

T

largely sustained through traditional practices of reciprocity, while in the other they are maintained through new institutional strategies. In the former, mingas are mobilized to compete with other villages for scarce resources; in the latter, minga participants compete with one another. [Andes, disaster, Ecuador, labor, mingas, reciprocity, state]

This article examines practices of Andean cooperation and reciprocity in disaster-affected communities and resettlements in the Ecuadorian highlands. Cooperative labor parties known throughout the Andes as *mingas*, although outwardly appearing to be the same cultural institution, are practiced quite differently and with varying meanings in diverse contexts. Historically, anthropological studies have emphasized minga practice as egalitarian exchange labor, or as a practice embedded in patron–client relationships underwritten by conspicuous giving in exchange for labor. Recent scholarship, however, has identified minga practice as a key tactic in

recovery and the tensions between egalitarian ideals and class distinctions have long been important factors in the Andes. Furthermore, the question remains as to whether Andean reciprocity and cooperative labor constitute “threatened form[s] of social insurance” in contexts of scarcity (Wutich 2007).

In the context of trends of state centralization and decentralization that characterized Ecuador in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, whether minga—a practice that constitutes a key nexus of local and extralocal power—is a vehicle for status leveling and participatory governance, or for class-based, patron–client relations that remain central in the politics of rural Ecuador, is crucial. Moreover, power dynamics tend to be overlooked in studies of social support and mutual aid in disasters and resettlement, so this study examines the extent to which minga facilitates the exercise of collective or individual power. I describe how actors appealing to purportedly common repertoires of shared meaning and culture organized themselves in distinct ways to access and control scarce resources—primarily water and outside development aid.

: - ' , - ' ,

This study investigates minga practice in two communities of mestizo, smallholder agriculturalists in Canton Penipe, a rural municipality in the central Andean cordillera in the predominantly indigenous Chimborazo Province of Ecuador on the southern rim of the active stratovolcano Mt. Tungurahua. The first, Manzano, is a community of 52 households; the second, Pusuca, is a disaster-induced resettlement of 40 households. State agencies and NGOs began constructing resettlements in 2007–2008 for those displaced by the devastating Mt. Tungurahua eruptions in 1999 and 2006. The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MIDUVI) constructed one resettlement consisting of 185 homes built on a landless urban grid in Canton Penipe’s main town, Penipe. Alongside these, the U.S.-based, Christian Evangelical disaster relief organization Samaritan’s Purse built an additional 102 homes. Roughly five kilometers to the south, the Ecuadorian NGO, Fundación Esquel, constructed forty-five homes to create a hilltop resettlement named Pusuca, for resettlers from around a dozen neighboring villages—nearly half from the village of Pungal de Puela. Unlike the urban development built by the state and Samaritan’s Purse in the town of Penipe, Pusuca included just over half a hectare of land for each household as well as additional plots for communal use.

Some people soon migrated away from Penipe in search of employment, but the

began to organize mingas in Manzano on a biweekly basis for projects including irrigation, potable water, and village road maintenance; they also worked to attract development resources and projects from the state and NGOs. In the Pusuca resettlement, a village council created by Esquel also organized weekly mingas for irrigation, potable water, and miscellaneous community projects.

These sites were selected for this study because they were both known to organize regular mingas through village councils, and because state agencies and NGOs operated initiatives in each, offering construction materials, project funding, food aid, and microprojects in relation to irrigation, potable water, greenhouses, live-

forms of conspicuous giving similar to concentric reciprocity, where labor flows to central actors who then redistribute wealth while accumulating power and prestige.

During fieldwork in 2009, mingas appeared in each village to be organized by village councils, independent of the reciprocal exchange practices and political allegiances that were part of quotidian life in both communities. Minga practice initially appeared consistent with what Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009) refers to as “vernacular statecraft,” or the administrative ordering of society at the village level that enables local action and the formation of intercommunity alliances where

practices. Cultural rules frequently dictate that minga labor must be repaid in kind (Orlove 1977), but many regularly avoid this through substituting labor with food and feasting (Deere 1990; Mayer 2002), alcohol (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009), household items (Harris 2000), or loans and payment (González de Olarte 1994). Minga thus develops into a process of perpetual labor recruitment via repeated practices of conspicuous giving to laborer households, with redistribution qua reciprocal exchange periodically facilitating the flow of accumulated wealth and goods from elites to commoners.

Minga Statecraft

The gradual decline in the hacienda system in the mid-twentieth century was accompanied by the establishment of village councils whose decision-making and practical capacities were established by law and facilitated by minga practice in various ways. These village councils form the basis for local governance and relations between communities and outside actors. A study of 131 villages in Chimbo-razo identified the primary functions of village councils as organizing mingas and village assemblies, searching for external institutional support and funding, and implementing community projects (Cadena and Mayorga 1988).

In his ethnography of Kichwa civil society and indigenous mobilizations in the northern highlands of Ecuador, Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009: 17) describes mingas as standardized and regulated by list-making (attendance-taking) practices that level status differences by compelling all to participate on the same terms. Village councils achieved their objectives by simplifying and standardizing information about their populations, resources, and environment. These standardized forms enabled village councils to “administer, persuade, and at times coerce residents to move toward a common purpose” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 7). Colloredo-Mansfeld dubs this kind of locally imposed legibility “vernacular statecraft”—the primary tools of which are list making, council formation, boundary drawing, and interregional contacts. List making is a leveling mechanism that neutralizes differences in status and conflicting interests by creating “a special domain of value” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 99), known in Penipe as the

—' f f B —'

Recent anthropological approaches to the state dissolve distinctions between state and civil society. Instead of a coherent system producing uniform actions, it is useful to consider the disaggregated, competing, and often incoherent agendas of

and Garcia 2003; Cameron 2010). This study therefore paid special attention to the roles of the state and NGOs in shaping minga practice and the extent to which the practice is coopted or transformed in the image of external sponsors' ideas about Andean culture.

In 2009 and 2011, I lived in Penipe at the edge of the resettlement area and participated in dozens of mingas and village council meetings in both Pusuca and Manzano. I joined in people's daily lives, assisted with farm work and errands, and accompanied village leaders as they organized mingas and projects. Using interviews and observations, I documented how decisions were made, and by whom, regarding minga practice and participation, sanctions for nonparticipation, and project and resource inclusion; and the frequent exchanges of prepared meals, crop shares, cash loans, tool loans, *randimpa* (dyadic labor reciprocity), and *peon* (labor exchanged for three meals and around \$10/day). I conducted oral history interviews with villagers and collected village archival histories from municipal records.

f

5

Three key village council strategies—organizing mingas, brokering outside support, and implementing projects—have proven equally instrumental in domination and democratization; exclusion and inclusion; peasant and indigenous political movements; and processes of political centralization and decentralization. The latter constitute twin elements of an Andean modernity that work to render legible the rural peripheries. The 1937 *Ley de Organización y Régimen de Comunas*

economy (Ayala Mora 1999; Becker 1999; Bretón 2008). While addressing disparities in land distribution, these reforms also fostered renewed interest in village

scarcely more than administrative centers for rural regions with little in the way of urban economies. They have insufficient funding for their administrative activities and consequently rely heavily on federal allocations. In Penipe, accusations of favoritism and clientelism in government were common, with municipal, parish, and village leaders commonly accused of steering funds and other resources to their client bases, while excluding others. Yet clientelism is itself hotly contested in Ecuador; Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler (2008) find that while some decry

reclaim their livelihoods made him an imposing and galvanizing force in the community and beyond. Among the largest landowners in Manzano, Bernardo also had unique ties to municipal and provincial government and local NGOs, meaning that he could broker outside resources for the village.

Although list-making was a central part of minga practice, and participation was a frequently stated condition of inclusion in projects and resources such as irrigation, inclusion did not correspond highly with minga participation. Instead, those most commonly included were most tightly bound to the core group through reciprocal exchange relations. Those who rarely attended mingas, but regularly supported council leaders and engaged in reciprocity with other members of the core group, would often be included in exclusive projects or meetings with outside organizations. As village leaders struggled to mobilize their villages for recovery, the few who expressed dissent from their plans were subjected to a sort of malign neglect, not informed of local initiatives, and excluded from mingas, projects, and exchange relations. The remaining villagers were vocally enthusiastic about their unity and solidarity, rarely gossiping about others' politics or participation: they often trumpeted their solidarity in contrast with neighboring villages, with which they saw themselves in competition for outside resources.

Bernardo engaged in perpetual recruitment exercises, routinely making rounds in Manzano and the Penipe resettlement in his white pickup truck to invite participants. His invitations were almost always accompanied by the promise of tangible benefits, such as new services or microdevelopment project inclusion. One day, Bernardo invited me to a minga he was organizing. We drove around the Penipe resettlement while he recruited Manzano participants, explaining that he was organizing the minga to perform maintenance and weeding around the potable water system. He had just come from meeting with the Parish Council (*Junta Parroquial*) and the municipal government where he learned that Manzano could recover more than US\$15,000, which he claimed was owed to them, to repair and expand the potable water system, but they would have to demonstrate a united front and organize mingas. I pointed out that he was driving past Manzano homes in the resettlement and asked why he did not inform them. He responded that some people were simply too difficult and uncooperative and, when I mentioned one woman in particular, he complained that she and her sisters never supported his initiatives and were a constant source of dissent. Over time, I noticed that Bernardo recruited roughly the same thirty households for each minga and meeting, while regularly ignoring several others.

Weeks later, Bernardo was organizing a community workshop in Manzano on disaster response and recovery. Given local reluctance to label the area a disaster or risk zone,² I asked him why they were doing this. He said that representatives from the recently developed Secretariat of Peoples, Social Movements, and Citizen Participation (

Ciudadana) were organizing this workshop to “bring projects” to the area. He wanted to have as many people as possible to make an impression on the representatives from the Secretariat. He encouraged me to attend more to fill the room than for my research purposes, and he recruited friends from neighboring villages, while ignoring the same Manzano households as before. The week before the workshop was scheduled, Manuel Orozco, a Manzano villager in his early thirties, was sitting outside the village meeting house, listening as Bernardo and I spoke about mingas. Manuel averred that he would like to work on community mingas, but no one ever let him know when they were. Bernardo did not

Leaders contributed scant labor, but worked hard in their leadership roles to represent and advocate for the community. They also made conspicuous gifts to other minga workers, among whom gossip about participation was trained outward to other communities, not to others within Manzano. When I took photographs at one Manzano minga, several women told me I should take pictures of minga labor in other villages, where they “just sit around not working.” At several parish-wide meetings, Manzano resident Frederico Castro complained loudly that too many people from neighboring villages only worked for themselves: it was only Manzano that worked for everyone. Such refrains were common among villagers.

Minga Practice in Pusuca

young girls whose soft-spoken husband was often away working their fields or doing his part-time job as a driver. As the secretary of the Irrigation Committee, Judith often demonstrated more leadership and exerted more power than its male president, yet she and her extended family were among the poorest, with little land or livestock, and for generations they had been cheap peon labor for their better-off neighbors. By contrast, in 2011, it was often Judith—stocky, indefatigable, and outspoken—who dictated work responsibilities on mingas, tracking rayas, and calling out people she perceived as shirking responsibilities. She was also one of the most vocal contributors at village meetings.

Despite strong leadership by presidents or some committee heads, the pro-

project and resource access was determined by minga participation or payment of fines.

f, B -' ,

What explains the contrasts in minga practice and governance in Manzano and Pusuca? One key factor appears to be the intersection of local patron–clientelism with the dual trends of decentralization and recentralization in Ecuador. A second key factor is the paternalistic intervention of the Esquel Foundation in the Pusuca resettlement. Finally, the intersection of these factors with some of the particular types of local agency afforded in post-disaster contexts helps shed light on the changes in and diversity of minga practice.

As a result of the dual trends in decentralization and recentralization, local development in Canton Penipe increasingly involved pursuing three funding strategies, often in concert with one another: appeals to ministries of the federal government to fund local projects (e.g., education, infrastructure, health cam-

in funding from dozens of NGOs to support micro projects in Pusuca, ranging

often the poorest among them—who, anxious about the precarity of their own access to resources, eagerly policed their neighbors. They kept meticulous accounting of participation and were relentless in using gossip as a first order sanction for nonconformity. This type of statecraft was decidedly parlous—dependent on the sly paternalism of Esquel, which momentarily neutralized class politics, while in some ways standing in as the conspicuous giver/withholder character that hitherto had been played by local patrons.

Both communities were striving towards a sort of unity based on the leveling mechanism of list-making, although as I encountered them, this was decidedly precarious in different but related ways. In Manzano, cooperation was organized through reciprocal exchange ties within the core group and the conspicuous giving of access to resources by the council president. Although they employed lists, their utility was ephemeral. They were not referenced or drawn upon for historical patterns and had little or no leveling effect on relational differences. Much like Arjun Appadurai's (1996) discussion of number in the colonial imagination, list-making in Manzano let people know they were being watched and evaluated and that those who kept the lists held the power. In contrast to the scattered notebooks of Manzano, the council and committees in Pusuca kept rigorous attendance records on spreadsheets, which community leaders and Esquel referred to in order

outside support for development projects and recruit minga participants to realize collective objectives. Alas, this came with the exclusion of those whose labor and exchange relations were perceived as nonconforming in these respective regimes of minga practice.

A

Fieldwork was funded in part by National Science Foundation Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, grants 0751264 and 0751265 and Dissertation Improvement Grant 1123962, and the Public Entity Risk Institute's (PERI) Dissertation Fellowship in Hazards, Risk, and Disasters. The author is grateful for the insightful feedback of several anonymous reviewers. All views expressed in this article are those of the author.

¹All names are pseudonyms.

²Locals engaged in a code switching of sorts, sometimes de-emphasizing disaster risk designations because they believed it would inhibit their ability to secure scarce resources (e.g., credit and infrastructure), while in other contexts, which might legitimize claims to formal support (e.g., housing and infrastructure), they emphasized the designation.

f

Alberti, Giorgio. 1970. "Ruptura de la Estructura de Poder Urbano Provincial y Surgimiento de Movimientos Campesinos." In

- de la Torre, Carlos, and Steve Striffler. 2008. "Global Currents." In *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler, 189–191. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Deere, Carmen Diana. 1990. *Household and Class Relations: Peasants and Landlords in Northern Peru*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Faas, A. J. 2015. "Disaster Resettlement Organizations, NGOs, and the Culture of Cooperative Labor in the Ecuadorian Andes." In *Disaster's Impact on Livelihoods and Cultural Survival: Losses, Opportunities, and Mitigation*, edited by Michele Companion, 51–62. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- . 2017. "Enduring Cooperation: Time, Discipline, and Minga Practice in Disaster-induced Displacement and Resettlement in the Ecuadorian Andes." *Human Organization* 76(2): 99–108.