



The ethno-environmental fix and its limits: Indigenous land titling and the production of not-quite-neoliberal natures in Bolivia



Penelope Anthias*, Sarah A. Radcliffe

Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, Downing Place, Cambridge CB2 3EN, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 24 July 2013

Keywords:

Bolivia
TCOs
Indigenous peoples
Development
Extractive industry
Land titling

ABSTRACT

During the 1980s and 1990s, an era of neoliberal reform, global development institutions like the World Bank began promoting and financing the collective titling of indigenous territories. Extending and linking existing discussions of neoliberal multiculturalism and neoliberal natures, this paper interrogates indigenous land rights as a type of “ethno-environmental fix”, designed to synergise protection of vulnerable populations and highly-valued natures from the destructive effects of markets, in an era of multiple countermovements. Using the example of the titling of TCOs (Original Communal Lands) in Bolivia, the paper explores how governmental aspirations for indigenous territories unravelled in practice, producing hybrid, double-edged and “not-quite-neoliberal” spaces – spaces which have, paradoxically, emerged as key sites for the construction of more radical indigenous projects.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Recent literature in geography on “neoliberal natures” has helped to move us beyond oversimplified understandings of neoliberalism, drawing attention to the variegated practices for governing socio-nature that have emerged in recent decades (for example, Brenner et al., 2010; Peck et al., 2010; Ferguson, 2010; Mansfield, 2007; Bakker, 2005, 2009; Brand and Sekler, 2009). As Bakker notes, however, this literature has been better at identifying variegation than accounting for it. Geographers have been collectively “unable to generate convincing explanations of the neoliberalization of nature as a historically and geographically differentiated, yet global (or at least translocal) phenomenon” (2010, p. 721). It is this challenge of *accounting for* variegation that this paper takes up. It does so by focusing on a rather different example than those previously considered. It starts from a consideration of why, during the “neoliberal” 1980s and 1990s, global development institutions like the World Bank, in collaboration with states, began promoting and financing the collective titling of indigenous territories in a range of countries. In contrast to the emphasis on the neoliberalization of nature, we focus on legal and political processes that gave rise to the designation of spaces and subjects as “outside” the market. The creation of legally-designated territories called Original Communal Lands (TCOs) in Bolivia permits an exploration of a scheme to deliberately produce forms of socio-nature that were not-quite-neoliberal, while also highlighting the

ongoing capacity of the postcolonial capitalization of natural resources to undermine these socio-natures.

Bringing together recent work on “environmental fixes” (Bakker, 2009, 2010; Castree, 2008, 2009) and “schemes to divide citizenship” (Hall et al., 2011, see also Li, 2007a; Moore, 2005), we argue that global support for indigenous land rights can be seen as an example of what we call the “ethno-environmental fix”. We do not use the term “fix” here in a narrowly Marxian sense (Harvey, 2003), nor do we wish to imply a rigid set of policy interventions for creating or governing ethnic territories. Rather, we use the term to point to the emergence, alongside neoliberal economic reform, of a spectrum of governance approaches that sought to synergise protection of vulnerable populations and highly-valued natures from the destructive effects of markets. To put it another way, in a world in which environmental risks, ethnic identities and spatial technologies of governance have all come to the fore, we think it is important to reflect on how processes of ethnic classification and differentiated citizenship are linked – discursively and in practice – to territorialised approaches to nature conservation. We further suggest that examining these links sheds important light on variegation in neoliberal governance approaches and outcomes. As such, while this paper focuses on indigenous land rights, the concept of “ethno-environmental fix” could be used to interrogate a broader set of governance interventions regarding not-quite-neoliberal natures. Existing discussions of indigenous land rights and neoliberalism, on which we draw, could also be enriched by a focus on the environmental agendas and outcomes of the “territorial turn” (Bryan, 2012; Wainwright and Bryan 2009, Offen, 2003; Hale, 2006, 2011).

In exploring these dynamics in the Bolivian and Latin American context, it is important to emphasise at the outset that the agency

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: penelope.anthias@gmail.com (P. Anthias), sar23@cam.ac.uk (S.A. Radcliffe).

of indigenous peoples in claiming territorial rights and envisioning alternative forms of development were foundational in shaping the emergence and outcomes of this ethno-environmental fix. As we seek to highlight, indigenous mobilisation and advocacy played a key role in shaping these shifting global policy agendas. Nor do we wish to suggest, by using the term “fix”, that indigenous land titling resolved problems of indigenous dispossession and environmental destruction under neoliberalism; still less that it has satisfied indigenous demands for territory. Our discussion of TCO titling in Bolivia highlights the governmental limits of the “ethno-environmental fix” in terms of all of the above. Nevertheless, indigenous collective territories do mediate market-nature-society relations in important ways, giving rise to diverse “not-quite-neoliberal” spaces, in which processes of marketisation often exist alongside other governmental or indigenous projects for territorial development.

The paper is structured as follows. Section one considers how the “neoliberal natures” literature has sought to explain variegation in neoliberal governance formations, suggesting that insights from this literature, combined with Tania Li’s focus on “schemes to divide citizenship”, provide a theoretical framework for understanding global support for indigenous land rights. Section two provides an analysis of global development policy and discourse during the 1980s and 1990s to elaborate the notion of indigenous lands rights as an “ethno-environmental fix”. Section three examines TCOs in Bolivia as one example of how the limitations of the “ethno-environmental fix” play out in practice and the hybrid “not-quite-neoliberal” natures this gives rise to. We conclude the paper by reflecting on how indigenous peoples in Bolivia have drawn on the limitations and contradictions of TCO titling to advance more progressive, post-neoliberal political and territorial projects.

2. Theorising variegation in “neoliberal” governance

2.1. Neoliberal natures and “environmental fixes”

The “neoliberal natures” literature has demonstrated that “neoliberalization” is a far from monolithic or totalizing process, but rather gives rise to a diverse array of arrangements for governing socio-nature. What accounts for this variegation? One explanation provided in many accounts is that variegation occurs as the result of an encounter between neoliberalizing logics and messy or uncooperative socio-natures. This messiness relates to both the socio-political context in which interventions are implemented, and the kind of natures that are being targeted:

[Variegation occurs] not only because neoliberalism takes place within existing political economic formations with which it has an antagonistic relationship, but also because of the articulation of labour and accumulation strategies with ecological processes in specific biophysical settings, which create barriers and constraints to capital accumulation (Bakker, 2010, p. 720).

This explanation is useful in revealing the ways in which governance arrangements are transformed “on the ground” – something we take up in our discussion of TCOs. Nevertheless, it only goes so far. Crucially, it does not shed light on broader shifts in policy agendas that may emerge over time from encounters with these natural and social limits. In fact, there is a danger that governance approaches that don’t appear “neoliberalizing” from the outset will simply be excluded from analysis – indigenous land rights being a case in point.

In this regard, a complementary perspective, inflected by Marxian interpretations, is the concept of “environmental fixes”, which describes economistic strategies of externalization and internaliza-

tion of socio-environmental conditions that are used to sustain accumulation in the face of countervailing forces internal and external to the capitalist system, which can include economic, ecological or legitimization crises (Castree, 2008; Bakker, 2009, 2010). Recent experiments in “market environmentalism” provide one example; as Bakker (2010, p. 13) notes, these emerged in response to the global environmental movement of the 1970s, when “widespread awareness emerged of the fact that an instrumentalist approach to nature as a ‘source’ for resources and ‘sink’ for wastes was reaching (human-perceived) limits.” As she notes, “a central irony of these processes is that they purport to present a [market-based] solution to environmental crises which capitalism has played a role in creating”. Castree’s definition of “environmental fixes” is broader than Bakker’s, encompassing cases where it is less a profit-driven quest for market expansion than “the danger of public unrest, leading to either regime change or system transformation”, which propels the state to adopt “a more interventionist role, economically, socially, and environmentally”, culminating in the application of various “environmental fixes” (2008, p. 149). Crucially, his account reveals that variegated processes of neoliberalizing nature are driven by objectives that relate not only to the need to overcome barriers to processes of capital accumulation, but also to the need to govern society and nature *in their wake*.¹

It is in this broader conception of “environmental fixes” that we see an opening for considering indigenous land rights in relation to neoliberalism – as a global policy agenda that gained traction amidst attempts to limit the destructive effects of marketisation on designated populations and natures. The key difference, of course, is that, unlike other examples discussed in the “neoliberal natures” literature, indigenous land rights do not employ markets towards this end. Nevertheless, as an approach for governing socio-nature arising during the recent period of market expansion, they demand our critical attention. As such, we argue for moving beyond a consideration of “processes of marketisation” and their misadventures to consider a broader range of governance approaches that have emerged alongside, and in relation to, these processes, and the ways they contribute to the production of designated areas of not-quite-neoliberal nature. In order to further interrogate how indigenous land rights can be considered in relation to marketisation, we turn to the work of anthropologist Tania Murray Li.

2.2. Countermovements and “schemes to divide citizenship”

In a recent paper (2007a), Li summarises the strategies that ruling regimes have employed to regulate relations between people and land from the colonial period to the present in postcolonial contexts.² Her approach draws on that of Polanyi, who famously observed that “to allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment would result in the demolition of society” (1957 (1944), p. 76). Before this destruction happened, Polanyi argued that society would recognize the risk of destruction, and devise protective measures to re-embed the reproduction of human life in social relations. These measures, and the social forces that bring them into being, comprise what he called a double movement or countermovement. While the concept of countermovement has often been used to refer to social movements facing neoliberal processes of “accumulation by disposses-

¹ In fact, distinguishing between capitalist and governmental purposes seems problematic. As many authors note, ungovernable socio-natures themselves present barriers to processes of capitalist accumulation. Furthermore, interventions are often defended on both economic and governmental grounds; as Bakker notes (citing Bernstein), “liberal environmentalism” is founded on the belief in the “compatibility of environmental concern, economic growth, the basic tenets of a market economy, and a liberal international order” (2010, p. 726).

² A revised version of this paper was published in 2010 (Li, 2010).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073689>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073689>

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