



Original Article

The co-constitution of neoliberalism, extractive industries, and indigeneity: Anti-mining protests in Puno, Peru



Emma McDonell*

Department of Anthropology, Indiana University, 701 E. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47405, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 July 2014

Received in revised form 15 October 2014

Available online 7 November 2014

Keywords:

Peru

Puno

Extractive industries

Indigenous

Protest

Mining

ABSTRACT

In June 2011, over 25,000 protesters congregated in Puno, Peru to demonstrate against a recent mining concession to a multinational mining corporation. Protesters employed an 'eco-ethno' rhetoric that centered around the potential for the mine to contaminate local water sources and made explicit their indigenous identity. The mobilizations eventually provoked the central government to revoke of the mining license and temporary halted all new extractive industry projects in the Puno region. The Puno protests present a case study to explore the impacts of neoliberal economic policies on indigenous peoples, the factors contributing to the emergence of a national indigenous movement in a country where previously ethnic activism was absent, and the utility of eco-ethno narratives for indigenous movements. The paper is composed of three main sections and arguments: (1) that while overall the acceleration of extractive industry investment caused by neoliberal policies threatens indigenous livelihoods, international governance structures and communication technology provide important new methods for indigenous peoples to secure international allies and legal support (2) that an indigenous movement centered around opposing resource extraction is emerging in the Peruvian Andes (3) that the eco-ethno narratives that won Amazonian indigenous peoples first-world environmentalist allies may not be successful in the Andes, but that a different variant of ecological rhetoric has proved useful in challenging state policies.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In May 2011, 25,000 protesters congregated in Puno, Peru to demonstrate against the Canadian Bear Creek Mining Company's plans to erect a 5400 hectare open-pit silver mine in Chicuito, a province in southern highland region of Puno, adjacent to Lake Titikaka, and alongside Peru's border with Bolivia. Local communities were not informed when the federal government discreetly overrode a constitutional ban on mineral concessions within 30 km of national borders to transfer mineral rights to Bear Creek in 2007.¹ Yet, as plans for the mine materialized and became public over the next three years, fears of water contamination grew and resentment of the lack of community consultation escalated,

culminating in the largest mining conflict in the Puno region in recent history.

The protesters, most of whom identified as indigenous Aymara, closed down the Desaguadero border crossing and blockaded all entrances and exits to the city. Businesses closed, no cars ran on the streets, and the police force retreated. Marching through Puno's streets day and night, they carried banners reading "Viva la lucha Aymara" (Live the Aymara fight) and "Agua si, mina no," (Water yes, mine no) while chanting "Humala, Keiko, la misma cochinerá" (Humala, Keiko, the same pig, in reference to the candidates in the upcoming presidential election). "We are engaging in a much more radical form of protest. Puno is under siege and we ask the government to solve the problem now," declared Walter Aduviri, head of the Natural Resources Defense Front of the Southern Zone of Puno (*Frente de Defensa de los Recursos Naturales de la Zona Sur de Puno*; FDRNZP), the Aymara organization that led the protests ("Perú: se agrava protesta antiminerá en la frontera con Bolivia, 2011"). In late-May, Quechua anti-mining organizations joined in solidarity and protests intensified, culminating in the sacking and burning of multiple federal government offices in Puno. On May 24,

* Tel.: +1 707 694 9082.

E-mail address: ekmcdone@indiana.edu

¹ "Decreto Supremo" (Supreme Decree) allows the executive powers to override legislative process for needs in the "national interest" that are immediate and pressing. The sale of the Santa Ana silver deposit rights to Bear Creek occurred in *Decreto Supremo 083-2007*.

President Alan García declared the situation a “national emergency,” thereby authorizing military intervention and suspension of the protesters’ civil rights. On June 26, after seven weeks of protests, police shot and killed six demonstrators attempting to take control of the nearby Juliaca Airport (Perú 21 2011; CNN Wire Staff, 2011a,b). Later that day, President Alan García’s cabinet gave in, revoking Bear Creek’s license and enacting a three-year moratorium on mining licenses in the Puno Department.

While the threat of water contamination was a central concern for protesters, they invoked broader claims about the nature of indigenous citizenship and livelihood rights. In a nation supposedly characterized by a “peculiar absence” of indigenous activism, the Santa Ana protests present evidence of a burgeoning pan-ethnic indigenous movement directly linked to neoliberal restructuring, and corresponding increases in extractive industries activity.

This paper draws on media reports, email correspondences of Puno residents, and first-hand experience in during the protest, with the aim of situating the Puno conflict within an emergent indigenous movement. I argue that the nascent movement, and its explicit organization around indigeneity, is related to shifts in Peru’s political economy and maturation of international indigenous rights discourses, both of which are linked to national and global-level neoliberal restructuring, respectively. This coupled anti-mining/indigenous movement can be seen as a neoliberal-era Polanyian “double movement,” a reaction to usurpation and commodification of natural resources due to increases in extractive industries activity made possible by market deregulation (Inayatullah and Blaney, 1999; Polanyi, 1944). Yet, perhaps most interesting is not the mobilization itself, but its organization around indigenous, as opposed to class, identities. The Puno protests illuminate not just the impacts of neoliberalism on “indigenous peoples,” but also the complex relationships between neoliberalism and indigenous *identification* itself.

The Puno case also shows that while neoliberal economic policies threaten rural livelihoods, new protections for people identifying as indigenous are institutionalized in international human rights law; and, that multicultural state policies encourage certain forms indigenous identification. We see that neoliberalism is not *impacting* people who are already “naturally” “indigenous,” but rather that the processes of neoliberal restructuring and indigenous identification are intertwined in complex ways. The violent repression enacted by the state in the Santa Ana protests demonstrates the contingency of indigeneity as states aim to discipline which types of indigenous politics and expressions are “legitimate.” Last, I compare the Andean indigenous movement to nearby Amazonian struggles to show that the ethno-ecological rhetoric employed by Puno protesters is distinct, and while “indigeneity” is considered a universal category, the ways groups draw upon and use this identification is situated and particular.

With the fastest growing economy in South America, the highest production of gold, silver, zinc, lead, and tin in Latin America, and by some estimates the second largest indigenous population in Latin America, Peru presents an exceptional site to examine relationships between indigenous identity politics, extractive industries, and neoliberal restructuring (IndexMundi, 2013; IWGIA, 2006).² The Puno Department in particular can be seen as a distillation of interactions between extractive industries investment and indigeneity. With 1274 *comunidades campesinas*,

the Puno Department is home to 22.43% of the nation’s *comunidades campesinas* (INEI, 1994).³ While the vast majority of campesinos in Peru identify as Quechua, the country is also home to a small population of Aymara, an ethnic group comprising an estimated one-third of Bolivia’s population. The Aymara are concentrated in southern Peru, and Puno is home to approximately 300,000 Aymara, about 67% of the nation’s total (INEI, 2012). As the Aymara were never conquered by the Inca, they speak their own language and consider themselves distinct from the Quechua even as they overlap in territories. While many Aymara are living in cities and employed in myriad industries, the majority who live in Chicuito practice agricultural livelihoods centered around farming, fishing, and alpaca herding and thus depend on access to fertile farmlands, freshwater from Lake Titicaca, and open spaces for llama herding.

2. Background and context: the protests overview

The Peruvian Government sold the rights to the Santa Ana silver deposit to the Vancouver-based Bear Creek Mining Corporation in 2007 (“Decreto Supremo-083,” 2007). Utilizing a *Decreto Supremo*, President García overrode the Peruvian constitution’s stipulation that barred foreign businesses from owning resource or land rights within 50 km of a border, arguing that the sale was in the “public’s interest” (Molleda, 2011).⁴ Bear Creek planned to erect the mine atop part of what was previously the *Reserva Aymara Lupaca*, a conservation area where a small population of alpaca herders resided (Mincetur, 2007). The mine would extract 47.4 million ounces of silver over an 11-year period, yielding an estimated US\$173 million in earnings over the course of the mine’s lifetime (Bear Creek Corporation, 2011). Construction was scheduled to start in late 2011 with operations beginning in 2012.

In early 2011, tensions rose in Puno as multiple battles between local people and the national government erupted around extractive projects. While residents of the Azangaro District had been calling for the restoration of the Ramis River since 2003 which no longer supported fish populations due to contamination from illegal gold mining, in March 2011, the community renewed its demands. Later that month, 2000 southern Puno residents called for the regional president, Mauricio Rodríguez, to declare Puno an agricultural area, making it off limits to mining (“Puno: Piden cambio del presidente de la mesa de trabajo sobre minería,” 2011; “Vuelve la calma tras protestas antimineras en Perú,” 2011).

The Santa Ana protests began May 9th when approximately 100 demonstrators blocked the Desaguadero border crossing in response to a meeting the day before between the regional president and the Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines (MEM) in which Bear Creek’s Environmental Impact Assessment was rejected (MEM, 2011). The protests were originally led by the predominately Aymara FDRNZP, but in mid-May, the Quechua-dominated organization, *Confederación Nacional de Comunidades del Perú Afectadas por la Minería* (National Confederation of Peruvian Communities Affected by Mining; CONACAMI), joined the protests, greatly increasing the size, transforming an Aymara struggle into an indigenous rights issue.

The protests began with two main objectives directed at the national government: a repeal of the sale of the mining rights to Bear Creek, and cancelation of other extractive activity in the Puno Department (Achtenberg, 2011a,b; “Vuelve la calma tras protestas antimineras en Perú,” 2011). In addition to concerns about water pollution, protesters argued that local people were not consulted about the Santa Ana project, a violation of the International Labor Organization’s Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

² The criteria used by the national census defines an indigenous person as if the head of the household or the head’s spouse had a non-Spanish, non-foreign mother tongue. Other criterion yield drastically different figures, as high as 47% of Peru’s population (OIT, 1999).

³ The legal designation *campesino* emerged in the Velasco-era Agrarian Reforms and refers to someone living in a communal landholding. While *campesino* may be seen as equivalent to peasant, many *campesinos* also identify with an ethnic group.

⁴ *Decreto Supremo* is a special executive power to override the constitution, or enact laws in special circumstances.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1047523>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1047523>

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