Landscapes of Liberation

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As in most of rural Latin America, in Puno controversies of landownership were marked by conflicting ideologies underpinning the proposed reorganization of the countryside. The liberal development discourses of the 1960s envisioned the rapid modernization of the countryside through technological progress and the abolition of semi-feudalism. The subsequent agrarian reform abolished the hacienda system only to replace it with cooperative structures responding to the revolutionary rhetoric of a collective mobilization of the peasantry. The end of military reformism marked the beginning of a period of contingent discussion and political dispute on how land was to be distributed and owned. As the Batalla por Puno reached its most tense phase, pursuant to Rénique, the department became a battleground for competing ideologies and ideas:

Puno was, at the end of the 20th century, perhaps the last living frontier of that indigenous Peru that the literati of a century beforehand had conceived as the launching pad for a crusade to re-found the nation. Its variegated communal world, the still pending struggle for land, its vast landscapes uninhabited by the hand of the state, its unguarded international border, among other factors, prefigured it as an ideal territory for dreams of insurgency and revolution.¹

It was not only for the liberal government to determine a cohesive agrarian policy, but, more importantly, for the mobilized peasantry to successfully defend their claims to land. Different projects of more or less radical reform, defended by peasant organizations, political parties, the Maoist insurgency or the central government, corresponded to diverging ideas of (rural) tradition and modernity,

¹ Rénique, La batalla por Puno: conflicto agrario y nación en los Andes peruanos, 1866–1995, 317.
(liberal) development and liberation. The same discourses eventually undergirded the increasingly violent land conflict across the southern highlands.

The Catholic Church, whose religious and social activism across the countryside had gradually increased since the early 1960s, defended its own vision for rural development. The bishops of Puno and Ayaviri, in their contributions to the 1979 CELAM conference in Puebla, had already reiterated their respective support for the pueblo who “wants its values, traditions and customs to be recognized”. Following the ideal of a grassroots-led transformation of the countryside that defied state tutelage, the church emphasized not only the historical claim to land of its rural parishioners, but also their right to “organize [themselves] according to [their] own models.”

Put differently, new forms of landownership had to respond to the aspiration of those working, but in most cases still not owning, the land. In a letter sent to the new President Belaúnde Terry in 1980, the bishops demanded the “respect of the peasant communities”, including their “communal structure” and their “own organization experiences”.

The church’s emphasis on community – when referring to the types of an organization, social structure and cultural tradition proper to the peasantry – also echoed intellectual contributions to debates on the rural question. Given widespread disillusion with what was once hailed as an “irreversible march on the paths of modernity”, Alberto Flores Galindo argued that the challenge consisted in “imagin[ing] a development model that does not imply […] the ruin of peasants” but which also allows for cultural pluralism and the respect of traditional practices and knowledge.

In a 1982 contribution to Allpanchis, he and his colleague Manuel Burga wondered whether a synthesis of tradition and modernity would be possible in the southern sierra, or whether such objectives would simply result in “impossible rebellions” based on the “desperation of the vanquished”. The corporative ideals which inspired the 1969 agrarian reform still remained influential among many intellectuals and activists after the demise of the military regime. Questions regarding the viability of land redistribution and the beneficiaries of these efforts continued to focus on future of cooperative and communal management of land, seen as a constitutive part of the social organization in the Andean countryside. In the same volume, sociologist Rodrigo Sánchez criticized this dualistic vision of Peruvian society, which presumes a fixed opposition between the

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peasant economy and capitalism, “lo andino” and modernity. In Sánchez’s view, these interpretations reflected the prevalent “idealization” and “mystified vision” marking contemporary understanding of the peasant community defended by many groups and intellectuals of the political left.6

But to what extent did this ‘mystification’ of the peasant community indeed reflect ideological bias? The “rhetorical opposition between ayllus and Indians, on one hand, and modernity and the West, on the other”, following anthropologist Mary Weismantel, can only be understood “in the context of its intellectual history and the political aims of those who invoke it.” The peasant community - often referred to as either the (distant) successor or the embodiment of the ayllu – has indeed been subject to continuous reinterpretation, reification and abandonment by social scientists. It is against the backdrop of these controversial discussions that one needs to critically analyze the corresponding political rhetoric reclaiming communities, be they “real” or “imagined”, as vectors for rural development in the department of Puno during the 1980s.7

The “(almost) eternal love story” between anthropologists and peasant communities, which finds its origins in the indigenismo of the early 20th century, is also an uneasy relationship. The classic studies of Hildebrando Castro Pozo, Luis E. Valcárcel and José Carlos Mariátegui outlined certain characteristics of community (i.e. communitarianism, ritual, solidarity and reciprocity) that inspired and intrigued anthropologists over the following decades.8 Throughout the accelerated social transformation of rural Peru during the agrarian reform, the dualist principles elaborated by the early indigenista writings - opposing modern and traditional, coast and highlands, Andean and occidental - still informed many historical and anthropological studies. Despite its popularity in social-scientific research, however, the concept of (indigenous or peasant) community has never benefitted from a congruent and widely accepted definition. Therefore, community can be framed as an “entity in a ceaseless process of definition and redefinition” as its structures and organization were being negotiated among its members, political and religious actors alike.9

Despite this burgeoning critical research on peasant communities, José Luis Rénique argues the socialist and indigenista visions delineated by Castro Pozo, Mariátegui and Valcárcel remained popular and barely challenged by the early 1980s. Allpanchis, for instance, had a number of volumes dedicated to themes like myths, peasant movements, communities, regionalism, agrarian economy and, indeed, the political thought of Mariátegui. At the same time, these regional studies had not yet produced any comprehensive accounts of the functioning of peasant economies by the early 1980s. In particular, there still existed no consensus with regard to how capitalism affected the internal organization of peasant communities. Thus, in response to the lack of scholarship on the puneno countryside and following similar tendencies in other provincial universities, the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano opened Puno’s first anthropology department in 1982.

Another reason why the ‘mystifying’, “radical Peruvian tradition” remained prominent is the fact that ‘lo andino’ as a distinct social category remained widely used to describe the peculiarity of social phenomena related to the inhabitants and society of the sierra. Alberto Flores Galindo, who remained director of Allpanchis until 1983, aimed to advance the history of mentalities. His articulations of an “Andean Utopia” as a project responding to colonial domination and social fragmentation, however, was criticized for perpetuating the localisms and essentialisms he himself had previously condemned. Both Flores Galindo and his colleague Manuel Burga followed the footsteps of early anthropological work which outlined related notions of territory and culture. Their elaborations on the “[Andean] cultural area”, in particular, lent implicit support to the idea that “cultural boundaries are territorial boundaries and the borders between culturally diverse groups are marked by strong ecological differences.” The criticism, and the more notorious rebuttal of “Andeanism” a few years later, reflect the revisionist tendencies which, during the 1990s, reviewed and discussed earlier community studies.

More fundamentally, one can argue, the “radical” writings of Valcárcel, Castro Pozo and Mariátegui still influenced the agenda for rural development in the southern sierra. During the 1950s and 1960s, the influence of these writers often

11 Rénique, La batalla por Puno: conflicto agrario y nación en los Andes peruanos, 1866–1995, 313.
led the development policy to translate into a “reinvention of community” according to the perceptions of the mostly foreign actors to the altiplano environment.\textsuperscript{16} Early transnational development projects, including the previously discussed Andean Indian Program, were accompanied by anthropologists studying the reception and acceptance of these ‘reinvention’ measures. Many of these programs articulated the objective of an “ideal community” which however differed from the existing structures and, therefore, required the intervention of state and non-state agents.\textsuperscript{17} In the mid-1950s, François Bourricaud tellingly complained about the fact that the “term community was used in such a vague manner” that it applied to many distinct social structures in Puno.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite these contrasting perceptions, the comunidad remained the principal axis for rural development for the numerous grassroots support organizations and their projects during the 1970s and 1980s. The objective of “community development” was as multifaceted as the many programs that aimed to promote modernization and literacy in the puneño countryside. A review of these projects from the time underlined that “peasant communities suffer from distorted perceptions” since “all public and private institutions try to organize them”. Whether it was for matters of functionality, economic concerns of decision-making processes, actors with an often limited understanding of communal organization advanced “models and organizational charts”, sponsored “committees and promoters” and often, in so doing, subjected the residents to plans they had little influence on and were not responsible for.\textsuperscript{19}

The 1970 Estatuto Especial de Comunidades Campesinas probably constituted one of the most far-reaching of these attempts at restructuration. Complementing the 1969 agrarian reform, the statute reorganized peasant communities along cooperatives lines, with new administrative bodies restricted to those members who could read and write Spanish. The introduction of new membership criteria, the replacement of old communal juntas and the appropriation of private lands into cooperative management, unsurprisingly, disregarded existing customs for governance and agrarian practices.\textsuperscript{20} As a result of this new legislation, the num-

\textsuperscript{17} For an overview of development practices focusing on highland communities in Peru, see Susan Vincent, \textit{Dimensions of Development: History, Community, and Change in Allpachico, Peru} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 50–58.
\textsuperscript{18} Bourricaud, \textit{Cambios en Puno: Estudios de sociología andina}, 65.
ber of officially recognized peasant communities rose from 167 to 460 during the course of the 1970s. In contrast to the large associative enterprises, with whom the neighboring comuneros and comuneras often entertained a tense relationship, however, peasant communities in Puno hardly benefitted from the Velasco reform. They had initially been promised a lot, but ended up receiving but 2.5% of the restructured hacienda lands and were among the sectors of society most affected by the economic crisis during the last years of the military regime.

On entering the 1980s, the peasant community remained an object of fascination and scrutiny: a ‘mystified’ structure often (re)constructed in intellectual and political discourse, idealized by development agents yet increasingly questioned by scholars. It was ultimately upon vague, oft-romanticized descriptions of these comunidades that many parties to the land conflict developed their political platforms. The Catholic Church in Puno, as historians Ethel del Pozo-Vergnes and José Luis Rénique have noted, also formed part of the network that “mystified the community” and hence mobilized the ideas of intellectuals of the political left. Whereas both authors rightly locate the practices and discourses of pastoral agents within a much larger intellectual heritage, they do not provide an account for why and how certain religious and lay actors construed the (peasant) community as a new ideal of rural development. Some questions remain open for investigation. How did pastoral endorsement of communal organization differ from contemporary intellectual debates on rural development? And in what way did pastoral agents develop a discursive strategy appropriating ‘lo andino’ in their preaching of liberation?

Communities of Resistance

The agrarian law advanced by the second government of Belaúnde Terry in 1980 was, from the outset, subjected to severe criticism with regard to its impact on the rural economy. Whereas he was in favor of agrarian reform, albeit carried out timidly, during his first presidency, he aimed to dismantle the cooperative sector and liberalize the land market during his second term in office. The liquidation of associative enterprises risked exacerbating rural poverty. According to regional studies, the small-scale production of the campesinado could hardly compete with domestic and foreign agroindustry benefitting from a liberalized market. In other

22 Rénique, La batalla por Puno: conflicto agrario y nación en los Andes peruanos, 1866–1995, 204–05, 212.
23 Rénique, 255; Del Pozo-Vergnes, De la hacienda a la mundialización, 152.
24 Mayer, Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform, 28–30.
words, “capitalist development in Peru has [always] been anti-rural and anti-peasant” because it risked converting the peasantry into a (cheap) labor force for the growing demands of urban centers.\textsuperscript{25}

In their reaction to the 1980 agrarian promotion law, church representatives expressed their fear that the civilian government would thoroughly reverse the agrarian reform and further disadvantage its supposed beneficiaries. In a meeting on the “campesino question” in Lima in 1981, religious and lay actors criticized the promotion of private landownership. Although attendees at the meeting concurred that the agrarian reform had not resolved many of the pressing problems the countryside faced, they nevertheless commended the previous military government for recognizing the “social function” of land through the establishment of associative enterprises. If the latter were to be dismantled and sold, meeting attendees feared that the old landowning class would reclaim their lost property and that land would, once again, only serve for individual economic benefit.\textsuperscript{26} In their view, economic liberalization thus positioned the private interests of capital in opposition to the collective interests of impoverished rural workers and, most notably, the peasant community. In March 1981, sixty pastoral agents from across the southern Andes denounced the new agrarian law for not “offering a solution to bring Peruvian agriculture out of stagnation and alleviate popular hunger” as the projected reforms would not allocate to peasant communities the “land they needed to live”.\textsuperscript{27}

Within the context of public disputes over the restructuration of the agrarian system, opponents of the liberal reform projects affirmed the fundamental role of peasant communities. The alternative reform program elaborated by the Confederación Campesina del Perú (CCP) in 1981, for instance, asserted that the comunidades must constitute “the principal vehicle of agrarian development in the Andean region.” Among other recommendations, the CCP suggested that the state guarantee the peasant communities’ access to land, energy resources, financial support and basic infrastructure.\textsuperscript{28} A group of (anonymous) social scientists who contributed to the proposal expressed their concerns that the government’s law and framework for rural development would contribute to the disappearance of traditional forms of social organization. Notably, they also warned that the “widespread diffusion of Spanish makes it possible to introduce the ideology
of progress” as well as “individualism as an essential capitalist trait”. Notions of progressive (development) ideology and individualism, in their view, clashed with what they identified as the traditional values of the peasant community: communitarianism and solidarity.

Many clerics, women religious and laypeople in Puno increasingly sympathized with those contemporary intellectuals defending the sui generis nature of peasant communities and their role in the reorganization of the agrarian system. In 1978, for instance, Louis Dalle lamented that the “complex of the colonized” continued to haunt Peru and Latin America in its pursuit of “submission to the dominating power” and the “mania of imitation”. In his view, the pueblo “longed for authenticity” in its defense of tradition and in its opposition against abuses committed by colonial rulers or gamonales. The same year, the bishops of Cuzco and Puno reaffirmed the importance of “popular struggle against oppression” in a pastoral letter. In particular, they recognized that the peasantry aimed to “conserve the traditions of their ancestors in the face of attempts by dominant cultures to destroy them” as well as “defend proper forms of social organization” like the peasant community.

When rejecting economic liberalism as a (foreign) imposition, religious and lay actors not only drew inspiration from the communitarian ideals elaborated by indigenista intellectuals or organizations like the CCP. Neither did they, in reference to Eric Hobsbawm, merely invent a localist tradition. Rather, as this chapter argues, religious and lay actors developed a discursive strategy in defense of a supposedly authentic, historical form of ‘community’. As partly evidenced by Dalle and his fellow bishops, pastoral agents sought to (re)interpret and appropriate ‘Andean’ social and religious customs as an intrinsic longing for liberation. Church representatives, in other words, mobilized their own reading of tradition (past and present) as a source of legitimacy for what they considered ‘ideal’ communities. In line with Mary Watkins and Helen Shulman, the communities endorsed in pastoral discourse could be framed as “communities of resistance”, that is, communities “where justice and peace on a small scale are possible” and which “resist the dehumanizing forces present in the dominant [capitalist] culture.”

The reports of a 1982 workshop on land struggle illustrate how religious and lay actors in Puno renegotiated their (historical) understanding of peasant communities. Pastoral agents of the diocese, including Ronald Llerena and Luis Jesús López, argued that the subdivision of associative enterprises into individual land

31 “Acompañando a Nuestro Pueblo” (September 1978) in Gallego, La señal de cada momento, 55.
32 Watkins and Shulman, Towards Psychologies of Liberation, 209.
parcels could not constitute a viable option for rural development. Notably, they evoked values like solidarity and the “forms of communal resistance” which had once helped the peasants defend against colonialism, and in their view, would continue to do so against capitalism. Further advancing this argument, their fellow missionaries in Ayaviri developed their own vision of “Christian ethics in the struggle for land”. They argued that many of the “ethical-cultural values” of the contemporary peasant community were accordant with the “universal values of pre-capitalist civilization” described in biblical writings. The participants praised the sacred relationship between peasants and land, and underlined how the peasants’ struggle can be understood through their reading of the book of Exodus:

Like the history of the people of Israel, the history of the Andean people is characterized by its continuous struggle for land since its right to land had continuously been threatened or denied. Facing the voracious appetite for land of the Incas, Spanish captains, encomenderos, gamonales, or the state, peasant communities of the altiplano, resisted, retracted many times, rebelled: active or passive resistance, legal or violent battle to reclaim their land.

Through their longue durée perspective, the delegation from Ayaviri inscribed the contemporary peasant mobilization as part of a continuous conflict between oppressors and those comunidades striving for their eventual liberation. The Bible, as discussed in the previous chapter, could thereby serve as an important inspiration for both pastoral agents and parishioners in their commitment to solve the ongoing agrarian crisis.

The reinvigoration of the peasant community as a historic community of resistance also manifested in the curriculum at the IER Waqrani. Agronomists and pastoral agents resorted to a historicized reading of social organization and included the “history of community” in its courses (lesson shown in Figure 16). In July 1981, the IER hosted a course on the organization of communal production in which future models of landownership were discussed. Based on a brief analysis of precolonial and colonial history, the course material noted how both ayllus and later comunidades occupied a small, marginal space in a rural economy that had been successively dominated by the Spanish crown, haciendas and associative enterprises. Facing these continuous aggressions and the disappointment of the Velasco reforms, the peasant community had been forgotten and marginalized, lacking land as well as technical and financial support. The course guide warned that if communal lands were to be fully subdivided among individuals, its mem-

33 AOP, Taller teológico del Sur Andino (1982), Texto de discusión no. 1: “La tierra en el proyecto andino de liberación,” Aporte del grupo de Puno.
34 AOP, Taller teológico del Sur Andino (1982), Texto de discusión no. 3, “Ética cristiana en el trabajo / lucha por la tierra,” Aporte del grupo de Ayaviri.
bers would lose communal ties and could thus not mobilize for more lands or better educational and health services anymore.

Notwithstanding growing internal divisions among community members, the course manual emphasized that the peasant communities still maintained important communitarian traditions like faenas and religious fiestas. With their vision for a peasant community-led future as the “sole alternative” to unequal, capitalist expansion, the course concluded, it was time “to show the exploiters that campesinos are capable of working the land in benefit of the entire community.”

Following a similar historical perspective, popular religion also constituted a cultural practice of resistance for comuneros and comuneras. As an example, one missionary and theologian researching religion in the southern highlands, Diego Irarrázaval, distinguished between a modernizing and a liberating dynamic among rural parishioners. Writing in 1980, he observed that capitalist values had increasingly infiltrated “traditional religion” through the influence of certain privileged groups. This “dominating culture”, Irarrázaval feared, risked “undermining the peasantry’s ethos of reciprocity and morality of defiance” and thus fostering “subordination to the leadership of mistis.” In contrast to the modern - and “evangelic” - emphasis on individual salvation, popular religious practice consolidated the unity among community members. Through the celebration

36  Piedra Valdez, La misión andina, 151–53.
and appropriation of religious fiestas and symbols, for instance, rural parishioners could strengthen reciprocity and their “non-conformist identity”. In so doing, the peasants “not only reproduced their traditions, but rethink them in opposition to the dominant culture.”

Following Paraguayan theologian José Luis Caravias, the Quechua vision of Pachamama was indeed “much closer to the biblical message than the materialistic Western conceptions of [rural] development.”

The reinterpretation and valorization of popular religion was a response to ongoing reforms and theological debates within the continent at the onset of the new decade. The episcopal conference in Puebla had already in 1979 expressed the need for the church “to not only evangelize individuals, but cultures as well”. In particular, religious actors were called upon to respect and value the (ever-changing) popular religious beliefs and practices, and incorporate them in their work. Pastoral agents should notably recognize the values of popular religiosity and role of lived faith in the creation of a collective conscience. The accompaniment preconized by the bishops in Puebla was thus not limited to social transformations, but first and foremost also the continuous development of a distinct popular religion.

From the late 1970s onwards, the evangelization of cultures propagated by the bishops in Puebla translated into a renewed emphasis on popular religion in many parishes of the Sur Andino. As discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, religious and lay actors aimed to offer new, liberating perspectives on some religious customs previously considered alienating and subject to numerous anthropological studies. Many parish teams developed new approaches to religious fiestas by seeking to foster the awareness-raising and communitarian aspects of local celebrations. Recognizing the values of what their predecessors often dismissed and criticized for the abuse of alcohol, pastoral agents aspired to understand the meaning of these celebrations for the peasant communities as well as their role in reproducing a collective identity.

The Fiesta de los Difuntos can be taken as an illustrative example. Pastoral agents in the province of Azángaro sought to mobilize the “liberating aspects” of the cult to the dead without “imposing content that [was] alien to the life and culture of the pueblo”. In their view, this fiesta notably expressed the parishioners’ admiration and respect for their ancestors, whose souls were said to maintain close ties to their living relatives. From a “liberating perspective”, however, these celebrations also revealed the often-avoidable deaths and often-unfulfilled aspirations of the peasantry. In their sermons, pastoral agents sought to address the “true causes” of the death of many (young) parishioners, in particular the prevailing social con-
ditions (e.g. malnourishment, lack of medical care) and political conditions (e.g. social inequality, marginalization). Furthermore, they insisted that peasants were to continue the historical struggles for social transformation that their forebears, family and friends could not, due to their untimely death. Pastoral agents called upon parishioners to remain “faithful to their forefathers” and continue to “fight for better living conditions” and “a more just society” in which their children could lead healthier (and longer) lives.40

Over time, then, pastoral agents in certain parishes had hence come to consider the peasant community and popular religion, respectively, as social structures and social practices that perpetuated traditions of resistance. Reclaiming and appropriating these traditions as a distinctively ‘Andean’ praxis of liberation, they engaged in a discourse that strategically positioned rural parishioners in opposition to forces of oppression and (capitalist) exploitation. Or, in the terms of Enrique Dussel, they equated Andinidad with “popular culture”, framing it as the lifestyle “least contaminated by the ruling classes”, as such constituting “the radiative nucleus of resistance to the oppressors by the oppressed”.41

Through its attribution of specific, ‘liberating’ values to these ‘communities of resistance’, however, this type of pastoral discourse ignored the dynamics of internal differentiation. In the view of many religious and lay actors, it was supposedly cohesive, solidary and harmonious comunidades who mobilized these practices of resistance. Thus, claimed scholarly critics, pastoral agents had misrepresented many rural parishioners whose communal organization barely corresponded to the envisioned ideals of collective action and reciprocity. A study on landowners-ship in Puno published in 1969, for instance, had already noted that a “high degree of individualism” existed within peasant communities, thus disqualifying the existence of a “mystical communal solidarity”.42 The same year, poet and novelist Juan Alberto Cuentas also criticized the fact that politicians in Lima misunderstood communities, claiming that the campesinado was “contrarian to agrarian collectivism” and that only private ownership could offer “progress, independence, justice and liberty”.43 Burgeoning scholarship on rural Peru which emerged during the early 1980s would partly confirm this criticism, for instance by emphasizing

that the peasant communities were in an “advanced phase of internal fragmentation.”

Simultaneous attempts to create ecclesial base communities further illustrate how pastoral agents sought to impose their ‘ideal’, (Christian) community in the countryside. Although significantly less widespread than in Brazil, these comunidades de base had constituted a method for evangelization in many regions of difficult terrain or inaccessibility. In the Prelature of Ayaviri, the parish priests of San Juan del Oro were among the first to experiment with the organization of such communities, which were to help parishioners to critically reflect upon their situation. However, Nicolas Castel and a woman religious from the local girls’ school struggled to communicate their model of communal prayers, biblical lectures and social collaboration. In fact, the communities of local comuneros and comuneras differed drastically from the pastoral agents’ ideal of a comunidad de base. In the sector of Chunchusmayo, they tellingly had to take several days to “make [parishioners] understand what a community is.”

All told, the different examples discussed in this section demonstrate how many religious and lay actors in the Prelature of Ayaviri and the Diocese of Puno developed a distinctively Christian perspective on land struggle by the early 1980s. Based on their endorsement of ‘communities of resistance’, pastoral agents actively supported peasant organizations reclaiming the restructuration of associative enterprises. Ultimately, this was a crucial moment for many pastoral agents to prove that their option for the peasantry would indeed translate into the envisioned accompaniment of rural parishioners.

**Democratic Restructuration of Land**

In multiple articles during the early 1980s, the magazine *SUR* warned its readers about the “return of gamonales” and arbitrary abuses of power by local authorities. In the district of Coaza, for instance, the owners of a hacienda unaffected by the agrarian reform harassed local comuneros and attacked their property rights. Since the agrarian policy of the Belaúnde government seeking to liberalize landownership risked being detrimental to the claims of peasant communities, nascent campesino organizations had to respond in defense of their interests amid an increasingly turbulent situation across the landscapes of rural Puno.

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The largest of Puno’s rural unions and peasant organizations that were created in the late 1970s and early 1980s adhered to the mariateguista orientation of the CCP. José Carlos Mariátegui served – together with Mao Tse-Tung – as the great doctrinal leader for the peasant movements emerging in that time. The issues Mariátegui once discussed became part of the claims of the mobilized peasantry, including the struggle against semi-feudality, gamonalismo and the reinvigoration of the peasant community. The Federación Campesina del Departamento de Puno (FDCP), the regional umbrella organization founded outside the town of Azángaro in late 1978, also symbolically acknowledged important leaders of anti-colonial resistance (e.g. Túpac Amaru, Pedro Vilca Apaza and Rumi Maki) as honorary members. The federation leaders, however, named the first congress of the organization after Mariátegui in recognition of the “value of the gran maestro of the Peruvian pueblo and proletariar.” Providing support to its members in opposition to landowners, administrators of associative enterprises and the Belaúnde government, the FDCP assumed a campesino and grassroots identity, reflective of then prevalent reinterpretations of the work of maestro Mariátegui. The political left in Puno, which principally defended campesino interests and land claims, also drew their ideology from Peru’s most famous Marxist intellectual. In 1984, they founded the regionalist Partido Unificado Mariateguista (PUM) as one of the leading forces of the ‘third path’.

Simultaneous efforts to establish ethnic federations in the southern highlands had not proven successful. In 1979, a first Encuentro de Nacionalidades took place in Cuzco, seeking to reunite peasant organizations – considered Quechua or Aymara “nations” – as well as social organizations from the Amazon region as representatives of “national minorities”. During the debate, many participants substantiated the rhetoric of the nationalist project under the military government. To them, it was unfair to differentiate between ethnic groups as exploitation and domination could also affect non-indigenous peasants and the working class. Put differently, according to SUR, they raised the question “how [can they] liberate [themselves] if all of Peru is oppressed?”

Unsurprisingly, the competition between those organizations embracing a class discourse and those defending a distinctively ethnic identity was only short-lived. By 1982, both the Congreso de Nacionalidades and the Federación Aymara Túpac Katari, ethnic organizations respectively competing with the CCP and

49 For a more detailed analysis of party politics in Puno and the role of PUM in the land conflict of the 1980s, see Rénique, La batalla por Puno: conflicto agrario y nación en los Andes peruanos, 1866–1995, 329–52.
FDCP, had failed to consolidate as movements with broad grassroots support. The peasant organizations, in turn, were excluded from attempts to coordinate indigenous movements across Latin America. The organizers of the first Encuentro de Organizaciones Indias de América del Sur – also held in Cuzco – barred Peruvian organizations because they identified as peasants and thus “expressed their rejection of the specific characteristics of Indian culture and tradition.”

In contrast, organizations and committees defending the interests of peasant women experienced relative success. In 1982, a first assembly of rural women from across Puno called for the establishment of a class-based organization of campesinas in support of land redistribution. The participants discussed the multiple forms of discrimination affecting mujeres campesinas, as they were subject to discrimination due to both their gender and their class. Despite their important contributions to the peasant economy, moreover, they still had little influence on communal decision-making. By this time, the Catholic Church had reformed its pastoral work from an early focus on promoting home economics through clubs de madres. After numerous priests and missionaries had struggled for several years to respond to the specific forms of oppression faced by women, the topic of women’s political participation gained significantly more prominence towards the mid-1980s.

Overall, the greater strength of campesino organizations from the department of Puno, found through mounting female support, among other means, also had reverberations at the national level. In January 1982, the village of Santa Rosa (Melgar) hosted the fourth national council of the CCP in preparation for its sixth national congress. At said national congress, the puneño peasantry constituted the largest participant group from any department, representing almost a third of delegates and base members. The numerous delegations from Puno critically discussed the shortage of land in the altiplano districts where associative enterprises still dominated a large part of the agrarian system. Ultimately, however, the delegation from Puno was not only there to “bring problems”, as SUR intimated, but rather, they also suggested an alternative solution to the agrarian crisis. This came

51 Archivos CCP, “I Encuentro de las organizaciones indias de América del Sur,” 27.02-03.03.1980, Cuzco.
about through their demands for the restructuration of the associative enterprises and the establishment of so-called “communal enterprises”.

According to Ricardo Vega, then president of the IER Waqrani, the communal enterprise (empresa communal) was conceived as an alternative agrarian structure in the early 1980s, after several years of debate across the department on how to organize communal agrarian production. These structures still adhered to the cooperative ideals of the Velasco reform, but relied on the voluntary participation of members of the peasant community. The communal enterprise, he claims, could hence be defined as a “peasant community that organizes itself entrepreneurially.” Despite its dependence on the market economy – where most of its produce was to be sold – the enterprise was to “respect the life of the community”, as decisions regarding planting, harvest and commercialization on the communal lands were to be made collectively. In its organization, Vega claimed, the communal enterprise thus “values Andean culture and identity” and fosters a sense of belonging as a foundation for both social cohesion and productivity.

The Catholic Church, most notably the clerics, lay agents and agronomists directly cooperating with peasant organizations, strongly supported these communal enterprises. In their 1986 pastoral letter, La Tierra: Don de Dios, Derecho del Pueblo, the bishops of the Sur Andino reiterated their support for the peasant community as the “axis for a program of authentic rural Andean development”. Referring to offerings to Pachamama, the bishops claimed that land – “from an Andean perspective” - was “both sacred and [a] source of life”. The redistribution of land, the central claim of the peasant organizations, was hence intrinsically connected to the perseverance of the peasant community:

The land is also the foundation of a way of life. The community is strengthened and made aware of its identity in the permanent struggle to make the land productive, to work in common, to defend its possession and to recover it when it is taken away from them by outsiders. The community expresses itself in bonds of coexistence, mutual help and forgiveness that make us discover a religious attitude towards the rights of the person. We believe that the Andean values guarantee a society that is more and more humane and, therefore, more and more free, in which the Christian ideal of fraternity and solidarity can be lived.

In other words, land was necessary to “revitalize the culture and values of the Andean world” as it promoted cohesion within the peasant communities, rather than

56 “La tierra, don de Dios, derecho del pueblo” (March 1986) in Gallego, La señal de cada momento, 224, 232.
disputes or injustice. Not only did the communal enterprise respond to the concerns regarding the social function of land, but it more importantly also respected and fostered communitarian traditions. Echoing their appropriation of ‘lo andino’ in opposition to ‘dominant society’, religious and lay actors ultimately supported an initiative that allowed for the continuity of two intertwined, collective practices, in their view: that of a liberating faith, and that of ‘Andean’ resistance.

The utopia of liberation, while still projected towards the future, reinvigorated forms of supposedly traditional social organization. It was within these social structures – or an idealized version thereof – that Catholics could liberate themselves from oppressive structures and foreign impositions. It was from reclaimed and communally administered lands, moreover, that the peasants could begin to reclaim their identity, nurture traditional beliefs and practice a liberating faith. Pastoral agents could hence construe communitarianism as an essential trait of campesino identity, with the rural pueblo belonging simultaneously to both a distinctively ‘Andean’ and Christian community.

Peasant movements – embodying the “autonomous organizations of the people” often invoked by pastoral letters – found important allies in religious and lay actors. Following Rénique, the church even “cleared the path the CCP [had] consol-
The FDCP, in fact, gathered most of its support and membership in the provinces that contained many clerics and laypeople advocating an ‘option for the peasantry’. Many parishes and diocesan institutions across the altiplano closely cooperated with local unions and campesino organizations, albeit not in an institutionalized manner. For example, leaflets and bulletins created under the auspices of the diocese and prelature (Figure 17) promoted communal enterprises as viable alternatives for the restructuration of land, bishops were invited to partake in regional peasant congresses and, most notably, the IER Waqrani constituted an important forum for capacity-building and the mobilization of the peasantry in the north of the department. According to Luis Jesús López, for instance, the Spanish missionaries in Asillo not only supported the political education of their animadores and encouraged them to attend the IER in neighboring Ayaviri, but initially also hosted the headquarters of the local peasant union in the parish building.59

In the province of Melgar, the cooperation between pastoral agents and peasant organizations was indeed particularly fruitful. In June 1981, the campesinado of the province founded the Federación Unitaria de Campesinos de Melgar (FUCAM) based on previously existing peasant federations, unions and agrarian leagues. Rejecting the new agrarian reform policy, the members of the federation called for the restructuration of associative enterprises while “defending and respecting forms of associative labor in local enterprises and communities.”60 Three months later, the IER offered a workshop supporting the FUCAM with regard to the restructuration of associative enterprises. Participants, including among others parish priests from Asillo, Azángaro and Ayaviri, were to discuss the principles of restructuration together with the economist Alberto Figueroa. Participants agreed that through the creation of communal enterprises, the restructuration of associative enterprises would strengthen “the communal structure and its developments” as a means to promote social justice despite inequalities existing within each community.61

Later the same year, the IER Waqrani officially became the technical committee of FUCAM. It thus constituted a forum through which peasant organizations and the Prelature of Ayaviri further strengthened their relationship. It provided information on the patterns of landownership and a space for strategic negotiations on peasant mobilization, and assisted in concretizing plans for restructur-

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ation. Under the leadership of Ricardo Vega, the Instituto continued to advance the interests of peasant communities as the protagonists and main beneficiaries of the restructuration process – in line with the then predominant discourse of the regional bishops.

The support of peasant movements, however, also subjected priests and lay agents to attacks and threats from those who deemed such actions to constitute an inappropriate political interference. Local authorities and the owners of rural estates arguably felt threatened by the activism of those “subversive agents” they considered a driving force for the rising militancy among peasant organizations.\(^{62}\)

With increased presence of Sendero Luminoso in northern Puno, many critiques accused clerics and laypeople of secretly supporting the armed insurgency. To them, liberation theology was but a Marxist ideology in religious disguise. In late 1982, for instance, an *animador cristiano* from Umachiri had been imprisoned by the police because of suspected terrorism as he was “carrying leaflets of the priest, leaflets of the *izquierda*”.\(^{63}\) A letter sent to the editor of the newspaper *El Observador* a few weeks later claimed that “Sendero [Luminoso] is found disguised […] in some Catholic priests of Umachiri, Ayaviri and Asillo.”\(^{64}\)

In an increasingly hostile environment across the altiplano, many religious and lay actors hence became the targets of slander, from different parties to the conflict. American journalist Tina Rosenberg, when visiting Ricardo Vega in Ayaviri, described how he was an enemy figure for all competing factions, as “Sendero […] and managers of the big farms hated him” while, in addition, “the army, the antiterrorist police and the paramilitary squads of the government considered him a Senderista.”\(^{65}\)

**Land Invasion and Redistribution**

The drought that affected Puno in 1982 and 1983, as well as the torrential rainfall and ensuing floods experienced from 1984 to 1986, further exacerbated the unresolved tensions surrounding the claims for land redistribution. The criticism notably focused on the inaction in Lima, where political leadership still seemed to care little about the fate of the peasantry in Puno. In line with the invitation to the second departmental congress of the FDCP in August 1983, the Belaúnde government approved additional financial cuts to the emergency aid program and

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rejected any funding for development support of the \textit{puneño} agroindustry, thus aggravating the “impoverishment of the countryside.”

The electoral victory of Alan García of the anti-imperialist Peruvian Aprista party in 1985, a self-proclaimed \textit{presidente comunero}, could not appease the tensions across the southern highlands. In contrast to his predecessor, García sought to increase public spending to promote growth and fight the ongoing economic crisis, among other things also by aiding the agrarian sector with subsidies, price support and access to credit. More than political dialogue with community leaders or policies to fight rampant inflation, however, FUCAM demanded that the new president respond to the calls for the redistribution of landownership if he did not also want to further aggravate the abandonment of the \textit{puneño} countryside. After multiple years of unsuccessful petitions, demonstrations and negotiations, the regional \textit{campesino} movement arguably lost its patience with the central government that appeared to ignore the long-standing grievances of the peasantry. The organization therefore announced that if no governmental action was taken within sixty days, they would launch land invasions throughout the province of Melgar.

Through their claim for a “democratic restructuration”, the leaders of FUCAM and the IER staff aimed to reduce the size of associative enterprises founded by the Velasco reform for the benefit of adjacent peasant communities. The democratic element in this restructuration process, Vega noted, was how it responded to widely supported claims for a redistribution of land and how this would be decided upon by members of both peasant communities and associative enterprises. Whereas a draft piece of legislation on land restructuration was submitted to parliamentary debate, certain associative enterprises resolutely objected to any claims for reform. The Empresa Rural de Propiedad Social (ERPS) Kunurana was one of these enterprises in the province of Melgar subject to criticism from the IER. In fact, the associates of the ERPS Kunurana had significantly more (and better-quality) land at their disposal, yet produced less livestock and provided less produce to the regional markets than adjacent communities. Vega thus denounced the gross mismanagement of the ERPS Kunurana and called for its urgent restructuration.

68 Archivo CCP, Acuerdos y resoluciones, Segundo Congreso Provincial de la FUCAM, Ayaviri, 07.08.1985.
After a prolonged impasse of negotiations on its subdivision, Kunurana was the first associative enterprise to fall victim to land invasions. In late October 1985, Francisco d’Alteroche, the new prelate of Ayaviri, led a “march of sacrifice” onto the enterprise’s domain, accompanied by members of neighboring peasant communities as well as representatives of campesino organizations. In his speech, he strongly criticized unjust land redistribution, which forced many peasants to live off infertile lands on the hilltops while the rich lands of the associative enterprises remained underused. He therefore assured his rural parishioners of the continued support of the clergy of Ayaviri, who had made a historical commitment to the “progress of the peasantry [and] the progress of the communities.”

Despite attempts at mediation and further negotiations on behalf of d’Alteroche, nine peasant communities bordering Kunurana invaded its territory and took possession of up to 10,500 hectares of land in December 1985.

The escalation of the land conflict provoked further criticism of the active involvement of representatives of the church, which often specifically targeted foreign missionaries. Since many clerics of the Ayaviri prelature did not hold Peruvian citizenship, they were accused of unjustly interfering in domestic politics. Already in 1977, the bishop of Puno had signed a declaration in defense of his foreign colleagues by emphasizing that “the fact that they were not born in Peru does not prevent them from knowing our situation or having the same feelings as all Peruvians.” In reaction to the land invasion, the administrators of ERPS Kunurana also condemned the role of the missionaries in support of the land invasions. Leaflets denounced “the deviant religion”, accusing collaborators within the IER of working as “mercenaries” and the Ayaviri priests as “foreigners trafficking with the belief in God.”

The land invasions in Melgar, coinciding with a departmental strike occurring the same day, raised questions with regard to the processes of land distribution and repossession in the future agrarian economy of Puno. According to the FDCP, the new governmental directives recognizing the necessity of land restructuration issued in early 1986 constituted a “partial victory”. Whereas the García government appeared to agree on the principle of dismantling associative enterprises, it sought to do so in an “authoritarian and bureaucratic manner” and had, after one year in power, still not responded to the most pressing demands formulated

70 Francisco d’Alteroche, “En el Altiplano, para vivir se necesita tierra” (October 1985) in Gallego, La señal de cada momento, 191–94.
71 Centro de Capacitación Campesina de Puno, La lucha por la tierra en Puno: Las tomas de Macari y Santa Rosa 1985–2005 (Puno: Editorial del Pacífico, 2005), 40; Del Pozo-Vergnes, De la hacienda a la mundialización, 139.
73 AOP, “Al pueblo de Ayaviri,” n.d.
by the departmental campesino organizations. These claims were reaffirmed once again in August 1987, when the FDCP coined its struggle for restructuration as the “via campesina comunera”, consisting in creation of communal enterprises and the consolidation of peasant communities as the political support bases of the puneño government. At a regional eucharistic congress held the following month, Luis Jesús López gave a presentation in which he expressed his confidence that the democratic restructuration would “open perspectives for life and peace for the peasantry”. Asked about the risk that all the lands would be subdivided and thus that minifundismo would prevail across the countryside, López insisted that this was the “wrong path”. Once the land, “where Andean culture originated” was reclaimed, he argued, “this culture [would be] recreated with greater vitality and in better conditions and possibilities” through the reinvigoration of the peasant community and its own agrarian cooperative.

In the face of mounting economic and political instability, important questions remained about whether and how communal enterprises were to succeed as the principal basis of the rural economy in Puno. The formation of communal enterprises could prevent neither the growing urbanization nor the ongoing exodus from rural areas to the city. As much as (the ownership of) land was considered integral to peasant identity, it was also a resource with increasingly less value by this time. Regional commercial centers like Juliaca and Arequipa indeed entailed new visions of progress. Although pastoral agents could seek to diminish the allure of the city for their rural parishioners, the offer of paid labor proved irresistible to many (soon-to-be erstwhile) campesinos.

Ultimately, despite the successful peasant mobilizations, for communal enterprises, as a means to continue the cooperative models established by the agrarian reform (yet under comunero leadership), success was only short-lived. During its first stage, the number of legally recognized comunidades in Puno more than doubled from 1986 until the mid-1990s. According to a publication by the Centro de Capacitación Campesina de Puno commemorating the 1985 land invasions, however, communal enterprises “in a great majority declined from 1996, due to internal contradictions between the business management and its communal organization”, as well as due to the neoliberal agenda of President Alberto Fujimori, who aimed to fully privatize the remnants of the agrarian reform.

74 Archivos ROA, Convocatoria al III Congreso Departamental de la FDCP, Puno, julio 1986.
78 Centro de Capacitación Campesina de Puno, La lucha por la tierra en Puno: Las tomas de Macari y Santa Rosa 1985-2005, 111.
The success of the ‘third path’, or the religious involvement therein, however, can not only be measured against the backdrop of the rural reorganization in Puno. Pastoral agents also sought to promote an alternative path addressing the grievances of their rural parishioners who, particularly in the wide plains of northern Puno, risked falling prey to Sendero Luminoso. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission acknowledges that religious and lay actors played a decisive role in containing the spread of insurgent groups and preventing systematic human rights violations that had “occurred in other places without the same ecclesiastical presence.” Based on its examination of pastoral letters and pronouncements, the same report claims that the “progressive and dynamic” church in Puno contributed to “a new feeling of belonging among thousands of peasants”. 79

This sense of belonging was ultimately not only forged through the reinvigoration of the peasant community or the ecclesial community writ large, but notably through the fact that the central government was forced to respond to the demands of the mobilized peasantry. Even if the oft-cited ‘abandonment’ of Puno did come to a sudden end as a result, pastoral agents actively contributed to finding a peaceful solution to the widespread historic grievances about land redistribution. In so doing, they also affirmed the place of the rural altiplano districts on the political map of Peru – as landscapes in the process of a dynamic, grassroots-led transformation.

79 CVR, Informe final, 3.2. La Iglesia Católica y las Iglesias evangélicas, 2003, 431.