

Aymara Indian Perspectives on Development in the Andes

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Aymara Indian Perspectives on Development in the Andes

By Amy Eisenberg. Tuscaloosa, AL:
University of Alabama Press, 2013.
xiv + 263 pp. US\$ 49.95. ISBN 978-
0-873-1791-1.

This book is a passionate piece of advocacy for the Indians of northern Chile, who were grabbed from Peru, with their lands and coast, during the Chilean War of the Pacific (1879–1883). It denounces the insensitive treatment by state planners of the nation's "Aymaras" who inhabit Arica and Parinacota at the northern tip of the country. There are 3 ecological levels: the pastoral lakes and boglands of Parinacota on the high puna at 4200 masl; the pre-Cordilleran agriculturalists of Putre and Socoroma at 3600 masl; and the coastal valleys of Azapa and Lluta below 1000 masl, which descend through the desert to the Pacific port of Arica, exit and entry point for Potosi silver and Huancavelica quicksilver in Spanish colonial times.

Arica is a thirsty land. Today's unsustainable demands on highland rain and fossil water reserves depopulate the puna of people and flocks; new highways foster commerce but carry away inhabitants, destroying current and archaeological sacred sites. Eisenberg is an (ethno)botanist and gives sensitive accounts of plant cover, including data on traditional water management in the bogs (*bofedales*), whose pastures, beloved by alpacas, have diminished with the diversion of the river Lauca. This project has boosted horticulture in the coastal valley of Azapa, but the author criticizes the Chilean energy company ENDESA for diverting yet more water from the puna without informing the government, to the detriment of bogs, flocks, and pastoralists.

The last 2 chapters examine the destructive effects on "Aymara

patrimony" of 3 development projects: the construction and maintenance of Highway 11 from Arica to Bolivia, the formation of the Lauca National Park on the high puna, and the diversion of the international river Lauca from its source in Lake Cotacotani (puna) to the hydroelectric plant at Chapiquiña (pre-Cordillera) and thence to the valley of Azapa. This dried up pastures and provoked an international incident with Bolivia. Eisenberg relays local views, showing the contradictory effects of "development" and arguing that these might have been mitigated with an impact assessment plan. In Arica, this would require consultation, and Eisenberg gives "rules" for ensuring environmental and social justice: negotiations with local inhabitants, heightened community awareness, and active involvement (pp 154–155). Road building and river diversion respond to commercial, financial, and political imperatives, and the author confronts them with an invocation of "ethnic rights."

Ex-Peruvian Aymara-speakers have undergone misgovernment, racism, and brutality. Acts of ethnocide (sometimes genocide) were perpetrated by the Chilean army and police (and by some locals) before and after the plebiscite of 1929, which assigned Arica to Chile and Tacna to Peru. Recent work (eg Choque 2012) collects memories of mass graves and persecution by Chilean forces. When Augusto Pinochet mined the frontiers with Bolivia and Peru in the name of Chilean security, the military pillaged peasant resources in the process (p 34). To those who believe in the primacy of the nation and its cities, impact assessments seem irrelevant; advocates are crying in the wilderness. But how can these problems be addressed except by recognition and reparation?

Eisenberg proposes an apocalyptic narrative telling of the destruction of the "Aymara holy land," an area in which the Lauca National Park lies, and where (as often in

Parks) traditional practices (eg hunting predators to defend flocks) are controlled or forbidden. Drawing on ethnography and folklore from different parts of Bolivia, Peru, and Chile, she presents an "Aymara Cosmovision" reflecting a holistic vision of the relations between humans, animals, and nature. Eisenberg attacks official ignorance of this "cosmovision."

She demands "best practice" from governments, while declaring her own practice in a preface (pp 4–6) that reads like an Ethics Committee's checklist. But errors and confusions in the early chapters abound. It is not "best practice" to cite work on Quechua-speaking Callaguayas of the eastern, Amazonian watershed of the Andes (Bastien 1978), and attribute the same "beliefs" to "Aymaras" living on the western, Pacific slopes. Her linguistic base is shaky, for example, quoting from a recent transcription of the Jesuit Ludovico Bertonio's *Vocabulario* ("1612:615" [*sic*]) a translation of Aymara *chaku* as "volcanic rockwalled corral" (p 141). But Bertonio's *Vocabulario* of 1612 does not have a page 615; it gives "*chacu*: Roundup of flocks and even of people to bring them together" ("Rodeo que se hace del ganado y aun de la gente para juntarla"; Bertonio 1612, Primera parte, p 68).

Her local ethnohistory is also weak. Eisenberg gives an essentialized account of an "Aymara" culture that she claims existed since before Tiwanaku (approximately AD 200–1100), persisting till the present day. She seems unaware of current ascriptions of the Pukina language to Tiwanaku (Cerrón-Palomino 2010), with Aymara traveling south from central Peru. Moreover, Pukina was spoken in Arica and Arequipa well into the early colonial period (Bouysse-Cassagne 2010). Before the Spanish, some Aymara-speaking colonists were sent down from the altiplanic federation of Carangas, for example, to Codpa; Jorge Hidalgo's ethnohistorical work on Arica, and the colonial ethnogenesis of Codpa's

cacicazgo (Hidalgo 2004), is not cited. Other languages were Cunza, from Atacama to the south (the author for some reason calls the entire coastal desert “the Atacama”), and the language of the Camanchaca fisher folk (possibly Puquina too). Eisenberg brackets differences to create a unified picture of “the Aymara.”

Further confusion comes from snippets of historical narrative from different countries introduced without provenance. She states that the Law of Ex-Vinculation (1874) was applied unsuccessfully (p 29). But this law was enacted in Bolivia (Platt 1982) and never applied in Chile. She gives a passionate version of the Black Legend denouncing Spanish colonialism and proposes a return to 1532 as a “decolonizing” goal. She notes that 16th- and 17th-century “Indian Laws” separated the Indian and Spanish “Republics.” In the first half of the 20th century, some Bolivian Indians fastened retrospectively on this “pact” in defense against creole abuses (Ari 2014). But such a pact was never recognized in Chile. “Aymaras” in Peru, Bolivia, and Chile have different histories, systematically conflated by the author.

The treatment of language and cultural change is weak. The author uses the idea of “culture” to abstract a pagan religious “identity” with little mention of Catholic conversion or the different cultures and histories of villages, now caught in the global web

of capitalism. She writes: “Aymara hold [a] sacred obligation to protect their traditional resources. ... They are in a reciprocal partnership with the earth. ... Their relationship was created by the supernatural; thus a violation to their holy land is very serious” (p 151). Such language may resonate with some older Aymara-speakers, but many young people now live in the mines and cities. Few speak Aymara, even if they look back and up in conversation and may return for a fiesta. They would welcome local histories and ethnographies of their own places.

Behind Eisenberg’s discourse lie United Nations statements on indigenous rights which impose the need to essentialize and patrimonialize in order to unlock ethnic funding and legal defense. This can trigger new ethnogenetic processes that require examination. For, as Ernest Renan said in 1892, “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say, historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation” (in Renan 1947). This is not far from what sometimes seems to be happening with the Aymara in this book.

The lure of modernity lies behind the tension between “patrimony” (itself a modern idea) and the destructive effects of Chilean capitalism and state consolidation at the margins. Morally and ecologically, this book (adorned by John Amato’s splendid photos) makes a worthy case

and raises serious issues for Chilean politicians and planners. It lacks the historical, linguistic, and anthropological basis that might make its indignation yet more persuasive.

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