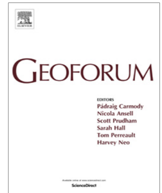
Geoforum 62 (2015) 13–23

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geoforum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum



Grassroots scalar politics: Insights from peasant water struggles in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Andes

Jaime Hoogesteger *, Andres Verzijl

Water Resources Management Group, Wageningen University, Droevendaalsesteeg 3a, 6708 PB Wageningen, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 22 October 2014
Received in revised form 10 March 2015

Keywords:
Water struggles
Grassroots struggles
Scalar politics
Peru
Ecuador
Andes

ABSTRACT

Based on insights from peasant and indigenous communities' struggles for water in Andean Peru and Ecuador, in this article we argue that the defense of grassroots interests -and with it the advancement of more equitable governance- greatly hinges on the capacity of these groups to engage in *grassroots scalar politics*. With increasing pressure on water resources in the Andes, the access to water of many rural peasant and indigenous communities is being threatened. The growing realization that their access to water and related interests are embedded in broader regional and national politics, legal frameworks and water policies, has led many communities and peasant water user associations to engage in networks and create alliances with other water users, governmental institutions and non-governmental actors. To better understand these (and other) grassroots struggles and strategies, in this contribution we develop the concept of *grassroots scalar politics*, which we use as a lens to analyze two case studies. In Ecuador we present how water users of the province of Chimborazo have defended their interests through the consolidation of the Provincial Water Users Associations' Federation Interjuntas-Chimborazo and its networks. Then we focus on how with the support of Interjuntas-Chimborazo the Water Users Association of the Chambo irrigation system defended their historical water allocation. In Peru we analyze the conformation and achievements of the federative Water Users Association of Ayacucho (JUDRA) and present how the community of Ccharhuancho in the region of Huancavelica, managed to defend its waters and territory against the coastal irrigation sector of Ica.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

In the Andes access to water for irrigation and other uses is and has for centuries been the 'life stream' of rural livelihoods and related Andean societies (Zimmerer, 1995). In this context, local autonomy, collective action and local water rights systems often materialize and sustain the infrastructure and management practices that enable individuals to access water 'though the collective' (Beccar et al., 2002; Trawick, 2001b). Although these local water use spaces exist 'through the collective', they have never stood in isolation from the broader context. The relationships and engagement of local communities with governmental agencies such as the ordinances of the Spanish Crown and later the municipalities, regional and national governments of the sovereign nation states; as well as with powerful private actors such as landlords (*hacendados*) and mining companies have existed for centuries (see Stern, 1992). More recently, with mounting pressure on water resources and the increasing realization that their access to water and related water rights are embedded in broader regional and national politics, legal frameworks and water policies, communities have become increasingly aware that to defend their access to water they have to create new networks and alliances that enable them to overcome their spatial constraints to agency (Boelens, 2008; Boelens et al., 2010; Hoogesteger, 2013b). In this article we argue that although the creation of networks and alliances through which Andean communities 'up-scale' their struggles (cf. Fox, 1996; Perreault, 2003a) is a fundamental cornerstone for the development of political agency, scale in itself is not the focus of grassroots struggles; rather it is a means through which interests, autonomy, rights, voice and territories are protected.

Andean rural communities continuously struggle for their (own forms of) development and political representation (Bebbington and Perreault, 1999; García, 2005; Yashar, 2005). Despite the unity that underlies community struggles, communities are internally fraught with differences and conflicts that determine how their struggles are shaped through, what Colloredo-Mansfield (2009) terms 'agonistic unity'; conceptualized as the process of managing

* Corresponding author at: Water Resources Management Group, Wageningen University, PO Box 47, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands.

E-mail addresses: jaime.hoogesteger@wur.nl (J. Hoogesteger), andres.verzijl@wur.nl (A. Verzijl).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.03.013
0016-7185/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

differences, negotiating disputes and constructing a community unit that mobilizes collective action. This making of community is greatly informed by strategies of organization and control which include the establishment of local councils, lists for tracking participation in communal labor and marking jurisdictional lines ('vernacular statecraft') (see Colloredo-Mansfield, 2009; Cervone, 2012). Water is an important axis around which community and supra-community collaboration is crafted. Beyond the basic human water needs, for many peasant communities[1] irrigation forms the basis for agricultural production as it provides protection against droughts, longer growing seasons and the possibility to produce high yielding crops and fodder. Therefore, where technically feasible, communities have constructed, operated and maintained irrigation systems for decades and sometimes centuries[2] (Trawick, 2001a; Zimmerer, 1995, 2000). Irrigation management which is based on collective action, is organized through the community or through 'separate' legally constituted 'water users associations' that unite the users of the system. The users are mostly community members; many of which identify as peasant and/or peasant-indigenous based on kinship or community membership (Yashar, 2005). Because of their size, many irrigation systems cross (and have members from) different communities. Their associations often have internal conflicts because of differences in class, ethnicity, religion, political identity or access to water (Bolin, 1990; Hoogesteger, 2013a,b). At the same time through 'agonistic unity' and 'vernacular statecraft' a unity is created that mobilizes collective action for defending and managing the irrigation system and engaging with external actors (Boelens, 2009, 2014; Boelens et al., 2009; Gelles, 2000; Guillet, 1992; Hoogesteger, 2015a). Based on these notions, in this contribution we analyze how water users in the rural Andes defend their water allocations and rights to voice and decision making by up-scaling their struggles through networking strategies and the consolidation of federations that claim broader spatial and social reaches (Assies, 2003; Bebbington et al., 2010; Boelens et al., 2010; Perreault, 2008). To do so we established two central questions. First, how do peasant water users engage with multiple and differently scaled actors and networks to defend their waters and right to voice in decision making? Second, in what ways does a focus on scale help to understand these grassroots struggles?

We answer these questions based on case studies of (1) the Provincial Water Users Federation of the province of Chimborazo (Interjuntas) and the fight of one of its member organizations the Water Users Association of the Chambo-Guano irrigation system in the Central Ecuadorian Andes; and (2) the Water Users Association of Ayacucho (JUDRA) in the Central Andean regions of Ayacucho and Huancavelica, in particular of the community of Ccarhuancho, Huancavelica. We analyze these cases through a perspective of *grassroots scalar politics* which builds on conceptions proposed by MacKinnon (2011). Based on these case studies, we argue that a focus on *grassroots scalar politics* offers a valuable lens to better understand how grassroots organizations and movements (in the studied cases water users) engage at different spatial scales to defend their interests, autonomy, rights and voice.

The Peruvian and Ecuadorian Highlands form an interesting region to study peasant and indigenous water users engagements in scalar politics. In the last seven decades, in both countries peasant movements and revolts (1950–1960s) were taken over by top-down revolutionary regimes (1970s) that prescribed bureaucratic peasant cooperatives and water user associations. This process took place at the same time and in somewhat similar terms in both countries. Water property was first privatized and then nationalized in the same decade, and both countries shared similar Water Laws (Peru 1969 and Ecuador 1972) until very recently when both countries enacted new water laws (Peru 2009 and Ecuador 2014 based on the 2008 Constitution) (see Harris and Roa-García, 2013; Roa-García et al., 2013). In both countries, but especially in Peru, indigenous cultural identity was officially replaced by a class-based denomination that re-catalogued Indians as peasants and granted these political incorporation and access to resources through the state and union organizations (Yashar, 2005; Pallares, 2007). Indigenous resistance movements which have historically been much stronger in Ecuador have given rise to great divergence (Cervone, 2012; García, 2005). In Ecuador, the 1990s were characterized by economic recession, political turmoil and the growth of indigenous and civil society organizations that have asserted their claims vis-à-vis the state through both electoral politics and popular mobilization (see Albo, 2002; Baud, 2006; CONAIE, 1996). In contrast, in Peru, violent terror (Shining Path) and military counter-force crushed peasant federative initiatives while strengthening the central role of the state (Stern, 1998; Yashar, 2005). In this context, indigenous movements have only recently gained some political space. These factors, combined with the ways in which ethnicity is enacted in Peru (Garcia and Lucero, 2004), have resulted in more localized and temporary social upheavals. Despite these differences, a common denominator of rural communities in both countries (whether they identify as peasant, indigenous or peasant-indigenous) is the sustained struggle for water and local autonomy in its management (Andolina et al., 2009; Clark and Becker, 2007; Yashar, 2005).

The article is based on the authors' field work between 2008 and 2013. Data collection consisted of semi-structured and open interviews with community members, leaders of the studied associations, politicians and personnel of non-governmental organizations concerned with supporting local initiatives; assistance to meetings, popular protests and negotiations; field observations and participant observation in the studied organizations. Based on the triangulation of the collected data, the institutional histories and achievements of the studied organizations were reconstructed and analyzed through the lens of grassroots scalar politics. After this introduction, in the following section we briefly discuss the literature on scale and scalar politics and present how the concept *grassroots scalar politics* contributes to this discussion. In sections three and four we present the case studies of respectively Ecuador and Peru to illustrate our argument. In section five we retake the two central questions that inform this article's inquiry as a means of conclusion.

Grassroots scalar politics

The concept of geographical scale has received much attention in the social sciences as a background in which human (inter)actions take place. In the most elemental sense scale is a 'socio-spatial level of analysis' used to understand the articulation of the organizing elements of spatial processes (Perreault, 2003b:98). Within human geography the concept of scale has been used for 'understanding the processes that shape and constitute social practices at different levels of analysis' (Marston, 2000:220). The central questions that drive the inquiries into the production of scale are first, to get a better understanding of how and why scale, as expressed through the different apparently fixed nested series of levels (the body, the local, the regional, the national and the global), matters for social, political and environmental processes. Second, how do these scales constrain the agency of 'local' actors

[1] Though most rural communities identify as 'peasant' and agriculture is important for the formation of a peasant identity, for many of its members agriculture is not the mainstay of their livelihoods.

[2] Many irrigation systems are multi-purpose systems that simultaneously service domestic water supply, livestock and irrigation needs. Household water supply systems (both rural and urban) have also been constructed, operated and maintained by communities and/or water councils (see for instance Armijos and Walnycki, 2014).

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073566

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/5073566

Daneshyari.com