Story 7: Munayniyuq: The Owner of the Will (and How to Control That Will)

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Apu Ausangate is más poderoso [most powerful]. Apu Ausangate is munayniyuq [the owner of the will]. He orders the other Apus. He is kamachikuq [literally, the one with the orders; the chief]; Salqantay comes after. Those are it. Salqantay, Ausangate, those are the two biggest Apus. They are atiyniyuq [with the capacity to do, or the capacity to do things lies within them]. They are the ones that put the potato and make it grow. We extend despachos to them; with despacho it does not hail, and the potatoes grow beautifully. Since they are with the capacity to do it, [with despachos] they do not unleash [bad things].

MARIANO AND NAZARIO TURPO 2003, Pacchanta

Munayniyuq is a notion that Mariano and Nazario used to qualify persons endowed with the capacity to decide runakuna lives. I mentioned the word earlier, in story 2, when I narrated Mariano’s conversations with urban political leaders, the state, and its representatives. This Quechua word has two main parts: muna, a verbal root that translates as will or desire or love; and yuq, a suffix that indicates possession, or the place where something originates (Cusihuamán [1976] 2001, 216–17). Cesar Itier — the French linguist and Quechua specialist, whom I have cited several times above — lists the word in his dictionary as meaning “powerful, person who gives orders” (unpublished ms.). Discussing a translation (from Quechua to Spanish and then to English) that would also capture the thrust of the word, Nazario and I agreed on the Spanish phrase dueño de la voluntad (owner of the will);
here, *will* refers to a life-commanding capacity that, not surprisingly, can be violent.

In the opening of this story, Nazario and his father explain that Ausangate is the highest ranking earth-being; as the most powerful, it is munayniyuq, the owner of the will, endowed with the attribute of commanding (he is *kamachikuq*) the rest of the earth-beings — and runakuna, of course. Being munayniyuq, earth-beings can send or prevent thunder and hail, thus hindering or favoring the lives of crops, animals, and humans. They are atiyniyuq: they have the capacity to do things. Similarly, as noted above, Mariano and Nazario — like most runakuna I spoke with — also referred to the hacendado as munayniyuq. So that I would understand the dimension of the power of the human owner of the will, Nazario explained: *Gustunta ruwachisunki munayniyuq nisqa. Gustu* comes from the Spanish *gustar*, to like. A translation would be: “He who makes us do what he likes, we call him munayniyuq.” Accordingly, the hacendado punished runakuna physically when he wanted to; could even kill them if he wanted to; ordered them to work when he wanted to; and gave them only the amount of land that he wanted to. Moreover, no one could contradict him; he took away the land of those who opposed him, raped their wives, and burned their houses. The munayniyuq’s voice was an order: “Anything, and that was it, everything he said had to be done — he just ordered” [*Rimarillalla, simillamanta ima ruwanapas kamachinpas*]. Not everything about this voice was destructive: he bought tractors and animals, good cows. He extended the wire fences (*yaparan alambrekunata*); he built the silos; he could give runakuna these things, but he also could and did take them away.

Conceptually translated (and not only linguistically), munay is a notion runakuna use to name the will that has the capacity to shape their lives. The entities where such a capacity originates are munayniyuq — the will resides in them. In the above conversations, munayniyuqs (or munayniyuqkuna, the Quechua plural) are inscribed in the socionatural landscape: the power that shapes runakuna’s lives emerges from earth-beings and from the landowner — they rule. In 1969, an Australian anthropologist named John Earls, who now lives and teaches in Peru, made a similar observation: “Both *mistis* and *Wamanis* are *munayniyuq* (Quechua — “the powerful ones”) to the Quechua peasantry. Both have the power of life and death over the common people” (1969, 67). (Here the word “mistis” referred both to the hacendado and to the president and government.) Earls went on to explain: “It is not
at all easy to disentangle the sheer physical and economic aspects of political domination from those firmly embedded in the religious system of the Quechua Indians” (71). I agree, with a caveat that draws from an explanation I gave in story 5: runakuna may not enact earth-beings only as religious entities. And then, elaborating on my agreement with Earls: munayniyuq is a complex notion in which ontologically different forms of will—or sources of power—meet in ways that, to be analytically productive, may not bear unraveling because, while exceeding each other, they owe their being powerful entities to their shared characteristics. Munayniyuq refers to those who represent the state, the hacendado and others; it also refers to the highest-ranking earth-beings. Omnipotent and arbitrary will originates in all of them; in some respects, there is no real way around them, only negotiation is possible. And the practice of negotiation between runakuna and human and other-than-human munayniyuq is also similar and different—at the same time.

Ausangate and Salqantay, the highest earth-beings were commanding, I had learned, because being in-ayllu they were place, higher in authority than the rest of the entities that made place with them. Why, I asked, was the hacendado an owner of the will? The response was connected to place as well—but in a different relationship. Back then, Nazario and Mariano explained, all of Peru was a hacienda. The hacendayuq [those with haciendas] were senators and diputados, they were the owners of the will [senador, diputado kaspunkuya munaniyuq karqanku]. That is why they formed the law; therefore the law was in their favor. The law was what the rich wanted [Qhapaqlapaq ley munasqa karqan]. That is why they behaved following only their own will, which was like the law [chayrykuwan munasqanta leyman hina]. What the hacendados wanted became law; there was no difference between their will and the law, as the former transgressed the latter with impunity. Even the notion of transgression was untenable, for the limit to human munayniyuq seemed to reside in themselves—no power existed external to them. Locally, they inhabited the state; they not only represented it, they were it—and “locally” covered a huge territory.

In more than one sense, Pierre Bourdieu’s interpretation of “absolute power”—a notion he uses to identify the power of the state over those it defines as its subjects—is fitting here. He describes it as “the power to make oneself unpredictable and deny other people any reasonable anticipation, to place them in total uncertainty by offering no scope for their capacity to predict” (2000, 228). Munayniyuq, both human and other-than-human beings,
are also unpredictable, whimsical in how they affect events. Different and also inhabiting the same notion (where they both exceed each other, and thus are mutually exclusive) earth-beings and human owners of the will share some attributes, but not others. Among the shared features: munayniyuq are enablers of life; in exchange, they demand things from runakuna. Their command is also inevitable and arbitrary; their munay obligates and obeys no reason. The sources of the capricious will of humans and earth-beings, however, are different. As place, earth-beings give themselves through water, soil, and vitality, and they also demand in return what they enable: crops, animals, food, and human breath. Runakuna can engage with this munay; they establish and maintain relations with it on a quotidian basis. On occasion they may need specialists, those from among themselves with the ability to better relate to earth-beings. Human munayniyuq are different: they obligate runakuna through the exercise of a whimsically personalized and thoroughly extractive rule of law; their will originates in the state.

Munayniyuq, when referring to humans, approximates what Peruvian scholarship has known, probably since the 1920s, as gamonal, and the regime of power called gamonalismo. Deborah Poole, long involved in the analysis of gamonalismo, represents it as a “highly personalized form of local power whose authority is grounded in nearly equal measure in his [the gamonal’s] control of local economic resources, political access to the state, willingness to use violence, and the symbolic capital provided by his association with such important icons of masculinity as livestock, houses and a regional bohemian aesthetic” (2004, 43). The gamonal, she explains, inhabits the slippery boundary between privatized and state law, where the ideal separation of functions between the two is cancelled. This figure, then, represents both “the state and the principal forms of private, extrajudicial, and even criminal power that the state purportedly seeks to displace through law, citizenship and public administration” (45). The object of the critique of this conceptualization of gamonal is the consistency of the nonseparation between private and public power, legal and illegal practices, that the state exists to enact. This separation is actually embodied; true and deceptive, its practice is both legitimate and illegitimate, and in either case it is suffused with personal affect. Thus the separation is also not one.

Runakuna’s notion of munayniyuq in my conceptual translation overlaps with this critique: owners of the will embody a practice of the state that main-
tains and transgresses the distinction between the legal and the illegal. Yet it goes beyond the concept of gamonal as well, for the object of the critique nested in my friends’ notion of munayniyuq (and very explicitly Nazario’s) is the modern state itself, and most specifically its disavowal of runakuna as political subjects in their own right. Originating in their official classification as illiterate, and therefore outside of the logos of the modern state, this disavowal is effected through biopolitical projects for runakuna improvement, a quest for their translation into modern, literate subjects of the state. In an intriguing paradox, the concept of munayniyuq that runakuna deploy to discuss the inevitable and thus irrational power of a-modern earth-beings is also a critique of the modern state and its disavowal of runakuna’s world. And an unsurprising statement unravels this paradox and transforms it into a matter of fact: a modern state engaging in political conversation with worlds of willful mountains would not be modern, nor would the conversation be a political one. Yet the reader must be reminded that conversations take place across these radically different realities. They are also part of each other—even if in a disagreement so asymmetric that the state has the power to deny the reality of the conversation, which thus can transpire without a modern public.

The Local Will of the Modern State

All the villagers know about writing, and make use of it if the need arises, but they do so from the outside, as if it were a foreign mandatory agent that they communicate with by oral methods. The scribe is rarely a functionary or employee of the group: his knowledge is accompanied by power, with the result that the same individual is often both scribe and money-lender not just because he needs to be able to read and write to carry on his business, but because he thus happens to be, on two different counts, someone who has a hold over others.
— Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques (emphasis in the original)

The landowner left in 1969. The agrarian reform replaced private with public land ownership and hacendado administration with public employees who managed the property. Years later, a renewed alliance between runakuna, peasant politicians, and leftist parties dismantled state ownership of land and distributed it among runakuna families. They were to individually have usufruct rights to the plots, grazing pastures, and collectively owned territories
that the agrarian reform had legally titled comunidades campesinas in 1969 (Mayer 2009). According to Nazario, this made runakuna *libre* (free): *Land is now ours, it is not in the hacendado's hands anymore; we are not punished for the sake of it anymore, we are not jailed when we complain anymore. Now we have a president from within us [noqayku uhupi kan presidente], we have an assembly, a directiva from within us. We, with our acuerdo [agreement], with our assembly, we do our plots. We command ourselves.*

Yet if landed property seemed to be the source of the hacendado’s munay, it turned out not to be the ultimate origin of the will of the local state. Dislodged from control of hacienda land, access to the state—or rather, “legal access to the law,” as Nazario would say—continues to elude runakuna, even though they now “command themselves” with respect to land. Human owners of the will, new munayniyuq, currently inhabit local state institutions and behave as the hacendado did in the past. My friend’s words: *According to their will they do the law [paykuna munasqankullamanya leyita ruwanku].*

Walter Benjamin (1978) famously stated that violence and state reason share origins. Runakuna would agree, yet they might insist on translating reason as munay. Thus, signaling its arbitrariness, they would emphasize that this reason inevitably denies their world. Accepting the reason of the state—for doing otherwise would be impossible—they proceed to try and turn the local state in their favor with gifts of sheep: *Only when we give a sheep, our documents are quickly decreed [expedited], we are listened to quickly. That is what the sheep is useful for. The gift of a sheep obtains legal services; runakuna give sheep to gain “legal access to the law”—an exchange relationship that at first sight may be called corruption. Yet critically interpreting such transactions as a form of transgression leaves the reason of local state munay in place—off Nazario’s critical hook. Annoyed and resigned, Nazario often repeated versions of the phrase: “The law is not legal here” [kaypi leyqa manan legalchu]. And in his experience, this nonnegotiable illegality of the rule of law originates in the disjuncture between the state’s foundational literacy and the condition of runakuna as illiterate. With their ability to read and write, local state representatives monopolize the ability to make the will of the state locally legible—even when it appears illegible to local state representatives themselves (which is not infrequently the case). Nazario’s words: *the hacendado leaves, and the authorities remain the same. . . . We are fooled, because we are sonsos runakuna who do not read or write. The state is in the paperwork,*
the receipts, the state needs our signature, it wants us to sign. When we sign, because we cannot see [read] the authorities steal from us... There is no life for us, we live in fear. We fear the juez, the gobernador. If we have a complaint, we allow them to earn a little something. They are munayniyuq, like the hacendado they have become. The juez asks for a sheep, the gobernador asks for a sheep. Who gives them sheep, who feeds them, who gives them alcohol to drink—that is the person that they will listen to, nicely. At that point, things come [happen] legally [legal hina hamun]. The authorities are like the tankayllu [a parasitic insect] that sucks the blood of the runakuna. The state is not for us, we cannot read.

Runakuna’s conceptualization of the state as munayniyuq, as the source of the arbitrary will that considers them sonsos (stupid or unintelligent), is a comment on the conditions that enable the zone of indistinction between the legal and the illegal that houses, all too normally, runakuna’s relations with the state. The comment sheds light on the historical relationship between the modern nation-state and runakuna, and most specifically in the former’s will to define the latter’s world as counting only inasmuch as it is destined to future improvement. Borrowing Jacques Rancière’s terms, by the will of the modern state, runakuna have no logos, therefore they are not: “Your misfortune is not to be, a patrician tells the plebs, and this misfortune is inescapable” (1999, 26). In my story, think of the modern state as the patrician talking to runakuna, the plebs. Or, rather, talking to the world of the plebs, for here the relationship is not with individual subjects but with worlding practices that assign mountains and human institutions similar qualities. This a world, therefore, that the state cannot recognize without translating it into its own terms, a process that includes the state’s duty to modernize the countryside and thus undo what it cannot recognize, skipping the step of acknowledging its existence. These conditions compose the state will, the arbitrary reason of the munayniyuq—the owner of will that imposes conditions of existence on runakuna worlds that start with their denial in the present and continue into the deferral to the future of their being something else. The biopolitical mission of the munayniyuq state is to let runakuna die, so as to make them live as modern citizens. This will is incubated (not only inscribed) in writing: it is the mandatory foreign agent that Lévi-Strauss mentioned in the quote above, the inevitable moneylender who “has a hold” over runakuna’s lives.
THE WILL THAT MAKES RUNAKUNA WAIT

The reading of Kafka’s *The Trial* inspired Bourdieu’s notion of absolute power as that which may free its possessor “from the experience of time as powerlessness” while endowing him or her with the capacity to make others wait arbitrarily and without prediction (2000, 228). The novel, he said, depicted what could simply be “the limiting case of a number of ordinary states of the ordinary social world or of particular situations within this world, such as that of some stigmatized groups—Jews in the time and place of Kafka, blacks in the American ghettos, or the most helpless immigrants in many countries” (229). He could have included runakuna in his “minority” list. As in *The Trial*, in the surroundings of Ausangate, state representatives most effectively manifest their ownership of the will through their control of bureaucratic time: they can make runakuna wait endlessly.

According to Nazario, the wait—and all that is transacted within it—occurs because [runakuna are] *silly people who do not read or write*. Rather than simply self-deprecating, this comment reflects on runakuna’s location outside of the lettered state. Becoming part of it—learning to read and write—is the alternative the state proposes to people like Nazario, and this proposal includes the cancellation of their world. The local bureaucratic wait that runakuna experience can be conceptualized as included in the evolution (in time) that the modern state expects from runakuna as they become part of a way of life that can actually count as existing. The transformative technology is modern literacy, understood as a capacious biopolitical project for the evolutionary overhaul of those needing it—that is, those that have not caught up with the present. Reading and writing are the cornerstone on which the modern state builds what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called “the waiting room of history” (2000, 8). The world of ayllu is invited to the room; runakuna may individually leave it after meeting the requirements of the modern subject—namely, the historical consciousness of secular individuals who can distinguish cultural belief from rational knowledge. The meaning the modern state assigns to illiteracy goes beyond ignoring how to read and write. It includes collectivism, paganism, the conflation of fact and myth, ahistoricism, and “consequently” lack of synchronicity (and thus incompatibility) with modern politics. Runakuna’s wait stops—and becomes that of the usual citizen—once they abandon the world of ayllu. Their gifts of sheep to local bureaucrats may accelerate
the paperwork, but they do not cancel their biopolitical wait—rather, the gifts that may diminish the wait are part of the trial of runakuna, the experience of who they are per the will of the modern state. To runakuna, their absolute dis-possession of the time of the state and the time required for their improve-ment are identical—the latter justifies the former, they emerge together from the munay of the state. Runakuna’s biopolitical wait constitutes an impera-tive voice, an “order-word” carrying “a little death sentence” with it (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 76). Pierre Clastres called this practice “ethnocide”—the humanitarian annihilation of difference and optimistic construction of same-ness, a process he conceptualizes as the “normal mode of existence of the [civilized] State” (2010, 111). Inhabiting this normality, many of us are blind to the process or shrug with analytical impotence at its appearance.

Runakuna both reject and accept the biopolitical command to wait; their re-lations with the state is complex. Adding to the complexity, while a historicist fiat makes the wait inevitable, the world of runakuna (and tirakuna) exceeds the institutions that demand it. All these—rejection and acceptance, inevita-bility and excess—are present in the everyday dynamics between the state and runakuna. Rondas campesinas, the institutions through which runakuna engage with the state, are composed of those dynamics.

Rondas Campesinas: Making the Law Legal

I was already a relatively familiar presence in Pacchanta when my request to attend a meeting of the ronda campesina was accepted. Rondas are not con-fined to the region where my friends live. Rather, they are controversial so-cial institutions nationally known for their self-appointed task of controlling local abuses, both big and small—ranging from marital infidelity to cattle stealing and state corruption. Inaugurated in the northern coast and high-lands of Peru, particularly in Piura and Cajamarca, rondas have spread widely throughout the country since their beginnings in the 1970s (Degregori et al. 1996; Rojas 1990; Starn 1999; Yrigoyen Fajardo 2002). Usually described as institutions for the application of customary law, their legal history has me-andered quite a bit since their first public emergence. But in 2003 their cen-tral role in defeating the Shining Path and the political pressure they have exerted resulted in what Peruvian lawyers, politicians, and pundits refer to
as the “official recognition of rondas campesinas.” What this recognition means in terms of the limits and possibilities of rondas is still unclear and it might remain so. For more than a year, beginning in June 2012 and continuing as I write this in March 2014, rondas in Cajamarca — their place of origin — have been crucial in organizing protests against a mining corporation’s intention to destroy several lagoons to extract gold. This political activity certainly goes beyond the limits granted by the official recognition of rondas and continues to complicate their relationship with the state.

When I arrived in Pacchanta in January 2002, though it had not yet been officially recognized, the ronda in the region of Lauramarca was ten years old. Promoted by liberation theology priests (my friend Padre Antonio was among the organizers), NGOs, and regional peasant organizations, in the early 1990s the local ronda started conglomerating the peasant communities (most of them also in-ayllu collectives) in the environs of the town of Ocongate. An increasing number of stolen animals, related violence, and, quite saliently, the impunity of local state representatives involved in crime and corruption motivated runakuna to create the local ronda. Not surprisingly, in the early years of the organization, relationships between it and local authorities were extremely tense and occasionally confrontational. Perhaps the most memorable of these earlier conflicts involved a relatively well-known official of the District of Lauramarca, whom the ronda assembly — the meeting of all its members (one per household), which represents the ultimate authority of the organization — charged with supporting a group of cattle rustlers. He was whipped in punishment. The official, a person who could read and write and also had some unofficial legal training, retaliated by denouncing the president of the ronda to the local legal authorities. The case was legally solved and the ronda president acquitted, but during the period I visited Pacchanta, relations between the ronda and local state authorities remained tense. Rondas not only interrupt the illegal complicity between human munayniyuq and criminals, but they also interfere with the state’s claim to its monopoly on the exercise of legitimate violence. Thus, on this count alone ronda practices — which runakuna engaged in “to make the law legal” (to quote once again Nazario’s phrase) — were illegal because they usurped the sovereign authority of the law. To prevent being denounced legally — and skirt local munayniyuq — ronda assemblies were kept away from the purview of the state. During the time I visited the area, massive meetings (attended by anywhere from one thousand to four thousand individuals, depending on the agenda) gathered
in places deemed remote even by local standards, out of the view of local state officials. In fact, I was chased away from the ronda once, when I first arrived and attempted, quite ignorantly, to attend a meeting I had accidentally happened across. I was thus surprised when I was later allowed to attend the ronda assembly that I describe below. It consisted of a gathering of about 500 individuals — mostly men, though many women also attended.

A RONDA ASSEMBLY: PUNISHING A HORSE THIEF AGAINST THE POLICE’S WILL

The meeting began. After singing the national anthem and raising the Peruvian flag, the agenda was discussed. The main issue for the assembly was to punish a thief who had stolen horses. Members of the ronda had captured him but, rather than demanding his freedom, the thief demanded that he be surrendered to the police. He did not want to face communal justice; facing it can be tough, the thief knew — deals with the local state were far easier. At his request two policemen had come from Ocongate to take him into official custody, and indeed protect him from judgment and punishment by the assembly. As ronda members guarded the thief, the policemen asserted their authority: “You do not have any right to have this man, you cannot punish him. Only the police can punish. He could complain, he could accuse you to the judge.” The assembly murmured loudly, and the president of the ronda responded: “You say it is not our right, but when he goes to the police station you let him free, and he gives you something . . . you do not punish him. You just want what he can give you. It’s the same with the judge . . . you side with the thieves, and we, those who are interested [in stopping this], remain concerned, worried.” The police insisted, but to no avail; the assembly shouted angrily in support of the ronda president, and with this power, the ronda authorities ordered the state authorities to leave. Once they had gone and the assembly calmed down, the action proceeded. First, those ronda members who had found the man described how and where that had happened; then the owner of the stolen animals brought witnesses to certify that the horses found in the possession of the alleged thief were his animals. The man confessed and was obliged to pay for his wrong: he had to return the horses and pay the owner (I cannot recall how much) to compensate for the days he had
To get to the site of the assembly meeting, Nazario, his son Rufino (also a head of household), and I walked three hours uphill from Pacchanta. On the way, they told me about something that had happened several years ago. It was 1989, and Rufino was nine or ten years old. His brother and sisters were with Mariano in Pacchanta; Rufino was with his parents, tending the herds near their house in Alqaqucha, which was higher than their main residence and also isolated from the rest of the village but had good pastures for the alpaca (before the tourist boom, the family earned most of its income from selling wool). It was the rainy season, which coincides with elementary school vacations in Peru; thus Rufino, like other boys of his age, was occupied as his family’s shepherd. Nazario was fixing stone fences, and Liberata was in the house. The sun was up; it was early in the day—probably before noon—when a troop of rustlers came. First they attacked Nazario, tying his feet and hands with wire that they found in the house and stuffing his mouth with *pariation*—the local word for parathion, an insecticide poisonous to humans—so that he could not scream to warn the shepherd, his son. Then they went after Rufino, tied him with a rope, and corralled the animals that they would later take with them (thirty-two alpacas, six sheep, and eight horses). Then they proceeded into the house, where they raped Liberata and gathered all the products the family had brought with them from Pacchanta (dehydrated potatoes, potatoes, and sugar), their clothes, and their beds (made of blankets and sheep skins) into a pile. Finally, before leaving, they sprayed kerosene on the house and set it on fire. It took Nazario and Liberata a long while to free themselves and find Rufino. Once they did, trembling with cold and fear, they walked to Pacchanta. I did not even dare ask if they had gone to the authorities; as it turned out, they had, but
they knew that nothing would happen. After that event, and when they were able to start a new herd, they did not take it to Alqaqucha, even though the pasture was better there; they were too afraid to be alone in that remote spot. Many other households were limited in this way—and those that had valuables (radios, tape recorders, and gas stoves) took them to a relative’s house in a nearby town, where robbers would have more difficulty stealing them. Conditions are different now: herds graze in remote places and people can keep their valuables at home. The rondas have effectively curbed rustling. People say the authorities are unhappy: now there are fewer thieves to bribe them—or did the authorities bribe the thieves? That actually might have been the case; as owners of the will, they could decide to send the cattle rustlers to jail if they did not collaborate with them. This was the illegal way of the law in the region.

With this event fresh in our minds, we arrived at the site of the gathering, a lagoon that bordered several districts. Remote and high, it was selected
precisely because it was difficult to reach. My presence had been accepted, I was told, because I was a trusted friend of the Turpos. Still, I had to swear in front of the assembly that this was the case. Nazario told them I had a camera and tape recorder, and I had to offer both to the president—they did not want their actions recorded. All attendants were also participants, responsible for anything that happened for good or ill, and so was I. Grateful that they allowed me to participate, I accepted all conditions. When asked about my purposes, I said the ronda was reminiscent of the collective in-ayllu leadership that many years ago had “walked the complaint” with Mariano Turpo and against the landowner, against the owner of the will. Of course, not many people heard me—the crowd was huge. But those who were near me agreed somewhat, and they also corrected me: rondas were like the ayllu that Mariano worked with in that they all took turns, they were all involved, and they worked for everybody. But they were also different. Land was not at stake anymore; it was the legality of the law that was at stake. State authorities did not like the ronda because they were against the law—they made the law illegal.

Walking back to Pacchanta, as we talked about how the assembly had forced the policemen to leave, Nazario and his best friend, Octavio, explained why runakuna supported the organization: rondas were controlling state authorities, they were making the law legal. They told me the story of how the rondas were born, as they called it.

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RUNAKUNA’S WILL TO CONTROL THE MUNAYNIYUQ: HOW RONDAS WERE BORN

In those days the authorities sided with the thief; they did not want our organization. The judge did not want the organization. We invited him to the assembly. “I am not coming,” [he said]. “It is not your right” [mana qankunaqa dirichuykischus]. We invited the policemen; they came to the assembly. “We are going to be with you, in this fair thing we are going to be together,” they said. But then, in the end, the police did not [help us]; they had just talked for the sake of talking. The police always, always listened to the thieves when they went to their post.

The runakuna in the assembly approved: “When we go to the judge, we
always need money, we need sheep; the complaint lasts too long, it takes way too many days to be fixed. In the ronda we [will] not need sheep; people who offend [will] pay a fine for their misdeed. The fine [will] be sixty soles.” The assembly approved. So, saying this we sent oficios [official letters] to the authorities to say: “You want sheep, money; therefore, you favor those that give you money.” With this, we silenced the judge, the governor, and the police post; they did not say anything against the ronda anymore. The judge, also a runa, got mad at the ronda, he said: “You never obey what I order, so do whatever you want, make your own laws.” Thus, with these things [the rondas] were born [Chayqa aqnapi, chaykuna nasirqan].

The rondas I came to know were not attempting to replace an absent state. Rather, as in Nazario and Octavio’s story above, they were targeting a familiar and very present state: the bureaucrats, local owners of the will—the munayniyuq—and their arbitrary demands to exchange law and development for sheep and money: It is true, we have made rondas to stop fights and robberies, we want to have a peaceful life [thak kayman chayapuyta munaspa]. Other runakuna agreed with them: the state did not bring peace, but rondas had. And the ronda not only organized on behalf of runakuna; the organization also benefited the mistikuna of the region: The thieves were not scared of the mistis; they also robbed their cows, horses, their mules. That is why they [the mistis] respect the rondas. Rondas also got the roads under their control so that people could travel safely, protected not only against robbers, but also against the state representatives who were their allies: Before the rondas, buses were ambushed, saying that they [the passengers] were terrorists, the thieves stopped them—the authorities received money from them and they protected them. These, the rondas made disappear. And to my surprise, rondas did not punish runakuna only; they could chastise non-runakuna in the region, too: We respect the misti because they read and write, they are learned, but even if they are, if they steal there has to be justice. They should not lean on other doctors that are more powerful. Even if the thief is a misti with a lot of money, we should not fear him. We should be able to say, “Pay for it, recognize your misdeed.” We should obligate him. While the ronda had not punished many non-runakuna, its demonstrable power made local munayniyuq unhappy: The Judge, the governor, they are hating the ronda [ronda paykuna llakisqa karanku]. Rondas have had
the ability to reject the local practice of the state and limit the munay that obliges runakuna to make a gift of sheep in exchange for making the law legal. This possibility has a geographical condition: it works where ayllus take-place and implement practices of their own—many of which complicate, and at times exceed, state practices, including the demand for the exercise of political representation.

The Power of the Ronda Is Not the Power to Represent

My conversation with Nazario and Octavio above happened shortly after the state legalized the rondas campesinas, making them “legitimate interlocutors of the State” with the capacity to “coordinate their actions with state representatives” and to control “development projects within their communal jurisdiction.” Illustrative of this new and relatively agreeable relationship, in 2004 the justice of the peace of the district of Ocongate coordinated his actions with the ronda. As Nazario explained, the juez himself, he sent a man, saying, “This person is like this, we have fixed it in the office, now you within the ronda give him a punishment.”

Seemingly, their official recognition eased—at least nominally—the rondas’ relationships with local state authorities. However, effected in the state’s terms, this recognition did not unsettle the fundamental relationship between state and runakuna, whereby the former denies the world of the latter by demanding its transformation into, precisely, the terms of the state. Recognition did not affect the ronda’s organization, either; it continued to rest on in-ayllu relationality. Interestingly, as in-ayllu relational mode inflects ronda dynamics, an intricate situation results in which the collaboration between state authorities and runakuna—which can even be read as the participation of rondas in state activities—also transpires without the state, and in many cases against its central practices as well.

As noted in earlier stories, beings in-ayllu—runakuna and tirakuna—are entities with relations inherently implied. This means that such a being is not an individual subject in relation to others. Rather, an individual in-ayllu is analogous to a knot in a web: a confluence where connections to other knots emerge and with which the individual is. Composed by heterogeneous connections, a person in-ayllu appears (in different and hierarchical positions) always inherently related to others. One of the requirements for the exercise of ronda leadership is to be aylluruna, and this is not only a way to exclude
the more powerful townspeople (potential munayniyuq) from ronda command. Just as important, being in-ayllu limits the way ronda leaders can practice authority, specifically when it comes to “representing” their collective. Let me explain why I use quotes here.

Representation—legal and political—is the expected relationship between the modern state and its citizens: a democratically chosen leader stands for the electorate, and this is not an arbitrary condition. Rather, it occurs as a result of a pact—officially called an election—that seals a relationship between the chosen leader and those who chose her (or him). Accordingly, the latter grant the former the power to speak for them. Ronda leaders are also elected, but in-ayllu election does not result in representation; however, representation is not absent either. This is how Nazario explained ronda authority: From among us we command ourselves [nuqayku pura kamachinakuyku]. Those [who command] are with credentials [they are authorized by the ronda assembly], they [their names] are in the actas [minutes]. Choosing with our vote [vutuwan churayku aqllaswan], we position them. And then they are for us to obey, they command [anchiman hina kasuyta, kamachikun]. [The president] of the directiva gives orders for one year. He relates to all [state] institutions; he has to go to talk about the road, the water, anything. We respect him, we cannot argue when he gives us orders, and if we do not obey, they fine us. If he is a drunk, or if he does not solve things properly, or if there is a problem, we [the assembly] make him pay a fine [mchasqa mana allintapas huq nata problemanta mana allinta alchawanku, payta multata pagachillaykutaq]. Thus we respect the directiva, and they respect us [anchikunawan, directivata respetayku y directivapas respetallawankutaq].

The “us” that Nazario refers to is the assembly of all ayllus that compose the ronda; this assembly inherently constitutes ronda authorities, who therefore are never without it. The ronda is individuals who are always already with others, always “an assembly.” This includes authorities whose individual will is restricted to the approval of the collective from which—not for which—ronderos (all those who form the ronda, including its authorities) act and speak. Failure to not speak or not do from the ronda not only results in removal from the position of authority, it also implies punishment, which can be a fine, physical chastisement, or the denial of access to collective land and grazing rights; everyday shame; and social and economic ostracism. There is no outside of the assembly for any of its members to occupy, and therefore the authorities’ practice of ronda representation is the collective will of all
present in the assembly. Unlike liberal forms of representation, the significance of ronda authorities—their power to signify—continues to rest in the assembly. And thus, it is not difficult to find a parallel between the ronda and the Zapatista requirement to “command obeying” (Comandanta Ester 2002, 186). Reversing the directionality of the authority contracted through liberal democratic elections, ronda elections obligate the elected leaders from the very instant when they are chosen to command. Nazario’s phrase was unambiguous as he narrated his version of ronda success: *We made Julián Rojo return, we chose him for two more years.*

Rojo was one of the founders of the ronda to which Pacchanta belonged. He had done a good job, and there was nobody else like him. Although he did not want to return, he had to, and his return was insisted upon through an assembly election. This was, indeed, reminiscent of Mariano’s story: he too was chosen to lead, he did not want to, but he had to. I told this story earlier, and I had already heard it from Mariano himself when Nazario and Octavio told me about Rojo. The opposite of munayniyuq—because it is the will of the assembly that articulates their authority rather than their own munay—both Julián and Mariano also match what Clastres said about chiefs in societies without a state: they are chiefs with no power, and rather than possessing the power of their eloquent speech, they have to use such eloquence for the collective (1987).

As it was with the runakuna leaders during Mariano’s heyday, the authority that the ronda grants its heads emerges from in-ayllu relationships. While based on these individuals’ abilities, it transforms their capacities into their obligation toward the collective and inhibits their individual power—without necessarily canceling it out. Unlike Mariano, Julián Rojo could read and write—at least somewhat, probably like Mariano Chillihuani, Mariano Turpo’s puriq masi, his partner in walking the grievance. But something that Mariano Turpo and Julián Rojo did have in common was that they both “knew how to speak.” Speech is a required quality in a leader—Clastres also agreed; this seems to be a normal trait in politics, including modern liberal politics. However, unlike liberal politicians whom the electorate grants the power to speak on its behalf, ronda authorities (and Mariano, earlier) depend on the collective for their speech. It is the assembly that decides what the authority will say, without necessarily granting this person the power to represent them as a signifier represents the signified. They are leaders without followers, for the separation between these two that would be required to make
them such (leaders and followers, distinct from each other) does not exist. The assembly is never passive or silent; on the contrary, it is always speaking and making its authorities speak. In turn, it is the task of the ronda officers, as members obligated to the assembly, to coordinate the actions that will eventually result in their speech. In a similar vein, Mexican theorist and political activist Raquel Gutiérrez (2014) suggests that in the case of the Bolivian collectives she is familiar with, the limit of the activity of communal representatives is the collective will, formulated in mechanisms through which individuals negotiate an agreement among themselves, rather than giving over their will—delegating it—in exchange for the management of the common good. Thus when their leaders “represent” the ronda—for example, when they engage state institutions, NGOs, or political parties—this relation is also a non-representational practice: they are in-ayllu, never acting without the collective, which is where their power rests.

This process is not free of conflict. The partial connection between representation and non-representation is also a site where endless discussions occur. These can be violent, for while authorities do not represent the assembly, there is a possibility of their doing so (and not only for collective benefit, but their own as well). For one thing, they can make the assembly speak what they deem to be the most convenient words. This, however, is not as simple as manipulation, for convincing a ronda assembly that emerges from in-ayllu relations requires daily work and the command of long-lasting respect, which can also occasion a clever strategy of alliances, bribery, and abusive power. The leader that emerges in such conditions would be identified as munayniyuq, with his authority in danger of being cut off by the ronda assembly.

Rondas are complex institutions. Concerned with “making the law legal,” they incorporate the state in their dynamics. Yet the power that makes rondas possible is different from (sometimes even other to) the power of the state, which runakuna like Nazario perceive as an inevitable owner of the will and, in this inevitability, analogous to the power of earth-beings. Unlike the latter, however, for runakuna the power of the state is separate from, and frequently even antagonistic to, in-ayllu conditions. Instead, the power that makes rondas possible is in-ayllu, inseparable from it; the power resides in the collective, which cannot grant representative power (potentially equivalent to individual will, or munay) to its leaders without undoing itself as a collective. The emergence of a munayniyuq from within the ronda—which is quite frequent—acts against this collective and results in violence. It is the kind of
local power that obfuscates the obligatory relational ties that being in-ayllu implies, and is debilitating both of ronda command and of the munayniyuq, an unsettling local figure whose individual munay the ronda will work to cancel, resorting to violence if necessary. At other times, as in the case I discuss below, the violent will of an individual can be controlled by appealing to the state—the same state that denies the in-ayllu way of life that sustains the ronda, and that the ronda attempts to make legal.

**Rondas against the Local State from within the State**

During the years when I visited Pacchanta, only in-ayllu runakuna could be elected as ronda authorities, but membership in the ronda was opened to mistis—mostly town merchants—who also found recourse against delinquents and munayniyuq thanks to ronderos. The ronda had been a success by local standards. Nazario was enthusiastic: *Now there is less [fewer gifts] for the lawyers, less for the police. The ronda is making court trials disappear. Lawyers are sad; before they at least got sheep, the police also. We have made things calm down; [with] the organization of the ronda there are no payments.* The ronda’s relative accomplishments in challenging the police and the local legal system inspired discussions about extending ronda surveillance to state representatives—all of them, not only the visibly corrupt ones. *We would begin in Ocongate—[the representative of] the Ministry of Agriculture is in Ocongate. We would ask him: “How much money has arrived in the ministry for the district? And how have you spent that money?” All those things would be declared, they would have to say the truth. There would be justice. Because we do not check on them, there is no justice; if we did, there would be justice, any order they would give us would be legal. With that, from the ronda, the decrees, all the state documents, if they are okay, would be overseen from within us [the ronda]. From within the ronda we would sanction [we would say]: “Those persons that work in that institution are okay,” or “They are not okay.” If they are not okay, we would fire them. That is how we would approve; we would supervise what they do.*

Nazario proposed the ideas above in a small assembly in his village. He had been most immediately motivated by the publicly known fact that the mayor of Ocongate (a foreigner to the district who had established residence in the region as an elementary teacher) was stealing large amounts of money from the budget allocated to the district municipality. A ronda member had been killed after denouncing the mayor in an assembly; he was a suspect in the kill-
ing, but who could condemn a local authority? The mayor had infiltrated the ronda, it was said, by bribing runakuna with salaried jobs in the municipality. People murmured: the ronda had to be more careful about who attended assemblies, and only people well known as members should be admitted. According to Nazario, the ronda had proven its success—it had scared thieves and had been able to control those who protected them—and it was time to begin supervising all other state representatives, beginning with the municipality. So he continued to address the small group of people who had gathered: *That Víctor Perez [the mayor] is stealing our town’s money. That is why we are denouncing him. If we do not talk [publicly] about that robbery, another mayor will be chosen next, and he too will steal.*

I had learned from Mariano that taking on in-ayllu leadership was onerous; it implied risking one’s life and getting nothing in return. And as I listened to the conversation in the village gathering, I realized that this had not changed. Nazario continued: *Some of us are silent; some of us speak and fight with him, the mayor watches us, hates some of us. [But those who are silent should realize that] the money that we are complaining about will not be for the persons who are walking the complaint, it will be for everybody. We fear walking in the streets; he is sending people to follow us. That person who died was not complaining about the mayor because he had stolen his animals or his money. He was complaining about the money that belonged to the town, and he was killed. While some are happy, others find death.* Violence was escalating, and it seemed like the only way to stop the mayor was to make his corruption known in the broader regional political context—beyond the munay of the local state. Gathered by the ronda and supported by my friend Padre Antonio (in his role as *párroco*, leader of the local parish), a group of twenty ronderos took shelter in the local church building and began a hunger strike. They invited representatives of the main regional news media and denounced the mayor in a local press conference. After a short but violent political tug-of-war, the ronda won: the mayor had to resign and went to prison. He remained there for several months, perhaps years—he was never seen in the region again. During my last visit in 2009, some people still feared retaliation. All actions had been directed against the corrupt mayor; however, they could implicitly reverberate against the regional authorities whose corruption was the norm (and therefore *not* corruption!). The ronderos’ hunger strike was obviously an action if not necessarily against the state, against its local practice for sure.

The victory against the rogue mayor also meant the defeat of a large net-
work of his thugs, which included many runakuna who were willing to risk their relations with the collective. This defeat reaffirmed in-ayllu possibilities and emboldened rondas to expand their attempts to control local state authorities—Nazario’s proposal above slowly came to fruition. The assembly discussed whether it might even be better if they chose electoral candidates for office from within the collective. When the next municipal electoral season came, the ronda decided to walk inside the state, and occupy it with ronda practices to vote in democratic elections, thus following state practices. They started by choosing candidates for mayor from “within themselves”—[the candidates are] from within us, was how Nazario put it. It was decided in a ronda assembly that each ayllu should choose two candidates; then “from among them” the general assembly would choose one as the ronda candidate.

Participation in democratic elections was not new for runakuna. They had elected state representatives since 1979, when the new Peruvian constitution—joining other multicultural policies across the continent—granted “illiterate citizens” the right to vote in national and local elections. In the 1990s, policies to deepen neoliberalism—of which multiculturalism was a part—implemented the so-called decentralization of the state administration. One of the measures put in place was that municipal authorities (mayors and municipal councils) who had formerly been appointed by central authorities were to be locally elected. In many parts of the country, residents of towns and some runakuna rushed through the door opened by the decentralizing call to participate in local state institutions. Yet once they got past the threshold, “illiterate citizens” found the lettered practices of the state pushing them back out. In Cuzco, a case that people of all walks of life always mention is that of Zenón Mescco, a runakuna who was elected mayor of a rural hamlet called Chinchaypuquio, three hours by car west of the city of Cuzco (probably eight hours from Ocongate). He was accused of fraud and put in jail. He was illiterate, he explained in a later interview: his accountant had made him sign documents that he could not read. He was found guilty and spent four years in prison; his ayllu was unable or unwilling to defend him.

Runakuna in Ocongate are aware of Mescco’s case; they know that literacy is a requirement when they think about viable candidates for municipal elections. When we were talking about possible ronda candidates for mayor, I asked Nazario about Rojo, the ronda organizer my friends admired—the one they had made return as the ronda leader. How about him as candidate?
Nazario was very quick to respond: No he cannot, he has little instruction. No . . . he would not have support [Julian mana atinmanchu, pisi istrukshunin mana . . . manan apuyankumanchu]. And he continued: In the end, there is not one with high school [education] . . . there is none within the assembly of runakuna . . . from among us, there is no one. In fact, Perez, the corrupt mayor, had been elected because he had a secondary education; while he was not a candidate from “within the ronda” (ronda ubupi), by the time of his election he had won the favor of the assembly because he had helped interpret the legal documents about ronda organization that circulated prior to their official recognition. Perhaps he had learned how to fool runakuna; he realized he could tell them whatever he wanted, Nazario thought.

“ILLITERATE” CITIZENS OF A LETTERED STATE

In 1979, a constitutional decree formally lifted the ban on the participation of the “illiterate population” in national and local elections. A couple of years later, a myriad of municipalidades menores (smaller municipalities) were created in peasant villages, thus potentially opening the doors for runakuna to participate in the will of the state. However, literacy is still required to conduct the business of the local state. Who could imagine a late-liberal state that does not place modern logos (history, science, and politics) at its center? And if this question represents a challenge to hegemonic knowledge (the sphere from which possible answers could emerge) the idea of a non-lettered state is even worse; it is absurd. It expresses the unthinkable: that which perverts all answers because it defies the terms under which the question is phrased (Trouillot 1995, 82). And the flip side of the unthinkable is that which does not even require thinking or saying—in this case, the requirement of literacy among elected state representatives even if they do not read and write. This illogical imposition is not a problem in need of consideration because, as the flip side of the unthinkable, it is “the way things should be.” In an era when states may pride themselves on multiculturalism—if they achieve it—modern literacy (and all that it encompasses in its semantic field) continues to set the limits of acceptable difference, or tolerates it at its own risk and until its expected failure. The “indio permitido” (quoted in Hale 2004), or the Indian whose citizenship the state authorizes is the literate Indian as secular,
individual subject. The other Indian (“illiterate” and in-ayllu) is not given direct access to the state: she needs to wait, use intermediaries, or bear the consequences like Mescco. There is no legal measure against this condition, for no liberal right to illiteracy exists.

Nevertheless, alternative literacy projects inhabited by heterogeneous de-colonial practices also exist. Close to home (or to one of this book’s homes), the struggle for schools that Mariano’s generation of leaders engaged in embodies one such effort; similar political projects exist today. Reading and writing in these projects empowers radical difference—it does not cancel it—even if many times the reading and writing is practiced in Spanish only.

The Ronda Inhabits the State:  
A Winning (Literate) Candidate

So the pool to choose the ronda candidates was restricted to its literate members, who were usually not runakuna; counterintuitively—to me at least—the assembly decided to choose ronda candidates from among members who lacked governing experience. Having been previously involved in government, Nazario explained, could have instilled bad habits: *We want someone who is clean, someone who has not done any “cargos,” like working in [a state] office. People learn to steal; working as an officer [directivo], people may also learn to steal. Some runa who is clean, with beautiful experience, someone like that will look after our place, so we say [Huq limphiw runaqa, sumaq iqpizin- shawan runata, llaqtata qhawarinqa nispa].*

After several failed attempts in which the ronderos lost to other local candidates, the ronda candidate finally won in the municipal elections in 2008. Graciano Mandura, born in Pacchanta, is the son of an in-ayllu household. He not only reads and writes in Spanish, but he also has a degree in animal husbandry and was working for a development NGO when he was elected mayor of Ocongate. An outsider would not see him as “an indigenous peasant”—he was unlike most of those who had elected him. He did not fulfill any in-ayllu obligations in Pacchanta either; when he was old enough to join the collective, he chose instead to move to Cuzco for his education. Currently, he does not have access to ayllu resources in Pacchanta, where he still has family. When I met him, his wife was a teacher in the local high school;
their children went to elementary school in San Jerónimo, an urban district connected to the city of Cuzco by public transportation. (In fact, I met him through his job; as a friend of Mariano and his family, he was very helpful during my first visits to Pacchanta, as was his wife.) Reading and writing, a university degree, a house in Ocongate, and earning a salary from an NGO: all this would qualify Mandura as misti or a non-runa. But as Nazario and, most emphatically Benito, his brother, also asserted: *He is like us, runa class, he has runa blood. Some runakuna, when they read and write do not want to be seen like us, they want to be respected like the misti; they do not respect runakuna. Graciano is not scared of the misti and he respects us, he is like us, he has runa blood, runa clothes, runa class [runa yawar, runa p’achayuq, runa clase]. Now, one from the runa class is mayor; the ronda won.*

And this indeed was the case. Mandura was a ronda mayor, and thus his performance was supervised by the ronda assembly. This is the way he explained it to me: *I have to be careful, I do not ask all the time, but I have to be...*
aware not to offend anybody. I cannot get rich; that is the most important thing. I have to serve; the ronda has to see I serve. Seemingly, then, not even as state authorities are ronda members granted the power to undertake representation in liberal, democratic terms. Authority continues to rest in the organization. Literate ronda officials are not only the individual modern subjects that the state can recognize as its representatives—subject to the collective, their position as state representatives does not add up to one (but it is not many, either).

Similarly complex, Mandura embodies an alternative, if implicit, project for literacy. Perhaps it bears similarities with the one that Mariano proposed in the 1950s and for which he walked the complaint from Pacchanta, to Cuzco and Lima: a project that would allow runakuna to read and write without shedding in-ayllu relational worlding that, along with others, make life in the region of Ausangate. Gavina Córdoba, a native Quechua speaker who also writes fluently in Spanish and works at an international NGO located in Lima, calls this process *criar la escritura*. Her Spanish phrase can be translated as “to nurture writing,” and the intention underpinning it is to counter literacy as a national homogenizing project. “You make writing your own, or make your own writing, you make it different, like you, you do not allow it to change you: you change it once it is your own” she explains. In these alternative literacy projects, runakuna who read and write do not translate themselves into the representational literate regime of the lettered state—and thus they challenge its status as the owner of the will, or munayniyuq. This challenge, however, is partial: modern practices of political representation (those that belong to the sphere of the state) are hegemonically present, always impinging on non-representational practices, which in the best of cases have to negotiate with those modern practices implicitly or explicitly. For example, and eloquently, Mandura was also the candidate of Acción Popular—it literally translates as Popular Action in English. A nationwide populist political party that is moderately inclined to the right, Acción Popular sponsored Graciano’s electoral campaign, whose monetary cost to the ronda therefore was minimal. Unlike the ronda, this party granted its candidate—Graciano Mandura (also the ronda candidate)—the power to represent it in the local elections. For Acción Popular this meant the possibility of counting Ocongate as a place where the party had influence, and thus where it could implement (and, if successful, showcase) its “rural development” plans. But this
influence, which flowed through modern forms of political representation, still had to be negotiated with the ronda: within it, Graciano was not free as an individual to represent—and thus command—“his constituency” as Acción Popular would have expected. Moreover, the ronda collective was not “a constituency” that was distinctively separated from Graciano; he was inherently part of it.

As in the case of Julián Rojo, Graciano Mandura’s circumstances reminded me of stories that Mariano had told me—how his lawyers or leftist allies wanted him to sign papers, which he could not do before consulting with the ayllu. Intriguingly, the local state includes many non-state ayllu or ronda practices, and the collectives include state practices. The relation between the two spheres is tense: the state can compel rondas and ayllus to abide by rules of representative democracy even as it denies recognition to non-representational practices—or precisely because it denies them recognition, thus signaling limits to democracy that are unquestionable and historically legitimate (and thus not perceived as limits).

Rather than two disconnected logics, in Ocongate, where Graciano Mandura was mayor—and possibly in other places in the country—the ronda’s participation in municipal elections (proposing their candidates and overseeing them) reveals a complex local state where the ayllu (or ronda) non-representational regimes cohabit with modes of representation that are the norm for the modern state. Thus, when it comes to political conversations that include “the illiterate’s” notions of democracy, elections may become sites of empirical and conceptual equivocation (Viveiros de Castro 2004b): they may refer, simultaneously, to radically different (representational/non-representational) practices, which, however, when enacted cannot be distilled from one another. Challenging liberal thinkers who would deem unthinkable the simultaneity of obligation to a collective and democracy, in the rondas and in-ayllu the election of leaders can be both democratic and an obligation—the result of partial connection between distinct forms of authorizing the power of the leader. Perhaps this is how “to command obeying” acquires meaning in the rondas and in-ayllu. As I said above, Rojo, the aylluruna who successfully implemented the ronda in the early 2000s, had to serve for two terms. I repeat Nazario’s words: *We made Julián Rojo return, we chose him for two more years.*

The same could have happened to Graciano Mandura, but it did not.
THE MAYOR WHO LEFT THE RONDA

Graciano was a popular district mayor; his term was a success. Among other things, he supported a mobilization in defense of Ausangate, the major earth-being in the region, against a possible mine that was projected to cut through it. Participating in runakuna’s plight when he was still a candidate, he agreed with many in the region that mining Ausangate would be equivalent to destroying the earth-being, something that Ausangate itself would not tolerate. When the news about the imminent prospecting for the mine spread, Mandura was one of the leaders who opposed it; the municipality contributed money to rent a bus and encouraged local people to travel to a demonstration in the Plaza de Armas in the city of Cuzco. In a series of events that the neoliberal decentralization of the state could not foresee, not only were ayllu and liberal modes of representation complexly entangled with one another, but more impressively, through the mayor of Ocongate, earth-beings had entered the
logic of the local state, even if central representatives of the state ignored or disavowed this event as indigenous superstition (de la Cadena 2010). The complexity, however, does not stop here—nor does Graciano’s political story. Being a district major elected by the ronda put him in an intricate position: he was a state representative whose power was not his own for his authority derived from obligation to the ronda assembly. Accordingly, his acts of municipal government were not top-down; he owed himself to the ronda electorate. Yet his position also led to political popularity beyond ronda and ayllu reach and drew him away from his obligations to these institutions. In April 2010, Graciano was elected mayor of Quispicanchis, the province to which the district of Ocongate and his village, Pacchanta, belongs. The jurisdiction of the ronda that elected him is limited to Ocongate, and in representing Quispicanchis, Graciano not only became a higher ranking mayor: as provincial mayor, and thus outside of ronda jurisdiction, he was now free to abide only by the rules of representative democracy. He no longer needed to obey the collective. Yet, as a modern representative of his constituency, he followed practices that the modern state has trouble recognizing—or does so only as folklore.

Built by the Brazilian corporation Odebrecht, a mega-highway (known as the Carretera Transoceánica because it connects the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans) cuts through the province of Quispicanchis. Projects for local social development are part of the construction of the road—perhaps in compliance with policies of corporate social responsibility. A web page for the corporation shows a picture of Graciano at the inauguration of one of these projects. Included in the inauguration ceremony, the page explains, was a “Pago a la Tierra”—translated as “I Pay the Earth”—performed by “four religious leaders” who requested the participation of the mayor of Quispicanchis. The web page translates Graciano’s words at the inauguration into English: “Our traditional customs cannot be forgotten and our traditions must be preserved. But we need to be organized to transform what we are receiving into the development of our community.”

These sentences appear on the web page in English; the article mentions Graciano spoke in Quechua. I do not know exactly what he said nor do I know what he meant. I guess his statement invokes partially connected worlds, their practices, and their projects. When I read the web page, the image that came to my mind was Graciano’s leading role in the campaign against the mine and in defense of Ausangate. Extrapolating from this and from my ethnographic experience, I guess that, most probably, the inaugural ceremony that the web
page refers to was a despacho to the earth-beings that compose the place of which Quispicanchis is part. Like he did when he was mayor of Ocongate, in Quispicanchis, Mayor Mandura engages in relationships with entities that are not necessarily recognizable by, or compatible with, the liberal and decentralized democracy that the municipality, as a state institution, also practices.

Of course, another interpretation is possible. For example, the mayor of Quispicanchis Graciano Mandura may have simply enacted a folkloric ritual to please the indigenous constituency that elected him. In this version, he is now a modern provincial state authority and has left the a-modern behind. Both interpretations are conceivable—and Graciano may have enacted either one, but also more than one. In that case, his practices would have intermittently interrupted each other, but neither would have invalidated the other. Partial connections are, after all, what life is about in Cuzco; they also color the political relationships among the worlds that these life projects enact.

Neither of the above interpretations denies that Mandura left the ronda collective, lured by the promises of a better life offered by one of the worlds that make up the Andes. And he left when he could, when he was guaranteed both a way out of Ocongate and a life in Urcos—the peri-urban town that is the capital of Quispicanchis. He might have been driven by a choice of an urban life for his children—and the choice was opened to him because he could read and write. However, leaving Ocongate and the ronda and moving to Quispicanchis does not simplistically suggest that he left the runakuna world behind. It may have been easier to leave the politics of the ronda behind than to sever relations with earth-beings which are central to the making of the runakuna world.