

Petit capitalisms in disaster, or the limits of neoliberal imagination: Displacement, recovery, and opportunism in highland Ecuador

A. J. Faas

Department of Anthropology, San José State University, San José, CA 95192-0113, USA

Corresponding author: A. J. Faas; e-mail: aj.faas@sjsu.edu

Disaster capitalism is typically defined as a systematic and opportunistic reconfiguration of economies and economic regulations in service of capitalist interests under the cover of environmental crisis. This article offers another complementary variety of disaster capitalism—the production of capitalist subjects, petit capitalists “empowered” by the state and nongovernmental organizations via initiation into the special knowledge and crafts of small enterprise. This is at once a well-intentioned strategy and one that reveals the limits of neoliberal imagination—the inability to envision recovery but through individualistic, entrepreneurial endeavors. In my study of recovery from the eruptions of Mt. Tungurahua in Ecuador, I present cases of state and nongovernmental organizations providing aid and recovery to affected highland peasants. These projects reveal people being moved to assume certain subjectivities by limited “inventories of possibility” and an internalization of dominant norms and structures. Even as subjects posture their culture and practices as moral, communitarian alternatives to capitalist greed, local economic strategies took on entrepreneurial characteristics that articulated with neoliberal ambitions of state and global institutions; peasant ambitions and desires are produced and invoked as if they were locally derived, while at the same time being co-constituted by dominant interests. I discuss how these dramas unfold, with attention to the creative agency exercised by locals.

Keywords Disaster Capitalism; Cooperation; Small Enterprise; Neoliberalism; Entrepreneurship; Ecuador; Disaster Recovery; Tourism

On a sunny Tuesday afternoon in mid-November 2011, after a long day laboring in collective work parties (*mingas*) for the irrigation canal, villagers from Manzano, a modest village of smallholding agriculturalists at the foot of Mt. Tungurahua in the Andean highlands of Ecuador, assembled for a meeting with the village and parish councils to discuss opportunities to facilitate recovery from the 1999 and 2006 eruptions that had devastated their community. When the topic of tourism strategies was brought up, Frederico Castro,¹ a heavyset farmer and florist in his seventies, raised his hand and, somewhat timidly, said, “I would like to do something with hot springs [*aguas termales*]” (November 15, 2011). Disregarding the absence of hot springs within the village territory, both the Village and Parish Council presidents agreed that this was a fine idea and turned to the rest of the assembled villagers to see what ideas they had. Other projects volunteered included volleyball courts, sand soccer fields, a sport fishing pond, food stands (someone intervened that these “must be for *platos típicos!*”), cycling routes, a zipline course, and a motocross track. Several people mentioned how successful various tourist endeavors had been in the nearby tourist destination town of Baños. All were concerned to return to the lives, communities, and places they had left behind since being displaced. What struck me was the extent to which they seemed to be transforming (or imagining a transformation of) the familiar place to which they sought to return.

In my study of disaster recovery and resettlement around Mt. Tungurahua, I came to interpret scenes such as the one unfolding on that sunny afternoon in Manzano as an outgrowth, not of neoliberal *policy*, but of a global network

of expertise and practices thoroughly steeped in neoliberal *imagination*. In its strictest sense, neoliberalism refers to a set of policy prescriptions of economic deregulation and privatization, but it is also a somewhat more abstract cultural and moral project to produce self-governing subjects aligned with the principles of global capitalism and personal (over collective, corporate, or state) responsibility for human well-being. Rather than the all-too-common lack of concern for local culture in disaster response and recovery (Faas and Barrios 2015), expert knowledge practices fuse with local aspirations and practices in disaster recovery often owing to avowed cultural sensitivities of intervening agencies. The rather improvisational postdisaster play of intervention and local agency reveals an intriguing emergence of capitalist subjectivities as all parties in effect engage in varieties of opportunism.

Indeed, neoliberal reform has only ever been partial in Ecuador. Planned reforms, austerity measures, and privatization schemes were met with overwhelming indigenous and campesino resistance in the 1990s that resulted in the ouster of several presidents. Yet, privatization and natural resource commodification continued in an uneasy relationship with the socialist rhetoric and incremental reforms of President Rafael Correa (2007–17), whose state infrastructure was in large part underwritten by oil extraction revenues. Beyond this, the Ecuadorian state has given rather wide berth to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which, since the 1990s, have constituted a major part of the institutional apparatus of rural development. NGOs, given apertures for operation by the state, partner with broader networks of NGOs steeped in discourses and techniques rooted in the presumption of individual political-economic subjectivity and which therefore promote individual maximization, entrepreneurialism and microenterprise, and bourgeois consumer trends (sustainable, organic, etc.), while regularly espousing concern for “local culture.”

At the time of the community meeting in Manzano, I was approaching the end of nearly two years of fieldwork in Penipe Canton, studying disaster recovery and practices of cooperation and reciprocity that locals often invoked to contrast their culture and values with what they perceived as the greed and selfishness of capitalism. In the wake of the 1999 and 2006 eruptions of Mt. Tungurahua, dozens of villages suffered physical devastation and the disruption of cooperative and reciprocal exchange repertoires (Faas 2015, 2017a). As throughout the Andes, local culture and practice long entailed tensions between mutual obligation and self-interest, but how would disaster and the scattered and often uncoordinated resettlement and recovery efforts affect these tensions? In this article, I focus specifically on practices of subsistence agriculture and cooperative labor (*minga*) and recovery practices broadly construed as entrepreneurship, or risk-taking commercial pursuits (Meisch 2002, 2). I focus on the values held in tension — morally *and* materially (Browne and Milgram 2009) — and the production of entrepreneurial discourses and practices in cases drawn from my fieldwork from 2009 through 2011. After first introducing the communities in the study, I present cases of aid and recovery programs — white onion production, small animal husbandry, tourism, and a farm-to-table program — guided by well-meaning actors. I find that these programs not only suffered from flawed planning but on another level revealed tensions and intersections of values, material flows, and discursive influences effecting the amplification of entrepreneurialism, the production of capitalist subjectivities, and the creative work of displaced disaster survivors working in situations of scarcity.

Disaster, resettlement, and revanche: Penipe, Pusuca, and Manzano

At the time of the 2006 eruptions of Mt. Tungurahua, more than three thousand people remained displaced from the previous eruption in 1999. This number swelled to roughly sixty-five hundred people in the wake of the 2006 eruptions. Lahars, pyroclastic flows, and raining ash and incandescent material destroyed or severely damaged hundreds of homes and devastated crops and small and large livestock holdings in the dozens of villages of smallholding agriculturalists along the western, southwestern, and southern flanks of the volcano and on the western ridge of the Chambo River Valley, west of Mt. Tungurahua. During this period, the Ecuadorian Civil Defense was dissolved into a new civilian institution, the Secretaría de Gestión de Riesgos (Secretariat of Risk Management),

which focused on risk prevention strategies in high-risk areas and coordinated institutional responsibilities for emergency response and relief processes. Meanwhile, several state agencies and NGOs proposed and subsequently implemented resettlement plans for displaced villagers whose homes were no longer deemed viable.

In 2008, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MIDUVI) constructed 185 homes on landless properties arranged on an urban grid as an extension of the municipal center, Penipe, roughly 10 km south of the volcano. Alongside these homes, the US-based evangelical Christian disaster relief organization Samaritan's Purse built an additional 102 homes and a community park. At the same time, Ecuadorian nonprofit Fundación Esquel built forty-five homes on a windy hilltop 5 km to the south of Penipe. This resettlement, named Pusuca (La Victoria de Pusuca), also included land for each household to cultivate (highly dependent on irrigation, which would take several years to develop), communal plots for cooperative projects, and a community center and park.

As I discuss extensively elsewhere (Faas 2015, 2017a, 2017b), these two resettlements differed in important ways that drew my attention both to their distinctions and to the villages previously evacuated in the high-risk zone around the volcano. Briefly, the landless resettlement in Penipe offered no economic opportunities to resettlers; there was no land for these agriculturalists to cultivate, and local opportunities for employment were negligible at best. Lacking land in Penipe and awaiting irrigation to support farming in Pusuca, some villagers migrated to cities near and far for wage employment. Many others simply returned to their previous villages in the shadow of the volcano to plant crops and raise their animals despite chronic ashfall presenting health risks, significantly diminishing crop yields, and injuring and sickening a variety of animals. In one sense, this was simply the most viable livelihood option for most. But the return movement also reflected deeply emotional and symbolic attachments to their home communities and landscapes. Doña Clara wept when speaking of spending her nights in Penipe Nuevo. Discussing the reconstruction of communities in Puela Parish in a parish-wide meeting, Pablo Cordova spoke forcefully and emotionally, “[I was] born and raised in Puela and I want everyone to do everything they can to make the sure the communities and the parish don’t die off. I’m willing to do whatever it takes to save Puela” (August 30, 2011). After a swell of applause, he implored everyone to bring his or her children back to the newly reconstructed elementary school in Puela so that it would not be shut down by the state. The future was in their traditional lands and communities, not the resettlement.

The revanchist movement of resettlers to their lands on the volcano led me to Manzano, a village of fifty-two households. While Fundación Esquel established a village council; organized communal labor parties (*mingas*) for community development projects; and successfully courted funding, resources, and expertise from the state and NGOs to develop Pusuca, the reconstituted village council of Manzano organized community members into *mingas* to repair damaged buildings and infrastructure in the community and worked to attract the attention of the state and NGOs to invest in the reactivation of the village (Faas 2017a, 2017b). Thus the Pusuca resettlement grew with the patronage of a Quito-based NGO that aided in community governance and channeled resources and support from third parties with the blessing of the state, while the people of Manzano simultaneously resisted state efforts—including mandatory full-time occupancy of the Penipe resettlement and divestment in risk zone civil infrastructure—while attempting to conjure the same development resources from the state and NGOs.

Disaster opportunism amid perennial tensions: Subjectivities and inventories of possibility

Though their motivations variously align and diverge, organizations and experts in the public, nonprofit, and market sectors tend to approach postdisaster scenarios as unique opportunities for “radical social engineering” (Klein 2007, 2). To the extent that disasters become structuring idioms for inequalities that inhere in a given society, affected people too can perceive the tragedy as an opportunity to retool society and social structures. In his ethnography of reconstruction in the wake of the 1970 earthquake and avalanche in Yungay, Peru, Anthony Oliver-Smith (1986)

presented cases of a peasant community's withdrawal from labor tribute, humanitarian aid workers refusing to distribute aid according to local hierarchies, and the emergence of new elites. However, the most sweeping forms of social engineering are typically advanced by the supralocal organizations of the market, state, and NGOs and tend to entail policy reforms and reconstruction measures that favor large capital interests at the expense of affected peoples, especially the poor — what has come to be known as “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2007). And yet, while evidence of such large-scale cases of disaster capitalism abounds (Gunewardena and Schuller 2008), this article is concerned with the more inchoate and less conspicuous fostering of the development of capitalist subjectivities embedded in expert strategies and the *opportunism* and affective senses of crisis in disaster that in many ways distinguish these contexts from other development initiatives promoting capitalist subjectivities. Here expert logics can fuse local meanings, morals, and practices with those of the market in ways that align the overt intentions of locals and institutions with more tacit intentions of developing producers and consumers suited to global capitalism.

To apply such critical analysis, we need not subscribe to any “steamroller image of modernization” or to the notion that traditional cultures are passive victims utterly fragile to outside influence (Salomon 1981, 421), nor need we romanticize rural pasts. At any rate, cultural imperialism and capitalism have historically cascaded through Ecuador (and the Andes more broadly), from the Incas through the Spanish conquest, successive postcolonial states and economic systems (haciendas and land reforms), and the dueling trends of neoliberal and socialist reforms characterizing the 1990s through to the present. Throughout these waves, rural populations have demonstrated impressive capacities to “adapt to, resist, absorb, and reconstruct outside stimuli” (Meisch 2002, 7).

In Penipe and throughout the Andes, campesino households have historically mediated between satisfying household needs for production, reproduction, labor, and consumption and meeting obligations to village, state, and empire. In addition to traditional practices and institutions of mutual aid and labor pooling, wage employment and entrepreneurial endeavors are often among the viable and sensible strategies employed by smallholding agriculturalists in disaster (and other) circumstances and need not reflect absolute incompatibility with collective obligations. For many, diversifying household economic strategies to include wage labor was a temporary postdisaster measure; they intended to return to agriculture and therefore continued — often struggling to meet competing demands on their time — to work *mingas* to maintain their eligibility for resources such as irrigation (Faas 2017a). These *mingas* were an important way of recovering connections to community and to a way of life they had been missing. Teresa Caicedo, a Pusuca resettler in her early sixties, made clear that a *minga* is “an occasion that we have in order to work” but added that it is also “for the whole community to spend time together, to bond with each other, and communicate” (interview, October 1, 2011).

Global policy and discursive trends infused with neoliberal ideologies in the twenty-first century frequently merge to produce cultural projects not primarily fostering radical individualism so much as producing new subjects “who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of globalized capitalism” (Hale 2004, 17) and who appeal to global capital — be it as low-skilled or technical labor or as new consumers (Ong 2006). The landless resettlements constructed in Penipe after the eruptions certainly created a pool of landless agriculturalists who could ostensibly join a low-skill labor force, were there any local industry to join. That is, while the state, NGOs, and local leaders in disaster contexts coproduce development schemes loosely aligned with capitalist interests, these are often not coherent enough to be taken seriously as instrumental strategies to advance or consolidate corporate interests, as in disaster capitalism writ large. Often as not, postdisaster entrepreneurialism is promoted in projects that merely *satisfice* in expert imaginations — *satisfactions* broadly consistent with abstract models of economy but not rooted in local realities. Thus the emergence of capitalist subjectivities can proceed as unplanned and uncoordinated as the early emergence of capitalism itself in Europe.

People can be moved to assume certain subjectivities via constrained “inventories of possibility” (Marino and Lazrus 2015, 342) — here, the scarcities and displacements associated with disaster — and an internalization of dominant norms, truths, and structures (Boelens 2015). Even as subjects posture Andean culture and practices as moral,

communitarian alternatives to capitalist greed, local economic strategies take on entrepreneurial characteristics that articulate with neoliberal ambitions of state and global institutions; peasant ambitions and desires are produced and invoked as if locally derived, while at the same time being coproduced by dominant interests. The work of state and NGO experts converges to “shape and direct individuals to be autonomous liberal subjects who will espouse the rational economies of competition, accountability, and self-actualization” (Sawyer 2004, 15). Benefits and opportunities conferred by the state and NGOs are not merely material but also discursive. Suzana Sawyer (2004), in her ethnography of Amazonian indigenous resistance to oil extraction, found that these benefits “induced new sensibilities and subjectivities They shaped the wills and desires of individuals such that they were more aligned with that of the independent, rationally maximizing, entrepreneurial liberal subject” (135). And finally, these economic strategies are of course emotionally charged and part of people’s symbolic and affective connections to their homes and communities (Barrios 2017). In the cases that follow, I discuss how these dramas unfold, with attention to the creative agency exercised by participants.

Development and recovery satisfaction: The white onion scheme

Entrepreneurial disaster recovery projects are frequently hand-delivered by professionals who are not working to refashion policy and economy; at times, they are instead making one-off attempts to stimulate production by investing in local entrepreneurship. In 2008, Andrea Pazmiño was a consultant for an Ecuadorian government program that used funding from international donors to subsidize the recovery of agricultural production in the area affected by the Mt. Tungurahua eruptions. One of their largest initiatives in 2007–9 was a subsidy program for planting white onions for market. Planners and project administrators subsidized fertilizer and seed and provided guidance on cultivation but did not adequately consider local and regional markets. After harvest, local markets were inundated, prices plummeted, and many onions rotted.

Months later, Pazmiño explained to me that she was merely given a couple of months to spend her budget on a pilot project and that that was the best they could come up with at the time. Locals were willing and often enthusiastic participants; other local crops (e.g., potatoes) were devastated by ashfall and acidic rains from volcanic exhaust, which not only spoiled plants but also desiccated soils, while saturating them with mineral overdoses. Many were therefore unable to meet household subsistence needs, let alone generate small surpluses (some more than others) for sale at local markets. The onions would not have likely impacted household subsistence, but because bulbous root crops are resistant to ashfall, profits from onion harvests might have been able to substitute cash from market sales to meet these needs. The project failure for many was therefore not a simple (or acceptable) market loss but a significant hit to household subsistence. As Pazmiño herself noted during our interview, “what do you do with white onions? Perhaps you can make a soup. But how many soups will you make? There was nowhere to go with these onions. This is regrettable” (September 24, 2009).

The white onion scheme was not a characteristically neoliberal state refusal to interfere in the economy but a state subsidy of market production over subsistence restoration, encouraging greater risk taking and—especially given the shortsightedness of the scheme—an added vector of vulnerability, further limiting people’s capacity to recover their livelihoods. It also reflected local farmers’ willingness to take advantage—assuming risks—of novel opportunities. This initiative supported the recovery of farming, though this had different meanings for locals and state agents. The state wanted to promote economic growth and likely project core competencies as a guarantor of public welfare (a specter of statecraft often tarnished in disaster scenarios), while locals were attracted by potential economic gain: The abiding concern was livelihood restoration; above all, they were concerned with returning to their land and the lives they feared they had lost to the eruptions. Rodrigo spoke to the press about the project, saying, “All our lives we have been farmers [*agricultores*] and we do not have any other source of work” (Pinto 2007).

Partial agency

In contexts of upheaval, people engage the world around them and change it even as their subjective and objective relations transform in the process; some may internalize profit-seeking motives, but, in the words of David Harvey (2006, 28, 148), “as creative subjects who resist the depredations of capital ... [they] become thereby at least partial authors of their own history.” Alas, agency is only ever partial. A Bourdieusian ([1972] 1977) notion of agency qua *habitus*, wherein actors purposively navigate social milieus based on tacit sensibilities of constraints and possibility, undoubtedly helped alleviate certain deterministic tendencies in the social sciences, but this reading of agency too is only ever partial, never outside history or (post)colonial structures of domination and exploitation. Agency, like dominant power, is also messy, as Kathleen Stewart (2007) expresses brilliantly:

It’s lived through a series of dilemmas: that action is always a reaction; that the potential to act always includes the potential to be acted on, or to submit; that the move to gather the self to act is also a move to lose the self; that one choice precludes others; that actions can have unintended and disastrous consequences; and that all agency is frustrated and unstable and attracted to the potential in things. (86)

Acknowledging frustration, instability, and uncertainty points us toward a rather ambivalent reading of the development of capitalist subjectivities in disaster recovery schemes. We need not simply read them as being imposed from above but also in light of local people’s efforts to recover and experiment with emerging conditions and the potentialities they engender. People can eagerly take advantage of opportunities and even work to shape them according to their own values and purposes, yet in the process fuse their own ambitions with those reflected in expert-driven recovery schemes rooted in neoliberal development discourses. When a federal government representative visited Manzano to propose a needs assessment and partnership workshop, Norberto informed her that they needed resources like credit to invest if they were to improve their lives. Months later, when the workshop finally took place, village president Bernardo argued fervently for development programs focused on individuals:

Here we are all equal. We don’t have rich people. The people want guinea pigs [*cuyes*], pigs, what have you. Pay attention to this [*Ojo a esto*!] We do not want this for the group, we want this for individuals. It doesn’t function very well with the group ... We have to think of the future through individuals. [Outside organizations] think about communities, but we want to think of individuals. (December 9, 2011)

Yet, in villages and resettlements where community organization is such a core value, it is hard not to read these utterances as revealing tension—invoking collectivity and equality while advocating for individualistic entrepreneurial projects. This is, of course, also a realistic assessment on multiple levels. Resettlement significantly added to the perennial challenges of community organizing and cooperative management, and while community organization can be a marker of aid deservingness, aid is typically administered to households.

The palimpsest of minga practice

Collective work parties known as *mingas* are at once exemplars of distinctly Andean cultural strategies and of partial agency. *Minga* is a smeary palimpsest of discourse and practice historically instrumental for domination, resistance, and local agency and adaptation. Though the practice is rooted in exchange labor as mutual aid, *mit’a* (Quechua, turn) was systematized by Incan rulers as a technique of statecraft whereby conquered populations were subjected to corvée labor, discursively cloaked as reciprocity with the Incan state (Morris 1978, 325). The *mita* system—which gradually became known as *minka* or *minga* in Ecuador and Bolivia (*faena* elsewhere)—was appropriated by the Spanish as a means of extracting labor tribute, though seventeenth-century indigenous resistance (re)appropriated the practice by making more direct claims for labor compensation (Stern 1988). After independence, highland

hacendados and coastal plantation capitalists continued to exact labor tribute via *mingas*, and while indigenous peoples and *campesinos* were popularly derided as backward and idle, *minga* labor plainly underwrote the modernization of Ecuadorian state infrastructure and economy, as they built the road, rail, and telegraph systems that united national territories (Larson 2008, 580–606). Penipe government official and poet Marco Murillo was well versed in this history, telling me that *minga* had been an important feature of local culture

since [the founding of] the Republic, since the time of the previous indigenous inhabitants, and also the mestizos. The practice disappeared in the fifties and sixties with the expectation that the government and the municipality would take care of everything. But it turned out that the government could not handle the work the way the people wanted. Community leaders realized that they would have to contribute their share, which would be the *minga*. This was in the sixties or seventies. In the last five or six years, this has deepened because labor is a community resource. (Interview, November 16, 2011)

The state and NGOs have continued to claim *minga* labor as voluntary, in-kind contributions to development projects in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Boelens 2015, 136–46; Faas 2017a). Progressive indigenous leaders in the Chimborazo provincial government successfully used *minga* as a campaign trope—“*Minga por la vida*” (*minga* for life)—articulating solidarity with traditional Andean cultures and values. Though nominally voluntary, such labor contributions are nonetheless frequent preconditions for development funding from the state and NGOs. As a feature of Ecuadorian decentralization (Faas 2017b), *minga* practice can even be said to abet neoliberal state devolution.

Minga is a powerful symbol of indigenous, *campesino*, and Afro-Ecuadorian cultures and identities, and the practice has played a vital role in local mutual aid, disaster recovery, governance, and resource management (Boelens 2015; Faas 2017b). *Minga* practice establishes community boundaries: physical boundaries, such as roads and canals, and boundaries of belonging, as participation is a condition of full community membership and resource access. In Manzano and Pusuca, individuals frequently complained, gossiped, and argued about *minga* participation, but while people in this region do not organize *mingas* on private property (common elsewhere), they consistently organized community *mingas*, at times to court outside resources and to establish and maintain local control over the use and allocation of these resources. In Pusuca, Zandro explained *minga* as “a meeting of everyone in the community for the good of one’s self [and] the good of the community” (interview, October 19, 2011). Karina likewise shared that *minga* “is a sacrifice that one makes in order to have a benefit, mostly for our crops” (interview, November 8, 2011). Sentiments were similar in Manzano, where David told me that *minga* “is a benefit for the progress of the community and for its members, as with the irrigation canal and potable water” (interview, October 22, 2011).

The practice can be a subaltern political strategy—several indigenous and *campesino* uprisings of the 1990s and early 2000s were the coordinated result of many locally organized *mingas* (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). In rural Ecuador, *minga* is an important component of quotidian practice—it is simply how groups of people get many things done. But beyond mere utility, *minga* practice is a potent symbol of community. In Pusuca, Manuel Reyes, who served as the resettlement’s second president, told me he was concerned that *mingas* had lately become too oriented toward material project goals: “When I was president, I made sure to have regular community *mingas* to organize the community and to beautify the village. . . . It is not enough to do *mingas* for projects; we have to do weekly *mingas* to keep the community organized and beautiful” (interview, December 2, 2011).

Along with the village council, the *minga* is one of the key elements of local governance (or “vernacular statecraft”; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009) and a practice within which not only property and rights but also values are produced, contested, and reshaped (Boelens 2015; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). As Mariana said when negotiating rights to irrigation water access in a village council meeting in Pusuca, “we are not the owners of the water, but the owners of the labor that brings the water to Pusuca” (September 3, 2011). The imposition of external values does at times prevail, becoming internalized (Faas 2017a)—as the long history of *minga* qua *corvée* labor attests—but

minga and village councils are venues within which these influences are reconfigured and brought in line with local values, even as local values themselves change in the process. External legal frameworks regarding water access, for example, have frequently been subsumed under locally developed rules (Boelens 2015; see also, regarding religious corgos, *faena* labor, and water rights in Mexico, Ennis-McMillan 2006).

Farm to table in the community basket: Learning and aspiring to market success

Aid experts do not only deliver resources. By imparting development strategies, state and nongovernmental experts provide objectives—goals for people to aspire to. On a cold and rainy Saturday in October 2011, the people of Pusuca assembled for their village council meeting. As was rather common at the time, the first hour was devoted to reviewing and quarreling over values, varieties, and quantities of different households' resource and minga labor contributions on the irrigation canal (*tareas*; see Faas 2017b)—funded by the Provincial Council of Chimborazo with support from the World Bank—then under construction. Midway through the meeting, Martha Santiago, community liaison for resettlement agency Fundación Esquel, welcomed Ingeniero Veloz from the Provincial Council.

Though he sat quietly at the side of the room for the first hour of the meeting, Veloz proved to be an animated and charismatic performer. An exceedingly thin man in his late fifties, wearing a sport coat approximately four sizes too large, he addressed everyone as *campeón* (champion) and, after joking a bit about disagreements expressed between villagers in the first part of the (always somewhat contentious) meeting and briefly expounding the moral and practical values of unity and cooperation, launched into a motivational speech of sorts. He focused on what he called the most vital elements of effective community organization, taking to the whiteboard to draw simple caricatures of two *socios* (partners). One was smiling with open eyes and exaggerated ears, while the other had a closed mouth, closed eyes, and narrow, closed ears. The former, he said, is the best element of an organized community; resettlers needed “pensamiento, capacidad, y corazón” (thoughtfulness, capability, and heart). He then asked what those assembled thought it was best to do with “los malos.” Before anyone could respond with the anticipated refrain of fine or other sanction, he said that they needed to bring the closed people around and help them become receptive and active community members. He stressed that willful, effective participants in cooperative labor and community organization were more valuable than money and, discussing the forthcoming irrigation canal, pointed out that they were “among the very few in Chimborazo who will have both land *and* water” (October 18, 2011).

Veloz then pivoted to his purpose for attending: In anticipation of the completion of the irrigation canal, he wanted villagers preparing for the sale and transportation of the additional goods they would produce. One central concern of his was that villagers eschew intermediaries and sell goods themselves. Another was that the Provincial Council wanted to see them produce quality *organic* goods. Veloz continued saying that they needed to organize production and do so efficiently, to improve their capacities for organization and cooperation and teach it to their children for a sustainable future. These comments were met with warm applause as Veloz proceeded to make a list of things villagers would need to do to effectively manage the challenges involved in community irrigation.

At the time, Esquel and the Provincial Council had begun supporting villagers' attendance at workshops offered by Swiss NGO, SWISSAID, and American NGO HEIFER. Most important was a program organized by the Ecuadorian nonprofit UTOPIA: the *canasta comunitaria*, which organized the sale of baskets containing various agricultural products from small producers to subscribing consumers. Village President Angel Turushina explained that he and at least two other women had been to trainings. Esquel paid travel, lodging, and incidentals, while the workshops provided training in commercial production, marketing, and features of the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution. In one community meeting, Angel enthusiastically promoted the *canasta*, saying it was “organized, built on values of solidarity” (October 1, 2011), and guaranteed fixed prices independent of market fluctuations. He explained that they agreed to pay US\$12 for potatoes,² even when the market price was down to US\$3 or US\$6, but

that people must understand that they would also pay only US\$12 when the price was up to US\$20. Esquel liaison Martha added that then when production capacities increased with irrigation, villagers would be encouraged to sell goods through the *canasta comunitaria*.

While this critique is necessarily rooted in material conditions, it is the discursive dimension in which these conditions are imagined, diagnosed, and reconfigured that is most revealing. In the economic development schemes in Pusuca, of which the irrigation canal and farm-to-table programs were central, state and NGO experts promoted entrepreneurship and celebrated those who took risks on new crop varieties, producing for market over subsistence, training opportunities, and marketing schemes. Innovators were rewarded with travel, training, project support, and the prestige of being called out as “champions.” In this we can observe the colonial imaginary—decidedly hospitable to neoliberal discourse and policy—of indolent indigenous and peasant peoples in need of proper training and indoctrination to become productive members of modern society. Coupled with historical tensions between highland conservatives in the hacienda economy (favoring dependencies of patron-clientelism and labor tribute) and liberal coastal capitalists (favoring paid, but cheap, labor), such refrains are today played out in Ecuador in alternatively muted and bellowed notes (see Kohn 2013, 145–46; Sawyer 2004, 206–16).

Efforts to foster the development of “modern” and capitalist subjectivity in liberal rhetoric and pedagogy have been as incomplete as capitalist development itself in Ecuador. But particular legal reforms, institutional parameters, and social conditions have made it possible for market rationality and entrepreneurialism to gain traction (Sawyer 2004, 14). Liberal reform transpired through legal regulations in the early twentieth century that eliminated labor taxes, weakened the legal grounds for debt peonage, and created mechanisms for campesino landownership (Faas 2017b; Guerrero 2008, 131). Sawyer (2004) points to Ecuadorian state (and, by extension, NGO) efforts to produce liberal subjects driven by “competition, accountability, and self-actualization” (14–15), who take ownership of their own successes and failures. These reforms were accompanied by often well-meaning but nonetheless racist and paternalistic rhetoric from liberal leaders promoting better livelihoods and productivity of the indigenous and peasant rural regions. Galo Plaza Lasso, president of Ecuador from 1948 to 1952, is one of the most well-known advocates of this cause in the twentieth century, and his essays on modernization and development are still often quoted. In one popular publication, Lasso ([1955] 2008, 196, 199) called for teaching “the Indian better living habits ... in order that his greater earning power may be channeled into improving his home, his diet, and his clothing, and that of his family,” to ultimately “convert him into a useful citizen.”

Material benefits provided by development programs encourage the sensibilities of independent, entrepreneurial subjects who maximize the productive potential of the rural landscape once inducted into the special knowledge and crafts of neoliberal subjectivity (Sawyer 2004, 135, 183). Angel was proud of what he had learned from a number of the workshops he attended. As we toured his new farm plots on the banks of the Rio Blanco in the valley below Pusuca, he showed me a variety of fruit crops (some, like strawberries, not commonly grown in this region) as he told me more about what he had learned in various workshops. “I learned from Esquel and other partners how to grow these fruits and other intensive crops that I had never grown before” (interview, October 21, 2011). When I asked if he was able to produce enough for household subsistence, he responded, “We produce for the market and it is plenty, thanks to the new crops and techniques we’ve learned. We harvest fruits every week throughout the year.”

Imagine yourself like your successful neighbors to the north: *Cuyes* and tourism

The merchants of Otavalo and the tourist industry in Baños (at the northern foot of Mt. Tungurahua) have long been celebrated throughout Ecuador as successful cases of modernization, indigenous and campesino entrepreneurship, and cultural survival; both are frequently touted as successful cases for rural communities to emulate. Such long shadows have for some time been buttressed by state discourses celebrating the production of capitalist subjectivity.

Responding to the 1949 visit of Otavaleño merchant Rosa Lema to the United States, representatives of Galo Plaza's government gushed to the press that they had "transformed the indigena into a useful member of society who produces and consumes" (quoted in Meisch 2002, 32).

Back in Manzano, at the community meeting described at the beginning of this article, village president Bernardo had just returned from a four-day training in Otavalo. This was a capacity-building workshop for facilitating local development, and his attendance was funded by a local savings and loan cooperative. Here he learned of the potential to develop *criaderos de cuyes* (pens for raising *cuyes*, guinea pigs that are a staple protein and favorite dish in the Andes). Bernardo presented a dollhouse-sized model of *criaderos* and, removing the roof, placed it on the table in front of him for the group to examine. He said it was a model that would be granted to up to three hundred beneficiaries in the parish. Funds for materials would come from the Parish Council, but beneficiaries would be expected to build the structures themselves. *Criaderos* were designed with separate sections for market production and household consumption; each household could raise more than one hundred *cuyes* at a time.

Teresa Oñate asked how they would be able to produce enough of the ash-vulnerable *hierba* to feed so many *cuyes*. Bernardo was uncertain. Mateo Barragan asked where the *cuyes* would come from. Parish Council president Washington Sanchez responded that with similar projects in the past, the Parish Council and other agencies provided *cuyes*, but they were simply consumed by the household, so he did not think they would have the funding to provide the *cuyes* this time.

At this point, Sanchez took over to pitch the tourism initiative, saying that the Parish Council budget for 2012 included funding to develop tourism projects. He explained that these funds were for people who proposed their own initiatives; there was no fixed tourism agenda or project. It was at this point that the conversation turned to hot springs, volleyball courts, and so on. Sanchez went on to say that they were working on training for locals and organizing tours to other tourist sites in Ecuador so they could learn from successful tourism entrepreneurs. He said that not everyone would become a stock-holding beneficiary in tourist profits, only those whose projects were selected to be funded by the Parish Council. He expressed concern that villagers work together to have an integrated system of activities, hospitality, and food so that revenues could stay in the parish and not be diverted to guides from Baños.

Partial agency and the ambivalent coproduction of subjectivity

A few days after the meeting in Manzano concerning the tourist initiatives and *criaderos*, I met with Washington Sanchez of the Parish Council. I expressed concern that many of the initiatives being considered seemed preposterous, and he responded that they were merely thinking out loud and considering ways of experimenting with their challenging situation:

I agree. We are not even in the first phase. We're thinking. But there are many things we can do, for example sport fishing, boating, something like this. These are things we could begin next year. We also want to do mountaineering and lake and waterfall excursions. All in order to advance the parish. (Interview, December 8, 2011)

Likewise, when Frederico Castro raised his hand and volunteered his ideas for developing a tourism project on his land in the shadow of the volcano, he was exercising agency and creativity in addressing the scarcity, instability, and uncertainty that troubled him and others struggling to recover from disaster and displacement. It could even be argued that frequently and ardently raising their hands for projects—no matter how plausible or locally coherent—itself constituted an emergent expression of agency. Given their limited range of options, locals actively courted novel opportunities. Others raised hands to volunteer for various tourist initiatives, production schemes, and opportunities for training and advancement, nothing on the order of tacit endorsements of neoliberal capitalism. Nor were these merely passive acts of volunteering for prefabricated development strategies. Though

they were often met with pitches for entrepreneurial projects, locals frequently attracted attention from the state and NGOs by organizing *mingas* to demonstrate the community organization and solidarity that came to signify aid deservingness. Questions raised about the *criaderos* initiated a longer series of debates that would nudge plans toward greater accord with local values of sustainability and fairness.

Each project pilot, each workshop, was an opportunity to experiment with possibilities, to direct some resources to the household and community and network to access newer opportunities over time. These were not distributed equally—leaders, larger landholders, and males were often singled out for opportunities. In Manzano, Segundo and Martina both told me “it’s always the leaders who take the most advantage,” who “receive more benefits than the others” (interview, November 2, 2011). Interestingly, as a result of exclusion and feuding, Martina increasingly retreated from full participation in Manzano by starting her own successful business, a convenience store in Penipe Nuevo. Yet, in Pusuca and Manzano, villagers of every station positioned themselves for opportunities and, raising their hands, often realized at least some gains in the process. In Pusuca, Luz told me, “The benefits come to everyone, not anyone more, nor anyone less. It’s all equal” (interview, October 1, 2011). Paul likewise explained, “We all make decisions united as a group, but after each goes off on their own, doing things their way, and others go off and do things their way ... [and we have] much gossip and problems” (interview, November 27, 2011).

Discussion and conclusion: Strategies and subjectivities in disaster

Disaster capitalism is generally defined as a systematic and opportunistic reconfiguration of economies and economic regulations in service of capitalist interests under the cover of environmental crisis (Klein 2007; Schuller 2008; Schuller and Maldonado 2016). This article offers a complementary variety of capitalism in disaster—the production of capitalist subjects, new petit capitalists “empowered” by the state and NGOs via initiation into the special knowledge and crafts of small enterprise. I feel compelled to emphasize that these were all decidedly well-intentioned strategies developed and advocated by actors in good faith. Yet they also reveal the limits of neoliberal imagination, the inability to envision recovery but through individualistic, entrepreneurial endeavors. The boundaries of expert contrivance simply precluded serious consideration of low-growth subsistence livelihoods and cooperative practices were celebrated, but principally as vehicles for market production strategies.

The discursive pattern revealed in the cases considered here is an often subtle displacement of the desires of smallholding agriculturalists and a substitution of new desires of capitalist subjectivity. Many of these projects maintain just enough of a veneer of cooperation and solidarity to preserve a degree of consistency with local values. Ingeniero Veloz preceded his presentation of plans for market production in Pusuca with a lecture on the virtues and practical considerations of cooperation and solidarity. His emphasis on *organic* production was simultaneously a locally resonant signifier of Andean purity over the much-maligned products of genetic modification (associated with American agriculture) and a targeting of bourgeois consumer trends. The cumulative alignment of local desires to experiment and recover their lives, expert recovery strategies, and rural imaginaries diverts people from the lives they knew and to which they continued to aspire. We need not romanticize highland culture and subsistence economies to recognize that people were increasingly working for market in lieu of subsistence production, so much so that in their efforts to recover their lives, communities, and places, the emergent pattern is a significant reimagination and transformation of those places and relations.

None of the schemes considered were wholly unfamiliar departures from local practice and discourse: Private accumulation and entrepreneurship have long coexisted with mutual aid and obligation, and tourism has been a feature of Ecuadorian economy since the earliest days of the Republic. In addition to its important symbolic and affective resonance as relational sense of place, belonging, and identity, *minga* is a vehicle for channeling, producing, and managing resources at several nested levels of scale—national, communal, household—which are co-constitutive and interdependent. Households must meet *minga* obligations for rights to collective resources (e.g.,

water), which in many ways produces the collective resource base. This recommends the practice to the state and NGOs, who envision minga as a development potential of the poor. Thus minga produces resources while also channeling local and external resources, each process facilitating the other. But it would be mistaken to see minga practice simply as a means of facilitating the allocation or production of resources at the household level, as the practice is part of a nested hierarchy of relational processes (Faas 2015). Schemes like the *cuyerías* and farm-to-table projects, inasmuch as they would require *collective* resource management for irrigation, could result in sustained community benefit and the important familiarity that people sought to recover.

In sum, the cases considered in this study reveal the blurred distinctions between the disciplines disaster-affected peoples impose on themselves and those to which they are subjected as they struggle mightily to recover their lives, communities, and sense of place in the wake of disaster and displacement. These dramas bring into relief the messiness of dominant power and local agency. In each of the cases considered, we can see how local disaster recovery projects are produced at the intersection of local Andean practices and expert logics embedded in global networks of expertise, practice, and subjectivity. Importantly, however, so much of these projects are negotiated and implemented through minga labor and village councils; this is a space in which values and desires are produced and mediated, rules for conduct (re)produced and contested, and in which subjectivities might be reconfigured.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation (DDIG 1123962). I am exceedingly grateful to Kate Browne and several anonymous reviewers for insightful and exacting comments on earlier drafts. Any enduring errors or shortcomings are entirely my own. Very special thanks to research assistants Briza Diaz and Citali Hernandez for their work on transcription and coding.

Notes

- 1 All names are pseudonyms.
- 2 Economic crises in the late 1990s resulted in Ecuador abandoning its currency, the sucre, and adopting the US dollar.

References

- Barrios, Roberto E. 2017. *Governing Affect: Neoliberalism and Disaster Reconstruction*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Boelens, Rutgerd. 2015. *Water, Power, and Identity: The Cultural Politics of Water in the Andes*. New York: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1972) 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Browne, Katherine E., and B. Lynne Milgram, eds. 2009. *Economics and Morality: Anthropological Approaches*. New York: AltaMira.
- Colloredo-Mansfeld, Rudi. 2009. *Fighting Like a Community: Andean Civil Society in an Era of Indian Uprisings*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Ennis-McMillan, Michael C. 2006. *A Precious Liquid: Drinking Water and Culture in the Valley of Mexico*. Belmont, CA: Cengage.
- Faas, A. J. 2015. "Disaster Resettlement Organizations, NGOs, and the Culture of Cooperative Labor in the Ecuadorian Andes." In *Disaster's Impact on Livelihoods and Cultural Survival: Losses, Opportunities, and Mitigation*, edited by Michele Companion, 51–62. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- . 2017a. "Enduring Cooperation: Time, Discipline, and Minga Practice in Disaster-Induced Displacement and Resettlement in the Ecuadorian Andes." *Human Organization* 76(2): 99–108.
- . 2017b. "Reciprocity and Vernacular Statecraft: Andean Cooperation in Post-Disaster Highland Ecuador." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 22(2): 495–513.
- Faas, A. J., and Roberto Barrios. 2015. "Applied Anthropology of Risk, Hazards, and Disasters." *Human Organization* 74(4): 287–95.
- Guerrero, Andres. 2008. "The Construction of a Ventriloquist's Image: Liberal Discourse and the 'Miserable Indian Race' in the Late Nineteenth Century," translated by Tristan Platt. In *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler, 103–16. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gunewardena, Nandini, and Mark Schuller. 2008. *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira.
- Hale, Charles R. 2004. "Rethinking Indigenous Politics in the Era of the 'Indio Permitido'." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 38(2): 16–21.
- Harvey, David. 2006. *The Limits to Capital*. New York: Verso.
- Klein, Naomi. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Larson, Brooke. 2008. "Andean Highland Peasants and the Trials of Nation Making during the Nineteenth Century." In *South America*, vol. 3.2 of *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, edited by Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz, 558–703. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lasso, Galo Plaza. (1955) 2008. "Two Experiments in Education for Democracy." In *The Ecuador Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Carlos de la Torre and Steve Striffler, 193–99. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Marino, Elizabeth, and Heather Lazrus. 2015. "Migration or Forced Displacement? The Complex Choices of Climate Change and Disaster Migrants in Shishmaref, Alaska and Nanumea, Tuvalu." *Human Organization* 74(4): 341–50.
- Meisch, Lynn A. 2002. *Andean Entrepreneurs: Otavalo Merchants and Musicians in the Global Arena*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Morris, Craig. 1978. "The Archaeological Study of Andean Exchange Systems." In *Social Archaeology: Beyond Subsistence and Dating*, edited by C. L. Redman, M. J. Berman, E. Curtin, W. Langhorne Jr., N. Versaggi, and J. Wanser, 315–27. New York: Academic Press.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1986. *The Martyred City: Death and Rebirth in the Peruvian Andes*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pinto, Wilson. 2007. "La Siembra de Cebolla Desplaza a la de Papa." *El Universo*, December 19. <http://www.eluniverso.com/2007/12/19/0001/12/86F55A7B67E148BC96CA21E82E5721D8.html>.
- Salomon, Frank. 1981. "Weavers of Otavalo." In *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, edited by Norman Whitten, 420–49. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sawyer, Suzanna. 2004. *Crude Chronicles: Indigenous Politics, Multinational Oil, and Neoliberalism in Ecuador*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schuller, Mark. 2008. "Deconstructing the Disaster after the Disaster: Conceptualizing Disaster Capitalism." In *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reconstruction*, edited by Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller, 17–28. Lanham, MD: AltaMira.
- Schuller, Mark, and Julie K. Maldonado. 2016. "Disaster Capitalism." *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 40(1): 61–72.
- Stern, Steve. 1988. "Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean." *American Historical Review* 93: 829–72.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.