque. She was attuned to the increase in the number of international tourists visiting Yanque as Peru’s rural violence quieted. Conveniently located along the paved road between Chivay and the Cruz del Condor, a site to which tourists flock every morning to spot Andean condors, Yanque had the potential to benefit from new tourism revenue. Liliana suggested that Yanque’s grade school students take advantage of that potential income by performing the Wititi, the village’s signature traditional dance, for tourists at the daily crafts market. They could collect tips and save up for their class trip. Although Yanque’s schools had few resources, students dreamed of traveling to a destination beyond Arequipa as a rite of passage when they graduated. Since she made that suggestion in 2004, every day has featured a Wititi dance for an audience of hundreds of tourists. She transformed Yanque into a profitable spectacle to be viewed, if briefly, as a node on the tourism circuit, which then spurred the opening of an array of local live-in hostels and cultural tourism enterprises.

The influence she gained as a community member soon propelled her to election victory as a regidora (town councilor). She would later use this local success to claim authority as an adviser to Desco’s participant entrepreneurs. Recently, she and her husband Freddy Panuera—who works far from Yanque as a veterinarian for the Tintaya mine company foundation—have decided to enter the tourism market, transforming their property into a restaurant and hotel. They believe that cultivating their entrepreneurship represents a step toward prosperity while making permanent the time both spend together at home, which they see as the ultimate goal of upward class mobility.

Based in a home across the dirt lane from Liliana and Freddy’s residence, the Huaracha family and its ancestors have lived in Yanque and the patchwork of highland territorial annexes now under its jurisdiction since before the Spanish invasion. The couple anchoring this family, Gerardo Huaracha, 77, and Luisa Cutipa, 80, owns a range of terrains that exemplify Murra’s vertical archipelago:
a central household site in Yanque, croplands in the village’s hinterland, and pastures near the high-altitude village of Tuti. They have also seen recent success in the cultural tourism sector, maintaining two guest rooms in their home, and filling a third room with heirlooms, relics, and documents dating to the pre-Incaic Collagua era, which several NGOs helped them brand to travel agencies as the “Uyu Uyu Museum.”

Mobility was a favorite theme in the Huaracha household. Gerardo narrated his life by describing his intraregional trajectory by foot, horse, and truck, which many Andean children of his generation made:

In my youth, I studied only primary. And after, I went to work in the valleys of Arequipa—Camaná, Tambo, Majes—those valleys, no? And I made a little money, worked five, four months, and from there, I bought with that money my little clothes, little shoes. I arrived here, and after arriving here, my parents worked in the chakra [agricultural land], and I helped them in the chakra. Then, at twenty years old, I met my wife, and—I always went to the valleys to work. There was almost no money. I would go to work, then return after three months, four months, five months. Also, I turned twenty-two, then I had a child, Sabino, no? But I always went to the valleys to work. (G. Huaracha, interview, 2015)

In distinguishing between his two principal labor sites, the distant coastal valley and the local highland chakra, Gerardo’s refrain—“I always went to the valleys to work”—suggests the importance of altitudinal variation to his life story: navigation between terrains was essential for generating money and becoming an adult. His intraregional vertical migration enabled him to build savings and forge bonds with his fellow workers, conducting the labor of self-extension that would later become essential to Gerardo’s political success in Yanque. He was President of the Peasant Community, a formalized body that regulated land use and resource access, and District Governor, a local leader appointed by Peru’s Minister of the Interior who serves alongside the mayor.

Luisa’s body registers her own lifetime of migration. Especially when speaking of how comparatively easy it is today to move from Yanque to Arequipa, Luisa recounted her mobile past of barter missions on foot. As her mother tended the main household site in the highland settlement of Ran Ran, the rest of the family traveled on foot for four to six weeks at a time with some eighty llamas, donkeys, and horses upward through the cold highlands of Espinar and down into the balmy valleys of the Cuzco region. Luisa was especially talented on horseback and cited those experiences as the reason she does not walk well anymore: that past mobility’s cost has been a present immobility, accompanied by constant pain in her knees, waist, and back.

Sometimes as Luisa described those journeys, she indicated that her attainment of maximal social status was the moment she and Gerardo traveled farthest. In
2012, the couple was invited to fly on an airplane for the first time in their lives. Luisa recounted her experience on the airplane in her usual mix of Quechua and Spanish, fielding questions with delight. They took an all expenses paid trip to a workshop in the northern coastal city of Trujillo after their museum caught the attention of Turismo Rural Comunitario (Rural Community Tourism), a state-based initiative focused on indigenous tourism entrepreneurs. At the workshop, they presented their business plan, participated in capacity-building seminars, and stayed in an upscale hotel. The initiative awarded their museum a prize for its contribution to local tourism through its display of rescued indigeneity (Cutipa, interview, 2014).

But for Luisa, the airplane formed the core of the story. She dwelled on the details: the ride was smooth, and although “I thought I would be afraid . . . we just ascended, and it was fine (tranquilo nomás). And we arrived so fast!” Despite Luisa’s difficulty walking, her ascent into the air allowed her temporarily to overcome the body’s limits. It also allowed her to overcome the limits of social status. Although the workshop was presented to the couple as an opportunity to be valued for their indigenous identity, Luisa articulated her mobility as an achievement in spite of that identity: “I’m poor, I’m a woman, I’m Indian, but there I was, me on an airplane!”

Conclusion

From Rafael’s stalled vehicle and the Lluta association’s long wait, to Luisa’s aerial ascent, this ethnographic inventory of mobility narratives suggests that the ability to negotiate the Arequipa region’s dense vertical terrain is a condition of possibility for personal and economic development and mutual value transformation. Success in the labor of physical mobility entails developing expansive intersubjective and interdependent value-creating relationships that, in Munn’s words, “go beyond the self.” Liliana accomplished this in transforming Yanque into a profitable spectacle. So did Gerardo and Luisa, whose entrepreneurial effort led them to fly to Peru’s northern coast.

An important dimension of this labor is the sacrifice it often requires. Essential to mobility attempts is the ability both to endure what Kwon calls “the work of waiting,” as Luz Marina’s immobilization shows, and to exploit the tensions between mobility and immobility, as we see in the opportunities emerging in the temporary public of public transportation. Mobility’s vertical labor is sometimes agonizingly ambivalent, because the attempt to alleviate household scarcity by leaving home can strain kinship ties.

Contemporary Andean vertical archipelagos are built and activated through the expansion and contraction of families, professional networks, and class
hierarchies at different points on Arequipa’s steep grades. While the obligation to move between these nodes can be oppressive, so can the obligation to stay in place. In a context in which various exigencies drive people to circulate throughout the Arequipa region, reading mobility as something that takes place in three dimensions offers a methodology for analyzing how those who traverse Andean space determine what is valuable to them. The Andes’ vertically constituted environments urge us to approach mobility as inextricable from the places and people it connects.

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Notes

1 Elsewhere, I have written about the Spanish reducción and its implications for political and class identity (Hirsch 2016).

2 Uyu Uyu is Yanque’s pre-Hispanic name.

References Cited


