



Original Article

Jobs and kindness: W.E. Rudolph's role in the shaping of perceptions of mining company-indigenous community relations in the Atacama Desert, Chile



Anita Carrasco*

Luther College, Department of Anthropology, 700 College Drive, Decorah, IA 52101, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 October 2014

Received in revised form 26 November 2014

Available online 26 December 2014

Keywords:

Mining company

Indigenous community

Codelco

Anaconda

Chile

ABSTRACT

American capitalist interests in the Atacama Desert can be traced back to the early 20th century when Anaconda Mining Company acquired the mining operation of Chuquicamata in northern Chile, by then already the world's largest open-pit copper mine. Doing fieldwork in this same area, I heard stories from several elder villagers about an American engineer from Anaconda, a very kind "gringo" in their own words, that unlike other white people, remembered their names, asked them about their lives, and loved to take pictures. Doing research I found that one of the company's chief engineers in charge of exploring for water for mining operations, William E. Rudolph, extensively photographed the neighboring indigenous peoples' environment and villages, wrote several survey reports exploring water and had written several papers for the American Geographical Society Review. Introducing the concept of 'moral identity', this paper explores how the humanitarian actions undertaken by individuals like William Edward Rudolph shaped the perceptions and expectations about mining expressed in the social memory of indigenous peoples in the Atacama Desert.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

The obligations of one man are frequently the expectations of another man.

Erving Goffman (1956)

1. Introduction

In Northern Chile, mining company-indigenous community relations have not been exempt from corporate policies that cover various areas under the spectrum of social responsibility (hereafter, 'CSR'). These are typically, although not exclusively, development policies. They must be displayed in the communities around the company's mining operations (Rajak, 2009) if companies are to achieve what some chief executive officers (hereafter, 'CEOs') refer to as 'buying a social license to operate' (Interview, Calama 2007).

The CSR policies adopted by mining companies in Northern Chile promote an important discursive technique that distinguishes between 'old mining' and 'new mining': a shift in paradigm whereby companies went from ignoring communities, to including

them as stakeholders or actors with an influence that is now 'fully acknowledged' (Trebeck, 2007; Carrasco, 2010, 2011). This discourse has been described as being constituted by a dichotomist language that defines 'old mining' as that which destroyed the environment, had minimal industrial security standards, and ignored the needs of local communities. In contrast, 'new mining' is defined as that which is socially and environmentally responsible and, above all, has the technology that allows for the mitigation of environmental risks (Bebbington et al., 2008: 899). The agenda underpinning the discourse of new mining aims to conceal harm and neutralize critique. Kirsch (2010) discusses the ways in which industry promotes itself as practicing 'sustainable mining', by introducing the concept of 'corporate oxymoron' to understand the inherent contradictions with such a combination of words.

In the context of the 'new' ethics publicized by mining corporations about their relationship with communities and the environment, it is interesting to explore the perception that local communities have about mining. In previous ethnographic research, I have studied how mining company-community relations in Northern Chile can be understood through: (a) the perceptions that local indigenous peoples called *atacameños* hold of the social and environmental impacts of mining; (b) the social memory of *atacameños* that establishes a strong contrast between

* Tel.: +1 5204618613.

E-mail address: carran02@luther.edu

the times when the mines were owned by North American capitals and contemporary mining in the hands of the Chilean state; and (c) formal economic contracts in the form of water lease agreements between indigenous communities and corporations (Carrasco, 2014). This study complements my previous research by focusing specifically on the social memory of the relationship between mining and communities in more detail. I pay special attention to the stories told by the villagers of Toconce in the Loa River basin of Northern Chile. I point out the existing contrast between a negative image of contemporary mining on the one hand, with a nostalgic and positive remembrance of the historical presence of mining in the times that the industry was owned by North American Capitalists, on the other hand.¹

The expectations around the behavior of others in relation to us are not built in a vacuum; they are strongly influenced by the moral identity that is attributed to the 'other' with which one establishes a relationship. Drawing from previous research (Carrasco, 2014), I define moral identity as a group of positive and negative characteristics attributed to an individual, a group, or an institution. These characteristics are rarely backed up by empirical evidence; on the contrary, they are largely constituted by social prejudice. In theory, there can exist a socially and environmentally responsible mining company that will have a hard time convincing society that their behavior is not representative of the moral identity that Chilean society assigns to mining corporations: as polluting and socially irresponsible entities (Yañez y Molina 2008; Larraín y Poo 2010).

On the other hand, rural indigenous communities are generally given a moral identity that is essentially positive because of perceptions of their harmonic relationship with nature (Hames, 2007). In the case of Chile, indigenous peoples' moral identity has not always been the same. Before the publication of the Indigenous Law of 1993, there was a denial of indigenous presence in Chile (Gundermann, 2000), and being indigenous was associated with negative characteristics such as backwardness and ignorance (Bengoa, 2000). For legal recognition purposes, all of the indigenous populations that lived in the Atacama were labeled '*atacameños*' under Chile's 1993 indigenous Law. The label '*atacameño*', therefore, is neither original nor representative of a homogenous identity. However, indigenous peoples in the region have since appropriated the label and now refer to themselves as '*atacameños*' when asked about their ethnic identity.

Moral identity is not at all a stable category. It changes and is affected by social and historical events that transform the social prejudices and labels that are imposed on individuals, groups and institutions. The concept of moral identity acquires meaning only in the context of the establishment of a relationship between two or more social entities (individuals, groups or institutions). This paper will explore how the moral identity of a mining corporation was transformed with its transition from being the American-owned mining Anaconda Company to the Chilean-owned mining company CODELCO.

Anaconda Company was one of the largest mining corporations in the United States, producing copper, aluminum, silver and uranium. In 1882, an Irish immigrant by the name of Marcus Daly, along with George Hearst, built the first mine and smelter owned by Anaconda in Butte, Montana. Anaconda grew to the point of becoming the largest copper producer in the world. In 1914, it started to purchase foreign companies. In 1929, it became the owner of Chuquibambata, one of the most productive mines in the

world. The people indigenous to the rural villages of Atacama refer to this company as 'La Chiléx' or Chile Exploration Company, the local names given to Anaconda. In 1971, the elected socialist president Salvador Allende, in his plan for nationalization of copper production, constitutionally expropriated the mines in the hands of Anaconda and created the National Copper Corporation (CODELCO).

By exploring both the social memories of natives from the rural village of Toconce in Atacama and the unpublished reports and personal diaries left by William E. Rudolph (1956a, 1956b, 1955b, 1954, 1928), this paper will provide an understanding of why *atacameños* remember Anaconda positively and why their negative perceptions are almost exclusively connected with CODELCO. One would expect that herdsman whose lives were transformed by the extraction of water executed by Anaconda during the first half of the 20th century would generate a negative opinion about this company. The purpose of this paper is to understand why that is not the case.

2. The *gringos* were good

Toconce is located 86 km east of Calama at an altitude of 3350 m above sea level. Most of the population is composed of small-scale farmers who utilize cultivation terraces of pre-Columbian origin. Despite the impacts of water extraction for the mining industry, these farmers still cultivate corn, potatoes, broad beans, and legumes and have home vegetable gardens. Some of them are also herders and have small chicken and rabbit farms. Community members claim that until the 1950s, Toconce had a population of approximately three hundred people. Currently, it has a population of 60 people who retain cultural and linguistic influences from their Quechua origins. They attribute a lack of water to the dramatic depopulation of their village.

In the past, agricultural and herding activities were much more intensive than what can be observed these days (Bähr, 1985). Toconceños counted on the availability of high-quality water sources and extensive pasturelands, the most famous being *Inacaliri*, a zone heavily impacted by the pipeline projects, described in the next section of the paper. As Elena Mendoza, a Toconceña born in 1938, recalled:

When I was a little girl, maybe 6 years old, I was already pasturing my parent's animals. Back then there was plenty of water flowing through the canal. Any farmer could water their crops without problems because there was water to spare. There was no need to have an irrigation shift system because the water flowing through the river was all for Toconce until ESSAN (Empresa de Servicios Sanitarios de Antofagasta, S.A.) came and took it from us. Today, from Monday to Thursday, farmers from the lower sector irrigate their crops. From Friday to Sunday, it's the turn of those farmers who live in the upper sector of Toconce, like me. [Elena Mendoza, Toconce, 2007]

Irrigation is carried out using a water uptake valve connected to the matrix pipe belonging to the water company, Aguas Antofagasta S.A. (formerly ESSAN). This uptake produces a flow of 25 l/s. However, in 2004 Toconce was able to recover 100 l/s of water rights that were in the hands of the water company. The community had lost their water to this company back in 1967, and the consequences for agriculture quickly became evident. Irrigation of the terraces was notoriously reduced, and the sustainability of their agriculture collapsed.

In the 1990s, as part of the Chilean state Plan of Regularization of Indigenous Water Titles (Cuadra, 2000), led by the National Corporation of Indigenous Affairs (CONADI), under the third article of the indigenous Law 19.253 of 1993, the state granted titles to a total of 100 l/s of surface water to the village of Toconce. After an

¹ For a detailed ethnographic study of the relationships between mining and indigenous communities in Atacama, see the PhD dissertation: *One World, Many Ethics: The Politics of Mining and Indigenous Peoples in Atacama*. School of Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson. 2011.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1047501>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1047501>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)