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Resource Rumours in the Bolivian Andes: The Potential of Gold in Community Land

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the rumour of gold in an indigenous, Andean community. As the rumour circulated, it triggered speculation regarding potential claims to the gold, as well as concerns about how extraction should be managed in order to maintain a good relationship with the animate landscape. Specifically, the rumour tested the previous flexibility of community rules concerning land access, as well as assigning more responsibility to the rotated local leadership position. Rumours offer insights into the social and emotional contexts within which resource extraction takes place, while at the same time playing an important part in shaping these very same contexts.

KEYWORDS: resources, rumours, Andes, *ayllu*, land, mining

One bright October day in 2008, high in the Bolivian Andes, sitting by the side of his field while taking a break from planting potatoes, Don Eusebio gently kicked the dry dusty ground that he was depending on to sustain his family in the coming year. Chewing his coca leaves and nodding towards the nearby mountain, Wayna Tanka, he said to me:

> I've heard that a few people in P'iya Qayma have found gold up there, they have found something, I don't know, but some of that mountain comes down into our village. There could be gold just here under us too, maybe under the potatoes. These fields are good to have.

In the weeks following this exchange with Don Eusebio, I was privy to several more conversations in the area about this potential discovery of gold. No one I spoke to was sure about who exactly had found the gold or the specific locations of the finds, but all the discussions were marked by an intense interest in the subject. Was the gold really there? Who did it rightfully belong to? And so the rumour began and spread in the local area. Over the course of the following pages, I will explore this rumour of gold, its socio-material and historical influences, as well as its effects on social organisation and relationships within the community, including that with the land itself. In doing so, I offer an example of the lived experiences that demand our attention in an ethnographically grounded analysis of resource conflicts in Latin America.

Rumours and gossip are particular kinds of evidence that raise epistemological and methodological questions for anthropology. Using a rumour as data may appear awkward - rumours heighten subjective positions, and the content is driven by multiple emotions and motivations, or as Andean anthropologist Krista van Vleet writes, it is 'interested data' (2003: 494). For ethnographers this is not necessarily problematic; our data is always subjective and generated from a particular perspective. In fact, gossip and rumours are in some ways quintessential ethnographic data, the seemingly mundane events from which not so mundane insight into human society can be distilled

(Besnier, 2009:1). While anthropologists may be at peace with rumours, scholars from other disciplines have been less enthusiastic about the subjective data that rumour epitomises, and indeed anthropology's management and verification of evidence in general. One such voice is feminist, literary critic Trinh T. Minh-ha who has accused anthropology of constructing its own discourses in an un-objective, gossip-like way. She argues that anthropology requires complicity within the discipline; anthropologists refer to and depend on each other, as well as favoured research participants, for credibility, thus producing 'peculiar' truth claims and representations (Trinh, 1989: 68). While I reject Trinh's interpretation of anthropology as 'scientific gossip', studying rumours or gossip does, nonetheless, force us to consider our methods - how we create hierarchies of knowledge and typologies of data. This involves not only engaging with the question of whether the data is valid, but also examining our own assumptions regarding the kind of data that a rumour produces.

The value of rumours and gossip, from the anthropologist's point of view, often derives from what they can tell us about social relationships and moralising discourses in particular ethnographic contexts, rather than whether it might be a source of verifiable data. As Historian Luis White has put it, they reveal 'passions, complaints and revisions that are sometimes suppressed in the lives written about from oral interviews' (White, 1994:81). Perhaps the most famous 'rumour' in the Andes is that of the *Kharisiri* (Aymara, meaning slaughterer), a mythical stranger who comes at night and steals the fat from people's bodies, leaving them to die slowly. Anthropological analyses of *Kharisiri* 'stories' have interpreted the phenomena variably as a cathartic response to, and re-enactment of, current and historical traumas such as colonial exploitation, fears of the 'other', racial violence, or ambiguous feelings towards capitalism (Canessa 2000).

My approach to rumour and gossip moves beyond the particular classification of rumours as data that offers insight into existing, but obscured, relationships and interests, exemplified by these commonly offered analyses of the Kharisiri. Instead, I emphasise the 'doing-power' of a rumour, its capacity to not only reflect and expose underlying passions or social hierarchies, but also to make

things happen. In a similar vein, Van Vleet (2003) has examined how the practice of gossip actively shapes moral discourses and social relationships in an Andean community, enabling people to create coherence and manage emotions such as envy.

The present piece builds on Van Vleets argument, as well as Max Gluckman's work (1963) on gossip as a practice that generates belonging; and Michel Foucault's description (1978) of gossip as speech acts that create disciplined citizens and social categories, such as deviance. It also speaks to some of the anthropological literature on resource extraction that specifically addresses rumours and their impact on the processes of extraction and the wider economy (e.g. Behrends, 2008; Onneweer 2014; Weszkalnys 2016, 2014, 2008). What all this work has in common with each other, and the present article, is its focus on the changes that rumours can effect. My argument, however, diverges from that of Gluckman's and Foucault's regarding the outcomes of rumours - while they posit 'belonging' or 'discipline and categories' as the given outcomes, I reject the notion that we can predict the effect of a rumour, instead each one works in its own way with unpredictable consequences. In the Bolivian case explored here, I show how the rumour created a shift in social organisation within the village and forced a consideration of the relationship between the villagers and the local animate landscape.

The land that Don Eusebio was working, as well as the land worked by his fellow villagers in Vila Victoria, and that in the neighbouring village of P'iya Qayma, all belong to *ayllu* Kirkiyawi. This piece is based on data that I collected during 22 months of fieldwork in Kirkiyawi between 2007 and 2009. An *ayllu* is an indigenous kin-territorial unit that organises people, land and work. Territorial units referred to as *ayllus* have existed in the Andes in shifting manifestations, ranging from large hierarchically structured political units of the Aymara Kingdoms, to the smaller community-centred collectives of today, since before the rise of the Inca Empire in the 15th century. *Ayllu* Kirkiyawi is Quechua-speaking, and one of the remoter areas in the department of Cochabamba, and indeed in the Bolivian highlands. Both Vila Victoria and P'iya Qayma sit at an altitude of just over 4000 meters

above sea level, and the inhabitants are almost exclusively subsistence farmers.

The *ayllu* as a community organisation is at the core of claims to cultural sovereignty by indigenous rights movements in the Andes. More recently, *ayllus* have been the bases for the implementation of land re-titlement - *saneamiento* - giving indigenous groups legal ownership of the land they live on. In February of 2008, Kirkiyawi was awarded a communal land title in the form of a *Tierra Comunitaria de Origen* (TCO, Native Community Land) granted by the Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria (INRA, National Institute of Agrarian Reform). TCO status gives *ayllu* inhabitants usufruct rights, that is the legal right to make use of a property, and ownership rights over most resources found on their land. The title protects the integrity of the communal land by prohibiting the private ownership of it; as a result, no individual or family can sell *ayllu* land. While the state retains the rights to all non-renewable subsoil resources throughout the country (as established in the 1997 Code of Mining, *Código de Minería*, and the 2009 Bolivian Constitution), in theory the TCO title ensures the rights of the inhabitants to be consulted during any state or privately funded extraction of non-renewable resources in the TCO.

Despite the reality that non-renewable subsoil resources are legally state assets, the villagers of Vila Victoria and P'iya Qayma have interpreted their TCO *ayllu* rights to include the ownership of all resources, including minerals found in the ground. This misunderstanding can partially be explained by a failure of communication between the *ayllu* members and INRA officials. However, as part of a larger discussion on human and non-human relationships in the Andes, I will also suggest that it is the result of divergent understandings of the categories of renewable and non-renewable resources. In the present discussion, the ethnographic detail of this misunderstanding is important, as much of the impact of the rumour was a result of the assumption that the *ayllu* would make all decisions regarding rightful ownership of the gold.

In addition to the confusion regarding the legal right to non-renewable subsoil resources, the villagers have no agreed process as to how they might divide the potential benefits from gold

extraction. Above ground resources, such as arable land, are held communally by the *ayllu*, but usufruct rights are in majority private, and everyday access to land is based on patrilineal inheritance practices. As such, land provides no clear blueprint for how subsoil resources within *ayllu* land should be owned and managed.

This paper investigates the effects of a rumour of gold in community lands. In doing so I trace how the impact of resource extraction - its history and potential futures - interact with a specific legal, socio-economic and nature-culture context to influence the thoughts and feelings about life options amongst the rural indigenous population. I argue that the rumour triggers the beginnings of a re-evaluation of community rules around land, resulting in a hardening of the previously flexible ways that people had access to land. It also highlights and cements some of the responsibilities the local leaders have with regard to the animate landscape, something that again affects community structure and the status of rotated leadership positions. As such, the ethnographic data in this article illustrates that even when the resources may not be there, they have the power to trigger social consequences that demand our attention.

Resource Debates in the Andes and Beyond

Resources in the Andes are simultaneously commodities *and* part of inalienable landscapes in complex relationships with their human dwellers. This section will link the analysis of this article to previous scholarship on resources, specifically drawing out the work on emotion, potentiality and hope in this body of literature. The second half of the section discusses the cosmological context of resource extraction in the Andes, demonstrating how this, combined with local history, influences both the shape and reception of the rumour.

The story of non-renewable resources has traditionally been told in terms of relationships of extraction and exploitation, of resisting communities pitted against powerful states or private companies (e.g. Acheson, 2006; Ballard and Banks, 2003; Mantz, 2008). Recently, the analysis of non-

renewable resources has moved beyond the level of these antagonistic relationships between extractors and communities, and new theoretical approaches are being productively pursued within the 'anthropology of resources' (Richardson and Weszkalnys, 2014: 6). This literature works to delve deeper into the 'resourceness' of resources, examining both the materiality of resources and the multiple experiences of resource extraction, as well as moving away from the dominance of the David and Goliath narrative of dominant extractor versus the vulnerable, local community (e.g. Behrends, 2008; Ferry and Limbert, 2008; Onneweer, 2014; Richardson and Weszkalnys, 2014; Weszkalnys, 2016, 2014).

It is notable that many scholars within this movement have explicitly engaged with the temporality of resources, specifically as it relates to future-oriented sentiments of expectation and hope (e.g. Ferry and Limbert 2008; Weszkalnys 2008). In line with much of this literature, this article examines a moment that lies outside a period of resource extraction, yet the situation that unfolded was directly linked to the imagination of extraction and the rumour that circulated in turn shaped socio-economic relationships, including those that influence future resource management. As Onneweer (2014) has argued - in order to understand the full effect of resource extraction we must also include what happens before it is extracted and even when it is not extracted. A good example of this approach is Behrends's article (2008) on oil in Darfur, Sudan, which demonstrates the disintegrative consequences of a rumour of oil. Here, the potential of oil played a significant part in the continuation of a local war. Behrends aptly illustrates how a rumoured resource has the ability to produce similar events to what an existing resource might. Similarly, Weszkalnys (2008) work on São Tomé and Príncipe examines how the anticipation of future oil finds created a sophisticated oil economy, involving infrastructure and shifting property prices.

While the present analysis builds on the significant work that the above authors have undertaken to foreground the lesser studied aspects of resource extraction, such as emotions and temporality, it diverges from this body of literature by focusing on intra-community relations, rather

than the relationships between affected communities and outsiders. In both Weszkalnys's and Behrends's ethnographies it is the government, or a range of powerful actors - such as NGOs, insurgency groups, national military - who are managing the expectation of potential resources and thereby consciously orchestrating the political and socio-economic outcomes. In Kirkiyawi, the rumour was a community affair. It also differs from the literature on rumours driven by *envidia* (envy) in Latin America (e.g. Van Vleet, 2003), or that of gossip and witchcraft (e.g. Stewart and Strathern, 2003), where the rumour tends to have specific agents (such as an individual or group), motive/s and target/s. In the villages of P'iya Qayma and Vila Victoria, the rumour was, at least at the stage of the research, not connected to a particular set of motives, or interested parties who were consciously capitalising on their existence. Instead, it belonged to all people, and while it certainly stirred thoughts and feelings regarding personal benefits from the gold, or fears of losing out, its impact was being negotiated within the community and at that incipient stage there were no given winners or losers.

A key focus of the resource debates in Latin America has been the role of the animate landscape, and how this shapes the motivations of indigenous groups with regards to extractive activities. Indeed, animate landscapes were central participants in the particular narrative that the rumour in Kirkiyawi created, as will be explored below. In the Andes and Amazonia, analysis of the relationships between humans and non-humans enables us to appreciate the multiple effects of resource extraction (Allen, 2015, 1988; Conklin and Graham, 1995; Viveiros de Castro, 2005). Many anthropologists have shown that the relationships people have with the surrounding animate landscape are nuanced, complex and multiple. Firstly, the defence of resources is not simply about a strong inclination to protect nature - an eco-warrior approach - but instead about managing the relationships with the agentive landscape (Blaser, 2009; De la Cadena, 2015, 2010; Li, 2013; Penfield, 2018; Salas, 2016). Secondly, it would be wrong to assume that mining is always an affront to the landscape. Salas (2017), for instance, argues that there is a significant difference between various types of mining, and furthermore that there are different kinds of mountains, or *apus,* as animate mountains are known

throughout the Andes. His ethnographic data demonstrates that underground mining conducted by indigenous people who are concerned with protecting the potency of the animate landscape is in stark contrast with open pit mining conducted by large companies or the state. This is because indigenous groups extract only moderate amounts of minerals and manage the health of the mountain through ritual feeding. Taking Salas's point that the Andean rural population do not conceive of mining as one monolithic activity, I will argue that my interlocutors view underground, community-run mining as being an integral and everyday aspect of the reciprocal relationship between humans and non-humans.

A History of Extraction

An appreciation of previous generations' experiences of resources and their extraction are crucial to understanding the meaning of the current rumour. As such, this section will offer a brief overview of the history of extraction in the country and local area.

In Bolivia, sub-soil resources loom large in historical memories, present lives and potential futures of the country's population. While resources have generated enormous wealth, the indigenous population have mostly not benefited. In fact, resource extraction - ranging from colonial times to the late 1990s and involving both state actors *Corporación Minera de Bolivia* (Bolivian Mining Corporation), as well as national and foreign private companies, has more often than not entailed the exploitation of the labour of the highland rural population (Klein, 2003; Nash, 1979). However, as I will demonstrate, the indigenous population's approach to mining is not wholly negative, but instead involves a sense of responsibility, desire for reciprocity with the local landscape, and dreams of potential riches.

Under the administration of Viceroy Toledo (1569-1581), the colonial government moved to intensify the already established *mita* (Incaic tribute system involving conscripted labour) to provide labour for mines across the Andes. Most famously, workers provided labour in the silver town of Potosí, with its *Cerro Rico* – the richest silver mine in the whole world in the mid-sixteenth century

(Murra, Wachtel and Revel, 1986: 7). The colonial *mita* demanded that one seventh of a community's male *originario* population (those living with their original kin group and who have rights and responsibilities to the *ayllu* land they work), always work in the mines for little compensation. This forced labour generated wealth that was enjoyed by the elites or sent abroad, rather than invested in national infrastructure (Klein, 2003).

By the twentieth century, tin supplanted silver as the most extensively mined mineral in the country. A small group of tin barons monopolised the industry, most famous among them was Simón Patiño, who amassed incredible private fortunes and held important roles in national politics. The indigenous poor continued to supply the labour, but saw little of the riches that they brought to the surface. The traumatic depth of the *mita,* and subsequent experiences of aggressive resource extraction, has led James Dunkerley to refer to the resulting suspicion and paranoia towards any foreign interest, experienced by many Bolivians, as the 'Potosí syndrome' (Dunkerley, 2007: 135); that is, a fear that outsiders, particularly those from the United States, will exploit their resources and labour. The 'Potosí syndrome' illustrates the way in which emotion and rumour hovers around resources at a broader national and historical scale. This national–level historical consciousness interacts with the memory and knowledge of the local history of resource extraction.

Ayllu Kirkiyawi is geographically close to both the town of Potosí and the productive mining areas of Oruro department, which experienced a gold rush in the 1980s. With this in mind, it is understandable that the local population might think gold lies waiting in the local hills. Indeed, small-scale mining for gold and other metals does occur in a handful of locations in the wider *ayllu*, which is within a day's walk of Vila Victoria, in designated zones called *cuadras* (squares). The Bolivian government established these *cuadras* before the legal creation of the TCO, and leased them to individuals or companies who were prospecting for valuable minerals, awarding them exclusive rights to mine the *cuadras*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, wealthy speculators from beyond the local area quickly bought up the majority of these *cuadras*.

In 2009, there existed circa 48 *cuadras* in Kirkiyawi. A majority of these had never been mined and instead most leaseholders retained them for investment purposes, hoping their value would increase over time, even though the few *cuadras* that had been mined had produced meagre results. Many leaseholders were eager to 'sub-let' their *cuadras* to the local population. The price for a sub-let in 2009 was around 300 US dollars per month, per *cuadra*. The local population who took on these sub-lets set up small co-operatives and worked narrow mine shafts in the hope that they would strike it rich. However, these co-operatives had a very precarious claim to any riches they might have found. Municipal workers confirmed to me that when finds had been made in the *cuadras* of neighbouring municipalities, the sub-lets to the local population were ceased and the leaseholder brought in their own work force, thus retaining control and profits. This demonstrates a continued local experience of resource extraction as a process that excludes the rural, indigenous population from its benefits.

On a national level, the battle for resources has in more recent years been marked by the water and gas wars, 1999-2000, and 2003 respectively (Albro, 2005). During these conflicts, large sections of the Bolivian population, including rural indigenous groups, activists, and the urban working and middle classes, mobilised to resist the privatisation of water and the cheap export of gas. Recognising past exploitation, these movements were part of a political turn in history that aimed to overhaul an unequal society and ensure that Bolivian resources benefited the Bolivian people. These events ultimately led to the election of Evo Morales in 2005, and the re-legitimisation of *ayllu* life. It was in the historical moment that opened thereafter the people of P'iya Qayma were considering the potential of gold in their hills. It was a time when things had finally turned in their favour, when the people had won the water and gas wars and the creation of TCOs supposedly secured *ayllu* lands. The fact that resource wealth had historically, remained just out of reach of the local population made the prospect of gold within their TCO, a very significant thing. As will be described below, the power of the rumour of gold draws on both the memories of past exploitation and victories, as well as promises of a different future.

The Rumour and its Consequences

Returning to the rumour of gold in P'iya Qayma, having heard about the gold from Don Eusebio, I went to speak to Don Freddy, a resident of P'iya Qayma, at the foot of the hill where gold was said to have been found. He too had heard the rumour and, along with some of the men in the village, had climbed the hill with the aim of confirming it. He showed me a piece of rock with a slight shine to it. He was unsure but thought that maybe this was a spec of gold and maybe the rumours were true: that someone else in the village had actually come across gold. The potential of gold was giving him a lot to think about. He was aware of the TCO status of the *ayllu* and discussed his potential claims with me:

> I am happy with the work INRA has done; now our land is fenced in like a *cancha* [pen for animals], and belongs to us. But they [INRA] tell me I can't sell it; it is only mine to work. The gold is maybe mine if I stay, I don't know whose it is. I wonder…if I find it, will it be mine? But, I would like to move to Cochabamba where my first daughter is and I have cousins that could find me work.

As mentioned, the TCO status of *ayllu* Kirkiyawi awards rights to land and renewable resources, as well as the right to be consulted in the event of any planned extraction of non-renewables in the area. The community as a whole - i.e. not individuals - hold these rights. But given this communal dimension of land ownership, who does the community consider to be the rightful owner of the gold in the communal land?

A person's claim to family fields and the communal fields are according to *ayllu* rules based on community membership, which in turn is established through a combination of descent and fulfilled social obligations. However, as will be illustrated in the following pages, these models of access to

land are largely normative and the right to work land is negotiated on more of a case-by-case basis, influenced by power, personal relationships and ability. While the community's ownership of the *ayllu* land is now established through law, usufruct is differentiated and less 'regulated'. Therefore, the organisation of land rights does not provide a blueprint for how subsoil resources might be owned or divided in the *ayllu*. Not only is it unclear how the villagers might share any subsoil resource, but with the potential of gold, the stakes in any negotiations over land and community membership are significantly raised, and as explored, people fall back on the ideal rules regarding membership as they navigate unknown territory.

This ethnographic section examines how the rumour functions, and how it produces heightened anxiety amongst the villagers as they wonder whether claims to land through descent and social obligation may be scrutinised afresh by fellow villagers within this new context of potential gold. In turn, we can see how this heightened anxiety impacts on decision-making, and ultimately on actions. The aim here is to lend analytical efforts to these immaterial drivers of change – rumours and speculations.

Descent hinges around *originario* surnames; each *ayllu* village usually consists of a majority of families with *originario* surnames. These are the families imagined to be original proprietors/custodians of that land. In P'iya Qayma, the surnames Chajhuari, Chui and Veizaga are the three *originario* names, and almost every man and child in the village holds one of these three. However, these names do not necessarily indicate descent. Instead, they often function more like titles and it is not unusual for families who move into the area to adopt an *originario* surname and over time gain full access to land. Studies of *originario* surnames conclude that they tell us very little about where a person's ancestors came from or who 'originally' lived on a piece of land (Saignes, 1995). This is, in part, the outcome of the extensive migration triggered by the colonial *mita,* where thousands of highlanders left their *originario* villages in order to avoid the labour drafts for the mines.

Don Freddy's family came from Cliza, a town in the Cochabamba valley, and originally bore the surname Rodriguez. Upon migrating to the area, more than two generations ago, they had adopted the name Veizaga due to its *originario* status. Their claim to land in P'iya Qayma as *originarios* was at the time of the research not questioned. While Don Freddy insisted that this had never been an issue previously, he confided in me that since the rumour of gold had started circulating he felt less sure about his future claim to land in the *ayllu*. He expressed a concern that some people may become more fastidious in following *ayllu* rules to the letter, and some might suggest he was not a full member and did not have a claim to the potential gold.

Alongside descent, fulfilled social obligations are, according to *ayllu* rules, crucial to the right to claim, retain, and access land in *ayllu* Kirkiyawi. These social obligations include participating in the *cargo* system by shouldering rotated authority posts, liaising with NGOs, and sponsoring *fiesta*s (parties), as well as performing communal labour. The *cargo* system, which can be found in various manifestations across Latin America, ensures that, in theory, power and resources are circulated on an annual basis within a community. Based on this, an *originario* who had migrated away from their home village and lapsed in their social obligations should lose their claim to *ayllu* lands. In practice, fines could be paid as compensations for unfulfilled social obligations, the work of the rotative leadership roles could be executed with minimum effort without serious consequences, and due to the shortage of labour in the community, seasonal migrants and intermittent returnees were welcomed. As such, migration did not automatically entail a definite loss of future access to *ayllu* land.

All these practices indicate that *ayllu* membership had a degree of flexibility that has come to characterise *ayllu* rules and livelihoods. However, as the rumour of gold spread, this flexibility appeared to come under threat. For instance, in the wake of the rumour, alongside the confusion regarding the relative rights to the potential gold, there was a growing consensus present in everyday talk that in order to make any claims on subsoil resources in *ayllu* Kirkiyawi, an individual or family

should work the fields on the surface of that land. This meant that future long-term migration away from the community risked forced abdication of any future claims to potential sub-soil resources.

This situation was creating a dilemma in the minds of villagers like Don Freddy, as indicated in his statement above: should he move the family to the city of Cochabamba and pursue a new and economically beneficial life there, but potentially walk away from continued claim to his fields and the gold; or, alternatively should he stay in the village, continue life as a subsistence farmer and pursue the possibility of buried fortune? His decision was complicated by the fact that his *originario* status was not watertight: he could not trace his decent back to the *originario* Veizagas in the village. When discussing the potential gold with his neighbours, one resident had mentioned that this gold would be a well-deserved find for the *originarios* in the areas. Don Freddy confided to me that he was unsure whether he would be considered an *originario* in this case, and whether the comment had been uttered in order to consciously exclude him. He claimed that this worried him and deepened his anxiety around decisions for his future and that of his family.

A few days after Don Freddy showed me his shimmering stone, I had a conversation about the rumoured gold with another P'iya Qayma inhabitant, Don Vitalio. He had planned to temporarily move to the city of Oruro during the upcoming summer months for paid work on a construction site, but had now decided to return in the new year as he was in line to step into the cargo post of village *ayllu* representative, *jilanqo*. Don Vitalio told me that if it had not been for the new land rights - which INRA had awarded them - and the rumour of gold, he would have stayed away for longer. He now felt he needed to be in the area and have a stake in any potential prospecting for gold, and for his commitment to his *ayllu* obligations - in this case his role as *jilanqo* - to be beyond the scrutiny of his fellow villagers. He was also convinced that the potential gold would result in more work for the *jilanqo.* As will be discussed in the next section, this shift in workload was about the management of the relationship between the villagers and the local mountain, Wayna Tanka, during any potential extraction process.

Resources and Animate Land

Until now, this article has discussed the problem that the villagers were grappling with in regards to the potential loss or gain of land and gold. In this final section, I will explore another layer of considerations and actions that the rumour set in motion - that of their relationship with the nearby mountain *apu* Wayna Tanka. In contrast with the vengeful powers that inhabit the mines: *El Tio* (the uncle), *Supay* or *Huari* (devil-like spirits) - which are famously described in the work of June Nash (1979) or Peter Gose (1986) - the potential extraction of gold from *apu* Wayna Tanka did not provoke intense concern regarding any automatic vengeful action by the mountain. In fact, alongside the range of reactions described above that the rumour sparked, what also materialised were feelings of resignation and a growing sense of responsibility concerning the work that lay ahead.

Don Vitalio continued to explain that not only did he feel the need to remain in the village in order to protect his membership in the *ayllu*, and thereby future access to both land and the hidden gold, but he also indicated that it was his responsibility to remain in the village and ensure that the gold was properly extracted: ‘This might be a lot of work, but we cannot just leave it in there. It is our job to take it out of Wayna Tanka. It needs to be done well’.

The local population’s perceptions of the potential risks and gains of mining is connected to their cosmological perspectives on land, and relationships between humans and non-humans. The current anthropological discussions about resources and animate landscapes stem from broader research trends in the social sciences and philosophy about the different ways that people relate to their surroundings and about worlds premised on alternative, non-modernist principles of nature and humanity (e.g. Descola and Pálsson, 1996; Ingold, 2000; Viveiros de Castro, 2005). As both Blaser (2009) and De la Cadena (2010) have noted, for instance, resources and environmental conflicts in Latin America are defined at their core by a battle over competing models of reality. That is, such conflicts are not a battle over *a singular* nature and access to this presupposed realm; but a

disagreement over what nature is, exemplified in the belief in opposing socio-natural worlds, or 'naturecultures' (Latour, 1993). Following on from this discussion, I take seriously the role of the local animate mountain and argue that the relationship between the villagers and the mountain was a crucial element in the inhabitants' disposition towards any potential mining.

Animate landscape was indeed a reality in this community, and the *apu* Wayna Tanka, where gold was rumoured to be buried, was often described as an agentive mountain. This was very clearly evidenced a few months before the gold rumour started, when a man in the village of P'iya Qayma was murdered by *apu* Wayna Tanka. Don Facundo, who was a local *curandero* (healer and fortune-teller with the abilities to communicate with non-humans), died at the relatively young age of 45. The village attributed his death to the *apu*, and specifically to the particular relationship that Don Facundo had with Wayna Tanka. Over the period of many years Don Facundo had offered sacrifices (most probably involving blood and alcohol), to the *apu* in exchange for his *curandero* powers. Don Facundo, villagers whispered, was killed because he had lapsed in his sacrifices, and therefore broken the deal he had made with the *apu*. Many villagers informed me that he had been an unscrupulous and unkind man and they were not surprised that he had acted dishonourably in his relationship with Wayna Tanka, or that the *apu* had chosen to kill him.

In view of this, it might not be surprising to consider how the local population may have concerns about digging into, and extracting valuable metals from the corpus of a well-known killer. However, the opposite turned out to be the case; rather than fear the consequences of extraction, they expressed the belief that small-scale mining for gold, managed by the villagers themselves, was the ethical and responsible thing to do. As *ayllu* members, they are tasked to judge the appropriate amounts of gold to be extracted, and ensure that a harmonious relationship with *apu* Wayna Tanka is maintained throughout the process: as Don Vitalio put it – 'it needs to be done well'.

The local conceptualisation of small-scale mining is one akin to growing potatoes in a field, both important elements of the reciprocal relationship between humans and non-humans. The analogy

between small-scale mining and subsistence farming not only concerns the level of control - meaning the decisions regarding timings and amounts of extraction and production in the mines and fields are determined by the villagers, as opposed to the state or a mining company - but is crucially implicated in how both these activities shape the relationship between people and land. As I have argued elsewhere, labour that engages with the land and renders it productive is highly valued in Andean rural communities (Sheild Johansson, In Press). This chimes with Harris's description of the Andean Christian genesis story, as imparted to her by her Aymara-speaking interlocutors, where food-plants, livestock and metals where considered as the blessed raw materials of the new world. They were given by God to be worked or processed, actions that are considered a form of blessing and wellbeing (Harris, 2007: 159), to paraphrase Don Vitalio, it is the job of *ayllu* humans to grow potatoes and extract minerals.

In her work, Harris highlights the perceived similarity between potatoes and gold, as well as other minerals in Andean *ayllus*, observing, for instance how the same word, *mama*, can denote both a gold nugget and an oddly shaped tuber (Harris, 2000: 209-212). Carmen Salazar-Soler has also argued that miners in Huancavelica, Peru, view ploughing and mining as similar, in both cases the 'earth-being' (animate field or mountain) is penetrated by farmers and miners in order to be rendered productive (Salazar-Soler, 2006). The miners in Huancavelica described the discovery of a new vein as the earth giving birth (Salazar-Soler, 2006: 175-178), thus emphasising the miners' role in the subsequent fertility of the *apu*. Gose (1986) has also pointed to the reciprocal relationships inherent in mining in indigenous Andean communities. Nevertheless, for Gose, rather than the relationship itself being fertile and positive, reciprocity is predicated on ensuring appropriate compensation for minerals extracted, that the *apu* is fed well through rituals and sacrifices.

In agreement with Harris and Salazar-Soler, I argue that the acts of mining, planting and ploughing are understood as something valuable, and not something for which the *apu* requires compensation, especially if 'done well'. I do not deny that *apus* in the Andes can be harmed and killed

by mining, as variously detailed by Gose (1986), De la Cadena (2015) and Salas (2016, 2017). What I suggest is that in Kirkiyawi the assumption is not that mining is an affront to the *apu*; instead, it is an activity, which, if managed well, is part of a larger and valued relationship of reciprocal vitality between people and land.

It is evident, then, that non-humans are a consideration in any decision about extraction in this Andean *ayllu*. It is also clear that the villagers expect the relationship with the local *apu* would be improved by the mining, rather than negatively impacted by it. In P'iya Qayma, many villagers said that *apu* Wayna Tanka expected them to extract the metals from its belly, just as the fields are meant to be ploughed. This perceived similarity between farming and mining may inform local perceptions of the categories of renewable and non-renewable resources. While there is little room to explore this further here, I suggest that we should consider seriously whether these categories translate well in the indigenous contexts, within which they have legal consequences in terms of ownership rights. Their definitions are cultural and bound up in specific metrics of time and quantity, specifically a 'modern and western' definition of a non-renewable resource as one that cannot meaningfully be replenished in line with the speed of extraction.

As illustrated by the cases of both Don Freddy and Don Vitalio, this rumour of gold, infused with the hope of potential gains and historical memories of resource exclusion, set in motion conversations and decisions that in small ways began to shift societal norms, economic behaviour and intra-group relationships in these two villages in *ayllu* Kirkiyawi. This rumour also affected the tasks of the rotated leadership post of *jilanqo*. In so doing, this constellation of effects offer an analytical gateway into local beliefs regarding the relationship between mining and agricultural activities, and as an extension, insight into how humans and non-humans live together in the rural Andes.

Conclusion

During the fieldwork period, several trips up the mountain Wayna Tanka were undertaken by multiple villagers in the hope of finding some proof of the presence of gold. While none of the excursions resulted in any firm evidence of the mineral, neither did they disprove its existence, and so the beguiling potential of gold remained.

The ethnography has demonstrated how the rumour of gold had multiple effects in P'iya Qayma and Vila Victoria: influencing thoughts and plans for the future, considerations of one's rights and obligations, and worries about upholding claims. In a reaction to the fear of losing access to land and potential gold, villagers re-assessed their economic strategies and adapted their lives accordingly. Don Freddy never moved to Cochabamba, and Don Vitalio did spend his summer in P'iya Qayma that year. Another result of the rumour was the increasing responsibilities that would be assigned to local leaders - *jilanqos* - to ensure the well-managed extraction did go ahead. This potential work of the *jilanqo* provides insight into the parameters of impact that resources can and do have; for instance, demanding proper management of the animate landscape. Here the story of extraction is not one of violence and antagonism but about considered cooperation with the land.

Gluckman's famous work on the social function of gossip argues that they are markers and creators of belonging to a group (1963:313). In the case of P'iya Qayma, the rumour and gossip does potentially serve to deepen a shared experience of how the villagers should relate to the land. However, the uncertainty and speculation that the rumour triggers could also be seen to tug at the seams that bind this community together - the opposite of Gluckman's strengthened social boundary. Neither does this rumour present an obvious space of resistance nor collusion, as Van Vleet found in her Andean fieldsite (2003: 499). I would argue that the function of a rumour can never be a given, but always depends on the context that it produces, reacts to and inhabits. Similarly, we should be careful about making assumptions regarding the role of a rumour within wider power matrixes. For instance, in contrast to much of the current anthropological scholarship on resources and their extraction, which deals predominantly with larger scale extraction - such as at the level of the nation or ethnic groups –

this article has focused on intra-community relationship. Unlike the cases discussed by Weszkalnys (2016, 2014, 2008) or Behrends (2008), the rumour presented in this paper was not instrumentally employed by the locals - let alone a powerful outsider - for monetary, or other, gains. Instead, the impact reverberated within two small communities, resulting in a shift in relationships, feelings, social organisation, and the plans for future resource extraction.

The effects of resource extraction is not only created by the extraction that does take place, but also the knowledge of potential extraction and battles over the rights to these. I suggest that in our endeavour to move away from common approaches that pit small eco-warriors communities against extractive giants, we should look carefully for the everyday ways that resources surface in the life of our interlocutors. As such, we need to continue to pay attention to all the minutiae of experiences surrounding resource extraction, including rumours, emotions, hope, and the potential of resources that may or may not be there.

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