

Canadian mining in the Peruvian Andes: coloniality, limits to corporate social responsibility, and rising indigeneity

With the help of the CLAG Field Study Award, I conducted a three-month fieldwork this past summer in the Peruvian Andes. My research took place in Chamaca—a rural district about seven hours away from the city of Cusco, the capital of the region. Chamaca is made up of ten indigenous peasant communities (*comunidades campesinas*), which have a certain degree of autonomy guaranteed by law. The district is also the site of the Canadian mine, which is fully owned by Toronto-based firm, HudBay Minerals. While the mine is relatively new and entered production only in late 2014, there have been various conflicts between the communities and the mining firm. Most notably, in 2016, all ten communities seized the mine for four days, halting all production, because of the unfulfilled commitments and insufficient contributions of the company. Political ecology literature has indicated a need to further investigate the gendered experiences of mining as well as the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) regimes on social mobilization. Scholars have also noted the rise of indigeneity in the Peruvian Andes since the 2000s, reversing a pattern that had even been termed the “Peruvian exception.” Using the lens of feminist political ecology, I thus centered my research on the following three questions: **1)** What are the local people’s perceptions of mining and how are the perceptions and impacts gendered? **2)** What are the limits to the mining company’s CSR program? **3)** How has mining affected community governance and social mobilization, and the way indigeneity is understood and politicized?

To collect data, I collaborated with an NGO in the city of Cusco, Derechos Humanos Sin Fronteras. While I had originally planned to focus my research on one of the two communities considered to be “directly influenced” by the mine, after the NGO and the local people showed concern for my safety and the potential difficulties of carrying out the project in this relatively “closed” community, I decided to live in the district’s municipality and to widen the focus to the district level. I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with community members and leaders from eight communities, as well as personnel from the district government and the NGO. This included interviewing four current community presidents, four previous community presidents, and the leaders of local social organizations who were involved in organizing the protest in 2016. Most of the interviewees had also participated in the negotiations between the district and HudBay. Living in the community made room for participant observation through my day-to-day interactions with local people. As well, my relationship with the NGO enabled me to participate in various workshops organized/attended by the organization.

My preliminary findings indicate that extraction in Chamaca is supported by coloniality—state-community relations and community-mining company relations that are sustained by colonial logics. Local people have expressed feeling abandoned by the state, and they believe that the state supports mining companies over them. HudBay’s deficient consultation process is an example. Even though Peru is supposed to guarantee Free, Prior, and Informed consent, my interviewees indicated that such consultation did not take place. An interrelated issue is that not all *campesino* communities are classified as indigenous by the Ministry of Culture determines. Community leaders noted the difficulty of achieving this denomination, as the state definition of indigenous is bound to

the past; the use of modern technology, such as cell phones, hinder the people who have been discriminated against as “Indians” from being classified as such. Only two of the communities in the district are considered indigenous, but there is very little difference in heritage, customs, and practices between them and the other eight communities.

The mining company – community relations, which are largely defined by the HudBay’s CSR commitments, are also supported by and reinforce colonial dynamics. Uneven development across scales is one of the impacts of extraction and the CSR arrangements. To start, certain communities are classified to be in an “area of direct influence,” whereas others, of “indirect influence.” The two communities considered to be in direct influence have their own CSR agreements and have received significantly more benefit than indirectly influenced communities. However, indirectly influenced communities, in reality, are steps away from the directly influenced and the mine, and suffer from high levels of contamination. Unfortunately, most communities are not even considered to be indirectly influenced and therefore do not have their own agreements with the company. In Chamaca, aside from the one directly influenced community of Uchucarco, the nine other communities only receive benefits from the firm’s CSR commitments to the district. However, everyone is affected by contamination to some degree; interviewees indicated that fishing, which used to be one of the main sources of subsistence, is no longer an option. This has further marginalized the most vulnerable, including single mothers and widows.

The annual negotiations between the firm and the district reveals that the firm exploits the communities’ marginalized status, thus bringing into question for whom CSR really benefits. Even though there is a huge power differential between the two parties due to the fact that the local people have low levels of formal education (due to colonial state-community relations), the firm seems to take advantage of this by not even allowing NGOs to participate. By imposing arbitrary conditions and excluding vulnerable populations from receiving CSR projects (e.g. a mini-stable was only built for community members with 5+ cows), the mining firm has further marginalized certain groups, which again include single mothers and widows. The result of uneven development within communities and within the district has caused conflicts between community members, between communities, and between districts. The physical (e.g. contamination) and emotional (e.g. anger, feeling worn out) impacts of mining operations seem to be resulting in the local people’s loss of time, and ultimately, early death.

While the mining operation seems to have negatively impacted community governance because of distrust generated by corruption both real and imagined, it has sparked social mobilization and the politicization of indigeneity. Some communities are in the (difficult) process of getting the “indigenous” recognition to become eligible for prior consultation, and in July, at the popular assembly, the social organization that directs district governance and represents the interests of all ten communities (Frente Único de los Intereses de Chamaca) called on the communities to self-identify as indigenous.

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Municipality of the District of Chamaca



A typical landscape of the district



Crop and livestock farming is the main economic activity of the region



HudBay's Constancia mine is located upriver, just a few minute drive away from here



HudBay Minerals's Constancia mine



A fence delineating HudBay's property and an "indirectly influenced" community