"WHEN THEY CAME TO TAKE OUR RESOURCES"
Mining Conflicts in Peru and Their Complexity

Wendy Coxshall

Abstract: This article focuses on the debates over the Río Blanco mining project in Piura in northern Peru. Using Tsing's notion of 'friction', I explore the complexity and global connections in this case and show how the actors engaged universal categories to pursue their agendas. I argue that the campaign against Río Blanco is an example of indigenous mobilization in contemporary Peru because the local protestors invoked the global term 'indigenous', although they mobilized as peasants and as *ronderos/as* (civil defense patrollers). Their decision to campaign as peasants, however, illustrates the continued relevance of class in a contemporary global context. By using their peasant identity strategically in combination with their regional identity and their identity as marginalized peoples, the local population of Piura gained a more powerful voice.

Keywords: extractive industries, 'friction', global connections, governance, indigeneity, peasant, Peru, *rondas campesinas*

In March 2006, Nicanor Alvarado, a Peruvian agronomist and the coordinator of an environmental agency in northern Peru, and managers of Monterrico Metals (MM), a British-based mining company, were invited to participate in a public debate in Britain's Houses of Parliament on the impact of UK mining in Peru.[1] The Peru Support Group (PSG), a grassroots organization in the UK,[2] organized the meeting after hearing conflicting reports about violence between MM and the communities affected by its Río Blanco mining project in Piura in northern Peru. At the time, Río Blanco was a proposed large-scale, open-pit mine, and MM, a wholly owned subsidiary, was carrying out exploration activities to determine the mineral and metal contents of the soil. The public meeting ended in a deadlock after the company repudiated Alvarado's allegations against it. Firstly, MM denied that it had acted violently toward the population. Secondly,

it claimed that it had in fact obtained legal authorization from the local population to carry out its explorations on their land. Lastly, the company's lawyer emphasized that MM was complying with the relevant international treaties and standards on large-scale mining, suggesting that it had done nothing wrong. However, these treaties did not require MM to publish its findings about the economic, environmental, and social impacts of the Río Blanco project until after it had carried out its detailed feasibility study and environmental impact assessment. The population's demand to make this information widely available therefore remained unfulfilled.

In response to this inconclusive debate, the PSG set up an independent British and non-stipendiary[3] delegation to investigate Alvarado's allegations. The delegation also aimed to raise the British public's awareness about the extractive industries and to influence UK government policy on 'corporate social responsibility' and 'good practice' among British-based companies operating overseas. As a British citizen and an anthropologist with research experience in Andean Peru, I was invited to participate in this delegation, which conducted investigations in Peru for 10 days in September–October 2006.[4] The other delegates included two academics (a human geographer and a hydrologist), an independent journalist and writer, and a member of Parliament.

The academics in this delegation set out, first, with the PSG coordinator to conduct a series of interviews in Lima, the Peruvian capital, with the minister and vice-minister of energy and mining, the Red Muqui (a consortium of NGOs and CONACAMI),[5] MM, and the Peruvian ombudswoman. Afterward, we traveled northward to Piura, where we attended a meeting with the bishop and urban-based representatives of the diocese in a coastal town below the Río Blanco project. Those members of the diocese then escorted us to the highlands to meet the populations that lived beside the Río Blanco project, with whom they had regular contact. During this trip, we held meetings with rural members of the diocese, leaders of local *rondas* (civil defense committees), and communities along the road to the mining camp.

Drawing on my ethnographic experience as a delegate, I will explore the ensuing debate by highlighting how the actors engaged in universalizing processes. I will discuss, for example, how the state and MM engaged 'the law', as a universal abstract term to conceal the legal complexities around particular 'points of friction' (Tsing 2005), which enabled them to pursue their agendas. I will also show how the local population invoked global categories ('the indigenous' and 'the environment') to campaign against large-scale mining in the region. Their campaign, I argue, is an example of a contemporary indigenous mobilization despite the local population's decision to protest as *ronderos* (civil defense patrollers) and *campesinos* (peasants). In doing so, they were able to pursue their claims for autonomy and empowerment in the ongoing debates about the politics of identity, ways of belonging, and forms of governance in Peru.

In my ethnographic analysis, I employ Anna Tsing's (2005) concept of 'friction' to draw attention to the global connections in the Río Blanco debates. I also show how the class term *campesino* was an identity label that the rural population chose to adopt in its protest against the Río Blanco project. For the

peasants in question, *campesino* was not an anachronistic term that should be rejected because of some essentialist or 'traditional' (as opposed to 'modern') connotations, as Kearney (1996) has provocatively argued. Rather, as Edelman (1999) has suggested, the word 'peasant' linked the local population at Río Blanco to their social history and to contemporary debates on rights to access resources. It was through their identity as *campesinos* and their engagements with globalization and modernity that these rural people were negotiating their place in the 'new world order'. In this way, they were exercising rights that were previously denied to them under colonialism and structures of power that persisted afterward, such as the hacienda system of land governance.[6]

Some Theoretical Predilections

So why is Tsing's concept of 'friction' a useful tool for analysis? Firstly, 'friction' is more than a descriptive tool for understanding global connections. It is also an analytical one that critiques universalizing theories that define globalization in terms of 'flows'. This is because 'friction' provides a way of acknowledging the frequent delays and disruptions in global connections. Secondly, 'friction' offers me a way of analyzing the Río Blanco case without reducing it to a mining conflict, which would suggest that the actors' intentions were primarily destructive. 'Friction', by contrast, produces 'universals' and is necessary for global connections to operate, regardless of their outcome.

'Friction' is also a compelling concept for analyzing global connections because it has various meanings that reflect the multiple and complex ways that these connections work. For example, 'friction' produces 'heat' and 'light' (sparks), as the Río Blanco debates did. 'Friction' also implies different kinds of movements that 'push' and 'pull', that 'grip' and 'slide'. This 'push-pull' movement was reflected in the nature of the contentious exchanges between the actors in the Río Blanco debates. The 'sliding' and 'gripping' movement mimicked how the debates flowed and then ground to a halt, 'gripping', as they did, when the debate reached a final deadlock. Tsing's notion of 'friction' also produces 'gaps' in which voices are lost and dismissed because they fail to combine or collide with others through 'friction'. The third point of contention in the Houses of Parliament debate is an example of how the 'friction' of global connections resulted in a 'gap'. In this case, the gap was between the population's demands for information about the impacts of the Río Blanco project to be made available immediately and MM's later publication of this material, after it had completed its comprehensive feasibility study and environmental impact assessment in accordance with international treaties and standards on large-scale mining.

Frictions: The Alleged Violence between MM and the Population

From the moment that I joined the PSG delegation, my experience of the Río Blanco debates was that they were incredibly heated, intense, and fast-paced.

The issues discussed, such as the environmental impacts of large-scale mining, also had implications across global, regional, and local scales. The actors, moreover, collaborated by talking across their differences within partial global connections to pursue their own agendas (Tsing 2005). The British delegation, for example, was independent from the PSG, which had established it. The PSG had its own agenda, namely, to lobby the Houses of Parliament and to support the Peruvian agronomist so that the local population's opinions about MM were heard. Alvarado, however, did not belong to one of the communities affected by Río Blanco. Rather, he coordinated an environmental agency, Vicaria del Medio Ambiente, in northern Peru, which is part of the Red Muqui coalition, whose goal is to represent populations affected by mining in Peru. Members of the local population, I will show, were also divided over the Río Blanco project and had different objectives.

During meetings held with members of the rural population, the delegation repeatedly heard accounts about two marches that had been organized against the Río Blanco project, as well as personal testimonies about the injuries that protestors had sustained. The first protest, which took place on 22 April 2004, involved a group of *ronderos* marching on the mine site. During the violent confrontations that ensued between the *ronderos* and the security forces that MM had hired to protect the mine site, a local *rondero*, Reemberto Herrera, was killed by a tear gas grenade. The second protest at the mine site on 25 July 2005 was much larger, involving 2,000 to 3,000 male and female *ronderos/as*. Violence broke out again between the protestors and the armed forces, although the protestors claimed that the march was intended to be a peaceful protest. During this second march, another *rondero*, Melanio García Gonzalez, was killed, and a policeman and a local man were mutilated. Many protestors received minor injuries.[7] Local people claimed that they were unarmed and had responded in self-defense to attacks by armed anti-terrorist police of the Special Operations Department (DINOES). *Rondero* leaders reported that around 200 *ronderos* were waiting to be sentenced after being charged with violent conduct during the second march. The police, however, had not responded to their accusations that the armed forces had inflicted violence on them. In addition, the bishop of the diocese recounted to the delegation that he had planned to attend the march to dissuade the protestors, who were members of the diocese, from using violence, but he was prevented from doing so by the police, who abducted him. The helicopter that should have dropped him and two others, from Oxfam and CONACAMI, at the mine site on Henry's Hill flew them instead to a different hilltop, where they were held captive until the march was over.

These testimonies suggest that MM was involved in violent confrontations with the population near Río Blanco, as Alvarado claimed, even if the company did not initiate the violence. The director of MM's social team claimed that the *ronderos* themselves instigated violence by regularly organizing overnight raids to destroy agricultural nurseries that MM created to assist communities affected by the Río Blanco project. Members of the rural population countered that MM representatives had initiated violence against

them by being abusive to their local authorities at a public meeting and by bribing 'thugs' from the town to attack them for being 'anti-mining'. They also claimed that MM had produced strife among them by bribing the people who had migrated to urban areas to attend its consultation workshops, knowing that the rural population would likely boycott them. Urban migrants, they suggested, could be bribed more easily than members of the rural population because they now relied on wage labor and no longer had a stake in their rural communities of origin. The rural populations, by contrast, were subsistence farmers whose livelihoods depended mainly on the natural resources affected by the Río Blanco project. As these examples show, MM capitalized on generalized differences between the urban and rural populations by turning them into universal and opposed categories that it associated with being 'pro-' and 'anti-mining', respectively. By engaging in this universalizing process, the company produced 'friction'.

One young *ronda* leader also recounted how MM contributed to discord within the population by bribing members of neighboring *caseríos* (hamlets) to attack each other, and how her teenage cousin took part in one such attack. She reprimanded her cousin for this but ultimately held MM responsible for inciting these conflicts to quash the population's campaign against the Río Blanco project. "MM knew," she added, "that the population could easily be bribed to commit violence against their neighbors for little money or a bowl of rice because they are so poor." The girl held up an empty soup bowl to emphasize just how insignificant the cost of bribery would be for a wealthy mining company.

Despite these negative accounts, MM also tried to intervene within the population in a positive way by offering local men jobs. However, this created resentment toward the company and conflict within the population. A number of men from different local communities and *caseríos* reported that they had worked for MM as manual laborers at the mining camp. However, these men did not support MM and its activities at Río Blanco. Rather, they claimed that they had little choice but to work for MM because there were "few alternative forms of wage labor available in the highlands." This reflects the lack of investment in the local and regional infrastructure and markets. One of the men also criticized MM for not making better paying jobs available to local people, who did not have the skills or training to use the high-technology machines that were operated by qualified engineers from overseas. MM paid the local men a standard 10 soles (approximately US $3) per day for their labor, which was far less than the salaries that the engineers would have received. It was also a far cry from the rich rewards that these men alleged that MM told them they would receive from the Río Blanco project. It seems likely, however, that they signed up to work for the company in order to claim their share of the wealth that they anticipated would be generated by the project.

The local people generally criticized those members of their community who worked for MM and accused them of stirring up family conflicts. However, they were angrier with MM, claiming that this issue had turned them overwhelmingly against MM and the activities of all foreign mining companies in the area. At

this point, the Río Blanco debate had gone too far. It had stopped being a public, political issue and had become a private one that divided their families.

MM's decision to offer paid work opportunities to the local population also had gender implications. The company did not employ women as manual laborers at Río Blanco. This may be because MM did not consider this kind of work suitable for women[8] and/or because productive labor is generally regarded as men's work in the Andes (Harris 2000; Platt 1980). The difference between men's and women's paid work opportunities would likely produce friction within the population. There was also a noticeable absence of paid work for women in the highlands, although no one raised this issue with the delegation. As a result, I suggest that these women would be more likely to turn to the 'informal' economy for paid work. This is a particular source of concern since prostitution and HIV/AIDS have been shown to increase with the influx of male migrant workers in areas of mining development (see, e.g., Campbell 1997; on South Africa, see Jochelson, Mothibeli, and Leger 1991).

The local population's allegations that MM had acted violently toward them produced friction and change within the company. In September 2006, MM published a statement in the regional newspaper, *El Tiempo*, in which it apologized to the populations affected by the Río Blanco project for the previous "attitudes and conflicts" created by some of its staff, whom the company had therefore dismissed. MM vowed that such conduct would never be repeated. This apology marked an about-face in the company's behavior. It announced a series of changes, including the creation of a new social team to address MM's social and environmental responsibilities in the Río Blanco case and a legal team to deal with outstanding legal proceedings related to the previous violence. The company also refuted its earlier denial during the Houses of Parliament debate that it had acted violently toward the local population. The manager who denied this allegation was one of the staff members who had been dismissed. Shortly after the parliamentary debate, the company's chairman was also replaced. All of these changes enabled MM to reinvent itself as a 'new' and 'ethically responsible' company. The anthropologist in charge of MM's new social team also made this clear to the delegation by repeatedly distinguishing between the 'old MM' (before the 'corrupt' members of staff were fired) and the 'new MM' (after she and the other members of MM's social and legal teams were hired).

Organizational restructuring and the appointment of new staff and managers recurred throughout the company's history. Several months after the delegation's trip to Peru, the new social team was dismantled, and the director and her staff were reportedly fired because they had failed to reduce the persisting 'social conflicts' over Río Blanco. Shortly afterward, MM's newly appointed chairman was replaced when a Chinese mining consortium bought out the company in April 2007. All of these changes conjured up the idea and belief, particularly within the population, that MM was the same but different in the sense that it could now be expected to operate in a more ethically responsible way. How far this conjuring is effective or convincing, however, depends on who has the power to make changes seem possible (Tsing 2005).

Frictions: Legal Contradictions over Access and Use Rights to the Land

I turn now to the second point of contention in the Houses of Parliament debate, that is, whether or not MM had acquired legal permission to carry out its mining activities at Río Blanco. The issue arose because the Río Blanco site is situated on land that belongs to two communities. This led to a complex legal dispute over the status of different laws to decide the parties' rights to access the land and use its resources. In this dispute, both MM and the Peruvian state referred to recent international treaties and liberalization policies in Peru as 'the law'. Invoking 'the law' as a universal category enabled the Peruvian state to dismiss the existing local and regional legislation as irrelevant and thereby to promote MM's Río Blanco project and large-scale mining in Peru. The principal legislation on land rights and governance in Peru relates to political and social entities known as 'peasant communities' and to *rondas campesinas* (local peasant patrols). The population in Piura tried to use both forms of legislation to defend their rights to control who accesses their land and how it is used.

Peasant communities and the laws that govern them were created under Peru's agrarian reform in 1969, which redistributed lands to the rural populations who had lived and served on them under the hacienda system of land governance. As members of a peasant community, these previously disenfranchised populations were officially recognized as Peruvian citizens with collective legal rights to own and control the land that they lived and worked on. These rights are based on liberal democratic principles that are still relevant today in Peru.

This legal dispute also produced friction within the population, which had mixed feelings about the Río Blanco project. Local people's opinions underwent change when their expectations about the company and the Río Blanco project were not fulfilled. This was illustrated by an argument that broke out at a public meeting held by the PSG delegation in the community nearest the Río Blanco mine camp. We arrived as it was getting dark and encountered only a handful of men, all of whom worked for MM or had done so in the past. Most of them were locals, while others were migrant laborers from other places in northern Peru. During the meeting, one man held another responsible for the escalating tensions between MM and the population. He claimed that MM had bribed the man, a community leader, to sign a document that the company had circulated to local communities, asking permission to carry out its activities at Río Blanco. Recognizing that our questions had provoked a heated conflict that was continuing to escalate, the delegation members intervened to steer the conversation in a different direction. However, by then we had heard enough to suggest that this leader might have signed MM's document for the benefit of his community. It seemed that he, like other community leaders, had initially believed that the Río Blanco project would bring prosperity to the local population, but he changed his mind later, when MM failed to fulfill these initial aspirations.

The discussion in the meeting now shifted to a debate concerning the document's legitimacy. Many of the men at the public meeting argued that this

document was illegitimate because the signatures on it did not represent the community's opinion. According to the laws on peasant communities, two-thirds of the community should have approved the document at a vote in an *asamblea general* (community meeting). Everyone at the meeting agreed that a communal vote on the issue had not taken place in any of the communities affected by Río Blanco. The ministers of energy and mining had previously explained to the PSG delegation that the peasant community laws did not give community members the right of veto in matters of national and state interest, such as mining, and could not prevent MM from accessing the land. Members of the Red Muqui, however, argued that even if MM had the right of way to access the land, it did not have legal permission to penetrate the soil and take away the minerals and metals beneath. The Peruvian ombudsperson's office, the Defensoría del Pueblo (2006), also concluded that the state had acted illegally when it declared that MM had permission to carry out mining activities at Río Blanco. The company, it argued, had not acquired a two-thirds majority of votes held at *asambleas generales* in the communities affected by the Río Blanco project. The report appeared to have little impact, however, and fell into the gaps in the Río Blanco debate. Nevertheless, when it was published, it contributed to the conflict by fleetingly grabbing the actors' attention, much like the delegation's report.

In response to the state's argument that peasant community laws were invalid in this case, the local population sought other forms of legal protection to support their rights over access to and use of their land and its resources. In doing so, they were trying to introduce global, neo-liberal laws, which they knew that the Peruvian state and MM recognized. Local leaders were keen to hurry through legislation on individual land rights, a *rondero* leader told me, because the state refused to recognize the collective rights of peasant communities and *rondas campesinas*. The introduction of individual land rights was another controversial issue that divided the population and placed pressure on local authority figures. This leader was concerned that some local people were interested in acquiring individual land rights so that they could sell their land to foreign mining companies for a quick cash profit, without considering the long-term economic, environmental, and social impacts of doing so. He was particularly troubled about how to regulate the behavior of larger landowners, who, as Higginbottom (2005) has pointed out in the case of Colombia, stand to gain substantial profits by selling their land to foreign mining companies, should they acquire individual property rights.

The *rondero* leader also feared that MM would exploit less wealthy individuals, who were eager to profit from the sale of a single plot, by paying them less than the market value of their land. This would likely depend on how the company valued the land. As agricultural land, it would be worth very little, but if the land were valued for its contents, it would be worth much more. The contents of the land, in this case, referred not only to the minerals and metals under the soil but also to its water resources. MM had proposed to use large quantities of the local water resources in its mining processes at Río Blanco. As the ice caps in Peru's mountainous regions melt due to global warming, the water resources near Río Blanco are also decreasing. These resources are

critical for the survival of the rural population near Río Blanco and also the population that lives on Peru's semi-desert coast, which includes the residents of the Peruvian capital (BBC 2007).

The Peruvian State and the Extractive Industries

Understanding why the state failed to support the local population, who are, after all, Peruvian citizens, is not as clear-cut as it seems. In this section I will discuss the internal frictions that the debates over the Río Blanco project and the extractive industries in Peru produced within the Peruvian state. The main tension for the state was between its loyalty to Peruvian citizens and its interest in foreign mining companies, like MM, which the state encouraged to invest in Peru. The state was not, therefore, a neutral arbiter in these debates on mining in Peru. Foreign investment is an attractive option for resource-rich 'developing' nations like Peru, as the race to control the world's depleting supplies of natural resources intensifies and dictates the struggle for power in the 'new world order'. Since the 1990s, metal and mineral prices have soared on the global economic market. This has led to a substantial increase in the number of concessions available for the extraction of oil, gas, minerals, and metals in Peru (see Bebbington et al. 2007). Attracting foreign extractive industries to Peru is therefore an important way for the Peruvian state to promote national economic growth. Proposing a total ban on mining is not a defensible argument in this global economic climate. Only arguments that challenge how the extractive industries operate have the potential to 'travel' and exert an impact rather than fall into the gaps in these debates.

Peru's positive approach to foreign investment contrasts with many of its neighbors (e.g., Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Brazil) that are also resource-rich developing nations. These countries generally reject US and Western investment, especially in their natural resources, favoring instead regional integration as a Latin American bloc to empower themselves in international relations. Peru has actively encouraged foreign investment and economic liberalization since the presidency of Alberto Fujimori, who came to power in 1990. In 1992, after suspending Congress to rewrite the Peruvian Constitution, Fujimori implemented a series of radical neo-liberal reforms that became known as the 'Fujishock'. In the process, Fujimori granted increased powers to the military, which supported him until November 2000, when he was forced into exile to avoid facing charges of corruption and human rights abuses.[9] The new Constitution amended existing land reforms since 1969 by introducing a distinction between surface land rights and subsoil rights over the contents of the land, which were classified as 'national heritage'. This alteration undermined peasant community laws by restricting members' collective ownership rights to the surface of their land, while allowing foreign-based mining companies to remove and profit from the sale of Peru's national heritage with the Peruvian state's authorization.

One way in which President Fujimori initially attracted investment in Peru was by setting below-average tax rates. He also made the royalty payments that

mining companies are usually required to pay affected populations voluntary. These highly competitive terms undersold the country's natural resources and undercut the communities affected by mining in Peru. This set a precedent for subsequent Peruvian governments, which have continued to promote foreign investment in the extraction industries. It has also had an impact on the government's willingness to listen to and embrace the grievances of its citizens affected by mining, who are among the poorest and most marginal populations in Peru. As a result, Oxfam (among other national and international NGOs) has intervened to support these communities. The government of the current president, Alán García, has pro-actively encouraged foreign investment in the extractive industries in Peru and, to support this agenda, has also introduced legislation to curb the powers of NGOs (see Crabtree 2006).

The Population's Campaign and the Indigenous-Environmental Axis

I return now to the local population to consider why it based its campaign against Río Blanco on 'indigenous environmentalism' and engaged 'indigeneity' as a global, universal category. Based on her comparative reading of the contemporary literature on indigenous peoples, Tsing (2007) explores how different groups have or have not engaged with the term 'indigenous' in order to understand how it became a universal category. Her approach, and those of the other contributors to *Indigenous Experience Today* (de la Cadena and Starn 2007), differs from that of most anthropologists, who have focused on the theoretical meaning of the term 'indigenous' (see Kenrick and Lewis 2004; Kuper 2003) and/or embraced the term within an activist anthropology aimed at promoting the rights and entitlements of marginalized peoples (Sawyer 2004). In her chapter, Tsing identifies three main axes around which indigenous peoples have articulated their 'voices': sovereignty, autonomy/pluri-ethnicity, and the indigenous-environmental. Voices organized along these axes of indigeneity, she argues, 'grip' and 'travel' globally, while others that do not follow these axes are likely to remain unheard and fall into the 'gaps'.

Not surprisingly, the highland population of Piura chose to capitalize on the indigenous-environmental axis to voice their objections against MM and the Río Blanco project. It fit with their marginal status and livelihood as agriculturalists and allowed their voices to 'travel' and be heard, particularly in Peru. Yet this was not an obvious and unproblematic choice: the population of Piura did not classify themselves as 'indigenous' but rather as *campesinos*, or peasants, and *ronderos/as*, that is, civil defense patrollers. These identities were also combined in the name of the *rondas campesinas,* as Starn (1999: 31) highlighted. I suggest that the local people avoided identifying themselves as 'indigenous' because in Peru it is generally considered to be a pejorative, "dirty" (Orlove 1998) word, despite the positive connotations associated with the global term 'indigenous', which the words *campesino/a* and *rondero/a* also do not imply. This suggests why the local population did not explicitly refer to the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples or the UN Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples in its campaign and discussion with the delegation about Río Blanco. Moreover, people in Peru generally use the term 'indigenous' to refer to Amazonian populations, although they are officially classified as 'native' peoples (García and Lucero 2004; Greene 2007).

Being 'Indigenous' and Being a 'Peasant' in Peru

The apparent absence of the indigenous in Peru has recently sparked much debate among scholars of Latin America. In contrast to neighboring Latin American states (e.g., Ecuador, Bolivia, and Guatemala), Peru has experienced neither a recent resurgence in indigenous identity claims among its citizens, nor a rise in explicitly indigenous-based movements that have campaigned against the activities of the extractive industries (e.g., see Sawyer 2004 on Ecuador). The enduring legacy of General Juan Velasco's populist, Marxist reforms in the 1970s contributed to the local people's decision in the Río Blanco case to identify themselves as *campesinos* (see also Starn 1999). These reforms introduced the class term *campesino* to replace the racial-ethnic term *indio*, which was considered to be racist. 'Peasant', by contrast, was deemed to be a neutral term that reflected the agricultural livelihoods and occupations of the rural population as well as their 'underclass' status in Peru. In effect, however, this reinforced their 'inferior' status as marginalized peoples. Being a peasant in Peru still indicates that a person is poor, or *waqcha* (orphaned/abandoned) in Quechua, the main language spoken in the Andes. Furthermore, 'peasant' is a cultural term because the ways of being a peasant vary cross-culturally, including in Peru. This point was emphasized by Starn (1999) but overlooked by Kearney (1996) in his efforts to 'reconceptualize' the peasantry.

Prior to the emphasis on class under President-General Velasco, the debates on citizenship and inclusion in Peru had focused on ideas about racial-ethnic difference. In the early twentieth century, Luis Valcárcel and other Andean intellectual elites in Cusco (the Inca capital) developed an *indigenista* argument that reified the image of the *indio* as a pure and original identity in Peru, to empower themselves in relation to their lighter-skinned counterparts in the coastal capital. Their position and sense of inferiority were the outcome of a racialized geographical order that the Spanish colonizers had created to establish their 'superiority' as 'white-skinned' coastal settlers, over the 'inferior', 'dark-skinned', indigenous populations in the Andes and Amazonia. Although racial and cultural mixing since colonialism challenges these distinctions, the idea of a racialized geography nonetheless persists and has interesting implications for understanding how the communities near Río Blanco classified themselves, and are also classified, nowadays. As people who live on the coast and speak Spanish (rather than Quechua), the rural populations of Piura were not easily recognizable as Andean or Amazonian. Nonetheless, they were poor agriculturalists, who also lived between the Amazonian cloud forest and the Andean highlands in a marginalized region on the Peru-Ecuador border.

These observations can help us appreciate why the population of Piura did not mobilize under an indigenous banner, as excluded populations have done elsewhere in Latin America. The local people's decision to base their campaign against Río Blanco around political environmentalism shows, however, that they capitalized on the global indigenous-environmental axis by drawing on their agricultural livelihoods and marginalization in Peru. This supports my argument that their campaign is an example of an indigenous mobilization in Peru, even though the protestors identified themselves as being *campesinos/as* and *ronderos/as*. It also supports Marisol de la Cadena's (2000) argument that recent scholars were mistaken when they claimed that indigenous movements do not exist in contemporary Peru because people there have not mobilized primarily around an indigenous identity (see, e.g., Albó 1991; Mayer 1996; Yasher 1997, 2005). De la Cadena's argument is based on her observations about urban-based, intellectual mobilizations in the Andes (Cusco), which, she states, made claims for inclusion and equality in Peru based on a *mestizo* (racially and culturally mixed) identity shared with other Peruvians.

García (2005) has pointed out how rural populations in Cusco were similar to the urban-based, intellectual indigenous *mestizos* described by de la Cadena (2000). In García's (2005) research, rural people rejected bilingual Quechua-Spanish education programs because they wanted their children to learn Spanish and thereby become more *mestizo*. Conversely, the people in highland Piura were monolingual Spanish-speakers, but their rural-based livelihoods and agricultural occupations carried connotations of *mestizo* inferiority, at least in contradistinction to their urban-based coastal counterparts. They acted, therefore, as indigenous *mestizos* by campaigning against Río Blanco and participating in CONACAMI to pursue their case. García and Lucero (2004) have also argued that CONACAMI is a current example of an indigenous mobilization in Peru because it is a multi-ethnic grassroots organization that is not produced by state-led policies.

Indigeneity and the *Rondas Campesinas* in Northern Peru

Rondas campesinas are also grassroots organizations, although their origins and institutional structure differ from contemporary indigenous movements in Latin America. *Rondas campesinas* were first established in Cajamarca (in northern Peru) to combat local land grabbing, petty theft, and delinquency after the land reform of the 1970s. The expropriation of land from the hacienda estates and the expulsion of the land-owning elites created a political vacuum that the state did not fill; rather, it remained largely absent. The *rondas* in Piura were set up to tackle social problems as well, although these emerged later due to the food shortages produced by a severe drought in 1983 (Huber 1995). The authorities in Piura drew on the Cajamarca model to set up their *rondas*, which formed part of an expanding institutional, hierarchical, and bureaucratic structure of *rondas campesinas* in northern Peru. *Rondero/a* authorities initially clashed with community structures of power, but later the *rondas* became

integrated into them. Over time, the duties of the *rondas* increased to include the administration of justice, as well as law enforcement. In the 1980s, the *ronderos/as* became targets of Shining Path's Maoist insurgency campaign in Peru, as well as key actors in the counter-insurgency struggle that eventually brought about Shining Path's 'defeat' in 1992, when its leader was captured (Degregori et al. 1996).[10]

The institutional and bureaucratic structure of the *rondas campesinas* in northern Peru mimicked state structures, producing a parallel justice system between customary and state law. Although *rondas campesinas* supported the state, they were not state agencies. Nevertheless, the prolonged absence of the state in highland Piura meant that the *rondas* continued to provide a necessary service: overseeing the law and administering justice in the region. The *rondas* wanted to be recognized by the state as independent agents of the law. They did not wish to be absorbed or controlled by the state. This remains a point of contention between the *rondas* and the state, which historically has sought to absorb or dismantle them as outlaw organizations that threaten the state (Starn 1999).[11] By protesting against the Río Blanco project as *ronderos/as*, the people of highland Piura were therefore contributing to these ongoing struggles over identity, forms of governance, and ways of belonging in Peru.

This was exemplified by a *rondero* leader, who claimed that people in the region were no longer asking for state recognition but instead were seeking independence. "They are tired of waiting and hoping for the state to support them, not only in this struggle against foreign mining activities in Piura but at any time in their history," the leader explained. "It was not they, the population, that failed to identify with the state, but the state that did not identify or support them as citizens," he concluded. These words also illustrate how the protest at Río Blanco was an indigenous campaign in which the population of Piura engaged with the remaining two axes along which indigenous voices 'travel' globally: the axes of sovereignty and autonomy/pluri-ethnicity (Tsing 2007).

Conclusion

In this article I have focused on a brief moment in the ongoing debates over the Río Blanco project, exploring Tsing's (2005) concepts of 'friction' and 'engaged universals' as they relate to this matter. Rather than embellishments that confuse the issues, I have argued that the complexities around particular 'points of friction' are the very issues at stake in this case. Looking at the Río Blanco project simply as a mining conflict would have inaccurately overemphasized the destructive dimension of the debate and the structural opposition between the various parties participating in it. The notion of 'friction', however, provides a flexible, analytical tool that highlights the complexities of the Río Blanco case and the 'push-pull' nature of the exchanges between the actors. The 'points of friction' that I discuss in the ethnographic sections encouraged the local actors to engage with globally circulated concepts—such as 'the indigenous' and 'the environment'—and to 'push' forward their

agenda, while contributing to the debate with original combinations of arguments that addressed these global concepts.

Although the protestors identified themselves as *campesinos/as* and *ronderos/as*, I have argued that the population's campaign against the Río Blanco project was an example of a contemporary indigenous mobilization in Peru. The protestors rejected the term 'indigenous', which is pejorative in Peru, but they capitalized on its positive connotations as a universal term by articulating their campaign arguments along the main global axes of indigeneity that Tsing (2007) has identified as sovereignty, autonomy/pluri-ethnicity, and the indigenous-environmental. As coastal inhabitants, the population of highland Piura were also classified as *mestizos*, not as Andean, *indios*, or indigenous. However, their agricultural livelihoods as rural-based 'peasants' suggested that they were racially 'inferior' to their urban counterparts, especially in Lima. This indicates that these activists can be conceptualized as 'indigenous *mestizos*' (de la Cadena 2000), who also participated in the indigenous organization CONACAMI (García and Lucero 2004) to protect their rights as communities affected by mining in Peru.

Furthermore, the population's decision to identify themselves as *ronderos/as* connected their indigenous-environmental campaign against Río Blanco to their ongoing demands for sovereignty and autonomy in a pluri-ethnic state, despite the awkward status of the *rondas campesinas*. Operating between state and customary law, the *rondas campesinas* have never been quashed or integrated within the state but rather remain a perennial thorn in the state's side. The persistence of the *rondas* can be partially attributed to their ability to adapt to new challenges in the state's absence: delinquency after agrarian reform in 1969, a drought in 1983, political violence in the 1980s and early 1990s, and large-scale extractive mining from the 1990s onward. It can also be attributed to the vertical, bureaucratic, and institutional structure of the *rondas*, which mimicked state legal structures. Moreover, the autonomy and geographical dispersion of the *rondas* in northern Peru resembled the autonomy and global dispersion of MM and other subsidiaries owned by transnational mining corporations.

Finally, the *rondas campesinas* were 'peasant' organizations, and the local people campaigned against Río Blanco as both *campesinos/as* and *ronderos/as*. This illustrates that the term *campesino* was representative of their rural-based livelihoods, which the Río Blanco project threatened. In this case, *campesino* was not an imposed identity (cf. Kearney 1996) but rather a chosen one that communicated a particular cultural history and economic status (cf. Edelman 1999). The local people's combined identities resonated with the subjectivity of marginalized indigenous people, a quality that they communicated in their indigenous-environmental campaign. This flexibility in self-representation also enabled the local actors to pursue their arguments in the ongoing debates about ethnic identity, forms of governance, and ways of belonging in Peru while they campaigned against Río Blanco. Thus, we can appreciate that the Río Blanco debates were not principally about mining but rather about local people's demands for the equal distribution of power in Peru and their place in the contemporary 'new world order'.

Acknowledgments

Wendy Coxshall has a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester. She is currently studying for a Master's Degree in Social Work at the University of East Anglia. She is co-author of the report *Mining and Development in Peru with Special Reference to the Río Blanco Case in Piura, Northern Peru* (2007) and author of "From the Peruvian Reconciliation Commission to Ethnography: Narrative, Relatedness, and Silence" (2005).

Notes

1. Minutes of this debate are available online at the Web site of the Peru Support Group (http://www.perusupportgroup.org.uk/article.php?article_id = 203).
2. The PSG informs its members and lobbies the British government about relevant political and human rights issues in Peru.
3. Oxfam, the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), and Christian Aid paid the expenses for the delegation's field trip to Peru.
4. My research was about reconstruction and reconciliation in the aftermath of political violence in Peru between the Peruvian armed forces and Shining Path Maoist guerrillas in the 1980s and early 1990s (see Coxshall 2004, 2005).
5. The Red Muqui is a nationwide umbrella group of several non-profit organizations whose goal is to defend the rights of rural and indigenous communities affected by mining projects. CONACAMI is the Confederación Nacional de Comunidades Afectadas por la Minería (National Confederation of Communities Affected by Mining in Peru).
6. The hacienda system of land governance continued until agrarian reform in 1969.
7. As evidence to support their claims that security forces had used violence against them, *ronderos* showed the delegation photographs in which they and other local people were bloodied. They also emphasized that they were unarmed.
8. See Safa (1997) on gender and multinational companies employing women as *maquiladoras* (seamstresses) in Costa Rica.
9. Fujimori was later extradited to Peru and sentenced in April 2009 to 25 years in prison for ordering the 'disappearances' and killings of civilians on two occasions during the political violence in Peru.
10. Most of the *rondas* in the southern Andes were set up by the Peruvian armed forces to help them combat the Communist Party of Peru, more commonly known as Shining Path. The south was where political violence was also more intense. The *rondas* in the north were grassroots initiatives that responded to the threats of Shining Path.

11. This holds particular poignancy because the *rondas* played a critical role in combating Shining Path's insurgency against the state. The global 'war on terror' also legitimates fears of a return to political violence in Peru, as did televised public accusations that campaigners against Río Blanco were 'terrorists' (see Bebbington et al. 2007).

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