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In the Realm of Supay: The Stories of the Miners

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In the Realm of *Supay*



The Stories of the Miners

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Academic Directors: Ismael Saavedra and Heidi Baer-Postigo

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Cover Image: *La Salvadora*, by Guiomar Mesa

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From the Miners

“We have to make jokes. We have to laugh or we wouldn’t survive.”

“The mine lets me eat, the mine lets me live, but it will kill me.”

“The wealth of our land has always been the source of our poverty.”

Prelude

There is no sunrise here, no dawn of the day, no “*buenas tardes.*” No, here it’s nothing but darkness. The only light comes from the beacons atop faceless figures, crawling through three-foot tunnels. There’s no light; no air. The shadowed forms move and work by touch and sound: the rough walls coated in dust, the pounding of the perforator. This is another world, a world of constant night, a world below. A world filled with magnificent riches and ugly terrors. A world owned by El Tío. And so these figures work, day after day living in the night, working in the darkness, in the land of El Diablo, in the realm of *Supay*.

The Beginning

Ah, El Cerro Rico. She's beautiful, no? Looming over Potosí with her red-tinted earth. But her real beauty is hidden within. Her body filled with veins of silver, the very silver that shimmered in the eyes of the Spanish empire and made Potosí one of the largest cities in the world. Oh, and the tin, the tin that helped Simon Patiño own mansions on 3 continents, living in villas in the United States and France while the ones here in Bolivia only collected dust. Mineral wealth you wouldn't believe. They say that the Cerro Rico has twelve *polleras* of riches, and in 500 years we've only arrived at the third *pollera*. But these first three *polleras* have left Potosí, spread by the Spanish to all corners of the world. But this wealth, like everything in this world, came with a cost, a cost paid with countless lives buried in mines. They say that from the mining over those 500 years you could construct two bridges between Potosí and Spain: one of silver, one of bone.

But let me tell you how the Cerro Rico came to be. Some say that one time a man, his wife and their child were being chased, but his wife became too tired to continue after walking for so long and proceeded to sit down. The woman was very wealthy and was carrying all her money with her, weighed down by her riches. "Hurry," said her husband, "we're running out of time!" But she had made her decision. "I'm done. I'm tired and won't take another step, continue if you want." And so she sat and her son stayed at her side. "Well, if you stay forever, everyone will come to rob you," said her husband as he walked away. And so Cerro Rico, and Cerro Chico from her bent knee, were formed. Her riches became veins of silver, and just as her husband warned her, the Spanish arrived and stole her riches. He, the

mountain Malmisa, sits a short distance away, gazing at his wife. And so it has been since before my time.

But what you hear depends on who you ask. I heard that before the Spanish came, Diego Huallpa, an Inca, went to Cerro Rico to explore it. With a flash of lightning he saw the first *veta* discovered of El Cerro Rico: a vein of pure silver running up the mountain. But while he was on the mountain, a booming voice came down from the *cumbre*, and it said: "Leave the mountain and its riches, for they are not for you but reserved for another." With that, Diego Huallpa ran down the hill and never touched the mountain again, and thus, called it *Potosci*, meaning the one that bursts.

But more than the mountain, you're probably wondering what's inside, no? There are, of course, the riches you couldn't believe, and the one that controls them, El Tío. But he wasn't always El Tío. No, no, my friend, he used to be an angel, one of God's sons, Jesus' brother. They say he was called Jorge. Unlike his brother, he did not obey his father and was punished for it. Punished, castigated, sent down below the surface of the earth, banished to another realm. But in that realm Jorge became El Tío, controller of mineral wealth, lover of Pachamama, protector and punisher of the miners, *Supay*, El Diablo.

But he's not The Devil, not the capital-D Hell-dweller, the Lucifer with seven rings of burning sinners. No, he has the horns and all, but he's not your Satan. But that's how the Spaniards tell it. Before they came there was already *Supay*, controller of souls. This *Supay* took on the image of a perverse man, but he didn't scare them. No, they asked him for favors. They say that *Supay* made a bridge, and

his believers would cross it at night, and from sunset until the rooster would crow, they would dance, dance for *Supay*, and in turn, he would repay them with good health and favors. They say he would walk around the mountains, but it was the Spaniards who put him within. And there he sits now, his greedy mouth open with an insatiable hunger, his penis fully erect with the virility of the Cerro, eyes green and penetrating, and his horns atop his head.

He is not The Devil, nor is he God in the mine. But El Tío has the power in the mines, in that dark world. The miners don't worship him but honor him, and in return they receive the assistance and protection from their deity. Outside of the mines is the land of *El Señor, misa y Jesús Cristo*, but once they enter the *bocamina*, they must not pronounce the names of their Catholic faith. You see, in the darkness another force resides. One that can give *vetas* or take them away, offer protection or punishment, all depending on their faith. Guardian and castigator, El Tío sits in the mines as he has for the past 500 years, controlling El Cerro Rico and her riches.

But the wealth, the wealth that put Potosí on the map, that funded Spain. "Worth a Potosí," they say, for it became what all other riches were judged by. The Spanish searched for El Dorado and they found El Cerro Rico. Some say that El Cerro's husband, the mountain Malmisa, gives El Cerro gifts of silver, tin and zinc. But everyone has a different story. Others say she has lovers, Porco and Kari Kari, mountains richer than her, and to win her affection they compete with gifts. And because of this her wealth never runs dry. But it's El Tío that places the *vetas* and shows them to the miners. They say that every night at midnight, El Tío goes to the back of El Cerro and opens it. On a *vicuña*, they say he rides, and with him are the

sapos, toads filled with silver, and these toads enter the mines and place the wealth in *vetas*. El Cerro's eternal wealth gave birth to this great city and financed many more.

And so sits El Cerro Rico. The world inside her is full of riches and beauty, but also of darkness and pain. If it's stories you want, it's stories you'll get. So let's begin, and I'll tell you the tales of prosperity, pain and perseverance from the dark world of El Cerro Rico.

Huari and the Virgin of the Mineshaft

It is said that the Uru-Uru people worshipped the Sun, Inti, as they called him. Under Inti they fished and raised llamas, a life content. They say that Inti's first-born daughter, the beautiful Inti-Haura, would rise every morning, bringing her dawn across the plateau. And every morning she awakened the giant Huari with her rare beauty, outlining the Andean slopes and valleys in a thick syrup of oranges and yellows, casting shadows on the subtle elegance of the countryside, and Huari fell in love. Huari chased after Inti-Huara with all of his energy, but his love was prevented by the power of Inti. To stop Huari, Inti buried the giant's powers inside the mountains, hiding them from the dawn. And so Huari cursed the Sun, vowing to corrupt the Uru-Uru from the very realm to which his powers were banished.

Huari then took the human form of a prophet, preaching to the Uru-Uru of a new way of life, a way of living different than that of Inti. Huari told the Uru-Uru about the mines. About the great riches within; gold, silver, wealth they couldn't imagine. And so they abandoned their ways under Inti. They began to drink to Huari into the darkness, well after Inti had set, cursing their neighbors and enemies with frogs, snakes, lizards and ants, taking others' possessions, growing richer and richer, a mad dash for wealth no matter what the cost. The town became poisoned with violence and ready to implode from greed.

Then one day after a storm came the beautiful Nusta, the Inca princess, emerging out of a rainbow. And with her the villagers began to return to their old habits under Inti. But Huari would not stand by and lose his believers and his battle with Inti. In retaliation, he sent four plagues, each a symbol of their previous

devotion to him, each one to destroy the village. First was an enormous snake, crawling from the south and devouring livestock in its path over the mountains to the village. But the Uru-Uru called on Nusta, who sliced the snake in two and petrified it. Not to be thwarted, Huari next sent a titanic frog from the north, whose breath set their fields aflame. This, too, Nusta turned to stone by throwing a rock into the frog's mouth, agape and ready to burn the village. Huari then sent a gigantic lizard, its sweeping tail ready to take out all of their homes. Nusta chopped off its head and scattered its pieces throughout the mountains. Huari's final attempt was a horde of smaller terrors, and swarms of ants poured into the valley, only to be turned into sand dunes by Nusta. To finally defeat Huari, Nusta placed a cross-shaped sword into the earth, penetrating Huari's domain and allowing peace to return to the corrupt village.

Today, they say you can see the petrified snake in the hills near Oruro, that the nearby lake runs red with the lizard's blood, and the massive sand dunes that were hordes of ants. And Nusta? Nusta has stayed in Oruro, now the Virgin of the Mineshaft, to whom the people of Oruro, the descendants of the Uru-Uru, dance in honor of every year during Carnival.

The Life of la Guarda

We used to live down in the city, down below. Six years now we've lived here in the mines. Six years since El Tío took my husband. He worked in the mines for a long time, *harto tiempo*, starting when he was 12. Just a helper then, you see, but by 14 he was a perforator. He kept us alive, me and the kids. Five kids, you see. Used to be seven. But that's how life goes here. And then six years ago he died. We tried to stay in the city, we tried everything we could. The crops we grew didn't make it through the winter here, no, not here in the mountains. Animals *tampoco*. So we moved up here.

This mine has two Tíos, but one most of the miners have never seen, and the ones who have only recently. It's right here, you see, right by the entrance, but it's small, so small that most miners don't notice it. They say it must have just appeared, because miners didn't see it before. The other Tío is deep in the mine, *bien lejos*. And this Tío, he's a sophisticated one, you see. He won't smoke the cheap cigarettes, no, just the big, fine cigars. "This Tío is refined," they say. But he still works. This year he took a *jovencito*, killed by sand that poured down on him. But the thing is this sand fell from on top of a flat surface, not a ramp or anything. It had to have been moved to fall, but it fell, fell and killed the worker. Nothing falls on El Tío. All around him, yes, but where he sits is always clean. That's the only accident that's happened since I've been here, since we had to leave the city.

My husband, he was vice-president of the cooperative, you see. And so we got to move to this *bocamina*. In the city we couldn't afford the light and water bills; here we don't have to pay them. All we have to do is take care of this *bocamina*,

make sure no one goes in when they shouldn't, keep everything ready for the miners. We moved here for a better life. Things haven't quite worked out that way though. My kids, they don't have anyone else but me. My parents, they're still by Uyuni, they've abandoned me. My brother left for Argentina. I'm all my kids have, and then my fall happened...three meters, you should have seen my eye, purple all around it. And that's how it started, all the pains. Look, look at my hands, *hinchados*, and my feet too. But the worst is the pain in my head. A few nights ago I woke up, my head spinning, my vision just in spots. And yesterday my head was so cloudy, I couldn't remember a thing I was doing. All since the fall. And it scares me. I'm scared for my kids. I'm afraid to leave them alone. I'm afraid what would happen to them if I die. There's no one, no one else for them. Two months I've been sick, you see. Nothing helps. I wake up and can't breath, I can't see, my head pounding. Six years here, I just want a better life for my kids, that's all, I do it all for my kids. But I'm scared.

The Life of la Palliri

There's less of us now. There used to be more, now just us 10 or so. There's just less to go around, you see? The quality of the minerals *ha bajado*, we can only make enough money for our families. That's how I got here, at least. My husband died and four kids need to be fed, you see? And so I came here. We take the minerals that miners remove from the mines and sort them, useful and useless rocks. We sort them in these *puestos*, down here outside the *bocaminas*, and sell them down in the city. Most of us are widows, or we wouldn't be here. This isn't a life of choice, but of necessity. But it works. I'm still here, aren't I? And my kids are able to stay in school. I work so that they don't have to do what I do, so they don't have to enter the mines. When my husband died Emiliano was going to start working here, but he was only 15, just a *jovencito*, I wouldn't let him start his life like that. Because they don't leave once they start. They get a taste of the *plata*, and they don't leave until their lungs stop working. I've seen it happen.

It happened with my husband. He was 13 and in love with engines. He had one book on how cars work, a book he read every single night. But he couldn't afford to go to school. Here it doesn't matter what you wanna do if you don't have the *plata*. So he heard about the mines, heard you could make some money there, figured he'd do it for a bit, just to pay for school so he could become an engineer. But he never saw his dream; worked six days a week until he died, never took apart an engine in his life. But he had to. For me, for our kids, he had to push it behind him and enter the night.

El Tío? That's not for us, oh no. They say if we enter the mines the *vetas* just disappear, that the Pachamama is jealous of women, or that we distract El Tío. Out here is where we stay, *fuera* from the darkness. But we, the widowed women of El Cerro, do it for the same reason as the *mineros*: because there's nothing else for us to do.

Into the Dark

Part I: Julio

It was a Friday, and like any Friday, a day of the *ch'alla*, and the day we *cargamos* our week's load down to the city and finally make some money. At 10 that day we entered the mines. We hadn't had much luck that week, the *vetas* just weren't there. So we had to *ch'allar*, so El Tío would show us the silver. I entered with my group of four: me, Francisco, Santiago and Victor. Francisco has been working longer than all of us. He started as an assistant when he was 13 and was lighting dynamite on his own by the time he was 16. At 37 he's the senior of the group, and he looks it: when he was 22 another miner counted 5 explosions when there'd only been 4. Francisco went first, and now he has the missing eye to prove it. "You don't need both eyes when your day is night," he tells every new miner in the *cooperativa*, "But you sure as hell better count right if you're working with me." He says he was punished by El Tío early so he'd always know his place, and since then he's never had an accident, or even seen one in his mines. "Better my eye than my lungs. El Tío is looking out for me now."

Victor was one of those new miners. And mining isn't in his blood. He's just a *campesino*. Hell, we all were once, or our fathers were, it's not like we're regular city-folk. But you see, Victor never came to Potosí on his own accord. At 19 his father died, and his brother left to try his luck in Santa Cruz. So that left him and his mother with a *granja* they couldn't keep up. His mom forced him to come here, to enter the darkness with the likes of us. The first time he saw El Tío he nearly pissed himself. I mean, real scared. Santiago just laughed at him, "Calm down, *carajo*, he's not the

devil, he's a fucking *compañero*, one of us. He's who makes us rich, who shows us the *plata* we can support our families with, or go spend on *tragos* and single women if you're like Julio here." He laughed again, his booming, raspy cackle that sounds like a car backfiring, punched me in the arm and lit two cigarettes: one for him, one for El Tío. I'm the only one who isn't married. I've got a son, but he's in El Alto, haven't seen him in 12 years. I'm hoping to get outta this shithole too, leave this underground hell, finally end the constant night. Victor's wanted to get out as soon as he got in, but he has to respect El Tío to do it, that's what he doesn't understand. He just wants to sit in the plaza and play his *charango*, he's more muse than miner. His fear of El Tío rapidly decayed, replaced by contempt, a mocking disrespect that makes Santiago's blood boil.

And so it started that Friday with the *ch'alla*. "Let's go see that *carajo*, I don't want next week to be like this one." Francisco led us into the *bocamina*, alcohol, cigarettes and coca in hand, and we submerged into the darkness.

Tío Jorge, he's called. He likes the cheap cigarettes, the ones that are 50 *centavos* a pack, and alcohol *puro*. Our Tío is like us, a *compañero*, and for that we have faith in him. You have to have faith when you *ch'allar*, or El Tío knows. And so we went to him to give our offerings. Francisco lit a cigarette and put it in El Tío's mouth, the smoke circling and spiraling upwards. Santiago took a deep drink and I *pijchar*. And so it began, as it always begins.

Every week we drink. We drink to El Tío, so that he shows us *vetas*, so that our silver is of *alta ley* when we go down to sell it, so that he protects us from all harm and keeps us healthy. So we can get richer and support our families, or so that

we can get richer and leave the mines before they eat us. We drink so that we can keep going, day after day entering the night. To ease the pain of moving the two-ton carrier in and out of the mines, the constant threat of an explosion or cave in that could take your life. We offer the alcohol to El Tío, placing it at his feet, to the Pachamama. But not Victor. Victor just drinks and avoids looking at El Tío, or any of us.

But that Friday Santiago snapped. “Hey Victor, you want us to lose money this week? He’s our friend, our protector, but you gotta take care of your *compañeros*, no? You’ve gotta fucking give them something if you want to get it back.” It was the third week in a row Victor hadn’t so much as glanced at El Tío, and Santiago was fed up with it.

“Who gives a fuck if I pour some alcohol on the ground or on the statue or not? It’s a statue, that’s it. Yeah, Santiago, I said it. A goddamn statue. Now I’ll drink here for myself, but not for him, not for it. “

Francisco just shook his head. “Victor, you have no idea what you’re doing, *carajo*. Not a fucking clue. You ain’t no miner, you’re still a fucking *campesino*.”

Santiago poured out a whole bottle at the feet of El Tío. “Let’s go down to the city, see how much this *cabrón* has lost us. “

And every Friday we go down to the city, *cargando, borrachos*, off to the processor to sell our week’s load. The city people just stare at us, whisper about the *borrachos* who waste their money on booze and can’t put their kids through school, the *borrachos* who make more money than they can working in the city but waste it all. We see them, we hear them. They don’t know why we drink, why we need to

drink. That we make jokes and fight to stay sane. But they just stare, *borrachos* they whisper.

But this Friday, we heard the whispers of two old women, and that's right when Victor's bag slipped, the minerals tumbling to ground, and our money with it. Silver, lead and zinc rained across the road, a thin covering of possibilities: food, a car, maybe an escape. He had shown disrespect to El Tío, and so El Tío was giving it back to him. Victor began to pick up the pieces, repacking the bag, and Francisco shook his head again. "This *campesino*..." Victor shot him a glare before hoisting the heavy sack onto his shoulders. As we continued, Victor began to tremble, his teeth chattering from a cold no one else could feel. His eyes darted to each one of us, searching for signs of his symptoms in others. The hint of a smile dashed across Santiago's face for a second, gone as quick as it appeared. Not a smile of normal pleasure or simple contentment, no, something sadistic, a malignant flash of pleasure derived from pain.

We finally arrived to sell our week's haul. I unloaded my bag, releasing the pain from my shoulders. Our minerals were inspected and given a price. "260 *bolivianos* a kilo for the *plata*." *Putá, baja ley*. Santiago stared at Victor, no hint of a smile this time. We split up the money and got ready to part ways, but Francisco stopped Victor with a hand on his shoulder before we left: "Victor, be careful tomorrow. And get ready to work your ass off, we can't lose this much every week."

Don Piscoya

You may have heard of Don Piscoya, even his legends are legendary. Ask any miner about him and you'll hear a different story. But I'm getting ahead of myself, you want to know how Piscoya's infamy came to be. In the 1970s, Piscoya began renting out a mine from COMIBOL. He was just like any other miner, at least when he began. But they say that when Piscoya entered a mine, *vetas* appeared on the walls. He had a good fortune beyond that of anyone before him. The tin was drawn to him, and him to it, and the money flowed from his mine. Now Piscoya wasn't an educated man, or even a smart man, but he was a lucky man, and lucky, uneducated men bring lawyers with them to avoid being tricked. Piscoya was rich enough to hire intelligence. If Piscoya wasn't in his mine, he was with his lawyer.

And so with his luck, Piscoya, with his constant *vetas*, extracted more tin than you could believe and became a millionaire. Now COMIBOL didn't like that Piscoya was getting rich off of their mine, leaving them with the scrapings he gave them for renting it, and so they kicked Piscoya out of his mine to get the tin for themselves. But Piscoya already had *harta plata*. And so he went to La Paz to buy *flotas*. He arrived at the company, who immediately dismissed him because he looked like a *campesino*, but his lawyer intervened. "You want to let this man buy *flotas*. He's about to buy six of your buses. And not over time. Right now. All at once." So he bought six buses, and the company threw in an extra one for free. And with these Piscoya started the first bus company of Potosí, *Montaña de Plata*, referring to the El Cerro Rico, the source of his great wealth.

And COMIBOL began working in his mine, looking for Piscoya's famous *vetas*, ready to get rich as well. But as soon as they stepped into the mine, the *vetas* disappeared. For six months they worked in Piscoya's mine, and never did they find the same quality *vetas* that Piscoya encountered with regularity. And so they let Piscoya rent out the mine again. And as soon as Piscoya walked into the mine, the *vetas* reappeared, the wealth shimmering even in the darkness. You see, they say he had made a pact with El Tío, that he was one with *Supay*, and with the help of El Tío he became rich.

And of this, everyone has a different story. My friend Don Jorge told me that he was in a *boliche* on *calle La Paz* with three other miners from his *cooperativa*, and they saw Piscoya there. Piscoya was drinking with his workers and his lawyers. Don Jorge knew about the wealth in Piscoya's mine, and he and his *compañeros* decided to leave the *boliche* and go rob Piscoya's mine. As they were leaving, Piscoya watched them, but did not make an effort to move. Don Jorge wasn't sure if he had heard them talking about their plan, but with Piscoya in the city drinking they were safe. And so they went to the *bocamina*, and no one was there, so they entered. Deep in the tunnel they saw a faint light. They went towards it, towards the statue of El Tío. But there was no statue. No, but there was a helmet, on a ledge, it's muted yellows illuminating a figure sitting where the statue would be, smoking a cigarette. It was Piscoya, but not the same Piscoya they had seen drinking down in the city. No, this Piscoya had small horns and a red tint to his skin, and he sat, calmly blowing smoke rings calmly towards Don Jorge. The miners froze, staring at the half-man, half-*Supay*, who in turn stared back, tilted his head back and let out a laugh that

filled the tunnels. And Don Jorge ran, stumbling in the darkness and the echoing mad cackle, tripping over his *compañeros* in a scramble to get out of the mine. Still trembling, they went back to the *boliche*, and there still drinking with his workers was Don Piscoya. When Don Jorge walked in, Piscoya stared right into his eyes and let out that same laugh that rang against the walls of the mine, a chilling laugh that turned Don Jorge's spine to liquid and made his legs shake. They say that Piscoya's pact with El Tío was so strong that he took on its form.

But they say he got rich, he got greedy, and he forgot to keep honoring El Tío. First, one of his buses had an accident, killing all of the people on board. And then another accident. People stopped using his buses, saying they were property of *el Diablo*, and Piscoya began losing money. All because he didn't continue his pact with El Tío. And *poco a poco*, he lost every *centavo* he had. He's still alive, living just outside Potosí, poor as he was before he entered the mines, reading coca leaves and telling futures.

Ah, but the pact itself. How did Piscoya encounter such riches, what did he do to take on the very form of El Tío? First he took a hen into the mine and sacrificed it to El Tío. With a quick slit, Piscoya spread the blood over El Tío's feet, hands, and open mouth. But that's not all. El Tío's hunger wasn't sated, and he demanded another sacrifice. And so Piscoya went to a hospital, and there he stole a newborn child. He brought this child to El Tío and offered it to him. And so his pact was formed: in exchange for animal and human blood, Piscoya was given wealth and protection from El Tío.

Now there are many stories about Piscoya, some more legendary than others, some exaggerated over time, but this, of the pact, is no story. What I have told you is the truth, and I know it because I heard it from Piscoya himself, in the very house I still live in today. So ask a miner about Don Piscoya; you may hear legends, you may hear lies, but Piscoya's pact with El Tío: that is pure fact.

Into the Dark

Part II: Santiago

Santiago watched as each ounce of their work from that week blanketed the road. Serves the fucker right, he thought. Santiago was sick of Victor's lack of respect, and, for the first time in his life, he was feeling these pulses, this sense of gratification from watching Victor pick up every last rock. But it was more than gratification, like he wanted to add to Victor's suffering in some way, anyway he could. He saw Julio looking at him and stopped staring at Victor. Did he know? Did they all see it? Victor finished repacking the bag and shivered. Santiago couldn't help but smile again, but quickly tried to hide it. He wasn't sure what had come over him, but he knew that it had to be kept secret.

When he heard 260 *bolivianos* per kilo, the pulses increased. It was one thing to disrespect El Tío, but another for them all to make less money because of it. Santiago went home that night, afraid to tell his wife the week's total. Their oldest of three was in her fifth year at Tomás Frias, about to finish her degree in accounting. It was the second time that month that their load was deemed low quality, and Santiago needed that to stop. They had just moved closer to El Cerro, and to be able to keep his daughter in college and pay for the house, something had to improve.

That night Santiago couldn't sleep. Tossing and turning with the problems of that day, he finally slipped into a dream. But this wasn't an ordinary dream. Santiago found himself on a farm, the same farm he lived on until he was five years old, just outside of Oruro. But his father and mother were not there. Instead it was just him, in a field of *papas*, and an old woman. Her face was so creased he wasn't sure where

her mouth ended, like folded leather bearing the wear of years upon years of working in the fields. Her hands were swollen with calluses, her walk an off-kilter hobble. They stood just feet apart, and she stared at him from her slits of eyes. She extended her hands, and to Santiago offered a viper, a bright green serpent calmly draped between the two sandpaper palms. He took it from her without fear, letting it rest in his hands, oddly tranquil. From behind him he heard heavy footsteps. He turned to see a *gringo*, tall and blonde with a red *sombrero* and tall boots. This *gringo* opened his lips, revealing perfectly white teeth, in a manner not malicious and not inviting, but unsettling.

“Your faith is strong, Santiago. And for this you shall be rewarded. But at a cost: I desire the soul of one of your *compañeros*, the young one. For this soul you will find good fortune, but for it to continue, so must your faith. Every Thursday night, you must come in, alone, without your lamp, and *ch'allar*. If you do this, you will prosper.”

Santiago turned back to the old woman, who handed him the snake, and with a smile she turned and began to walk away, through the *papa* field and out of sight. And before his very eyes, the *papas* multiplied and ripened, ready to be picked. He turned again to look at the *gringo*, but he had disappeared.

Santiago sat up, surprised to find himself in his bed again. El Tío had never come to him in a dream before. Things were finally looking up for the first time in ages. Santiago had heard stories about agreements with El Tío, miners who had gotten rich overnight. Rich enough to not just buy one car but a collection, drink whatever and live wherever they pleased. Santiago had waited for a moment like

that for years. 31 years old but with the sandpaper voice of a man twice his age, he was hoping to get what he needed from the mines before they finished filling his lungs.

The next morning Santiago woke up at 7 and walked to *Calvario*. He went to his usual *cholita* in her stand and bought a *bolsa de coca* for the day and met Francisco at a *puesto* to eat. Francisco walked up, dynamite in hand.

“¿Cómo estás, chango? Ready to head back into the depths?” Santiago was in a good mood, ready to find *vetas* and make up for the last week.

“Not as good as you, apparently, but probably better than Victor. *Putá*, I haven’t seen a man act that way after a *ch’alla*, dropping the bag and shivering like that. Honestly it makes me nervous, I have no idea if El Tío is done or not.” Francisco got a bowl of steaming *papas*, with beets and lentils on the side.

Santiago chuckled. “I don’t think we have anything to worry about, Francisco, I think our luck is about to turn around.” They ate in silence and waited for a bus to *Pailiviri*. Victor and Julio were already there, *pijchando*. Victor’s eyes were strained wide open, bloodshot and blank. “Jesus, buddy, rough night?” Santiago punched him in the arm, a habit that always amused him but rarely anyone else.

“Santiago, leave him alone. You guys are gonna be working a perforator together today, so work your shit out.” Julio generally acted as arbiter of the group, and this time was no different. So they sat with their coca and started. Santiago watched Victor, who just stared in silence out over the city.

They entered the mine, Santiago with the perforator in hand. When they started working, Santiago tried to make conversation with Victor but nothing

awakened those dead pupils. Santiago turned his lamp right towards him without as much as a twitch from Victor. Santiago began to sweat, unsure if it was from the heat or what he promised in his dream. He loaded up a sack of minerals and went off into the darkness, the sweat running into his eyes.

A Broken Promise

There was a man who worked in the mine, working for his wife who was pregnant. But he wasn't doing well in the mines, wasn't finding the *vetas* he needed. One day, when he was working, El Tío appeared to him, and said, "If you promise to give me your son once he is born, I'll make the *vetas* appear for you." So he went home and thought about his choice for a while, and accepted El Tío's offer. And with his decision came the *vetas*, like he had never seen before. 2 meters wide, they say. Pure silver.

And so he started to become rich from what El Tío had given him in exchange for his promise. And when his son was about to be born, El Tío appeared again. He told the miner to bring his newly born son to him to complete his promise. And so his son was born, and the miner brought him to El Tío. But then something changed in him: he saw his newborn child, not a day old, and realized he could not give him up to *Supay*. And so he let his child escape, breaking his promise with El Tío. He had his money, he had his child, but he had angered El Tío. And so he continued working, but always with an eye over his shoulder for what was coming. But he couldn't prevent it. El Tío pursued him and eventually took a life, as he was promised. Not of his child, but the miner himself.

And now they say that the ghost of the miner appears every night at midnight at the *Plaza Minero* as a warning from El Tío. If you make a promise with *Supay*, you better not break it.

Into the Dark

Part III: Victor

Victor, *pijchando* before he enters the mine, thinks about the long night before. He, too, had a dream that night. He was still having chills as he was falling asleep in the one room that is his house, his mom already asleep on her cot next to the stove. The rain tapped on the metal roof, growing stronger to a dull white wave of noise. With that water filling his ears, he found himself on El Cerro, right outside the *bocamina*. Here he saw a toad, but something was different, something was wrong. This toad was three feet tall, and when it opened its mouth a bright light shone. Victor looked into the light and realized that the toad was full of pure silver. The light reflected in Victor's eyes, a greedy glare towards wealth he had never imagined, let alone seen. Then Victor heard a laugh, raspy but booming nonetheless, but looked around and didn't see anyone. As the laugh echoed, the ground began to rumble, cracks forming and growing into fissures. Victor and the toad fell, and he suddenly found himself struggling to stay afloat in a flowing river. This river was yellow swirled with purple streaks, like the water that exits the mine. It filled his mouth, the metallic poison trying to enter his lungs. Struggling to stay alive, he watched the toad shrivel up and sink below the oily surface.

Victor woke up choking. His chills hadn't left, and in addition his lungs ached like he hadn't been able to take a breath. Not being able to go back to bed, Victor went outside to check on the crops his mother had attempted to start growing, despite the small amount of land and cold climate. Victor pulled out a potato, only to find it crawling with *bichos* and rotting from the inside.

Victor watches as Santiago and Francisco walk up. Santiago punches him in the arm, but his words don't enter his head. He hears Francisco say that he's working with Santiago today and gears up to go in. His lamp, his helmet, his boots, all blurry. Colors mixing, edges faded, Victor puts it all on, heavier than he remembers. Santiago grabs the perforator and they enter.

Victor operates the machine. The drill attacks the grey rock, exploding a cloud of *polvo* that envelops them both. He wears a mask, but the dust enters his mouth anyway. But his lungs don't feel dry; he can still taste the murky water. His ears ring with the rattling even after he stops. Santiago fills a bag with the rocks and puts it on his back. He leaves to drop it off, leaving Victor alone, arms shaking from the perforator. Santiago returns to take a turn. Victor thinks about the toad, how the silver shone, how the toad shriveled and disappeared into the cloudy river. "Victor, wake up, *carajo*, and fill this bag." They are deep into the mines where it heats up, oxygen replaced by dust and wind by stagnant steam. Everything moves in slow motion here, trying to swim through the syrupy air. But Victor hardly notices the heat. Even as his sweat drips onto the rocks he's loading, all he thinks about is the potato this morning, the rotten mass on his plate. He dumps the bag and returns to take another turn. Santiago carries another bag, his headlamp slowly diminishing until the last speck of light disappears from the tunnel. And then silence. A silence as stagnant as the air that Victor can barely breath, pressing down on his weary body that has been beaten down by more in one year in the mine than the 20 years before it.

Footsteps approach, but with no light. "Santiago?" Victor's question echoes without response, but the footsteps continue. Victor turns to see a different *minero*, without a lamp. His boots, his helmet, all spotless in the light of Victor's lamp, brand new like he hadn't even walked in the mine. "Where's Santiago?" Victor's senses snap back, the heat suddenly making his head pulse and the dust drying his throat. The miner smiles and tells him not to worry about Santiago, that he's there to take care of Victor now, to give him what he needs, what he deserves. Victor stares at this smile and feels the sweat trickle down his back. Despite this, the chills return. His teeth start chattering and his knees shake, trembling under what seems like the weight of the world. A small stream of sand falls on Victor's helmet and the miner's grin grows bigger. "What you deserve," he repeats, and with the growing grin comes more and more sand, followed by rocks, and Victor slowly disappears.

El Puente del Diablo

There once was a *campesino* from Potosí who fell in love with a beautiful woman, who was the daughter of the mayor of her *pueblito*. But her father did not approve of their love, and so they had to always meet in secret, but kept the hope that someday they could marry. One night the mayor was walking around the town and found the two of them together, and the mayor and the *campesino* began to argue over love and class, one he had and one he didn't. And so the mayor offered him a challenge, an opportunity: if the *campesino* could make enough money in one week, the mayor would let him marry his daughter. It was a sum too large for any man to make in a week, let alone one without a job, and so the mayor went home and slept in peace, sure that the *campesino* would fail.

With this challenge the *campesino* left for La Paz, where he worked as hard as he could, doing jobs even some animals wouldn't do. For five full days he worked like this, night and day, until he had enough money to return. On the sixth day his bus had nearly reached the *pueblito* where he was to give the mayor the sum, but blocking the completion of his challenge stood a gorge. He had completed the task, but was going to fail unless he could cross the chasm and reach his love.

Looking at the gap, he decided he needed to build a bridge so he would be able to cross into the town. But with only one day left, he called upon the Devil for help. If the Devil helped him complete the bridge before the first rooster's call, the *campesino* would give him his soul. And so they began constructing the bridge, the *campesino* on one side of the gorge, the Devil working from the other side, from the *pueblito*. And the Devil began working quickly while the *campesino* slowly

progressed, stone by stone. He began to realize that he was going to lose his soul to the Devil, but with the bridge completed, he'd also be able to cross to his love before the sun rose. And so with his dilemmas he turned to God, and asked for help to save his soul. And God sent down an angel.

It was nearly dawn and the Devil had all but finished the bridge. There were only two stones missing. The Devil went to place one in, but the angel sat in his way, blocking the gap in the bridge. So the Devil went to the other gap, but just as quickly the angel moved and sat in the way again. And so when the first rooster called, the bridge was incomplete, the Devil only able to put one of the two stones in due to the interference from the angel. And so the *campesino* did not have to turn over his soul and successfully reached the village, where he married his love.

And the bridge remains, *El Puente del Diablo*, just outside of Potosí. And if you go there today, there's still a single stone missing. They say that people have tried to find one that fits to complete the bridge, but not a single one has. And so they say the angel is still there, sitting in the way and protecting an innocent soul from the Devil.

Into the Dark

Part IV: Francisco

I was still worried about Victor. When Julio and I saw Santiago dropping off a load, we asked him how he was doing. “He’s not even fucking there, not in his own head. He’s just going through the motions, no mind, no *nothing*.” Santiago looked a little strung out himself, his good mood from earlier that morning stayed outside the mine. But there was nothing else to do but get back to work, and so Santiago parted ways with us. I counted the five explosions and Julio and I moved on.

But then Julio and I were getting ready to set the next dynamite when we heard Santiago yell. When we got to the gallery where they were working we saw the remains of a collapse, sand and rocks piled high with the perforator sticking out of the bottom. “He was just fucking here, I just left to move the load and got back to, to *this*. He was right fucking here...” Santiago was yelling at the pile of rocks, and then whispered something to himself, something I couldn’t quite make out. All I could hear was, “...not like this. You didn’t say like this.”

Julio wasn’t looking at the pile but to the side of it. I followed his eyes to see tracks, drag marks heading down the tunnel. We walked down the tunnel, following the lines until they suddenly stopped. And we found ourselves at him, El Tío, with no sign of Victor’s body. His green eyes glimmered through the smoke of the lit cigarette in his mouth. His penis seemed to swell with his power. Coca in one hand and alcohol in the other, he stared at us.

We left early that day to go to Victor’s house. How do you explain to a mother that El Tío has eaten her son? No body, just a pile of rocks and a trail of his exit from

this world. Victor would never escape the mines, never leave again. Victor's mom had already lost her husband, just two years before, and had no one to mourn with. When we broke the news she grabbed me by the shoulders and cried, pouring herself out and everything she had let out for her husband another time. If it lasted for days, I wouldn't have let go.

That night we arranged flowers on the empty coffin and celebrated for Victor. The whole neighborhood was crammed into the one room, drinking and dancing to honor the young miner. Santiago, Julio and I sat at the table with the dice. Drinking, smoking, *pijchando*, we played *cacho* until the sunrise. The next day Padre Ricardo came, a priest who had sat with us in the *bocaminas* when we were on strike and supported us through everything, like a *compañero*. At the house he gave a mass, reflecting on a life barely lived of a poet, a musician and a man dedicated to his family when others weren't. Then vacant casket was lifted to the cemetery. Into the ground it went, into the depths of the *subsuelo*, the land he had spent just one year working in and would never be able to flee like he wanted. A pile of dirt covered the casket, blocking out the last light it would ever see.

We returned to Victor's house, where his mother gave everyone a plate of food. Santiago sat in silence as Julio and I remembered Victor one last time. By this time it was getting late, and so we said goodbye to Victor's mother and went back to rest for Monday's workday.

But her work was not done. She adorned herself entirely in black, the black she would wear for the next year. And she began going to the river every day to wash every article of Victor's clothing, his bed, his possessions. For nine days she

went to clean everything that was his. And then she burned it. Everything Victor owned had been purified and sent off in the flames that licked the sky. And on the 9th day she held another mass.

And us? We went back to work and reentered the darkness. You have to move on, you have to keep working for you and your family. To stop working is to die yourself. To let your family die. To abandon your kids. And so that Monday we went back into the mines.

And Santiago was right, our luck did change. When we entered we found *vetas anchas*, silver, lead, zinc; our mine began producing like it never had before. We went back to work, and bit-by-bit we forgot about Victor, replaced by another young *compañero*, one who had faith. But Santiago never, ever forgot about Victor, that I can guarantee you. You see, he started hearing these noises in the mine, weird noises. First just echoing rumblings, but they began to become clearer, transforming into Victor's voice, calling for Santiago from the darkness. Santiago didn't stop working, but he never went deep into the mine like he did before. He was afraid, his fear that some hand would appear or some specter would draw him into the depths. His wealth came with this burden, one that followed him until silicosis took his life 5 years later.

Julio didn't change, the same calm, diligent miner that worked with an internal drive greater than that of any of us, much more than an instinct to survive. But always in peace, simply pleased with the new riches that had sprung from our mine. Julio was able to make enough to get out and see his son in El Alto. Haven't seen the *carajo* since.

And me? I'm still here, and I keep going, like I have for the past 40 years. My *compañeros* have come in and out, but I've still got my health and I'm still making money. I've got my cars, I've got my house, and I've got kids who never have to enter this darkness. One eye is a small price to pay. Better my eye than my lungs, I've always said, and El Tío still looks after me.

Afterword

This piece is the result of three weeks spent in Potosí, Bolivia. I first became interested in the topic of El Tío and the belief systems of the miners when my study abroad group spent three short days there earlier in the semester. More than just learning about the beliefs, I was interested in how they affected their day-to-day lives. At first glance, it may seem like the miners are devil worshippers, but delving a little deeper demonstrates the complicated and unique structures of belief, a result of a mixture of Andean and Spanish cultures that have changed and evolved over the past 500 years.

But in a way, not a lot has changed. The miners use technology that is anything but advanced and continue the practices, such as the *ch'alla*, which have been around much longer than mining in Bolivia. The culture is very much one of tradition, which I think was the first thing that drew me towards it. A tradition that was born well before my country even existed and continues today.

In my time in Potosí, my main method of research was going to El Cerro Rico itself and speaking with the miners. The miners normally enter the mines around 10 a.m., but before that they sit around the entrances and chew coca. It was during this time I'd talk to them, and with varying levels of success. Some days miners wouldn't want to talk to me, sometimes they'd say they didn't know any stories about El Tío, but generally after a fair amount of deliberation I'd find someone very happy to talk to me. That was undoubtedly the best part about this entire project: hearing the stories from the miners themselves. There are many good sources on legends from Potosí, and one particular book (*Los Ministros del Diablo* by Pascale Absi) that is an

incredible source on mining culture and El Tío, but being able to speak with the miners and hear their stories and learn what they know was an experience I'll never forget.

My goal with this piece is to provide as much of an insight as I can into the beliefs, customs and lives of the miners through a series of stories so that people from other countries (like the United States) can learn at least a little bit of what I learned in my time in Potosí. In my retelling of what I learned I tried to replicate the style in which I heard the stories in making almost every section in a conversational style. With this I wanted the reader to feel how I did on El Cerro, or feel as close to it has possible. Many of the stories, including the majority of the legends, have been left unchanged from how they were told to me. Others are combined accounts, but still completely the stories of the miners. For example, the Don Piscoya section combined a story I heard from a miner and the firsthand account of his pact that was told to a man I interviewed from Don Piscoya himself. This experience of hearing not a legend but a first hand account was very powerful for me, and so I included it in my story, taking the role the man I interviewed.

The four-part section "Into the Dark" was written with the intent of showing a snapshot of the daily lives of miners. While each character and the series of events is completely fictionalized and some events not daily happenings, each part displays an aspect of something I learned in my time with the miners. For example, the different apparitions of El Tío (as a gringo and as a miner without a lamp) were told to me by two miners in Pailiviri; the dream sequences include symbols such as an old woman and a toad (both representing the Pachamama), potatoes and vipers (the

vetas) and murky water (danger), all things that I heard from different miners; and the *ch'alla* is something very important for the miners, but as one miner told me, you have to *ch'allar* with faith, or El Tío knows. These are just some of the things that I found fascinating, and since they weren't included in other parts I had heard from miners, nor had I displayed a view of how the miners live today, I used "Into the Dark" to explore them.

My greatest challenge was how to organize as comprehensive view of El Tío and the miners as possible in a series of stories. At the same time, I had to keep it accessible to readers with no background on the subject without leaving any information out. I believe that the structure I have chosen (and the glossary attached) have done as good a job as any to achieve my goals. Besides being a source of information for the reader to learn about a culture seldom talked about in other parts of the world, I wanted the stories to serve as a place where the stories of the miners could be heard. Because these really are their stories. They are truly incredible and what drove my project, and now they are here to be shared. I hope that through their stories I have truly captured what it means to be a *minero*.

Métodos y Éxitos de la Investigación

Mi proyecto empezó por un interés en el sistema de creencias de los mineros que surgió mi primera vez en Potosí. De ahí mi propuesta: hablar con los mineros para aprender como El Tío les afecta en una manera cotidiana y algunos mitos sobre El Tío y las minas. Con esta idea, fui a Potosí y empecé mi proyecto.

Métodos

Mis métodos eran simples: principalmente, quería ir al cerro para hablar con los mineros para saber sus historias y sus cuentos sobre las minas y El Tío. He leído mucho sobre la historia del Tío y algunos mitos en libros, pero quería saber más sobre las leyendas que permanecen en la cultura de los mineros, y para hacer eso, iba a hablar con los mineros, con la ayuda de CEPROMIN (Centro para la Promoción Minera). Con los mineros, mis preguntas eran simples para que puedan detallar sus respuestas, pero algunos no me decían mucho con preguntas simples, y les preguntaba cosas como “¿Podría usted decirme algo sobre accidentes de la mina?” o preguntas sobre pactos con El Tío. A veces usaba preguntas más específicas, como preguntas sobre leyendas que ya sabía, Don Piscoya por ejemplo, porque cada minero tiene una versión diferente. Había desafíos también. Muchos mineros me dijeron: “No tengo historias del Tío,” y otros no querían hablar conmigo. Entendía que la presencia de un gringo que quería hablar sobre El Tío es un poco extraña y no me afectaba personalmente. Pero la mayoría de los mineros eran amables y colaboradores.

También tuve algunas entrevistas con expertos, como el director de la casa de cultura. Con ellos, tenía más de una estructura con mis preguntas. Aquí están mis once preguntas:

1. ¿Ha escuchado o tiene alguna información sobre El Tío de la mina?
2. ¿Qué significado tiene para Ud. El Tío de la mina?
3. ¿Conoce Ud. de dónde procede la creencia en El Tío de la mina?
4. ¿Cree que la creencia en El Tío es una herencia española?
5. ¿Cree Ud. que esta creencia se manifiesta en otros países del mundo?
6. ¿Cree Ud. que El Tío es una personificación de un protector telúrico o un demonio?
7. ¿Cómo relaciona Ud. la creencia del Tío con la fe católica?
8. ¿Qué relación encuentra Ud. entre El Tío y el Tata Ckajcha?
9. ¿Qué relación encuentra Ud. entre El Tío y la Pachamama?
10. ¿Cómo influye la creencia del Tío en la cultura del pueblo potosino?
11. ¿Considera cierto que El Tío proporciona grandes fortunas a los que pactan con él?

Con estas preguntas he logrado mis metas y he obtenido más información que sirvió de base para mis charlas con mineros, y creo que ahora sé mejor que significa El Tío de las minas.

¿Qué es El Tío?

La imagen del Tío de las minas hoy es el resultado de tantos años de una cultura minera con aspectos indígenas mezclados con aspectos del occidente. El Tío es parecido a la imagen del Diablo cristiano, rojo y con cuernos. Es decir que El Tío

fue creado por los españoles para manejar a los indios que trabajaban en las minas, pero El Tío tenía predecesores y raíces indígenas. Antes de la llegada de los españoles, ya había minería, y también había deidades del subsuelo. El concepto de *supay* (diablo en Quechua, *saqra* en Aymara) es algo más antiguo que la colonia. Este *supay* no era tan malo como el diablo del occidente. Para los Aymaras, era como un hombre perverso, pero no le temían, puesto que le pedían favores, como vengarse de sus enemigos. Dicen que el *supay* construyó un puente para que sus prosélitos pasen por la noche de San Bartolomé, con objeto de ir a danzar en el atrio del templo desde las doce de la noche hasta la mañana. Creen que este baile sanará sus defectos, porque el *supay* les recompensa y les cura. Algunos le entregaban su alma al *supay* por estos favores. Así que ya existía el vínculo entre *supay* y los muertos, algo que sigue con el Tío hoy. También había una creencia en un *supay* que ya existía y controlaba la riqueza mineral, pero este *supay* estaba dentro de las minas, pero una figura que caminaba por las montañas y los hombres no le han pedido minerales; el *supay* que les da riqueza mineral dentro de las minas era una invención de los españoles. Unos predecesores antiguos del *supay* son las *huacas*, unos ídolos incas que podrían ser la base de las efigies del Tío. Es decir que había *huacas* dentro de las minas antes de la colonia, y que cerca de los santuarios de las *huacas* más vetas ricas con plata aparecían. Diego Gualpa, el descubridor oficial de la plata en Cerro Rico, tenía un testimonio que había una *huaca* en el cumbre del Cerro Rico y una mesa ofrecida a la *huaca*, que había enviado a cuatro españoles. Otro predecesor posible es la deidad *Huari*, especialmente en la localidad de Oruro. Hay una leyenda sobre *Huari* que dice que él fue castigado por Inti, el dios del sol, al

subsuelo, y para vengar ha convertido las creyentes del Inti a su lado con la tentación de la riqueza de las minas.

Hay teorías diferentes sobre el cambio del *supay* antiguo hacia El Tío. Hay un mito que dice que el cambio fue derivado de los mitayos muertos en las minas. Los mitayos eran los indios que trabajaban en las minas obligatoriamente en la época de la colonia, pueblos enteros en esclavitud. Muchos indios han muerto de esta manera, y es decir que era el dueño de sus almas, y así se transformó en el Tío.

Anteriormente se creía que todas las almas de los muertos pertenecían al *supay*, pero en la actualidad se cree que las almas de los muertos en la mina pertenecen al Tío.

La creación española es diferente, con aspectos cristianos. Como en las creencias cristianas del Diablo, El Tío es un ángel caído, pero desemejante en cristianismo, es el hermano de Jesús, y exiliado por su papá, el Señor, al subsuelo donde controla a la riqueza mineral. Dicen que El Tío tiene relación con San Jorge, y por eso muchos se llaman “Tío Jorge,” y también hay leyendas sobre el Niño Jorge, el hijo del diablo y, en algunos casos, una *palliri*.

El término “Tío” tiene una mezcla de orígenes. Es decir que los indios no podían decir “dios,” y en vez de esto, decían “Tío.” Pero también hay más vínculos con el término. En Quechua, la palabra más cercana a tío es *t'iyu*, que significa arena. Por eso, la arena actualmente está en las creencias de los mineros, especialmente en Oruro, donde dicen que los arenales eran hormigas de Huari, un predecesor del Tío, transformados en arena. En castellano, el término tío tiene connotaciones del pariente, alguien que cuida, a quien se trata con respeto pero también con

familiaridad. Hay otros términos que tienen ambos sentidos de tío maternal y de diablo: *tulu* en Chipaya y *lari* en Aymara. Esta dualidad existe en el Tío de las minas hoy. Los mineros le tratan como compañero, como en las *ch'allas*, cuando los mineros toman, fuman y *pijchan* con el efigie del Tío, pero con las *ch'allas* también tratan de complacer el Tío para darles vetas de minerales. Las hacen cada martes y viernes. En las *ch'allas*, dicen que reciben una fuerza del Tío cuando toman. En Quechua, la palabra *callpa* significa fuerza y valor. Por eso, cuando toman, tienen más coraje, energía de trabajar en condiciones peligrosas cada día y también potencia sexual. Dicen que el alcohol es considerado como la orina del Tío. Otro ritual para El Tío es *k'araku*, cuando sacrifican a algunas llamas y ponen la sangre en la mina, y también los órganos como ofrendas al Tío. Todo para que El Tío no quiera comer la sangre de los mineros. Este ritual es hecho con menos frecuencia.

En el Cerro Rico, los mitos dicen que la Pachamama crea las vetas de minerales, pero con la dirección del Tío. Él es el dueño de la riqueza mineral, pero también mediador entre los mineros y el cerro. Pero hay muchos otros mitos sobre cómo se forman las vetas, y cómo los mineros las encuentran. El Tío les da vetas a causa de las ofrendas de los mineros. Cuando los mineros no le dan ofrendas, las vetas desaparecen o les enferma para castigarlos. Algunos mineros dicen que las vetas aparecen a causa de las ofrendas, pero también dicen que aparecen por las almas de los muertos dentro de la mina, como los mitayos, y otra gente que el Tío la ha comido. A veces los mineros tienen sueños en que El Tío le muestra donde van a haber vetas en la mina, y el próximo día los mineros saben donde están. Hay símbolos importantes en los sueños, como la mujer mayor y el sapo representan la

Pachamama, una víbora es la veta y agua sucia es algo peligroso. El Tío también aparece en las minas, a veces a los mineros que se han quedado solos. Puede aparecer en algunas formas, como un gringo, alto y rubio, con un sombrero rojo, pero también aparece como un minero, pero limpio y sin lámpara. A veces el minero hace un pacto con El Tío, como una ofrenda de su alma por la riqueza, pero también El Tío puede engañarlo para comérselo. También hay leyendas sobre personas que se han sacrificados a cambio de plata.

Hay un efigie de un Tío en cada mina, y a veces más que uno, y cada Tío es diferente. Tienen nombres y personalidades únicos. Algunos Tíos son más poderosos y ricos que otros. Hay Tíos que siempre quieren cigarrillos y otros que nunca fuman. En una bocamina he oído que su Tío no fuma los cigarrillos baratos, solo los más largos y caros. Los mineros le dan las cosas que su Tío quiere cuando *ch'allan* para recibir toda la plata posible. En las minas, los mineros no dicen el nombre de Jesucristo, y tampoco el Señor, para no enojar al Tío, quien controla las vetas de minerales. A pesar de eso, la mayoría de los mineros sigue asistiendo a las misas. Pero hay una presencia del cristo en las minas, en los *tataq'achus* y las vírgenes de las minas. Los *tataq'achus* son cruces que representan santos patronos que están en los primeros metros de las minas, y sirven como mediadores de los poderes peligrosos del Tío. Dicen que antes de su llegada, habían más accidentes mortales. Hay un equilibrio entre los dos, ambos les dan protección a los mineros, son encarnaciones del mismo poder, pero uno es sagrado y el otro diabólico.

Conclusiones

Hablando con los mineros, me di cuenta de la importancia de sus historias y cómo viven. Los mineros tienen desafíos grandes, especialmente en su vida cotidiana. Cada día están en peligro, y también hay problemas de salud como la silicosis que afecta a todos. La esperanza de vida de un minero es cuarenta años, poco tiempo en nuestro mundo de medicina avanzada. Trabajan cada día para apoyar a sus familias, pero hay prejuicios fuertes contra los que son borrachos que gastan mal el dinero. El Tío era mi interés principal, pero entendí la importancia de los propios mineros. Con mis cuentos, quiero demostrar la riqueza cultural y los cuentos interesantes de la historia minera y los mineros actuales. Era una experiencia increíble hablar con los mineros y aprender de ellos, y con mi obra quiero mostrar mi experiencia a todos los que la lean.

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Glossary

Brief Note: In Spanish, the diminutive form is very frequently used (-ito), and rarely does it imply the sense of something being smaller or inferior. In fact, sometimes it is added to make a phrase endearing, other times simply added with no meaning attached.

El Alto-The city right next to La Paz, Bolivia's capital, which barely existed until 1985. Since then, started by the shutdown of COMIBOL and a massive migration of miners who were left without jobs, the city has grown rapidly, now containing around one million people, about equal to the population of La Paz. Known as the Aymara capital of the world, the vast majority of the city is indigenous.

ancho-“wide,” Spanish.

bichos-“bugs,” Spanish.

bien lejos-“very far,” Spanish.

bocamina-Literally “mouth of the mine” in Spanish, the entrances to the mines.

boliche-any bar or club, Spanish.

bolsa-“bag,” Spanish.

buenas tardes- “Good afternoon,” Spanish.

cabrón-“asshole,” Spanish.

cacho-A popular dice game in Bolivia, similar to Yahtzee in its rules, but generally paired with drinking.

calle La Paz-A main street in Potosí.

Calvario-The area of Potosí right below El Cerro, where all the miners can buy supplies such as dynamite and coca or eat before they catch a bus up to the mines.

cargar-“to carry,” Spanish. Variations: *cargamos*-we carry; *cargando*-carrying

campesino-“country man” or “peasant” are the most literal translations, but generally refers to anyone who lives in a rural area, such as farmers.

carajo-“fucker,” Spanish.

Carnival-The festival in February, most famous in Oruro, where they honor La Virgen de la Candelaria (an apparition of the Virgen Mary) as well as perform the

traditional “Diablada” dance, dressed in elaborate devil costumes. For more information, see June Nash’s article “Carnival in Bolivia: Devils Dancing for the Virgin.”

Cerro Chico-The small mountain right in front of El Cerro Rico, now with a monument to Jesus on top of it.

Cerro Rico-The mining center of Bolivia, this mountain and its riches have been exploited for almost 500 years, and has become less and less safe over time as more tunnels are burrowed into it.

ch’allar-The verb form of the ritual performed for El Tío every Friday as well as Tuesdays during Carnival. However, this ritual is not only performed in mining sectors, but throughout the Andes, frequently involving pouring alcohol on the ground to signify an offering to the Pachamama. Variation: *ch’alla*: noun form.

chango-Bolivian slang for “guy,” Spanish.

charango-small, ukulele-like Andean instrument featuring five sets of double strings. Traditionally made out of the back of an armadillo, it is now normally made of wood.

cholita-Diminutive form of *chola*, referring to a woman in the city who still wears indigenous clothing, such as the *polleras* and a small, bowler-like hat. *Chola*, if used with malice, is a derogatory term, but *cholita* is generally endearing.

coca-The coca leaf, which is frequently mistaken as the same thing as cocaine. Cocaine is made from the coca leaf, but after a chemical process. The coca leaf itself is as much of a drug as caffeine is, with some similar effects, which include energy and hunger suppression, two things that are very useful for the miners. To consume it, one strips the leaf from either side of the stem and chews it (see *pijchar*), frequently building up a large mass in one cheek, similar to the result of chewing tobacco.

COMIBOL-The mining company of the Bolivian state. The mining industry was nationalized in 1952, and then de-nationalized again in 1985 with the crashing of the tin industry and a new movement in Bolivian politics to neoliberal politics. The shutdown of COMIBOL also resulted in a mass layoff of miners and a mass exodus, generally to El Alto. Mining was re-nationalized under President Evo Morales (in power from 2005-present), establishing COMIBOL once again as the national mining company.

¿Cómo estás?-“How are you?” Spanish.

compañeros-“companions” or “peers,” literally, but used to refer to one’s fellow miners. Spanish.

cooperativa-The system of organization of labor in the mines. To join one you have to pass a trial period first. Then you can move up, eventually to *socio*, a higher role in the organization. A *cooperativa* might own many *bocaminas*, and some have been around for decades.

cumbre-“peak,” Spanish.

flotas-“fleets,” literally in Spanish, refers to large busses.

fuera-“away,” Spanish.

granja-“farm,” Spanish.

gringo-A term for Americans or other white-skinned foreigners. Not derogatory.

guarda-“guard,” Spanish. The woman who lives at the *bocamina* and protects it.

harto-“a ton,” Spanish.

hinchados-“swollen,” Spanish.

Huari-Pre-colonial diety, possible predecessor to El Tío.

Inti-Sun, Quechua. Worshipped as a god.

Inti-Huara-Dawn, Quechua. Inti’s daughter.

jovencito-diminutive of *joven*, which means “young one” in Spanish.

ley-“law,” literally in Spanish, but used with the miners to describe the price and quality of the minerals they extract, such as *alta ley* meaning high quality and *baja ley* meaning low quality.

Malmisa-Another mountain in the department of Potosí.

minero-“miner,” Spanish.

misa-“mass,” as in church service, Spanish.

Nusta-“princess,” Quechua, specifically the princess in the myth of Huari and the Uru-Uru.

Oruro-Both the name of a department in Bolivia and the capital city of the department, known as the “folkloric capital of Bolivia.” Not far from Potosí and also has had mining. Famous for it’s Carnival celebration.

Pachamama-Also called *Madre Tierra* or “Mother Earth,” the Pachamama is regarded as the living spirit of nature in the Andean Cosmovision. The Pachamama is respected through offerings, such as the *ch’alla*.

Pailiviri-The central section of mines on El Cerro Rico, formerly COMIBOL’s center as well.

palliri-The female miners that work outside of the mines in stands.

pijchar-“To chew coca,” Quechua.

plata-“silver,” Spanish. Also used to refer to money.

Plaza Minero-The plaza near Calvario, featuring a statue to the miners.

poco a poco-“little by little,” Spanish.

pollera-The skirts worn by indigenous women, generally in layers. Can be a symbol of wealth, both in quality and quantity.

polvo-“dust,” Spanish.

Potosí-Both a department and city in the South of Bolivia, where El Cerro Rico is located. Bolivia’s existence and structure today can be looked at as a result of the wealth in the mines of Potosí: La Paz was a midpoint between Potosí and Cusco, Peru, where much of the Spanish silver was being shipped; Sucre, a city just east of Potosí, was the lower elevation administrative center of the colonial era, the lowlands of Bolivia were practically ignored by the Spanish since they were not connected to any processes of the mining industry, with Santa Cruz’s expansion only a product of the past few decades of economic success.

pueblito-Diminutive form of *pueblo*, “town” in Spanish.

Puente del Diablo-“Bridge of the Devil,” Spanish. Located just outside of Potosí.

puesto-“stand,” Spanish.

puro-“pure,” Spanish. In reference to alcohol *puro*, it’s the 96% alcohol they drink with El Tío.

puta-“bitch,” Spanish, but used more frequently like English speakers use “damn.”

Santa Cruz-The largest city in Bolivia, now containing two million people. Seen by most of Bolivia as the city with the most economic possibilities in the country, which is reflected by it’s growth in the past few decades from 50,000 to two million people.

sapos-“toad,” Spanish. Symbol of the Pachamama.

El Señor-God, as most of Latin America refers to him in Spanish.

Simon Patiño-Also known as “The King of Tin” Patiño was at one time was the richest man in the world thanks to the tin industry of the early 1900s. Spent most of his time outside of the country once he was rich in New York and Paris.

subsuelo-“subsoil,” Spanish.

Supay-“devil,” Quechua. However, this meaning has changed over time. As addressed in the first section, there was a *Supay* in Bolivia before the Western idea of “The Devil” arrived, and the current *Supay* is not identical to the Christian Devil, although has many aspects in common. El Tío is also referred to as *Supay* frequently.

tampoco-“neither,” Spanish.

tiempo-“time,” Spanish.

El Tío-“uncle,” literally in Spanish. El Tío is the deity of the mines in Potosí. While the image of El Tío frequently appears to be very similar to The Devil, it is a unique entity that is a result of syncretism that began 500 years ago. In the Andean Cosmovision, there is not the same “good” and “evil” that dominates the Christian Faith. Instead, there is an idea of duality. This idea is exemplified in the three worlds: The world above, the world we live in, and the world below. Similar to Heaven, Earth and Hell in Christianity, but with entirely different connections. A balance between things from the world above and the world below is important, hence duality. While El Tío comes from the world below, that does not make him evil. El Tío is treated by the miners like another miner they have to respect. Most miners still attend mass and are Christians, but inside the mine they respect El Tío and give him offerings so that they receive minerals in return.

Tomás Frias-The public university in Potosí.

trago-“a drink,” Spanish.

Uru-Uru-Indigenous people from what is now Oruro.

Uyuni: A city in the department of Potosí, famous for the salt flats next to it.

vetas-“veins,” Spanish. Used to refer to the veins of minerals in El Cerro.

vicuñas-An animal related to the llama.