Title/Subtitle: Critical ontologies: Rethinking relations to other-than-humans from the Bolivian Andes

1. Short title (if included): Critical ontologies

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5. Abstract:

Drawing from fieldwork and archival research carried out in Bolivia between 2010 to 2017, this article undertakes a rethinking of Indigenous ontologies in light of Bolivian interlocuters' efforts to navigate deeply precarious ties to named places and saints. I argue that attention to such instabilities importantly challenges romantic accounts of ontology that presume a stable domain of materiality or religiosity outside of practice. During fieldwork in Sarahuayto, a village in central Bolivia, I learned about the ways that Quechua-speaking farmers negotiated the relational and ecological effects of a divisive history of indentured labor and sexual violence through acts of devotion. These include practices of *paraman purina* ("walking for rain"), as well of feasting, flute-play, dance, and chapel prayer each February for the Patron Saint Virgen de la Candelaria, named places, and the Pachamama. These practices sought to rebuild ties to named places that were interrupted by the forbidding of offerings by the prior hacienda master and reshaped by state projects of Indigenous revivalism. I ask what these devotional practices, and participants' narrations of them, might teach us about the political workings of Indigenous ontologies in 21st century Bolivia. I propose *critical ontologies* as a scholarly lens that insists upon placing relations with other-than-humans within broader fields of legal and political contestation over rights, nature, and Indigeneity.

Introduction

Ricardo parked the truck along a narrow dirt road located just above a flat high terrace that housed a Jesuit chapel. During the earlier era of forced hacienda labor before 1952, the chapel was used for weekly sermons, and the outdoor patio for public floggings, both delivered by estate-hired priests. On the morning of February 2nd, 2012, the road near the chapel was unusually busy as relatives, migrated kin, and neighboring villagers returned to the village of Sarahuayto to celebrate the Patron Saint Virgen de Candelaria.[1] Sarahuayto is situated in the mountainous province of Ayopaya, Bolivia and was, until the 1950s, an expansive agrarian estate supported by the labor of more than 400 unpaid Quechua farmers. In 2012, it was peopled mainly by the children of those laborers. Ricardo, his two daughters, Oscar, and I spilled out of the truck that had transported us from the nearby town of Independencia. Oscar, a man in his mid-30s who had grown up in the village, had insisted I join for the fiesta since we first met in nearby Independencia, where I was carrying out fieldwork at that time and where he held a municipal post.[2]

After parking, the weary travelers dispersed to visit relatives and acquaintances to spend the morning catching up with loved ones before gathering in one of two houses where fiesta sponsors (*pasantes*) hosted flute-players for meals and the drinking of brewed corn beer (*chicha*). I joined Oscar as he headed off by foot to his parents' home, a thatched roof adobe house located about a half mile from the road, where agricultural lands gently slope toward the sandy Sacambaya River Valley below. Pausing near an adobe wall, Oscar pointed to a rectangular potato plot, "This land belongs to my father, it was a gift from the master." I asked, "Did your father receive the land because he was a hacienda manager [*melga runa* or *hilacata*]." "No," Oscar replied, "it's that my father's mother was raped by the master, and so he gifted her land." He went on, "This often happened. The master did not recognize the child, but he did leave him land. But please don't speak to my father about it."

I was still mulling over what Oscar had told me when we arrived at his childhood home. There, his sister offered us plates of dried meat (*charque*), corn, cheese, and salad greens and we stood in the sunny patio eating while her daughter played with drying cornhusks on a woven mat. Afterwards, Oscar and his father prepared for the day's festivities, putting on woven ponchos adorned with white cloth squares (*qhawas*) and gathering their pan-flutes and camel-colored felt hats before heading off to the fiesta sponsor's home. The family had a conflictive relationship to neighbors, so instead of joining merry-makers next door we set off, again by foot, to the other half of the village (which, like traditional ayllus, is split in two along two moiety or family descent lines) located about ¾ of a mile from there. While land gifts like the one alluded to by Oscar might seem far afield from Quechua relational systems, they follow from an insistence upon *obligation*, and obliging elites for their misdeeds, that has offered a powerful reparative language in the wake of hacienda servitude in this part of the world.[3]

Not everyone agreed about the terms of such obligation, however. During an earlier interview Severino, one of Oscar's neighbors and a prominent peasant union leader, critiqued hacienda servants as *yanqas:* "good for nothings" who sought personal gain rather than the well-being of the village as a whole. Oscar's family had turned "to favor the master" and who "walked in his image." This master had retained land in the region until 2002, and in 2012 his grandson still owned a portion of the hacienda property (Winchell 2017). In the 1980s, Quechua leaders were convicted for leading a labor strike, with Severino spending three years in prison (1982-1985). "To this day," he insisted, "they are my enemies. I won't give them even a thing."

The enduring divisions this elicited were apparent in forms of residence in 2012. Sarahuayto's upper village half was predominately comprised of former tenant farming families who led armed militias against the hacienda landlord. Those of the lower half or moiety, by contrast, were principally descendants of domestic hacienda servants and peons (*pongos*) who had at-times supported landlords when fighting broke out in 1947 and then again in 1953.[4]

Oscar's account of land gifting and he and his father's long walk to the lower fiesta sponsor's home illuminated the fragmenting effects of the region's violent labor past. Making use of lands initially appropriated from Indigenous populations through a system of colonial land grants (encomiendas) in 1645, haciendas were landed agrarian estates supported by Quechua and Aymara laborers who "served" as unpaid domestic and agrarian workers until hacienda abolition in 1953. Workers were whipped, beaten to death, and often subjected to sexual violence by masters (Lyons 2006). With the 1953 agrarian reform these more proximate, fertile lands became the property of favorite, "loyal" servants who had worked them under the hacienda masters. Land was given to loyal servants as well as out-of-wedlock children. In Oscar's case, the master did not legally recognize his son, likely due to the risks this could pose to entrenched Mestizo property orders. Yet he did bequeath him land. Since state land redistribution of hacienda property beginning in the 1950s, parcels exchanged in this way have become renewed sites of legal dispute, community conflict, and ontological disagreement.

[insert Figure 1 here]

Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and archival research carried out in Bolivia between 2010 to 2017, this article strives to rethink Indigenous ontologies (ways of being) in light of Sarahuayteños' efforts to address and navigate what they understood as a set of deeply precarious ties to named places and saints. Such instabilities challenge romantic accounts of Indigenous ontology that presume a stable domain of materiality or religiosity outside of practice. During fieldwork, [5] I learned about the ways that Quechua farmers in Sarahuayto negotiated the relational and ecological effects of earlier indentured labor and sexual violence. Pilgrimages of *paraman purina* ("walking for rain") occur alongside feasting, flute-play, dance, and chapel prayer each February for the Virgen de la Candelaria, named places, and the Pachamama.[6] Participants frequently narrated these events as the rebuilding of ties to named places that were interrupted by prior hacienda master's forbidding of offerings. My analysis asks how such practices address a colonial legacy of sexual and labor violence, including attenuated relations to other-than humans. It thereby aims to illuminate a field of ontological practice at odds with more purist understandings of Indigenous ontology as excessive, or outside, modern politics. *Critical ontologies* name these varied practices that overlap but also explicitly address both "modern politics" (here: state land titling, 20th century environmental change, and the lingering impacts of colonial Catholicism and labor violence) and the problem of upholding Quechua relations to kin, neighbors, and other-than-humans.

Methodologically, this contribution undertake a *surface analysis* of narratives, affects, and practices that circulated in public spaces and were shared with me by interlocuters in light of my positioning as a White, foreign researcher.[7] The accounts included in this article reflect my acknowledgement that some stories (many stories) are not mine to tell. This approach draws on Sharpe's (2016: 113-118) notion of "Black redaction" as an intervention in the ease with which Black interiority (and suffering) gets posited and circulated, and Simpson's (2016: 328) related insistence on "ethnographic refusal" against the extractive and voyeuristic tendencies of

ethnography. Following Hartman (1997: 11), I approach these surface accounts "for contrary purposes," that is to rethink the scope of the legibly political. For Sarahuayteños, however, the stakes of devotional practices did not rest on the problem of ontological plurality so much as how to foster "good relation" with other-than-humans (TallBear 2019), including saints imposed by earlier hacienda masters and to earth-beings whom they were forbidden to honor during the hacienda era. In recounting these events, participants emphasized the problem of building, re-affirming, and sustaining ties to other-than-humans in the aftermath of an oppressive labor regime. Such ontological relations can therefore be interpreted as modalities of historical engagement with Ayopaya's enduring legacy of labor subjection.

In Ayopaya, I carried out 125 interviews and oral histories in Quechua or Spanish, including with mineworkers, municipal government staff, and relatives of earlier hacienda workers and masters. I also participated in offerings (*ch'allas*) to named places and the Pachamama, a term used to connote a person associated with adjacent agricultural fields and fertile soils. The fiesta for Candelaria (February 2) occurs at the start of a new growing season and includes acts of animal sacrifice (*q'oas*), collective drinking (*ch'allas*), pilgrimages to named places in the nearby mountains and geological formations (especially highland lakes), and offerings of food, dance, and song.[8] By emphasizing the political and historical dimensions of these devotional practices, I complicate romantic accounts of Indigenous relations with other-than-humans as following passively from a recursive tradition of Andean syncretism.[9] I instead take up *paraman purina* with an eye to the "worlding practices that bring about the entities they enact" (de la Cadena 2011: 200). Seeing relations to other-than-humans as contingent upon action introduces new questions of their disruption, weakening, or attenuation in conditions where devotion is impossible or newly unappealing. I thereby hope to illuminate how Quechua Bolivians navigate earlier racial violence both as land dispossession and as a set of broader spatial and religious fragmentations that are not easily remedied through legal paradigms of recognition and redress.[10]

New materialisms and Indigenous ontologies

My argument draws insight from two fields of scholarly debate: first, studies of materialism or post-humanisms that refocus attention to material landscapes, object worlds and agents in order to remedy an over-emphasis on language and discourse in post-structuralist approaches (Bennett 2010: vii; Latour 1991; Stengers 2010). Concentrating on how non-human actors "enact" and thereby produce physical life can illuminate forms of action at odds with narratives of human exceptionalism that treat people as uniquely creative and nature as inert (Barad 2009: 175) and which therefore overlook the relations of reciprocity, touch, and care that come to jointly produce and create entities (Haraway 2008: 41; Ballestero 2019).

Renewed concerns with materiality have emerged alongside a second field of inquiry concerning Indigenous ontologies, that is—ways of being not fully subsumed within or translated into the logics of late liberalism (de la Cadena and Blaser 2018). In recent years, anthropologists have focused on Indigenous communities in the lowlands of South America for what their orientations to animals and landscapes reveal about the slippages of nature and culture (Descola 2014; Viveiros De Castro 2015). Work in this vein sets out to challenge the ubiquity of representation as a heuristic—that is, the secular or more Protestant view of other-than-humans as equivalent to the "supernatural," or as belief systems by which humanity projects itself upon the natural world as religion (Kauanui 2017; de la Cadena 2015). This has opened up new perspectives on Andean practices of ritualized exchanges with place-based earth beings, a classic

topic of ethnographic study. Offerings (*ch'allas*) of flute-play, dance, and animal meat can be re-approached not simply as externalizations of Andean worldviews but as practices that enact forms of agency at odds with secular presumptions either of a single God or of a passive, uniform Nature.[11] The cosmopolitical turn thereby invites renewed attention to the integrity and force of Indigenous practices at odds with hegemonic narratives of ethnocide or assimilation, that is of Indigeneity's inevitable subsumption within or displacement by Western modernity.

Critics charge that these efforts to recuperate a notion of ontological plurality, and its association with Indigenous peoples, uncannily echo secular ideas of the religious as a pre-modern, animistic residue that cannot be fully known but that offers "existential comfort in times of uncertainty and alienation" (Fernando 2017; see also Molina 2017a). In their efforts to resuscitate Indigenous relationalities, scholars risk painting an overly uniform portrait of the modern.[12] Furthermore, defining Indigenous ontologies as elusive or "excessive" overlooks how, in Peru, Bolivia, at Standing Rock, in the Te Awa Tupua act (New Zealand), and in the efforts to recognize the Ganga and Yamuna rivers (in India), other-than-human agencies are always *already* in dialogue with modern legal formations including Indigenous and human rights legislation, legacies of colonial Catholicism and Protestant-inflected secularity, and emergent discourses of Nature's sacrality in Indigenous and "nativist" activisms (G. Johnson and Kraft 2017; M. Johnson 2017; Lloyd 2017). Ideas of Indigenous attachment and care for other-than-humans here are not limited to anthropology; they are increasingly key to governmental Rights of Nature legislation and for nascent global movements that appeal to spirituality to protect and defend a dying planet. In this context, viewing other-than-humans as *beyond* modern politics risks reproducing settler frameworks of Indigenous religions as irrational, even terroristic residues (Kauanui 2017; Klassen 2017). Additionally, it can close down inquiry into how "modern" configurations assimilate or are transformed by resurgent spiritualities.

Despite critiques of the ontological turn as but another reiteration of the "savage slot" (Todd 2018; Bessire and Bond 2014; see also Trouillot 1991), new attention to Indigenous cosmological and ontological systems nonetheless can teach us about Indigenous refusals to engage with the world in ways that ascribe to modern Western conceptions of property and resources. Such nature/culture slippages irritate legal grammars of property premised upon the idea of discrete elements and resources (Papadopoulos et al. 2021: 2). Instead, they point to affective entanglements with other-than-humans at odds with modern liberal formations of "nature" and also of kinship (TallBear and Wiley 2019: 5; Simpson 2016). De la Cadena (2011: 279) proposes "cosmopolitics" as a way to sit with incommensurable forms of political practice in order to disrupt the frameworks of politics and justice that are allowable when nature and humanity are treated as separate.[13] If earth-beings are also kin (Salas Carreño 2016), their supplication affirms relationalities at odds with the fixing of kinship through modern regimes of racialized property and Indigenous dispossession (TallBear 2019). As forms of kin cultivated through "rearing" (*uyway*), such other-than-human agencies "emerge jointly" through material and affective consubstantiation (Weismantel 1997: 64, 192). In this way, earth-beings are not only inert matter, say a mountain layered with cultural meaning, but rather are crafted through action and known through what they *do* (Mannheim and Salas Carreño 2015: 66).[14]

Inquiry into nascent relationalities forged through ties to other-than-humans also offers an opportunity to re-assess the integrity of the "modern" (and of modern religion) as divorced from notions of animism, sacredness, or spirituality. Along these lines, Lloyd (2017) and Fernando (2017) ask: is the idea of the "native" (as rootedness and attachment to land) resistant to secular modernity, or might it be partly its product or symptom? This question is crucial given

how other-than-humans have "re-emerged publicly" in Peru (de la Cadena 2015, Bacigalupo 2021: 184), in Bolivian revivalist politics (Burman 2017), in Mapuche land struggles (Di Giminiani 2018: 171-172), and in global Rights of Nature movements. As of 2021, more than 17 countries had rights of nature legislation (Kauffman 2021). Recentering such resurgences casts in a new light proliferating appeals to the sacred in Indigenous political mobilizations and global Rights of Nature movements.

In dialogue with this lively field of debate, I examine practices of *paraman purina* (walking for rain) as occasions of Quechua people's purposeful engagements with the fragmentations, divisions, and relational attenuations elicited by hacienda servitude and politicized by state programs of Indigenous revivalism since 2006. In Sarahuayto, practices of offering and devotion to saints and earth-beings involved efforts to grapple with histories of colonial Catholicism and Mestizo violence that had disrupted attachments to other-than-humans, saints, and the Pachamama. If earth-beings arise as kin who demand care and responsiveness from human inhabitants (Salas Carreño 2016), that care was destabilized by hacienda labor and sexual violence.[15] As in de la Cadena's (2015: 106-107) account of Lauramarca (Peru), in Sarahuayto the kin relations and exchange practices that enact other-than-humans were altered by hacienda servitude, specifically the former master's forbidding of offerings. The violence of land dispossession was not just one of property expropriation, but also of "disconnecting [villagers] from our ancestral possessions of antique customs that we have had with the estate in question" (cited in de la Cadena 2015: 138). In this context, offerings (*ch'allas*)—including the recent revival of offering practices—are critical for local efforts to rebuild relations with earth-beings weakened by their earlier abandonment.[16]

Along with situating ties to other-than-humans historically, here I ask how people inhabit multiple relational regimes simultaneously.[17] This emphasis is not entirely new; scholars like Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2018: 6) have proposed "political ontology" as a way to apprehend "divergent worldings constantly coming about through negotiations, enmeshments, crossings, and interruptions." Yet arguments for a pluriverse at times slip into a language of *new contact across worlds* (Blaser 2013).[18] Here, the opposite of a one-world approach are those localized pluralities opposed to extractivism, ones that inhabit a space partly *outside* of histories of property and progress. Arturo Escobar (2018: x, 20) refers to this contact zone as a "civilizational juncture" based on the clash of minoritarian life projects and Western modernity, in which Black and Indigenous movements provide an opportunity to reorient design from its dependence on capital and the marketplace. Conversely, Anders Burman (2020: 182) argues that Indigeneity is so thoroughly absorbed into Bolivian governance that it has become a "black hole" that subsumes everything it touches. Here Indigeneity tends to be aligned either with resilient anti-extractivist plurality, or, where that politics falls short, with a manipulated instrument evacuated of true difference.[19]

My analysis draws from these debates to contemplate the intertwined histories of human, other-than-human, species, and landscape that cohere in plantation afterlives, of which haciendas can be understood as one variant (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019: 187). Rather than view ontologies as integrated (anti-extractivist) worlds or empty instruments, I follow Sarahuayteños' focus on historical fragmentations that do not eradicate or empty out difference but instead make it into a renewed site of care.[20] While Spanish colonial systems of agriculture—above all resource plantations—undeniably altered and re-ordered Quechua land relations, religious life, and political orders, those displacements were not monolithic; instead, they remain *patchy*.[21] Contemporary land and land-based relations are shot through with attachments that pose key

challenges to universalizing fantasies of European displacement. Here, I focus upon devotional practices aimed at creating and sustaining good relation with estranged kin, neighbors, and other-than-humans after the earlier forbidding of sacrifice and given fragmentary histories of sexual violence.[22] In this context, ontological relations do not only *multiply* but are also *recast* to address contemporary political and ethical questions of belonging after violence. Sarahuayteños' devotional practices were thus not "outside" modernity nor innocent of political critique (Bessire and Bond 2014: 441). Suspending more monolithic understandings of colonial legacies and of Indigenous ontologies, I instead attend to how Quechua Bolivians strive to rebuild attachments to landscapes, estranged neighbors, uncertain kin, and other-than-humans given the relational fall-out of an oppressive labor past.

Ecological and relational afterlives of subjection

In the agricultural province of Ayopaya, Bolivia, Quechua farmers with whom I spoke frequently blamed eroding soils and low crop yields on the land's earlier overuse and later contamination by pesticides by Mestizo hacienda owners. As I discuss elsewhere (Winchell 2020), they often perceived blight and related food shortages through the prism of the hacienda system's long-term ecological and relational effects. This was especially true of a severe blight in 2010, in which more than 100 communities were impacted and villagers lost about 87 percent of the total crop yield (La Patria 2010). Such events can be understood as evidence of the devastating impacts of the introduction of crop monocultures through colonial agriculture (Haraway and Tsing 2019; for Bolivia see Urquidi 1974; Gamucio 1977). More recently, top-soil loss has followed shifting farming procedures, pesticide use, and toxic run-off from unregulated mining pursuits (Zimmerer 1996: 110). Soil loss has been further aggravated by rising pesticide (organochloride) use as well as chemical runoff of mercury, radium, and lead from unregulated gold mining (Jørs 2016: 18).

While soil degradation from pesticide use since the 1960s postdates formal hacienda abolition by a decade, as I discuss elsewhere (Winchell 2020) it retains the trappings of earlier racial hierarchies of labor subjection. While haciendas throughout this Cochabamba region showed multiple signs of decline by 1916 (Gotkowitz 2007: 140–41), in entrenched hacienda regions of Ayopaya, Tapacarí, Arque, and Mizque, *colonaje* remained a dominant labor form until at least 1953 (Jackson 1994: 164). There, forced labor gave way to sharecropping. Those who did not have land worked "in company" with former masters, on whom they depended for seeds and plows. Former hacendado families manipulated peasant union structures (Rivera Cusicanqui 1987) and often retained land rights. The opposition this has elicited from Quechua and Aymara farmers is evident in peasant labor strikes on former haciendas in the 1980s, for which several Quechua leaders were subsequently imprisoned (Winchell 2022). It is this situation that President Morales (2006-2019), Bolivia's Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government promised to improve through decolonial reform, including land titling. I examine this program in detail elsewhere (Winchell 2018: 462, 2022). Here, I approach "contamination" from a different angle, one attentive to "moral metereologies" that coarticulate environmental and ontological processes (Burman 2017; Salas Carreño 2021) and that connect environmental degradation to colonialism. Doing so reveals how kinship traverses both: histories of land gifting and sexual violence affect attachments to other-than-humans, and environmental questions are also problems of being in good relation (Liboiron 2021: 19).

During Candelaria, villagers lit candles and prayed to Candelaria as well as offered gifts of song, dance, and pilgrimage to the Pachamama and other named places.[23] These practices occurred at a time of notable governmental anxiety with crop health and with the broader

conditions of peasant life in a region known for its violent history of hacienda servitude (Winchell 2022). In locating that labor past in qualities of a surrounding landscape, Sarahuayteños did not elaborate an "ontology" that could be detached from the problem of a landscape whose soils, crops, and ties to non-human persons and kin were eroded by earlier hacienda subjection. This raises a crucial question: How are Indigenous formations of ontological plurality experienced or sustained in sites marked by the continued material and relational grip of colonial-originating labor, economic, and racialized political systems? Posing this question allows us to re-assess approaches to Anthropogenic climate change that re-inscribe Eurocentric assumptions about materiality while muting Indigenous political engagements with landscapes (Todd 2016). Instead, following Yusoff (2018: 103), my hope here is to contravene in such tendencies both through an analytic challenge to Eurocentrism and also a "realignment of sense."

Crafting life in an eroded landscape

In Ayopaya, villagers characterized enduring relations to named places, otherwise known as *wak'as*, earth-beings, or other-than-humans, as dramatically altered when those practices were condemned under an earlier forced labor regime. In our conversations, farmers narrated drought, lacking rainfall, and potato blight as the outward, tangible expressions of the moral judgements of named places and saints. As one aging farmer put it, "The land is dry and crumbling. It doesn't produce anymore." Expecting to hear him link this to climate change, I asked why he thought this was. His response, "Because we are living in sin. We aren't living well together (*no somos bien*)." By contrast, participants saw occasions of shared gathering like saints' Day fiestas as important opportunities to restore degraded relations and landscapes. In such pilgrimage, flute-playing villagers dance the boundaries of the community, passing by sacred sites (*apachetas)* that are marked by stacked stones and boulders (Abercrombie 1998: 290, 319).

These practices resonate with broader experiences of climate change that are imbued with ethical associations, including of guilt, self-blame, and redemption (Burman 2017; Salas Carreño 2021). To inquire into the ways that Quechua and Aymara groups engage and challenge climate change through nonsecular languages and concepts, or "a relational ontology," Burman proposes the concept of "moral meteorology of the Andes." Using this framework, he examines how nonhumans (including *ayaju* or spirits, and *achachilas* or male ancestors) control weather, and how people seek to shape their agencies through ritual offerings. More than guardians of nature, he argues, in this context Indigenous people understand themselves to be guarded by nature (2017: 926). Pollution here does not merely describe a degraded environment but also "the disintegration of rural communities, industrially processed food, […] immoral social behavior, the lack of ritual practice and a more general alienation from the world of the *ajayu uywiris"* (2017: 929; see also Liboiron 2021). Such moral meteorology goes beyond self-blame to also condemn transformed orientations both to landscapes and earth-beings. This is evident in Aymara views that *jaqi* or non-Indigenous people bring climate change to local communities through immoral actions that disrupt ritual interchange with other-than-humans: they live "the bad life" (Burman 2017: 934 citing Aymara leader Carlos Yujra). Likewise, the Quechua farmer with whom I spoke yoked soil loss and declining crops to lacking piety.

This highlights climate change and related transformations to landscapes as processes that Indigenous Andeans grapple with, and not only through secular languages of climate science. Yet in contrast to portraits that oppose Indigenous from non-Indigenous experiences of climate change,[24] pilgrimage practices at Quyllurit'i in Peru reveal the range of orientations and

experiences of glacial melt (Salas Carreño 2021). Not only do pilgrimage practices shape and get reshaped by climate change, but they also arise as occasions of heightened state discipline, evident in the institutionalization of (urban) dancers, the government's forbidding of earlier practices of carrying away ice chunks, and conflicts between dancers and rural pilgrims about how to appropriately engage with the shrine and the receding ice. There, glacier retreat is associated with the Last Judgement, a narrative that coexists alongside ideas that Lord Quyllurit'i "was unable to bear the strong stench of human sins" (Salas Carreño 2021: 63). While disturbing in upholding narratives that displace blame for climate change onto Indigenous peoples (Salas Carreño 2021; Burman 2017: 923), such practices powerfully demonstrate how "Indigenous practices facing climate change take place within their own ontological terms" (Salas Carreño 2021: 67).[25]

Likewise, in Sarahuayto, people with whom I spoke did not view climate change as an abstract or planetary process: rather, it was the expression of forms of over-use and lacking piety associated with an earlier hacienda regime and that regime's impact upon Quechua devotional relations. Like the *jaqi* intruders condemned for polluting in Burman's account, or the ways that lacking devotion was blamed for the retreating glacier at Quyllurit'i, in Sarahuayto residents associated declining fertility with the forbidding of offerings (*ch'allas*) by the earlier Mestizo master. This suggests how—as forms of action contingent on continued sacrifice and offering—ties to named places could also be made precarious (de la Cadena 2014: 254). However, while the hacienda master had disallowed offerings, elderly Quechua residents joyously recalled escaping to the mountains to a frigid lake (Piña Laguna) to celebrate and make offerings. Absconding to the alpine forests, they evaded hacienda overseers, allowing for several days of revelry. This lake remains a key site of offering, including during the *paraman purina* pilgrimages of the Candelaria fiesta. In making offerings to these named places, Sarahuayteños addressed both declining crop fertility and a broader condition of attenuated piety toward other-than-humans and the Pachamama.

Pilgrimage and competing regimes of obligation

On the afternoon of the Candelaria festivities, I joined merry-makers and musician-dancers as they drank chicha and consumed potato, cheese, and a spicy *llaqwa* salsa in the outdoor patio of one of the fiesta sponsors, Don Angelo, also a village leader (*mallku*) at that time. As they stood about, a dispute arose between the host and a guest concerning a recent land sale. I caught only fragments: "How could you? Think of it. What of your children, your grandchildren? This land, our land, how could you?" As he spoke, his voice rose to a tearful wail that echoed across the patio, interrupted by a violent wind gust. Angelo leaned forward, his arms outstretched touching the sobbing man's shoulders. Just then, the head flute player put down his cup and took up his flute. As a torrential rain pour began he exited the patio, the dance troupe following him in short, shuffling steps in the direction of the chapel. We hastily drank up, accompanying the musicians as they wove through agrarian fields, passing over a creek before approaching the chapel. Earlier that day, in a pilgrimage known as *paraman purina* (walking for rain) the dance troupes had paid their regards to stone mounds at the periphery of the community, places attributed with agency.[26] In the past, I was told, this sonorous pilgrimage would last for up to three days.

In Andean practices of offering to other-than-humans in the rainy months of Carnival, acts of walking, music-making, and dance co-articulate embodied practices and devotional sensibilities, comprising what Mendoza (1997: 130) called "concept-feelings." Most crucial among these is that of pilgrimage or *pampachay* (leveling or flattening the ground) which has,

since the sixteenth century, been translated also as a process of pardoning or "forgiving" the soil. In this practice, physically traversing a landscape is understood to achieve an ethical condition not available to those who move by other means, for instance in vehicles (1997: 132). Pilgrims revisit sites understood to contain visible markings of earlier events, including for instance in one case in Cusco Peru the rock where the image of crucified Christ appeared (1997: 138), or sites of political violence to be commemorated (Van Vleet 2010). The pilgrimages that day visited landscape boundaries as well as the named place Piña Laguna, as well as other named places that residents did not share with me.

We then proceeded to the old Jesuit chapel, passing into the courtyard under an old stone archway overgrown by fir trees. There, flute-players gathered into two rotating circles of male dancers, known as *chiriguanos*.[27] Outside the chapel door, village and municipal officials look on, drinking and talking. I joined a crowd of women, teenagers, and children who were gathered along the periphery of the dancing. These competing groups of dancers embody or register villagers' support for one candidate or another, which in Sarahuayto also depended upon divergent alliances among the families of former servant and tenant farming families, as I discuss below. Whichever *chiriguano* group outlasts the other, withstanding drink and bodily exhaustion of one or more nights of flute-play, "wins." Dancers with whom I spoke over subsequent weeks were adamant that there are "always two groups" of flute players. Even if there is only one *pasante*, those who "are with" him play in one circle with non-supporters in a second circle.

Such choreographed opposition also carries cosmological significance, constituting a "meeting between two forces that enables a 'commingling of energy' (Van Vleet 2010: 199 citing Harrison 1989: 30). The success of a given individual in this battle reflects their proximity or support from other-than-humans, including saints or earth-beings, as well as their hard work and their relationships with other people who they can call upon for assistance (ibid: 202). Those relationships are made apparent in the quantity of dancers who are "with" each *pasante*, but support from other-than-humans may also be garnered through each troupe's danced flute-play (*paraman purina*) through the landscape on preceding and subsequent nights. Moreover, success is also evaluated based on connections to people perceived as more proximate to modernity and the state, including who travel to cities or overseas and have undergone formal education (ibid: 204). In Sarahuayto, candidate's alliances with officials were on display in forms of reciprocal drinking between *pasantes* and visiting municipal officials, including with Ricardo who had driven municipal employees, and me, to the event.

As the afternoon drew on, municipal authorities and union men from other villages took part in reciprocal drinking with the dancers, first filling *tutuma* (coconut shell) with *chicha* from their own supply and offering it to their drinking partner before the other reciprocated. These conversations often morphed into argument, men alternately pushing one another before embracing, and being re-absorbed into a *chiriguano* circle. The selection of a new leader was especially urgent as the village was immersed in broad disagreements about land titling, including whether to separate into two community units or to remain consolidated. Some villagers strongly opposed this unification, related to how contemporary land use related to historical divisions of hacienda tenant from servant families, with their competing views of earlier land gifs. Titling the community as a Tierra Comunitaria de Origin (TCO) would elevate some residents' land claims while putting at risk lands informally gifted to servants, including the land Oscar's father had inherited. In this heated climate, the *chiriguano* dancing offered a visual display of supporters (and bureaucratic allies) of each candidate.[28]

[Insert Figure 2 here]

That evening, Candelaria devotees lit candles and prayed to the Virgin de Candelaria in a small chapel as the flute-players continued their rivalrous dances, aided by the consumption of *chicha* and *trago* (cane liquor). The activities culminated in the sacrifice of a sheep. Amid stumbling flute-players, one *pasante* carried an adult sheep alongside the tangle of flute players and dancing bodies. Laughter rang out as the still-live sheep at times slipped and began to fall onto onlookers and fellow musicians, the *pasante* circled around the *rinku* space. Later, male *pasantes,* regional political leaders or *mallkus*, and municipal officials gathered for the burning of the *q'oa* offering which consisted of the sheep's hooves and heart wrapped together with anise, confetti, coca leaves, and candy*,* all understood as gifts to the Pachamama. Drinking here was felt to enliven people—especially men—to carry out difficult tasks, and to forge connections between men and earth-beings (Van Vleet 2010: 208). Likewise, acts of *pampachay* in the walking of flute-players, the contestations of power in the dancing, and increasing drunken-ness all assumed importance to efforts to shore up support from villagers and other-than-humans.

When I asked Oscar about these devotional practices, he explained that through flute-play or "blowing," participants sought to cultivate propitious relations to other-than-humans and control dangerous or excessive "winds" or negative emotions (Bacigalupo 2016: 58; Lema and Pazzarelli 2018). Oscar, whose had been among the flute players that day, explained, "You begin to blow [on the flute] so that the winds calm themselves. This is the idea. This is why we blow, we blow. It begins to rain in the first weeks of December and so we begin to blow and to help, we climb until Piña Laguna [Angry Lake] and play *pinquillo* [a six-hole flute]." While during the Fiesta de la Virgen de Guadalupe in the dry season, you seek equilibrium, in Candelaria "you're looking for conflict." He went on, "If there is a good fight it is a fertile year, [the harvest] will be good."[29] As the afternoon stretched on, competitive flute-play and physical altercations at its periphery were tangibly intermixed. Such aspirational conflicts had limits. The previous night, a tragedy occurred when a man attacked his mother, who died from blood loss. That death was not described as a "good fight," but rather as a senseless act of violence. By contrast, offerings of chicha, food, cane liquor, dance, and flute-play strengthened ties to other-than-humans, generating ample water flow in riverine streams.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

That devotional practices like these responded to transformed land, labor, and community relations suggests the need to reframe ontology from questions of a stable, discrete sphere of meaning or materiality to an *ethnographic* problem of how people strive to upheld ties through which other-than-human relations are sustained, or not, and the broader significance of such ties in the shadow of earlier violence. This was made clear to me in Oscar's response whether this fiesta was an example of MAS state efforts to "recuperate" Indigenous culture: "Look, it is difficult to recuperate something that is already lost. Only the activities that remain will be cordoned off, and thereby somewhat 'recuperated.' Because really you do not have anything you can recover. The whole record is lost and that's it; the only things that remain are attitudes, *fiestas*, for better or for worse." His account constituted a subtle critique of the more purist frameworks of Indigeneity shaping governmental initiatives at that time, including ethnic revitalization campaigns and the legal recognition of Indigenous communities. [30] Yet, Oscar

nonetheless saw the fiesta as crucial to Sarahuayteño belonging. Candelaria, he insisted, is "one of the *fiestas* that existed and that is a cultural expression, obviously of an existing culture transplanted here or brought from another place. But . . .There are indices, you can intuit, feel [*palpar*], see." Rather than a project of retrieval,[31] for Oscar this event enabled a somatic practice by which to incorporate elements of imposed religious and labor orders.

When Oscar and I joined another family for the long drive back to Independencia in early dawn, I mentioned to Oscar that Severino had missed the fiesta. Surveying the darkness outside the truck window, Oscar turned away, looking noticeably rattled: "Everyone has to attend. *Everyone*." As I noted above, in recent months there had been heated discussions about a proposal for land collectivization. Severino opposed the proposal, in part because of his own vital role leading peasant union clashes with the Mestizo landlords of the neighboring hacienda and their Quechua servants. Given hard-won land rights of peasant militia fighters, who are almost exclusively from tenant farming families, the idea of sharing land rights with former servant groups was deeply worrying, even appalling. Moreover, he had recently converted to evangelicalism, which likely contributed to his opposition both to the fiesta (with its abundance of drink) and to land collectivization, with its affront to ideals of individual wealth and social mobility. His absence highlights the challenges facing such devotional spaces as occasions through which to affirm ties to saints, named places, estranged kin and neighbor-enemies.

As farmers gathered outside the old Jesuit chapel that day, they sought to forge good relation among themselves, to earth-beings, and to saints in light of the fragmentations elicited by hacienda servitude. Other-than-humans and the Bolivian state did not inhabit different worlds, but rather converged as dancers and guests drank, played music, and spoke with potential supporters and bureaucratic allies. In this case, to be in good relation with other-than-humans also required taking on animosities and negative affects incurred by earlier institutions of labor bondage and land gifting. However, rather than only being a site of proliferating plurality, Oscar viewed that day's events as evidence of the attenuation of existing possibilities of being Indigenous, and of enacting ties to other-than-humans. His worries highlight how different realities "overlap and interfere with one another" rather only accreting into ever-greater multiplicity (Stensrud 2016: 80, 81; de la Cadena 2011: 274). Moreover, here multiplicity—as ethnic plurality—was not experienced as bereft of hierarchy, but rather as an artifact of state discipline and, in particular, of assimilative programs of Indigenous recognition.

Conclusion: Critical ontologies

Holding apart colonial histories and "modern politics" from Indigenous ontological practices has limited scholarly attention to the purposeful ways that people draw upon practices of care and attachment with other-than-humans to navigate the lingering impacts of earlier racial violence, land dispossession, ecological degradation, and possibilities for rights-based recognition. This slippage of ontological relations and political processes is less an outcome of inexorable immersion—as if people everywhere inhabit worlds that are already thoroughly mediated by "modern" value systems—but rather of Quechua Bolivians' insistent and purposeful engagement with relations of power in the present. In Sarahuayto, residents and participants in the 2012 Candelaria fiesta weighed and held together multiple relational regimes: making offerings of flute-play, dance, and sheep meat to named places (including those that had been illicitly visited during the hacienda era, like Pina Laguna); lighting candles and reciting prayers to the Saint Candelaria; traversing lands bequeathed to illicit children by hacienda masters and plots newly in

dispute given land collectivization proposals; and gathering (mostly) at the old Jesuit chapel to channel these animosities in the face of new opportunities for unification through recognition.

I have proposed *critical ontologies* as a scholarly lens that insists upon placing relations with other-than-humans within broader fields of legal and political contestation over rights, nature, and Indigeneity. As apparent in Oscar's juxtaposition of the Candelaria festivities and MAS cultural revitalization campaigns, in Sarahuayto earth-beings and state programs shared space in ways that contravene in scholarly visions of government and Indigeneity, modernity and ontological plurality, as necessarily opposed or mutually exclusive worlds.[32] Practices of devotion and offering during Candelaria were colored by doubt, and by worries about the capacity to uphold and enact ties that had been deeply weakened and attenuated.[33] In this context, devotion could not be separated from a range of overlaid and often divergent commitments—to earlier land gifts or their eradication through land titling, to a Protestant God or to the Pachamama and named places, and to recognized Indigeneity or its absence. Sarahuayteños's participation in (and absence from) the fiesta illuminates the work required to sustain and rebuild attachments to other-than-humans and how such efforts confront multiple—and at times incompatible—regimes of obligation and care.[34]

This suggests the ways that *pollution is relational*—both in terms of material histories of labor and land dispossession but also in the problem of landscape as one of upholding ties to other-than-humans, and of maintaining and affirming "good relation" with named places, saints, and the Pachamama as well as with neighbors, enemies, and estranged kin. Liboiron (2021: 19) makes this point, but challenges scholars to not collapse modern science-based assessments of pollution with relational definitions. The preceding analysis brings these two forms of pollution (as "contamination") together, just as Sarahuayto interlocuters do. Holding these perceptions together without hierarchizing them (e.g. treating soil scientists' knowledge as "true" and Quechua interlocuters' ideas as "belief") opens up new opportunities for dialogue and cross-germination across new materialisms and the ontological turn. Forms of labor and sexual violence refracted Quechua villages, threatening to disrupt ties among neighbors and to named places. Material histories of labor, land use, and pesticides went hand-in-hand with the hacienda's broader attenuation of kinship ties among people and with other-than-humans.

While scholarly insistence upon ontological multiplicity holds important possibilities for expanding the notion of self-determination—to each their own beings and agencies—against neo-colonial and secular disavowals of such agencies, this framework risks naïveté about the feasibility of proliferating plurality in worlds that are increasingly dominated by rights-based languages of (human) agency and redemption (Winchell 2022). Napolitano (2017: 564) makes a similar point when she asks, "Can an onto-epistemic analysis of relations of care, obligation, and shame do without the tensions of sexuality, desire, and impulses of predation and cannibalization?" Napolitano here draws attention to the constraints to ontological proliferation, including forms of sexual difference and hierarchy, in this case, histories of gender violence within haciendas to which Oscar's father's land gift responded. Taking my cue from Oscar's insistence on centering *loss*, here I have asked what happens to our understandings of other-than-human relations when they are calibrated to the impingements of divisive labor pasts and an uncertain present defined by disagreements across competing commitments, and attachments. My intent has not been to downplay the importance of what we might call ontological self-determination, but instead to take those competing commitments as problems in need of further specification and inquiry. Despite the impositions of colonial and settler-colonial legal and political regimes, however, I have sought to show how such relations insist upon their own

structures of value and reason. As lived sites of care for other-than-humans, then, critical ontologies may also point to a set of relational and ethical practices that do not depend upon anthropological narratives for their truth.[35]

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Acknowledgements

I owe a great debt to the many people in both Cochabamba city and Ayopaya who aided and facilitated my research there. In Ayopaya, a group of interlocuters who unfortunately must remain unnamed took care of me in the most robust sense of the word: allowing me to stay with them when other accommodation fell through, insisting I come along on walks and trips to abandoned grain mills, gutted hacienda buildings, sodalite and gold mines, and their own home villages in the region. In the United States and Bolivia, a range of scholarly conversations and friendships greatly abetted this research. The paper benefitted from discussions at the Equivocal (Anthropo)cenes workshop in Santiago in November 2018. Thanks in particular to Manuel Tironi and Marcelo González Gálvez for organizing the workshop, and to Timothy Neale, Emma Cardwell, Florencia Carmen Tola, Andrew Pereira, Ingmar Lippert, Sarah Kelly, Estrid Sørensen, and Pablo Howard Seward Delaporte for their thoughtful comments. The article's argument also benefitted considerably from the workshop "Ecocentric Reciprocities: Valuing More-Than-Human Landscapes," at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in April 2022. Thanks to Ana Mariella Bacigalupo, Cymene Howe, Jeff Diamanti, Bruce Mannheim and Stine Krøijer for their keen insights. Adia Benton, Sarah Fredericks, Angie Heo, Darryl Li, Hussein Ali Agrama, Julie Chu, and Bharat Venkat all read earlier versions of this article and gave invaluable advice on the argument. All errors and oversights are, of course, my own.

Figure captions:

Figure 1. A weathered hacienda wall in Sarahuayto (Ayopaya province, Bolivia), which was still used to determine property boundaries at the time of author's fieldwork (photo by author).

Figure 2. Musicians adorned with *qhawas* (cloth squares or shields understood to carry the protective force of Tata Willka or "sun father") gathered outside the chapel (photo by author).

Figure 3. Rainwater pools up between the upper and lower villages of Sarahuayto (photo by author).

Notes:

[1] Candelaria, "Our Lady of the Candle," is venerated across Latin America and Spain. Her appearance dates back to pre-Christian Guanche traditions in Tenerife.
[2] This opening excerpt draws from material published as "Chapter 2. Gifting Land," in *After Servitude: Elusive Property and the Ethics of Kinship in Bolivia* (2022).
[3] Winchell 2022. See also Marisol de la Cadena (2011: 257, 269).
[4] On anti-hacienda militancy in Ayopaya, see Dandler and Torrico (1987: 364-365).
[5] This name is a pseudonym.
[6] On Ecuadorian hacienda-era pilgrimages, see Gose (1994: 223-224).
[7] See Stoler (2010: 165) and Hartman (1992: 3).
[8] On *paraman purina*, see Vargas Montero (2011: 92) and Crandon-Malamud (1991: 124).
[9] Even scholars who display a keen sense of attunement to fragmentation at times cast ontological plurality as endemic. Stensrud (2016: 85) writes (of Pinchollo, Peru): "These farmers live in a relational world where all human and other-than-human entities are interdependent."
[10] Bolivia has been at the forefront of efforts to extend rights to nature, specifically to the Pachamama, with its passage of 2011 "Law of Mother Earth" legislation.
[11] See Gose (1994); Isbell (1978); and Lyons (2006: 102).
[12] For Andean relationality versus abstract, "modern water," see Stensrud (2016: 88, 91).
[13] See Tantaleán (2019).
[14] See Mannheim and Salas Carreño (2015: 58, 65).
[15] See Sabine MacCormack (1991: 338).
[16] See de la Cadena (2015: 97).
[17] See de la Cadena (2011: 133); Rivera Cusicanqui (2012: 105).
[18] Burman (2017: 931).makes a similar point.
[19] Bacigalupo (2021: 181) makes a related point.
[20] As is well documented, Spanish administrators and hacienda landlords imposed Catholic Saint's day fiestas on villages of forced laborers (Lyons 2006; Crandon-Malamud 1993, 575).
[21] My definition of "patchy" draws on Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt's account of landscape disturbances (2019: 188). However, I additionally develop patchiness as the *uneven-ness of such disturbances*. See also Krøijer, Kolling, and Sen (2020: 3).
[22] Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt (2019: 187) trace the conjoined processes of simplification (monocultural crops, Christian monotheism) and proliferation (of disease, of labor violence, and of cosmological or ontological plurality) following the spread of European agriculture.
[23] See Mannheim and Salas Carreño (2015: 56).
[24] Renewed attention to experiences of climate outside of Western scientific frameworks is crucial, but also risks reinscribing romantic views of Indigenous peoples as naturally opposed to capitalism (Burman 2017: 924).
[25] In other cases, rather than withdrawing, *apus* assume importance as "moral leaders" (Bacigalupo 2021: 177).
[26] As a White, non-Indigenous guest, many named places were not shared with me, and hence are not mine to share (Simpson 2016).

[27] *Chiriguano* is the name of an Indigenous group in the Chaco region of Bolivia. In some contexts, like Argentina, it is used as a racial slur (Rocca and Rossi 2004; Florencia Tola, personal communication).
[28] On disputes over territory in ritual battles, see Van Vleet (2010: 204 citing Platt 1987: 166).
[29] This repeats an explanation recounted to a journalist in Bolivia in 2000: 'if there are no deaths [during a tinkuy], there will be a bad harvest'" Van Vleet (2010: 204).
[30] See Rivera Cusicanqui (2012). On how colonial anti-idolatry campaigns and 20th century Vatican II models reshaped Andean devotion, see Orta (2004) and Gose (1994: 223-224). By 1968, the *tinku* was outlawed except as a "traditional" dance form and expression of folkloric patrimony (Arkush and Stanish 2005).
[31] By contrast, classic ethnographers described a precolonial ontology hidden beneath the "veneer" of Christianity (Abercrombie 1998: 109). Another variant views Latin American Catholicism as resistant to the secularizing thrust of Protestant modernity (Molina 2017b: 259).
[32] See de la Cadena (2011: 186) who makes a similar point about multicultural *despachos* in Cusco in the early 2000s. Yet elsewhere de la Cadena (2011: 275) draws from Viveiros de Castro (2015) to imply that "radical difference emerges as a relationship of excess with state institutions." See Bacigalupo (2021) for a critique.
[33] On doubt, see Bessire and Bond (2014); Erazo and Jarrett (2018); Simpson (2016).
[34] For competing sources of ontological power related to Christian shrines and precolonial souls (*supay*), see Platt (2001: 150). See also Abercrombie (1998); Orta (2004).
[35] Thus, while in Bolivia and elsewhere anthropologists have historically served as key adjudicators of authentic tradition, the practices described here reflect Quechua practitioners' pointed challenges to a culturalist framework and to its power to describe, and authorize, the real. This was implicit in Oscar's critique of MAS government programs of Indigenous revivalism, ones that implicitly take modern anthropological definitions of bounded culture (often falsely attributed to Franz Boas) as their base (see Stocking 1968).