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“Not Women’s Work”: Gendered Labor, Political Subjectivity and Motherhood

By Mary E. Wilhoit¹

Abstract

This article challenges broadly applied beliefs about the gendered nature of informality and the marginalization of single mothers to argue that many such women in Ayacucho, Peru routinely sought out formal-sector jobs and used these to exert authority over certain local processes of development. I argue that this situation, influenced in part by the male-dominated nature of the lucrative but completely informal coca economy, may also reflect Andean ideologies of maternal authority and the freedom afforded to single, rather than married, women. This article draws on over sixteen months of fieldwork in rural Ayacucho, during which time I observed women’s efforts to diversify and reconfigure their households and analyzed their income strategies in relation to political involvement and kinship networks. As I describe, my interlocutors were primarily landless, and sold food from home, engaged in hacienda ‘invasions’, and took available jobs with NGOs and municipalities. These jobs were often short-term, part-time, and low paying, and development and municipal projects sought women specifically for such positions, believing men were unlikely to take them. Countering the global pattern of women’s relegation to the informal sector, however, as well as the notion that single women are inevitably disproportionately marginalized, female heads-of-household in the Huanta region regularly sought formal, even government-sponsored jobs and used such positions to improve their own situations and direct community change.

Keywords: Gender, labor, ethnography, Andes

Introduction

In December of 2012, Peru’s first lady Nadine Heredia visited Felix Iguain school in rural Huanta. She was there to inaugurate the school lunch project *Qali Warma*, promoting locally sourced food. My *comadre* and landlady Isabel and I were excited to hear her speak and left several hours in advance for the school. As we walked, I finally got around to asking about the manila envelope Isabel was carrying. She had spent that morning pestering the family that ran the Internet café to open and worked there for several hours before emerging with the document in her hands. I had originally assumed she was on the INEI’s website; she had been trying to get work with the agrarian census. It was not until we left for Felix Iguain that I realized she had printed something to take to the event. It was a letter, she told me, on behalf of the women of Luricocha, asking the first lady for funding to revive a regional weaving workshop. How she might get it to Heredia she

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didn't know, but she felt this in-person event was the cooperative's best chance. When Heredia arrived, surrounded by press and security guards, I watched with awe as Isabel squeezed her tiny frame through the throng and thrust the letter into the first lady's hands. Heredia handed it to an escort without comment, continuing to the podium.

Although impressed by Heredia's elocution, I found myself thinking more about the temerity and determination of the thirty-eight-year-old single mother with whom I was living. Isabel was somewhat representative of many local women—she was raising her children without a partner and took diverse work opportunities—and I found myself pondering her courage and determination, characteristics it seemed she must have in unique quantities. I never learned whether Heredia opened Isabel's letter. Isabel did not despair; she and another member created a Facebook page to advertise its wares, and we sought international funding sources. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed that her actions that morning in fact represented but a more-forceful version of the assertions of citizenship rights in which many local women were engaged.

Rural Ayacucho is a difficult place for single, landless women, like those I conducted ethnographic research with from 2012 to 2013, to make a living. They have been forced to diversify, taking temporary, part-time and low-wage positions. Employers, including development and municipal projects, seek women specifically as employees for such positions, knowing men are unlikely to take them. However, countering the global pattern of women's relegation to the informal sector, many women in Luricocha sought formal and even government-sponsored jobs like those in the cooperative, with Qali Warma, in road and sidewalk construction, and with mothers' welfare programs *Juntos* and *Vaso de Leche*.²

Rural women's entry into the formal sector is rather surprising in a country where over sixty percent of women's income comes from informal labor.³ Indeed, Peruvian women are disproportionately represented in the "bare subsistence," category of street vending and completely self-created work, and, as around the world, they are often forced to diversify sources of income (Pini and Leach 2011). Diversification has followed neoliberal reform in rural areas in particular, as export-based production has challenged the viability of small-scale farming (Razavi 2009: 8), and in Peru, over fifty percent of rural income is now from nonfarm activities (ibid). This transition has led to increased disparities among households (Reardon et al 2001: 401-5) and has worsened gender inequalities as women have taken increasing responsibility for the remaining small-scale agricultural labor (Pini and Leach: 3). Lucrative rural jobs, as in resource extraction or mining, are taken by men, and subsequent differences in income don't just exacerbate gendered inequality but have far-reaching effects at the family and household level. With some exceptions, however, such as Shahra Razavi's (2009) work and, in the Andes, Enrique Mayer's (2002) and Rudi Collorado Mansfeld's (2009), most studies of diversification and informality focus on urban areas (Razavi: 13).

In rural Huanta, the most lucrative work is often to be found in coca production and transport from the VRAEM jungle.⁴ While women were essentially excluded from this informal (illegal) occupation, which is almost entirely male-dominated, they were as a result around to take

² *Juntos* is a cash transfer program for rural mothers, <http://www.juntos.gob.pe/>. *Vaso de Leche* provides milk for children. <http://www.mef.gob.pe/>

³ Informal work is a greater source of employment for women than men around the world. For more see Vosko 2002, Chant and Pedwell 2008, Razavi 2009, Friedemann-Sanchez 2012 or the ILO statistical database, <http://ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/lang--en/index.htm>; for more on Peru specifically see Beneria and Floro 2005.

⁴ The VRAEM, the Valley of the Apurimac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers, is the largest coca-producing region in Peru. An estimated 90% of the coca grown in the VRAEM becomes cocaine.

jobs with development projects, the municipality, and local schools. I found that such lower-paying but formal-sector jobs provided instrumental situations for women to contest unequal relations inside and outside the home. In contrast to studies demonstrating Andean women's exclusion, then, and despite scholarly discourses positioning rural women and single mothers as particularly marginal, I argue that such women used labor to influence local social development.

Status as single mothers, furthermore, was key to this. Single parenthood provided impetus to earn, and single mothers or female heads of household in the Andes may also find themselves in a unique social position, commanding the respect of motherhood but able to revert to a single woman's freer public persona. In Luricocha, as I have written about elsewhere (Wilhoit 2017a, Weismantel and Wilhoit 2019), many women lived and raised families with other women, an arrangement that facilitated the flexibility to seek wage labor without the stress and stigma that could accompany such a choice in traditional marriage arrangements. They still dealt, however, with entrenched notions of appropriate gendered behavior and, specifically, with women's general removal from the public sphere.

Women have long been described as less publicly vocal in Andean communities and as subordinate in certain family and community management matters (Harris 1980, Harvey 1994, de la Cadena 1995, Pape 2008, or Burman 2011). As I will outline, many scholars have linked this to an ideology of gender complementarity in which men have public voice and women, particularly married women, contain their authority to the space of the home. Outside the bounds of traditional households, however, those women raising children without male partners may be able to assert a more public form of authority. I will argue that, in Luricocha, this was facilitated by their active engagement as earners in the formal sector and by the accepted importance of their roles as mothers.

Gender Ideologies and Single Motherhood

In the Andes, women have long been described as essentially removed from the public arena (Stein 1980, Harris 1980, Pape 2008, Burman 2011). Women in places like rural Ayacucho are less likely than men to attend community meetings, give speeches or make demands of local institutions, and they have been banned from voting in many traditional peasant communities with the apparent understanding that they exert influence in the home (Stein 1980, Astvaldsson 1998, Pape 2008, Burman 2011). Anders Burman (2011) and I.S.R. Pape (2008) among others described this as related to ideologies of complementarity in which female and male forces constitute "the opposing but complementary constituents of the cosmos" (Burman 66-7).⁵ Such 'opposing forces' involve strict divisions of labor and spheres of influence—public and private, respectively—which have been deemed complementary and equal (see Astvaldsson 1998 for example).⁶ Gendered inequalities, however, appear inherent in such divisions. Pape found, for example, that women were systematically excluded and silenced, noting that ideologies of complementarity allowed men to claim that women's sphere of influence was the household and that women thus impacted community issues indirectly. In reality, women were not consulted on matters affecting the community and felt they had extremely limited influence (2008: 49). Burman (2011) found that

⁵ Gender complementarity has long been thematic in Andean studies; see Harris 1980 or Arnold 1997 among others.

⁶ He noted that women in Aymaran communities did not have the right to vote but claimed men were influenced by their wives at home, as evidence that "female authority, though with less formal representation and not as explicitly political, is as important as male authority" (242).

women were marginalized even in progressive contexts such as meetings on indigenous pride and decolonization.⁷

Women's silencing is particularly important to understand in the Andes, as scholars have interpreted the ability to speak there as constitutive of adulthood and personhood themselves. "Language," Olivia Harris (1980) wrote of Bolivia, "is the instrument which forms the human being...capacity to speak improves with age" (75). She noted that Laymi women were excluded from community decision-making on precisely this basis—their "inability to speak" in an area in which "formal speech is commanded by men" (73). This capacity seems to follow marriage, as multiple scholars have described the full human subject as half of a pair, or *chachawarmi*, arguing that the married couple, rather than the individual, is the true Andean 'social subject' (Burman, Harvey 1994). Given that scholars including Harris and Penelope Harvey have also linked marriage directly to women's removal from the public sphere, it can be surmised that the publicly social subject or the subject who can speak is inherently a *married man*, for whose wife full adulthood means influence at home.

As such, some Andeanists have alluded to the idea that single women have more freedom than married women. As Harris described, single women can "sing, dance, get drunk," but once married disappear from "symbolic discourse" (Harris 1980: 74-5). Sarah Radcliffe (1986) found single women were more able to migrate for work (41), while Krista Van Vleet (2002) noted that married Bolivian women were associated with subsistence work and indigenous identity while "single women, like married men, who work for wages are considered to be "more civilized"" (590). Susan Bourque and Kay Warren (1981) recorded women advising daughters not to marry, (as have I); their interlocutors suggested gender relations were more equal on the coast (35).

According to Penelope Harvey (1994) and Marisol de la Cadena (1995) among others, it is not when Andean women become wives but when they become *mothers* that they achieve kinship rights and respect. This may be because, as Mary Weismantel (1995) noted, wealth and success are associated with having many children – both as a measure of one's ability to support dependents, and because dependents produce wealth through their labor. The position of parent is a powerful one, in which the parent crafts the child's body and social position through feeding it, assuming an authoritative role which will later demand reciprocal care (see also Harvey 1998, Van Vleet 2002).

Motherhood, and the power-through-kin that it entails, can also be leveraged to demand respect outside of one's kin system. In Luricocha, a few older women with large networks were among the most respected and economically powerful individuals, not least because they managed the assets of ever-expanding families, caring for grandchildren and opening their own businesses (Wilhoit 2021 in press). Younger women with children, who often had fewer financial resources, benefited from ties to such women and also drew upon their status as mothers and providers to justify wage labor and engagement with political institutions as I will detail.

They also depended on peer networks, often established through work, that provided information regarding potential jobs and rights to support. The time they spent with other women working on stove installation projects, or smoothing concrete together on the road to Huanta facilitated discussion of specific rights, risks and peer exemplars. Several Luricochan women, for example, started their own NGO after working together for NGO Tadepa, while others attended university thanks to their mothers' fighting for repatriation funds. One interlocutor left Luricocha

⁷ This may be related in some cases to men's dominance of Spanish, which they can use in excluding monolingual Aymara or Quechua-speaking women (see Canessa 1997: 246).

following the end of her employment with the census and used the income to start a call center for victims of domestic violence.

In many cases, women were able to take these instrumental positions only in the absence of a male partner. Men often discouraged women from working outside the home, particularly if such work meant temporary migration or if the difficulty involved might seem to highlight a man's failure to provide. Jealousy was another factor, as men and women described the perception that women who traveled for work would be unfaithful. In such cases, work experiences and connections could provide the impetus and support to leave stifling relationships. This was, in fact, the final straw leading to Isabel's divorce. With her husband failing to work and not looking for income, she accepted her first stove installation project position only to receive ongoing verbal abuse around the theme that she was, in essence, now a 'loose woman.' Angry as this discourse made her, the job provided an important sense of esteem and a larger and supportive social network, enabling her to finally leave a marriage that had soured years before.

As she and other women described, children were their primary motivations for taking these jobs regardless. "*Mothers can't afford not to work,*" neighbor Ana put it; "*around here you can't count on a man to provide, you have to work in whatever you can to support your family.*" Similarly, Isabel's sister-in-law Gloria informed me that "*there are so many single mothers now, and we need work—our children depend on us.*"

Statements like these did not mean that fathers were unimportant in women's calculations. Men's absence was an important part of their constant search for income and an important reason for the availability of certain of the positions I will describe. Such jobs and the discussions they facilitated could provide insight into matters of separation and child support, spurring women's involvement with the legal and judicial systems. I ultimately accompanied a neighbor, Carmela, and two other women to Huanta City to leave denunciations demanding child support. I knew of several other women who fought off full custody requests made by former partners who accused them, essentially, of working too much and neglecting their children. They were able to counter these claims by demonstrating that they had had to take work to support their families, making the case that, as a mother's job was to care for and thus, provide, their working was simply proof of their dedication to their children.

As much as writing a letter to the first lady, such appearances in court functioned as assertions of rights and social status, and they were made most frequently by those women who were caring for children and unpartnered. Women's single status and their roles as mothers provided the need and determination to earn and to ensure that local infrastructure was up to snuff, as I will describe, and required them to seek reliable sources of income even where there were none that were long-lasting. At the same time, the labor that resulted from this set of responsibilities could position women to exert some degree of public authority.

Labor and Gendered Influence

Interlocutors in Luricocha perceived that the region had a large number of single mothers, and indeed the neoliberal era has seen an increase in "self-declared female-headed households in almost every Latin American country" (Deere 2009: 104)—something scholars across fields have long viewed with concern.⁸ The Andean context is no different; a growth in female-headed households has been correlated there with expanding inequality and rural poverty (Deere 2009),

⁸ For summary and critique of this position, see Varley (1996); see also Creed (2000).

an unsurprising correlation when women have increasing responsibility for entire families but remain marginalized in local economies.

In Huanta, women's growing presence in insecure labor positions has meant some have access to cash wages, traditionally the purview of men, but this shift has not been balanced by men's contribution to domestic labor or childcare, which remains an integral part of women's work.⁹ Nevertheless, as in Greta Friedemann-Sanchez's (2012) study, I argue that women's "self-valoración" and experience as working women altered gendered power relations. Specifically, labor provided instruments and/or instrumental situations for women to contest unequal relations inside and outside the home, as they used work with development and welfare programs, in construction and in data collection among other fields to exert political influence and to aid one another.

Women's most common sources of income in Luricocha included welfare organization Juntos, home-based stores, sewing, brewing and butchering, the collection and sale of avocado, and/or fruit for export, day labor in local construction projects or on farms, work for data collection and other temporary, government-sponsored projects, and work in schools, including cleaning and roll-taking. Men were much more likely to be teachers, a better-paying job requiring more education and training, to be employed full-time by the municipality, to work in transportation and/or to migrate semi-permanently or seasonally for work. While much of their work was informal, it was higher paid than that available to women, particularly in the case of coca production or transportation. Women, in seeking formal work, embraced far fewer and far less drastic kinds of risk. "Women," as Gloria put it, "are more likely to be thinking about their children and that responsibility. They can't afford the risk of being carted off to jail." Such responsibility presented a difficult double burden—women had a greater need for income but less freedom to migrate and less access to higher-paying work.

Andrew Canessa (1997) described Andean men's greater tendency to migrate as reflecting a difficult obligation—men must leave the community to fulfill social demands (240). Canessa's work provides a much-needed masculine perspective on this expectation; nevertheless, in Luricocha, women *desired* the vastly greater earnings available to men who were able to easily migrate. Many saw mobility as a privilege withheld from them because of their responsibility for offspring. As a result, they sought higher-paying occupations locally. When I moved in with Isabel, she was working as an overseer for a municipal sidewalk construction project and taking on sewing and tailoring work as it became available. I was also wage labor as an extra (but paying) mouth to feed. This was not new to her—she had taken in *pensioneros* or boarders several times in the past. She had also recently worked for an educational outreach program and a water main installation program. These were run by local governments, primarily employed women and were designed to last a few months. While these jobs meant that Isabel was able to afford luxuries some could not, life was tight.

Many such women referred to themselves as independent workers. "I'm an independent worker—when there are work opportunities, in whatever, you know?" Said our neighbor Mercedes. She went on:

"It would be good to generate real work...not just like washing clothes or caring for old people. Sometimes the municipality offers work but just to their people...If they give you some, they give you something like sweeping or something like that."

⁹ See also Friedemann and Sanchez 2012, Razavi 2009.

You know? [Women need] something where we can, well, get involved to do something and they pay us for our work. The bad thing is that there just isn't any sometimes... sometimes projects come in where you work cleaning ditches and all that and they pay you. But it's not all the time."

While only one woman in the small town in which I lived for the year 2012-13 was officially a municipal employee—the mayor and his support team were men, and her position was one year long—many were able to obtain short-term positions overseeing municipal projects or in construction. Mercedes, Isabel and many other local single mothers took these jobs as they could sometimes look after children while they worked.

In 2012, the municipality began a roads and sidewalks construction project along the road from Luricocha to Huanta and hired dozens of women from the area. The work was difficult (digging trenches and mixing, pouring and leveling concrete) and meant the women were away from home for eight or more hours daily. They paid transportation to the site, or walked several miles, and received twenty-two soles (less than nine US dollars) per day. This job provided guaranteed income, however, and allowed them to be home at mealtimes and to pick up children from school. Additionally, as the laborers informed me, having some control over the quality of the structure and the width of the walk added appeal; they could ensure that their children would be able to walk to school safely.

Numerous friends and neighbors worked for this building project, and one, Carmela, provides a good example of their experiences. Carmela was nineteen and lived on a lot belonging to her widowed mother Gisela. Carmela's family was quite poor, and she and her mother shared their space with Carmela's son and Gisela's thirteen younger children. Carmela had an on-and-off boyfriend, Ramón, who was forty-three and had another family in the department of Huancavelica. Ramón was a freelance builder and drove an unregistered *moto* (an open-air motorcycle taxi), but as both he and Carmela admitted, little of his income went to her. What their son Wilber saw of it came in the form of snacks his father occasionally bought him. Ramón and Carmela were sometimes clearly together, lying in the *moto* in an apparent attempt to get some privacy; other times she spoke of him as an Ex.

Carmela and Gisela shared an intense work ethic. Gisela was almost constantly mixing concrete or carrying wood for the family's ongoing attempt to build a house, while Carmela took care of her son and numerous siblings. The family had a small amount of land, but not enough to provide subsistence. Carmela, her mother and older siblings also worked on other farms for hire when such work was available, but women make less than men for farm labor (twenty to thirty soles daily, as opposed to forty or fifty) and children even less.

When I asked to formally interview Carmela about the construction job, Ramón insisted on being present, and interrupted her description of the work and of the planned walk itself to complain angrily that the whole affair was inappropriate. "*It's not women's work.*" He interjected loudly. "*And also, it's already been three months and they still don't pay them. Twenty soles per day...it's not enough.*"

I certainly agreed with the latter issue, and believed the municipality targeted women, knowing that men would not accept such low wages or wait so long to receive them. I was struck, however, by the fact that these complaints came from Ramón and not Carmela. Given that he was not paying to support their son, he was a contributing factor in Carmela's need to take the job. Between them, his anger and her acceptance highlighted a fascinating divide between discourse and practice: women were rhetorically excluded from physical and wage labor, eliminating them

from certain lucrative kinds of work and challenging their potential to protest the conditions of jobs like the one described, while they were actually responsible for some of the least-pleasant and worst-paid varieties. The job was, of course, *predictably* ‘women’s work’ precisely because of its low-skill and low-wage characteristics; just two of the forty-plus employees were men.

The sidewalk job also, however, provided a sure (eventual) income and the ability to influence an important element of local infrastructure. It was in the service of a walk that parents had clamored for, to make their children’s trips to and from school safer, and the fact that it was done by women, many of them mothers, meant that the quality of construction was under their control. As Carmela noted after Ramon left, “*Elena, the thing is that men have more farm work. They have more work altogether—they can make more. But with these jobs with the muni [municipality] and, like, Juntos, stuff like that, women—we’re earning and we’re getting involved.*” Here she highlighted several interesting paradoxes. Local women were not paid well, and their work could be backbreaking. On the other hand, such jobs gave them ties to local government and facilitated input into infrastructural developments. In charge of the construction itself, they were able to verify that the roads they and their children had to walk daily were sturdy, and the role gave them a platform for making critiques of the municipality. Employees argued with supervisors when materials appeared subpar, took pains to ensure a high-density concrete, and began an initiative to plant trees along the road.

Jobs like this one also provided a kind of gendered networking. Carmela, for example, later learned from women working on the sidewalk job that she could demand child support even though never married, and by early 2013 was taking initial steps to do so.

The same was true of work for NGOs and welfare programs, which afforded some women opportunities to lead small teams. NGO TADEPA, which installed stoves in rural areas of Apurimac, Cusco and San Miguel provides a good example.¹⁰ Their stove installation projects involved hiking around rural, hilly areas, carrying supplies, sleeping five or more to a small room, and sometimes going without food. The positions were sought after, nevertheless, and multiple interlocutors described it, essentially, as fun. Women also described their work with this program in relation to their roles as team leaders. The jobs could require long periods away from home, during which family or friends had to watch their children. They ultimately paid relatively well, though, and after several seasons some local women were in a position to train and lead other TADEPA workers, including male college graduates.¹¹

These positions of power were the most important points of many women’s reminiscences. When I interviewed two friends together about their work for TADEPA, they became competitive in discussing the respect their groups had afforded them. Mirza and Charo were responsible for ensuring that the project was well done and keeping track of members, and ultimately controlled the form the project took. Mirza had to fire employees that were not completing installations adeptly enough, including, as she stressed, men older than she was and educated men from Cusco. Charo, meanwhile, described her decision to apply this way: “*When I heard about it, I was desperate. There was no work, and he [partner] wasn’t working. The kids needed clothes. I was late signing up, but they let me train.*” As she reminisced, her tone changed to one of pride: “*they made me a group leader. I was directing people from Cusco, people who had degrees, teaching*

¹⁰ For more on TADEPA see http://www.redsidaperu.org.pe/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93:tadepa-taller-de-promocion-andina&catid=32&Itemid=167

¹¹ This is not to suggest that such NGOs have radically progressive frameworks, but rather that, as they seek to save time and money, they may not be as concerned with certain forms of social capital as they are with previous experience. They can also likely pay women lower wages than men for the same work.

them, making them work. I was a good leader and they respected me.” She valued the training, the power over educated people from a richer region, and the respect she had earned through the completed work. Not only was she overseeing the installation of stoves in the homes of people like her own friends and family, improving quality of life for other women whose cooking practices would be eased; she also demonstrated the power to inspire respect.

Sometimes temporary jobs with such projects led to more outright and combative forms of engagement, as I observed in the case of oversight work for the municipality. In the fall of 2012, various local women began working for a municipal sidewalk construction project. The construction was being completed by a crew from urban Huanta, and the women’s job was to make sure it followed the guidelines the municipality had authorized. Their consensus early on was that the work was quite shoddy. The drainage system was not functioning, and people feared their homes could become flooded. The mayor refused to acknowledge the apparent issues, and about a month into my stay, the overseers called a town meeting to air grievances. Fifty people attended, most of whom used their moment with the microphone to urge storming the municipality. Although four women organizers had called the meeting, few women spoke, supporting the oft-described gendered politics of public speaking. Those that did described anger over the poor workmanship, referencing fears about children’s safety.

As I watched and listened, however, I noticed something odd. The speakers were largely men, but they addressed their comments toward a small group of old women, the only segment of the circle that was seated. People had moved to make room for these eight women, elderly and all wearing traditional, wide skirts and bowler hats, to sit on a small concrete wall. They were quiet, with just the occasional, murmured dialogue amongst themselves. It became clear that this group, who never made public comment, were those who had to be convinced to act.

When I asked Isabel who they were, she replied simply ‘*las mamas*.’ I would learn eventually that all eight were local matriarchs with large kin networks, most of them business owners, whose power over their numerous descendants and grand-descendants translated into considerable power in local political and economic decisions. A few weeks after the initial meeting they gave their approval, and the overseers and their supporters occupied the municipality. This sequence of events, put into motion by mothers who had accepted the oversight jobs out of need and desire for community improvement, led to the municipality’s finally addressing the problem.

More subtly, but at a national rather than a local level of influence, women also engaged the political sphere when working in data collection. Three censuses took place while I lived in Huanta, and I was able to accompany women working for two, during which I observed the influence they exerted over these processes and the relationship such temporary but quasi-formal labor facilitated with ‘the state.’ Census work, seen as ultimately conveying local needs to the nation, involved procedures of careful tailoring through interaction, often carried out between rural women exclusively.

During the agrarian census, twenty-eight of the thirty local counters were women. The respondents at home during the day were also usually women, and were careful with their answers, fearing their memberships in gender-based welfare organizations like *Juntos* could be cut if they were demonstrated to have access to certain amenities. They wanted to be counted in a way that would not negatively impact access to aid. Collectors were equally calculating in their part of the process, evaluating households and using local expertise to make the process more humane and meaningful. They sought to produce a picture of their experience of rural life, imbuing national-level demographics with local concerns. Census work reflected, then, the trend of women’s

differential employment in temporary, part-time, low-income work, but enabled women to adjust the regional image produced in order to benefit themselves and others.

This example was also the one in which differences in women and men's relationships with 'the state' became most evident. The data produced during censuses affects revenue allocation, and women collected the data with a desire that certain programs not be reduced, particularly those designed for mothers. State representatives including military and police negatively impacted certain male-dominated trades such as coca production and informal transportation, however, and men did not benefit directly from the cash and food transfer programs the state designated as women's purview. These differences were reflected in the negative reactions many men had to census takers.¹²

Discussion

These examples might initially appear to reflect women's acceptance of those jobs available, rather than assertions of social authority. And certainly, Luricochan women's patterns of participation did not represent overt, clear-cut acquisitions of power. There is a significant difference between taking a temporary job and forcing your way through a bevy of executive bodyguards, and while positing a form of influence through wage labor, I am not describing gender-based or grassroots organizing in the traditional sense.

I suggest, however, that women's wage labor coupled exploitation with assertions to autonomy and authority for some, and that status as single mothers was key to this possibility. As Friedemann-Sanchez found in Colombia, women's labor reinforced "the social class system of power and domination in employment" at the same time that it provided "instruments for contesting the unequal power relations inside households" (2012: 35). In Luricocha, those women that had already abandoned such bonds were more able to access such opportunities; in other cases, work provided the impetus to leave limiting relationships. Simultaneously, low-paying and temporary work was increasingly entrenched as women's purview.

Economically, women in Luricocha remained marginalized. They suffered from the responsibility for family and social services that urban women also faced, in an area with fewer job opportunities and services. Isabel and her peers' strength, savvy and multi-skill proficiency reflected Rebecca Prentice's (2012) argument that women's self-teaching has become critical to their engagement with flexible labor markets. Despite being excluded from higher-up positions, they were the citizens most often *around* to work for and make demands of local institutions, and to take what they needed more assertively when necessary. They embodied what Saskia Sassen (2000) termed the 'feminization of survival.'

The resultant assertions of local, gendered needs were subtle and complex, and indeed, some aspects of these examples suggest government exploitation. The road construction project, for example, could be metaphorically linked to the 1920 *Conscripción Vial*, which made construction and maintenance of roads obligatory labor for indigenous men (see Bermudo 2003).

They also reflected the desires of a particular group of women, and not the most marginalized in the area. Partly because of my decision to live in the *cercado* or township of Luricocha, my interlocutors were bilingual, a critical piece of social capital facilitating wage labor with projects like the census. Luricocha is a large subdistrict, with many people living on farms, but the *cercado*, situated at the end of the paved road from Huanta City, had a school, several

¹² For more on women's work during the agrarian census see Wilhoit 2017b.

shops, and an internet cafe. Access to a home in town often did not mean home ownership, but, as in Isabel or her friend Maria's situation, a caretaking role in a home owned by distant relatives who lived in Lima or the VRAEM. But unlike those dwelling in some of the more remote, rural areas of the subdistrict, most women in the cercado had at least a primary education. And even amongst this group, there was considerable diversity of resources, strategies and power. Our neighbor Ana, for example, who helped care for Isabel's children, had no education and far fewer sources of income. They often did one another small favors, but Isabel also counted on being able to hire Ana for odd jobs with very little notice.

Andeanist scholars have long been at the forefront in arguing that policies seeking to promote rural wellbeing will have to take these complexities of positionality into account (Bourque and Warren 1981, 1991, Babb 1989, Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). But many studies also remain plagued by generalizations, including the suggestion that gender inequality is worst in poorest populations, that class (or race) is not a contentious issue in Latin America, and that "the urban" must be operationalized and interrogated before "the rural" (Brydon and Chant: 3). Terms like "rural women" are employed in well-meaning proposals designed to improve lives, but may mask women's very diverse experiences.

Such discourses have policy-level effects: legislation favoring land privatization in places like Peru was largely designed for urban citizens, for example, and legislators pushing this same process in rural areas failed to foresee the rural inequality and unrest that has followed. Measures promoting austerity and flexibilization have also been designed for cities, where access to education, transportation and other basic services is generally slightly broader. These and other reforms promoted in Peru since the 1990s have had a dramatic impact on rural women, particularly necessitating their extreme flexibilization and diversification (Deere 2009: 113, Medina 1995). Women are habitually seen as ideal subjects for engagement with different forms of flexible labor because, "given their domestic role, they have been socialized to have the flexibility to combine productive and reproductive activities" (Deere 2009: 114).

But Luricochan women with the linguistic capital and the opportunity were also decisive in using labor to influence local processes of development, and their acquisition of formal-sector jobs represented a different set of labor patterns than that predicted by near-global statistics. Although women disproportionately work in the informal sector worldwide, in rural Huanta, certain informal jobs were highly lucrative and thus the purview of men. Simultaneously, women like Isabel, Mercedes, and Gloria, impoverished single mothers, were those around to take rather menial, formal-sector work. They subsequently participated in local power struggles when they used those jobs available to assert leadership potential or to challenge municipal authority. Given the problems that many development initiatives in the rural Andes have had, such efforts are not only critical for women's and their families' well-being but, if attended to, could aid those institutions hoping to contribute toward greater equity—gender, racial, and class-based.¹³

This assertion of public influence also reflected a different set of gender relations than that found in many previous studies, a state of affairs I have argued can be linked to single status and to parenthood. Parenting alone in rural Huanta both necessitated and facilitated wage labor. In a context in which men may condemn their wives' working and traveling, single women appear to have more freedom than married ones. At the same time, motherhood is one of few ways in which women appear to obtain clear respect and authority in the rural Andes. The status of a single mother

¹³ Land titling, for example, has repeatedly failed to benefit women, while mining projects have spurred dramatic protests and violence. See Bebbington 2007, Mayer 2009 and Deere 2009 among other sources.

may, therefore, entail an important, liberating ambiguity, allowing those in that position more mobility and social voice.

In Luricocha, many women were both structurally subjugated and simultaneously verbal about their needs. Frustrating as their circumstances were, interlocutors there were convinced that they must make demands of local institutions to obtain greater rights and improve their communities.¹⁴ In so doing, they provided examples for their children of the ways in which women are independent and authoritative. While the impact of their labor on their own political subjectivities and on gender ideologies more broadly is impossible to measure, I will close with the thought that they are paving the way for a generation who will be harder to silence.

¹⁴ Findings in other areas of the Andes, by scholars such as Christine Hippert (2011) would perhaps suggest otherwise: in a study of development in Bolivia, she found that women were highly visible in local development, attending meetings and even outnumbering men, but they were not in leadership positions and felt that programs were over-burdening them; they were over-extended already and didn't understand why development initiatives always targeted them for wage labor as well, instead of their husbands (505).

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