



## Control and intimacy in the Amazonian reality: Newspaper rhetoric on forest sector reform in Peru



Matti Salo<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jukka-Pekka Puro<sup>b</sup>, Karoliina Knuuti<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Biology, 20014 University of Turku, Finland

<sup>b</sup> Department of Media Studies, 20014 University of Turku, Finland

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 18 December 2012

Received in revised form 29 May 2013

Accepted 31 May 2013

#### Keywords:

Amazonia

Forest governance

Ideological criticism

Local media

Peru

Rhetorical analysis

### ABSTRACT

Public debates on the fate of the world's rainforests stretch from local to global, and local newspaper rhetoric reveals complex engagements among different stakeholder groups in the ongoing struggles over rainforest resources. We draw our case from Peruvian Amazonia, and focus on the public debate over the country's forest sector reform. Newspaper rhetoric, as we call it in relation to local rainforest discussion, is unfolded by rhetorical apparatus via social movement rhetoric to ideological criticism. We show how the reform has created friction between the control orientation of the formal and the intimacy of the informal Amazonian realities, and discuss the ways in which the role of international rules and global trade have both exacerbated these struggles and offered new space for dialog. Amazonian realities are not closed to outsiders – but they easily reject interventions perceived lacking local insight.

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### Introduction

Public debates on the fate of the world's rainforests stretch from local to global, and local newspaper rhetoric reveals complex engagements among different stakeholder groups in the ongoing struggles over rainforest resources. Amazonian rainforests cover an area larger than the European Union, or two thirds of the continental United States, and are home to maybe a quarter of world's terrestrial species (Dirzo and Raven, 2003). Moreover, these forests provide ecosystem services vital locally, regionally and globally, including carbon sequestration, provision of raw materials, and regulation of climatic and hydrological cycles (Malhi et al., 2008). Amazonian rainforests also support a human population over 30 million, including hundreds of indigenous peoples with immeasurable cultural value (Pinedo-Vasquez et al., 2012).

Many Amazonian dwellers are well aware of the international concern their living environment engenders, embracing the growing interest in biodiversity, natural resources, and ecosystem services. As a consequence of local consciousness, the legitimacy of any action taken in relation to the Amazonian forests can be locally assessed through both an Amazonian and an internationalist lens. In this process, media often emphasizes urgent local development

needs, yet it also acknowledges associated environmental and social problems (Ladle et al., 2010).

We draw our case from Peruvian Amazonia, where the access to forests has been renegotiated in a profound forest sector reform (Smith et al., 2006; Hiedanpää et al., 2011; Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez, 2011). The reform has been driven by a widespread concern about the forest sector's low efficiency and the environmental as well as social problems that the insufficiently organized and regulated selective logging has implied in the region. The reorganization of the sector has involved a series of eminently local actors immersed in the denominated *Amazonian reality*, a combination of environmental (Salo and Toivonen, 2009), political, cultural, and socio-economic factors typical of the region (Santos Granero and Barclay, 2002; Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez, 2011). The Amazonian reality is simultaneously local and global: it forms a negotiable space in which the forest reform has taken place, gaining and losing legitimacy within the pool of stakeholders, and it is continually constructed *vis-à-vis* the global positions and roles Amazonian actors assume.

We place the reform in its historical context and then analyze the role of local print media in relation to the Peruvian forest law (Law 27308) and its implementation process as it proceeded in Peru from 2000 to 2007. We analyze the argumentation and rhetoric used by the actors involved in the process and in the associated public debate; local newspapers have a major role in public discussions and newspapers are, per se, an important arena of local discussion.

Newspaper rhetoric, as we call it in relation to local rainforest oriented discussion, is unfolded by rhetorical apparatus

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +358 407238298; fax: +358 23336598.

E-mail addresses: [mattsal@utu.fi](mailto:mattsal@utu.fi) (M. Salo), [jppuro@utu.fi](mailto:jppuro@utu.fi) (J.-P. Puro), [kssknu@utu.fi](mailto:kssknu@utu.fi) (K. Knuuti).

from Toulmin's (1958/2003) analysis method which is applied via Griffin's (1952, 1958) social movement rhetoric to ideological criticism, as conceptualized by McGee (1980). We apply the rhetorical conceptualizations in order to discuss how the arena of local newspapers functions and directs the contents and arguments that are aimed to justify the new forest regime or to stand against it. On the basis of this analysis we unfold the policy implications of local socio-cultural and economic engagements between different stakeholder groups.

## Materials and methods

### Study area and historical background

While lowland rainforests of Peru are among the most intact and most diverse tropical forests remaining on Earth (Bass et al., 2010), agriculture, cattle ranching, infrastructure development, mining, hydrocarbon exploration and logging, threaten many parts of Peruvian Amazonia (Oliveira et al., 2007; Bass et al., 2010). The region of Loreto, with its c. 369,000 km<sup>2</sup>, is larger than Germany or just slightly smaller than the US State of Montana (Fig. 1) and forms one of the most isolated parts of Peru. Almost half of the region's one million inhabitants live in and around the region's capital city Iquitos, a geographically isolated hub of regional trade and economic activity that has for well over a century also been integrated to modern global markets (Santos Granero and Barclay, 2002).

Loreto is covered by extensive humid tropical lowland rainforests of which an important part grows on seasonally inundated floodplains. Logging is selective, targeting a reduced number of valuable tree species whose individuals often grow scattered across the landscape and whose wood varies from light timber such as balsa (*Ochroma*) to very dense wood of the genus *Dipteryx* that does not float. The density of wood is an important factor with implications for the transport of timber; in the lack of roads practically all timber is transported by river, often taking advantage of flood pulses that expand the area from which timber can be floated to larger rivers and to sawmills (Salo and Toivonen, 2009).

While forest sector is an important source of export-revenue and employment in rural and poverty-stricken urban areas of the region (Tello Fernández et al., 2004), Loreto is still, mainly due to its isolation, one of the least deforested parts of the country. The sector's role as an agent of forest degradation is, however, indisputable (Oliveira et al., 2007) and associated negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts widely recognized (EIA, 2010; Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez, 2011).

In the traditional system, timber extraction depended on small-scale loggers working under short-term logging contracts (Barrantes and Trivelli, 1996). In practice these loggers were controlled by regional timber merchants and they extracted timber across the forest landscape with no management planning officially required (Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez, 2011). The main motivation of these loggers is self-employment and their lack of capital not only makes them vulnerable to and dependent on the intermediary merchants but also contributes to their informality. During the 1990s, a relatively broad consensus emerged about the need to improve the sustainability of the Peruvian forest regime, including improved formalization of the sector.

Resulting from this situation, a series of legal reforms was initiated in the mid-1990s under the government of President Alberto Fujimori in order to incorporate new environmental concerns into Peruvian legislation. Chiefly, this was a response to international policy development, particularly related to the implementation of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity ratified by Peru in 1993 (Hiedanpää et al., 2011; Salo et al., 2011; Sears and Pinedo-Vasquez, 2011). Furthermore, it was also associated

with the overall development in the forest sector sustainability requirements worldwide, including international goals established by e.g. the Worldwide Fund for Nature ("WWF Target 1995") and the International Tropical Timber Organization ("ITTO Target/Objective 2000"), both promoting the aim to get the international timber trade under sustainability standards (Humphreys, 1996).

Partly as an element of international processes, partly as a national initiative, the Peruvian forest legislation became under revision that led to the enactment of a new forest law in 2000, and the passing of its regulations that took the law into effect in 2001 (Peru, 2001). The timing of the reform was troublesome: the decade-old Fujimori government was in free fall, and in addition to being questioned internationally and within Peru because of undemocratic governance (Burt, 2009), it was particularly unpopular in Loreto, a traditional stronghold of critical attitudes toward any Peruvian central government (Santos Granero and Barclay, 2002).

Furthermore, the special condition of Loreto as a territory historically contested by the neighboring countries had previously made the region's industrial elites more power in national politics than could be expected solely based on their economic weight (Santos Granero and Barclay, 2002). The critical stance of these actors in relation to the forest sector reform was largely based on their claims against central government neglect of the Amazonian reality – despite the special treatment enjoyed by the region in the form of economic privileges such as tax exemptions.

In the midst of a vibrant public debate on the necessity and practicality of the reform, the new forest law was implemented and a public tendering for forest concession allocation was announced in Loreto in 2002. The process, strongly criticized in the region, was soon suspended, only to be reopened in 2003, and finally concluded in 2004 (Salo et al., 2011), implementing the new forest regime in Loreto as elsewhere in the country.

### Research background

The last five years have witnessed an increasing interest in studies of environmental communication and journalism, to the point that it can be said to have legitimated itself as an independent field of study. Research on environmental communication has increased the knowledge on societal value-formation processes and opinion-formation in environmental debates, and it provides a cornerstone for the media analysis as it is carried out in this study.

One of the progressive fields of study in environmental communication is based on rhetorics. Environmental rhetorics, pursuing such issues as sustainable development on one side, and efficient forest industry on the other, can be analyzed in order to understand how public opinion over rainforests is created (Herndl and Brown, 1996; Hendry, 2010). The main assumption in the analysis of environmental rhetorics is, obviously, that environmental questions are, in fact, also rhetorical in nature. In that sense, *rainforest* is a rhetorical artifact that contains values, attitudes and beliefs that vary, in our case, in the debate over the use of these forests.

Rhetorical analysis, as compared to such widely used methodologies as text analysis or content analysis, is aimed at analyzing the persuasion that different actors use in the rainforest discussion. In our study, the core of rhetorical analysis is based on argumentation theory. The methods of argumentation analysis have developed following the footprints of such seminal theoreticians as Stephen Toulmin, Chaïm Perelman and Kenneth Burke. New rhetoric, as Toulmin's, Perelman's and Burke's work has been labeled, among other modern rhetoricians, is a foundation also in most of recent studies on environmental rhetorics.

Reis (1999) examined two major Brazilian newspapers, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* and found that newspapers were more liable to cite government officials than other sources, and news emphasized economic issues instead of sustainability or environmental

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