

# Royal Roads and Entangled Webs: Mining Metals and Making Value in El Cubo, Guanajuato, Mexico

ELIZABETH FERRY, *Department of Anthropology, Brandeis University, 415 South Street, Waltham, MA 02454 USA. Email: ferry@brandeis.edu*

---

In this article I study recent struggles in the gold mining town of El Cubo, Guanajuato, Mexico, over what should happen to mining profits. Rather than framing these primarily or only in terms of a chain from production to consumption and periphery to metropole, I explore them as points of intersection, divergent paths, or entangled webs. This knottier perspective, allied to a more expansive theorization of value-making as “the politics of making meaningful difference and making differences meaningful” (as I said in 2013), allows us to see these contests in a new light, as attempts to revalue places close to the mines and people with long-standing connections to those places. By doing this we can recognize the capacities of miners and others in mining communities to create and contest value in the intersections of entangled webs, rather than seeing them only as those left behind in the transfer of value along a commodity chain.

**Key words:** gold, mining, value, commodity chain, entanglement, Mexico

---

For the past 20 years or so, I have been researching the mining of silver, mineral specimens, and gold in Latin America, especially in Mexico. I first became interested in mining and the economic and political regimes that it gives rise to as a primary engine of the world system, along with the commodity crops of sugar, cotton, and coffee. And I was fascinated by the places—indeed, the worlds—that mining creates, with distinctive social relations, cosmologies, and built environments. I went into this research because I wanted to know what kinds of places get formed through the extraction of precious minerals, even as the minerals themselves leave.

In this article, I address this question in the context of some new research, but let me start with a story from my earlier work. From 1996 to 1998 I lived in a small town of about 900 souls, 10 km from the city of Guanajuato, Mexico, in the Sierra de Santa Rosa, which lies between that city and Dolores Hidalgo. I lived in a two-room house with a glorious view of the mountains from the back terrace. It was between the butcher and the charcoal dispensary, so I was often kept awake long into the night by the squealing of pigs and the braying of donkeys (used to transport firewood and charcoal

Submitted November 29, 2017; accepted December 1, 2017; published online January 15, 2019.  
*Journal of Anthropological Research* (Spring 2019). © 2019 by The University of New Mexico.  
All rights reserved. 0091-7710/2019/7501-0002\$10.00

to hotels and restaurants in Guanajuato). Any of these noises would set off the dogs. And the roosters seemed never to have read fairy tales or children's stories to let them know they were only supposed to crow at dawn. They crowed at unpredictable intervals all night long. I had always lived in cities; I never realized the country was so loud.

The town of Santa Rosa is divided into upper and lower sections, transected by the small Guanajuato-Dolores highway. In the upper section, where I lived, there was one road clinging to the spine of the hill, paved with a combination of stones and concrete. When I first moved in, I inquired if there was a mailing address for my house and was told it was "Camino Real, *sin número*." I was amused that the pitted road had such a grand name, "the Royal Road," no less. When I had been living there a few months, I watched a children's game at a town festival—which consisted of loading a donkey with boxes of cookies wrapped in aluminum foil and letting it loose. The one who managed to catch the donkey got the cookies. The game was called "La Plata del Rey" (The King's Silver) (Figure 1).

I suddenly realized, and later confirmed, that my little house indeed did stand on a royal road, part of the tributary system (in both senses of the word) that fed into the

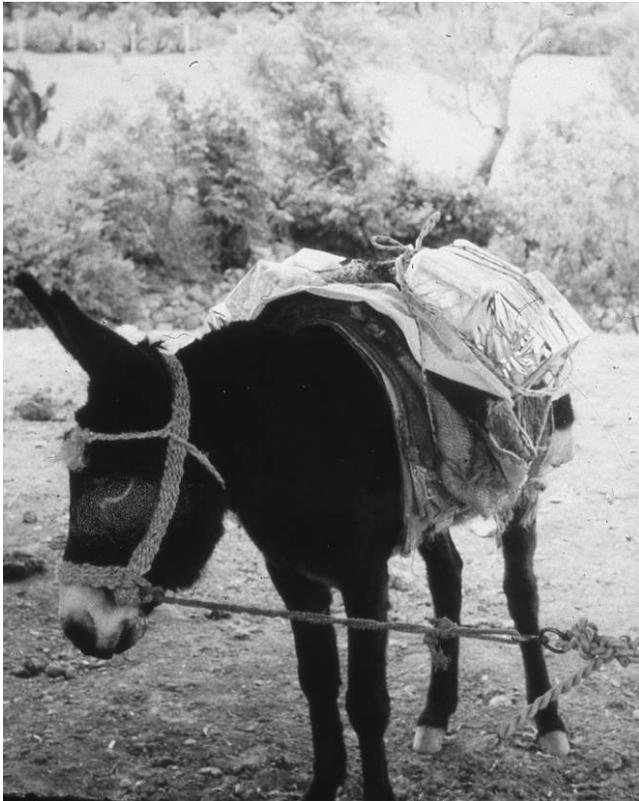


Figure 1. The King's Silver, 1997

Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, which runs for 2,600 km from the Spanish colonial capital of New Mexico near San Juan Pueblo to Mexico City (Jackson 2006). On the US side, the Camino Real is designated as a national historic trail by the National Park Service. The trail ran from Mexico City to Nueva Vizcaya (contemporary Chihuahua) by the end of the sixteenth century, and in 1598 the mine-owning Juan de Oñate led an expedition north from the silver-mining center of Zacatecas to what is now New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

The road on which my little house stood was part of the network called La Ruta de la Plata (the Silver Route) because silver from the mines of Zacatecas, Guanajuato, and San Luis Potosi was transported along this road, including the 20% tax imposed by the Spanish crown, the *quinto real* or Royal Fifth. At Mexico City, the silver was transported on yet another Camino Real that ran to the port of Veracruz, and from there it was shipped to Spain. I was told by the oldest resident and town historian that the richest family in Santa Rosa, which now owns the forestry concession for timber and charcoal, first made its money by robbing the donkeys of the silver as they passed through the town. Hence the game.

Silver created a road to carry it, and in the process it created and then linked all the places along its path. After independence from Spain and the shift of the nation's economy away from silver, this road fell into disrepair and many of the places along it became ghost towns. Some of these places are now resurrected as World Heritage sites and locations for adventure and heritage tourism, while others remain neglected or unrecognized.

The Camino Real system is a material, territorial instance of what is often known as a commodity chain (or at least the first part of one). And indeed, thinking about mining in terms of a commodity chain can tell us a lot. At the same time, I also seek to interrupt or divert the idea of a unidirectional arrow from production to consumption that is frequently assumed or implied in much of the classic literature on commodity chains. These (and I am a great admirer of many of them, such as Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* [1986] and Mimi Sheller's *Aluminum Dreams* [2014]) tell a very particular story with a beginning, middle, and end. Certainly, silver and gold are great protagonists in a story such as this.

This unidirectional narrative also plays a role in popular representations of commodity production, particularly those with progressive politics. The transformation of raw materials into finished products is frequently framed in terms of contrast—the glitter and the gloom of gold, the bitterness of sugar, the bright side and the dark side of aluminum, and so on. It's not that I disagree either with the truth of these representations or with the political leverage they can provide. But they have some unintended effects. They tend to place the value-making at the “production” end in terms of “nature” and “raw materials,” whereas the value-making that happens “further along the chain” is thought of as “value-added” and the result of human ingenuity, skill, or taste. Accounts such as these also restrict what counts as value-making as occurring within particular, already capitalized, institutionalized, and regulated structures. Fur-

thermore, they can tend toward an exclusive portrayal of miners and others affected by mining as suffering or abject. This depiction can mobilize empathy and moral indignation on behalf of these people, but often in ways that also flatten their rounded humanity and experiences (Beckett 2017; James 2010). In contrast, I focus on some of the ways in which values are not just passively available for exploitation, but actively and constantly made through social and material processes.

In recent years, anthropologists, along with other social theorists, have moved away from concepts such as structure, system, and chain in search of messier and more uneven metaphors of connectedness (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Discussions in anthropology now abound over anthropological knots, entanglements, assemblages, and meshes (Green 2014; Ingold 2008; Tsing 2015). These metaphors redistribute the energetics of social action into multiple centers, nodes, or tangles and they tend to privilege unevenness, contingency, pragmatics, immanence. This article takes the case of gold in El Cubo to nudge us toward these messier concepts of connectedness, not with the aim of negating the analytic power of these more linear models, but just to see what else can be seen by means of other conceptualizations. Rather than framing these gold-mining localities primarily or only as links in a chain from production to consumption and periphery to metropole, I explore them as points of intersection or entanglement in a web.

I also draw on another metaphor of connectedness and influence, Nancy Munn's *The Fame of Gawa* (1992), which describes how value is created through what she calls the "expansion of intersubjective spacetime" and also provides a possible alternative to commodity chains.<sup>2</sup> It is not especially surprising that the process of commodity production, circulation, and consumption creates social and material formations: places, people, practices. What I seek to specify is, that is how these formations can be seen as value-making in their own right. The commodity chain and its cousins outside of scholarship tell a story of the movement of value out of sites of production toward sites of consumption. Without ignoring this movement or its ethical and political ramifications, I seek to highlight ways in which value is stabilized and destabilized close to sites of production of even the rawest of raw commodities, and not just at sites of distribution or consumption.

In doing this, I mobilize a particular theorization of what value is and how it gets made. In earlier work (Ferry 2013), I have elaborated an idea of value-making as a two-tier social, material, and political process. In the first place, I see value as the politics of making meaningful difference: for instance, the difference between two pieces of gold of different degrees of purity, or two paintings, or two of any category of things. This part of my formulation is very much like Saussure's system of linguistic contrast, and it would be much too static if not for the second aspect, which I called the politics of making difference meaningful. That is, not all differences are equally meaningful—the difference between two so-called ordinary rocks may be less meaningful than that between two pieces of gold. And what differences are meaningful changes through and by means of politics (including the politics of both humans and nonhumans). One

example of this is the move toward transparency in commodities markets through certification systems so that mined commodities such as diamonds or gold can be certified as “conflict-free” or traced to a mine with a legal title. That is, there did not use to be any meaningful difference between gold from one mine and that from another (assuming the same degree of purity). The movement for certification systems can be seen as a political intervention that seeks to create a new axis of meaningful difference. Another example is in the rise in the 1980s of what William Roseberry (1996) called “yuppie coffees.” Before the emergence of niche marketing on the basis of a whole slew of new qualities (flavors, country of origin, method of production [e.g., “shade-grown”]), it could reasonably be said in the United States that “coffee was coffee.” The successful instatements of newly meaningful forms of difference allowed for a hugely expanded, diversified, and class-stratified market. One advantage of this way of looking at value is that it allows for the consideration of multiple forms of value within one framework (Searle 2016:14); another is that it allows us to see value as a constantly negotiated process not only over the relative value of particular things, but also what aspects of things are worth valuing. These are frequently heavily freighted ethical and political questions.

In the context of gold mining in Guanajuato in the 2010s, such questions include the well-being of towns from which gold is extracted, the locus of responsibility for that well-being, and the legitimacy of gold producers from within and outside the city and the country. In the town of El Cubo on Guanajuato’s outskirts, the site of one of Mexico’s richest gold mines, we can see how social compacts (and their ruptures), forms of extraction (and intrusion), and financial policies (and their failures) come together to create relatively durable projects of value-making. These are connected to gold’s path from production to consumption but are not entirely contained within that path, and indeed, in many cases they divert or depart from it.

The city of Guanajuato is one of the most famous colonial mining centers in the New World. Its apogee, in the late eighteenth century, took place after that of Zacatecas in the mid-eighteenth century and was punctuated by the spectacular bonanza of the Valenciana mine in 1768. According to the historian David Brading (1971), at the close of the eighteenth century Guanajuato was the leading producer of silver in the world, and its production of gold and silver equaled the world’s total production at the time. Much of this ore is found in the Veta Madre or Mother Lode, a 13-km-long vein system running northwest-southeast, with gold and silver embedded in a matrix of calcite and quartz. Many of the churches, plazas, and public buildings of the city were built at this time. The mines were closed during the War of Independence but were later reopened, with only indifferent success. The district revived at the end of the nineteenth century, and another swath of fine houses and other buildings was constructed in the southeastern part of the city, especially along the Paseo de la Presa.

This period ended with the outbreak of the revolution, and by the 1930s most foreign companies had left the zone. Mining continued, for the most part under Mexican ownership, until the 2000s. At this point, precious mineral markets began to rise, reaching all-time highs—with gold peaking at \$1900 per ounce in 2011. This bull market spurred extraction in Latin America and worldwide. This rise is driven in part

by the high prices (in turn driven by the global financial crisis and the perceptions of gold's behavior as hedge or haven. A hedge is an asset or asset class that moves in an inverse direction to another asset class—in this case, the stock market; a haven is an asset that retains its value in moments of financial crisis). Meanwhile, new technologies for gold processing have led to what Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert (2016) has called an invisible gold rush—the possibility of processing profitably at much lower ore grades. Open-pit mining techniques and heap leach processing with cyanide became desirable projects in the 2000s (though this has slowed somewhat in the past few years). Canada is a leader in mining worldwide, and Canadian companies are dominant in Latin America. For instance, according to the McGill Research Group on Canadian mining in Latin America, more than 75% of the active mining projects in Mexico in 2009–2010 were financed by Canadian capital.<sup>3</sup>

### EL CUBO

The town of El Cubo (Figure 2) is located at the southeast end of the Veta Madre, the silver vein that runs through Guanajuato. Mines to the southeast of the city are



Figure 2. El Cubo, Guanajuato, 2017

centered on the communities of Calderones, Rosa de Castillo, and Mineral del Cubo (generally known as El Cubo). The mine at El Cubo has the largest concentration of gold in the Guanajuato district but was not extensively explored until the nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as with many mines in Mexico, it was controlled by US companies. The relative isolation from the city of Guanajuato (only 7 miles away, but along a mountainous road and therefore several hours away on horseback) created the conditions for a highly insular community, bound to the mine by methods beyond wages, including debt, lack of other opportunities, and investment in the social life and infrastructure of the town, such as the institution of ritual co-parenthood known as *compadrazgo* (Mintz and Wolf 1950), painting the church, and repairing the school.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the superintendent of the mine at El Cubo was Irving Herr, from the United States. His sons Richard and Robert Herr wrote a memoir of their family's life from 1902 to 1932, which chronicles this patronal relationship. For instance, they recount the story of a serious accident in which a miner lost his leg:

Two days later three Mexican women, relatives of the injured man, came to see Irving in his office. José was going to be all right, but they had a petition to present to the *gerente*. Would he please arrange for the missing leg to be recovered so that they could give it a proper burial? (Herr and Herr 1999: 63–64).

If not, they said, he would not have his leg back once he got to heaven. Herr compromised with them by having the rock fall, beneath which the leg was trapped, blessed by the priest. The story is told with an eye to its quaintness, which I am not trying to reproduce here. But it also demonstrates a more paternalistic style typical of mining camps at the time. Indeed, in an article published in the US magazine *The Advance* on May 28, 1914, Irving Herr wrote of his workforce as representative of the peon class: “They are very much like children and we treat them as we would children” (quoted in Herr and Herr 1999:60).

At the same time, El Cubo has a history of rebellion. It was a center for Cristero activity in the 1920s,<sup>4</sup> and when I visited most recently, in 2017, one resident recalled stories from “*los señores*, when I was little” about the hangings of Cristero soldiers outside the mine's hacienda. In 1937 the town became famous in the history of the national miners' union when six miners were assassinated on the road between El Cubo and Guanajuato on their way to an organizing meeting. Their statues stand in front of the mining hacienda at El Cubo, and the anniversary of their murder—April 22—is celebrated nationwide. In the 1990s, among members of the Santa Fe silver mining cooperative, which operated mines in the northeastern part of Guanajuato, including some of the most famous mines of the colonial period (Ferry 2005), men from El Cubo had a reputation for being *bravo* (tough, wild) and *canijo* (difficult, hard to deal with). (I should note that I have never directly witnessed this, though El Cubo residents

sometimes have also described themselves—with a degree of pride—this way.) And as I describe below, it was the focus of a bitter nine-month strike in 2010–2011.

### PATRONAGE AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY—AN UNEASY FIT

For the final quarter of the twentieth century, the El Cubo mine was owned by Rafael Villagomez Hernández. Villagomez was a classic *cacique* with all the good and bad aspects implied in that term. His children became professionals in the city of Guanajuato, and his son Rafael ran as a political candidate for the Green Party in 2012. For the most part, people in the town remember his era with affection, often contrasting his regime to that of the Canadian companies that followed him. Many state that he “was concerned about the people,” that he “did everything for the town,” that he “was always helping us.” Of course, it is difficult to say how much of this is hindsight. However, in one interview with me in July 1997, an official of the miners’ local spoke of the general manager of El Cubo, named Rodríguez, in similar terms, suggesting a general sense of obligation in the company toward the town of El Cubo. Rodríguez “doesn’t want El Cubo [and other towns around it] to lose their population, so he gives jobs to older people doing other things, for instance planting thousands of trees, it’s very pretty.” Interestingly, two of the main complaints that residents of El Cubo have against the current company are that they don’t hire older workers and they don’t plant enough trees to replace the ones they cut down.

In 2004, Villagomez sold the surface holdings and concession rights to MexGold, which subsequently became a wholly owned subsidiary of Gammon Gold. During this time the number of mine accidents increased, which some attributed to the practices of miners, and others to overly long shifts and a lack of sufficient personnel to do the work safely. In 2009 the unionized miners at El Cubo began a 9-month strike over the failure to disburse the 10% profit shares required by Mexican law (the company claimed it was operating at a loss), eventually gaining most of their demands.<sup>5</sup> Gammon Gold changed its name to Aurico, perhaps to avoid the negative image it had acquired over the previous five years. In 2012 the holdings were purchased by the current owner, another Canadian company: Endeavour Silver. Endeavour also owns properties at the other end of the Veta Madre, near the town of La Luz. Endeavour and Great Panther are the two main companies currently operating in the Guanajuato district.

Endeavour Silver, as with nearly all mining companies these days, cultivates relations with the communities surrounding the mine through practices of CSR or Corporate Social Responsibility. They produce an annual sustainability report according to the voluntary principles set out in the Global Reporting Initiative ([www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org)), which is divided into economic, environmental, and social issues, with most of the activities that pertain to the company falling into the latter two categories.

The CSR regime has been written about extensively by anthropologists (Dolan and Rajak 2016; Rajak 2011; Welker 2014), but little has been written about the uneasy fit

between contemporary CSR and old-style patronage relations such as those that prevailed in El Cubo. Yet in Guanajuato certainly, and I would imagine any locality with a history of mining, the activities of corporations toward their “stakeholders” are seen in the context of older social compacts between mine owners and mine workers. In Latin America these compacts go back centuries and generate strong expectations rooted in concepts of moral economy. This history is frequently missed both in the scholarly literature and the actual practice of CSR.

Indeed, people who live near and work in the mines formerly owned by the Villagomez family (El Cubo) and, for that matter, the Santa Fe Cooperative (Rayas, Cata, and other mines now operated by Great Panther) constantly compare the interventions that the current companies make in their communities to earlier regimes, and they usually do so in ways that favor the past.

Residents of El Cubo also criticize the municipal government and state agencies for their lack of responsiveness and support. One resident opined (and I am inclined to agree) that El Cubo is caught in the middle—the municipal government tends not to take responsibility for the town’s infrastructure because much of that was formerly covered by Villagomez, while the current company only responds to the town’s demands in ways that are presentable to their shareholders, with little depth to or continuity in their actions. Although the company is less reviled than Gammon Gold/Aurico, many residents criticize the company’s treatment of its workers and commitment to the town’s welfare. The company is certainly aware of this. One Endeavour executive, asked about community relations, stated bluntly, “the people tolerate us”; her implication was that the people only barely tolerated the company.

Residents’ concerns and demands focus on labor and environmental issues. In addition to the two issues I mentioned above, they note the risk of flooding in the rainy season because of waste rock in the river (which is left over from earlier companies, but which the company has promised to clean up) and airborne contamination from the tailings dumps in the summer, among other things. Several residents pointed out that the gold that is part of their town is taken away and enriches others, with little of the benefit returning. One said, “*La mina tan rica y el pueblo tan jodido*” (“The mine so rich and the town so screwed”), thus framing the question of value in the very same contrastive terms as many of the scholars, journalists, and activists I described above.

### *Lupios*

“El Lupiaje”—when men enter mines in secret to take out ore, selling it to processors in the neighborhood—is long-standing in Guanajuato. It may be connected historically to the established right of miners in the district to a share of silver (known as the *partido*). This right was fiercely defended, and the attempt by mine owners to remove this privilege was one of the proximal causes of the regional rebellion that became the War of Independence from Spain (Hamnett 2002). It is also akin to other activities in mines in Latin America since the colonial period; Abercrombie (1996), for example, describes one incident from eighteenth-century Potosí.

Lupiaje and the protests against it raise questions of who really are the rightful owners of the silver and gold in the mines. This is especially so during those periods when the mine owners are not from Guanajuato. Lupios are also understandably more common when the price of gold and silver is high enough to make it worth the risk and costs of bribing watchmen, and so on. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the new period of Canadian dominance over Guanajuato's mines and historically high prices, the practice of lupiaje has grown tremendously and has become a major concern of mining companies in the district.

It has also diversified. Some lupios are locals, perhaps those who already work in a mine or have worked in one before, or perhaps not. They are concentrated in certain places, notably the neighborhood of Mellado in Guanajuato, in towns around La Luz, and in El Cubo. One person told me of a group of lupios near his house close to Mellado, mostly made up of young men who are experienced miners but do not wish to leave the city to work under contract in other mining regions in Durango, Coahuila, or Chihuahua (which many do). In part, he said, this was because they did not wish to undergo the mandatory drug testing required for these contracts, though he noted that these men used "just marijuana, nothing else."

Other squads of lupios are much larger, up to a hundred men, heavily armed. The groups have been operating for more than a decade. They are frequently from other cities and either have or are rumored to have connections to narcotrafficking. They are reported to have a shrine in Mellado (much as other crafts and occupations have a shrine, including narcotrafficking). Elia Mónica Morales Zárate, president of La Asociación de Ingenieros de Minas, Metalurgistas y Geólogos de México A.C., Distrito Guanajuato, laments this new breed of lupios, noting they "even put a want ad in the paper, '*se solicita lupios.*' Oh please. How shameless." The mining companies have severely cracked down on these people, bringing in heavily armed security forces. In 2014 two lupios were killed in the Rayas mine by security forces. The mining companies, and indeed many Guanajuatenses, support these efforts, seeing lupios as dangerous gangs invading the city.

Other observers, in particular those on the left who are opposed to or critical of the Canadian companies in Guanajuato, tend to see lupios as miners forced to enter illegally because of the closure of mines and the hiring of people from the outside. In one article published in the progressive media outlet *Zona Franca*, the reporter interviews several lupios, known only by their nicknames "Boots" and "the Mole." The Mole is quoted in the article as saying, "There are many people without jobs here in Guanajuato. What we are trying to do is support our families. The Canadians have no business to be here, they should go home."<sup>6</sup>

As in many mining conflicts, there is fierce debate over "people from here" and "people from outside"—not only Mexicans vs. Canadians but also Guanajuatenses vs. Mexicans from elsewhere. These groups are coded very differently, in moral terms, for residents, whereas those who work for mining companies tend to conflate the two groups, identifying all of them as organized criminal gangs and thugs.

The figure of the *lupio* also has a mythic dimension, linked to the unpopulated areas around Guanajuato, between towns such as El Cubo, Monte de San Nicolas, and Rosa de Castillo. These areas are punctured by old mine entrances, and *lupios* (I was told) camp at night or hide bags of ore-bearing rock to be collected the following day. They are also traversed by witches and ghosts. One of these ghosts, on the road between Guanajuato and El Cubo—the same road where the six men were killed on their way to a union meeting in 1937—was seen by one of my interviewees on several occasions, including the Day of the Dead—as a tall shrouded figure, descending the hill rapidly (his imagery seemed somewhat influenced by the Harry Potter movies or other images in popular culture). When he asked others if they had ever seen any spirits on that road, he was told of one, the ghost of a dead *lupio*, known as “el minero” or “el *lupio*.” In fact there are many bodies in and out of place in the mines around Guanajuato—dead bodies in the mines, bodies of legitimate miners and illegitimate *lupios*, and ghosts. Stories about *lupios*, and about ghosts, for that matter, are tightly entangled with questions of who is from Guanajuato and who is an outsider, and who has a legitimate claim on the riches upon which the city is built. Through these conflicts, human bodies and the substances of the mines are linked, and linked in turn to a meaningful difference between local and outsider (Figure 3).

#### *Fondo Minero*

Between the early 1990s and 2014, Mexico did not levy royalties on foreign mining companies, unlike most other countries. However, in 2014 they initiated a 7.5% tax



Figure 3. “Lupios rule/Made in Mexico” (Photo by and courtesy of Bernardo Monroy)

on the profits from mining, along with other taxes.<sup>7</sup> Eighty percent of these monies go to establish the Fondo para el Desarrollo Regional Sustentable de Estado y Municipios Mineros, known simply as the Fondo Minero, to be managed by states and municipalities where mining occurs. In 2014, this fund amounted to approximately 2,090 million pesos, and in 2015, more than 2,191 million pesos (\$110 million and \$115 million, respectively). These funds are intended to be used to build schools, improve roads, install lighting, improve sanitation, and build areas for recreation and sports.<sup>8</sup>

Implementation has been complicated. As of August 2017, the funds collected in 2014, 2015, and 2016 for Guanajuato and its municipalities that have mining still had not been spent on the infrastructural projects for which they were intended. In August 2017, one resident, a retired miner and shopkeeper, showed me the posts that had recently been placed for streetlights along El Cubo's main road, but he expressed skepticism about how much of the money would really go to the town and how much would be siphoned off by the government at the federal, state, and municipal levels. This skepticism was repeated by many with whom I spoke in El Cubo (and in other mining towns on the outskirts of Guanajuato).<sup>9</sup>

I do not intend here to determine whether there has been corruption in the management and disbursal of the Fondo Minero in Guanajuato. What stands out to me, rather, is the way in which the Fondo Minero as a financial form seeks to redirect some of the profits from gold and silver that are leaving the country back to the areas and even the municipalities where the mines are located and where miners live. Metaphorically speaking, it is the construction or attempted construction of offshoots of the contemporary iteration of the royal road from New Mexico to Mexico City and then on to Veracruz. Instead of the bandits ambushing the donkeys carrying the king's silver for the benefit of a few, or the "help" that caciques such as Villagomez gave to towns like El Cubo, this is an attempt (not necessarily successful, but an attempt) to routinize the enrichment of place in sites of production and not only sites of consumption or other points further along the "chain." It is an attempt to revalue the towns around Guanajuato in relation to other recipients of mining profits, such as the company, its shareholders, and the federal, state, or municipal governments.

## CONCLUSIONS

The extractive regime that has been operating in Latin America for the past 15 years has been more invisible and vastly more efficient than earlier waves. The twenty-first-century royal road seems like a super highway. The three areas I have discussed in this essay—debates over appropriate relations between the company and the town, the presence of *lupios* and ideologies surrounding them, and the proper distribution of the Fondo Minero—are instances of diverted and blocked paths, tangles and knots, denser networks, or a thicker mesh of interactions within this landscape of accelerated extraction.

At heart, all three cases I have discussed here concern what happens and what should happen to the places from which resources such as gold are extracted. In exploring these questions as they are being experienced in El Cubo, I have emphasized di-

vergence and entanglement over the single path of a commodity chain characteristic of some social science and public accounts of commodity extraction. This knottier perspective, allied to a more expansive theorization of value-making as “the politics of making meaningful difference and making differences meaningful” (Ferry 2013:18–20), allows us to see the three cases in a new light, as attempts to revalue places close to the mines and people with long-standing connections to those places. By doing this we can recognize the capacities of miners and others in mining communities to create and contest value in the intersections in entangled webs, rather than seeing them only as those left behind in the transfer of value along a commodity chain.

### NOTES

This essay was originally presented as the XLV *Journal of Anthropological Research* Distinguished Lecture. Funding for this research was provided by the Mandel Fund for Faculty Research and Norman Faculty Research Grant, Brandeis University. I am grateful to Les Field and Lawrence Straus for comments and support.

1. National Park Service, [https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/El\\_Camino\\_Real\\_de\\_Tierra\\_Adentro/History\\_and\\_Significance\\_of\\_El\\_Camino\\_Real\\_de\\_Tierra\\_Adentro.html](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/El_Camino_Real_de_Tierra_Adentro/History_and_Significance_of_El_Camino_Real_de_Tierra_Adentro.html), accessed November 3, 2017.

2. However, her model can project a formal purity that does not capture the messiness and contingency of social and material life reconceptualization of value. I might seek some other metaphor that, like Munn’s, locates movement and creativity within multiple centers, while also preserving some sense of unevenness—messier than a radio signal, clumpier than a crystal.

3. <http://micla.ca/countries/mexico/>, accessed November 24, 2017.

4. The Cristero War or “Cristiada” was a civil conflict in the center-west regions of Mexico from 1926 to 1929, in opposition to the anticlerical policies of the postrevolutionary Mexican government under President Plutarco Elias Calles (Meyer 2008).

5. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/02/25/estados/038n2est>, accessed November 24, 2017.

6. <http://zonafranca.mx/pirita-en-vez-de-oro-el-trabajo-diario-de-los-lupios/>, accessed November 25, 2017.

7. <https://www.gob.mx/sedatu/acciones-y-programas/fondo-minero-para-el-desarrollo-regional-sustentable>, accessed November 25, 2017.

8. <https://www.gob.mx/sedatu/acciones-y-programas/fondo-minero-para-el-desarrollo-regional-sustentable>, accessed November 23, 2018.

9. In September 2018, President-Elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced that he would shift the administration of the Fondo Minero to the Secretary of the Economy and would change its terms so that 100% of the funds would go to the communities, instead of only 80%, as was originally determined (<https://www.proceso.com.mx/549949/amlo-anuncia-programas-relacionados-con-la-industria-extractiva-y-el-fomento-economico>, accessed November 23, 2018).

## REFERENCES CITED

- Abercrombie, Thomas. 1996. Q'aqchas and La Plebe in rebellion: Carnival vs Lent in 18th-century Potosí. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 2(1):62–111.
- Brading, David A. 1971. *Miners and merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1763–1810*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beckett, Greg. 2017. A dog's life: Suffering humanitarianism in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. *American Anthropologist* 119(1):35–45.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1988. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Dolan, Catherine, and Dinah Rajak. 2016. "Introduction: Towards an anthropology of corporate social responsibility," in *The anthropology of corporate social responsibility*. Edited by Catherine Dolan and Dinah Rajak, pp. 1–28. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Ferry, Elizabeth Emma. 2005. *Not ours alone: Patrimony, value and collectivity in contemporary Mexico*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2013. *Minerals, collecting, and value across the U.S.-Mexican border*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Green, Sarah. 2014. Anthropological knots: Conditions of possibilities and interventions. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4(3):1–21.
- Hamnett, Brian R. 2002. *Roots of insurgency: Mexican regions, 1750–1824*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herr, Robert Woodmansee, and Richard Herr. 1999. *An American family in the Mexican revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ingold, Tim. 2008. "When ANT meets SPIDER: Social theory for arthropods," in *Material agency: Towards a non-anthropocentric approach*. Edited by Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, pp. 209–15. New York: Springer US.
- Jackson, Hal E. 2006. *Following the Royal Road: A guide to the historic Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*. Albuquerque: UNM Press.
- James, Erica. 2010. *Democratic insecurities: Violence, trauma, and intervention in Haiti*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Meyer, Jean A. 2008. *The Cristero rebellion: The Mexican people between church and state, 1926–1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mintz, Sidney W. 1986. *Sweetness and power: The place of sugar in modern history*. New York: Penguin.
- Mintz, Sidney W., and Eric R. Wolf. 1950. An analysis of ritual co-parenthood (*compadrazgo*). *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 6(4):341–68.
- Munn, Nancy D. 1992. *The fame of Gawa: A symbolic study of value transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) society*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Roseberry, William. 1996. The rise of yuppie coffees and the reimagination of class in the United States. *American Anthropologist* 98(4):762–75.
- Rajak, Dinah. 2011. *In good company: An anatomy of corporate social responsibility*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Searle, Llerena G. 2016. *Landscapes of accumulation: Real estate and the neoliberal imagination in contemporary India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2014. *Aluminum dreams: The making of light modernity*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Studnicki-Gizbert, Daviken. 2016. Canadian mining in Latin America (1990 to present): A provisional history. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Latino-américaines et Caraïbes* 41(1):95–113.
- Tsing, Anna L. 2015. *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Welker, Marina. 2014. *Enacting the corporation: An American mining firm in post-authoritarian Indonesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.