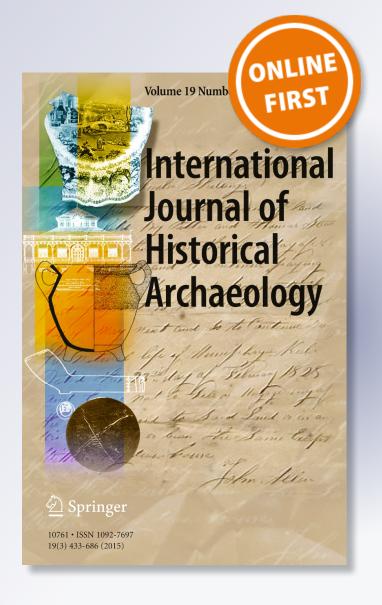
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International Journal of Historical Archaeology

ISSN 1092-7697

Int J Histor Archaeol DOI 10.1007/s10761-015-0309-2





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Mega-Mining, Contract Archaeology, and Local Responses to the Global Order in Argentina

Ivana Carina Jofré¹

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Abstract This paper shows that contract archaeology activities geared to large mining projects in Argentina articulates with a global discourse on heritage that seeks to patrimonialize places of Indigenous memory. However, these hegemonic moves for the creation of a sense of the "real"—which positions mining as an unavoidable and even desired "reality" and mining corporations as sensitive and responsible actors—are confronted by counter-hegemonic forces, among which current narratives of aboriginality are prominent.

Keywords Mega-mining · Heritage · Hegemonic struggles · Places of memory · Contract archaeology

And the ants, Julio.

Just go to my barracks where, with patience and dedication,

they have installed in the walls, floor and even the ceiling.

Food may be short, but we have ants for quite a time or,

rather, they have us,

and a peaceful coexistence is our guarantee for survival.

Elephants, of course, confirm once again that nature imitates art

Published online: 12 September 2015

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and that heavy asymmetry reconciles one with himself.

On elephants, ants and revolutions, EZLN

Introduction

Mega-mining—also called large-scale mining—is a form of mineral exploitation adopted by flexible capitalism in peripheral regions of the world. Mega-mining is not a conventional mineral exploitation. This new type of mining is done by chemical and technological processes that are different from those previously used in traditional mining, which tapped mineral layers concentrated in seams. Nowadays and because of their massive exploitation through the centuries, sought-after minerals, mostly gold, are rare and they mostly exist scattered in the rocks, in small particles that have to be separated from the ore. In order to separate gold from the ore, entire mountains are blown up, reducing them to small rocks that are submerged in a "chemical soup"; this chemical process is called "cyanide leaching." This technology produces a tremendous environmental impact, leaving highly toxic and persistent chemicals (cyanide, sulfuric acid, mercury) in the ground and in the waters, and affecting human populations, animals, and plants. Its toxicity has prompted some countries—e.g., the Czech Republic (2000), Germany (2002), and Costa Rica (2002)—and regions— New South Wales, Australia (2000), and some counties in Colorado and Montana in the Unites States-to prohibit it. This technology uses vast amounts of water and energy, widely exceeding the limits of local consumption (Colectivo Voces de Alerta 2011; Svampa and Antonelli 2009). Besides, it pollutes lands and water sources, and targets territories of indigenous communities and national parks, thus causing massive social and natural disruptions. As it is the case, mega-mining is mostly carried out in peripheral countries, given civil opposition in metropolitan countries. In Argentina most mining operations are located in the Andean range, at high altitudes and sometimes even over the line of glaciers, from where rivers flowing into inhabited areas originate. Given the high impact of these projects, and because of the intention of Barrick Gold Company to "relocate glaciers" in the Andean border line, a specific law (26.639), strongly resisted by mining companies and some sectors of the political establishment, has been passed in Argentina for the protection of glacial and periglacial environments.

Mega-mining is not just an economic endeavor. It also is a model of neo-modernization, a normative path of development in which the exploitation of mineral resources appears as an unavoidable necessity to further economic growth, in spite of its known collateral effects—pollution, corruption, violation of human and natural rights. In most countries, mega-mining projects have to pass through legal filters before becoming operative. Yet, those filters are rarely more than simple bureaucratic steps with little consequences for the final realization of the projects. One of those filters is environmental licensing, whereby mining companies abide to legislation supposedly enacted to protect the environment. In the last two decades, archaeological assessments of the areas to be impacted by infrastructural works have become mandatory as a part of environmental licensing; such assessments, know in Argentina as Archaeological



Impact Studies—Estudios de Impacto Arqueológico (EIA)—are performed under contracts paid by the mining companies. In this paper I want to show how contract archaeology linked to mega-mining projects works not just to clear the land of historical traces for development but also to patrimonialize places of Indigenous memory as a part of a complex network of hegemonic actors that contribute to the institutionalization and naturalization of an extractivist development model; this model has been implemented at the regional level in countries of South America and the global south. The scientific/technical language of archaeology serves well the megamining discourse centered on security, territory, and population (Antonelli 2009).

I want to address contract archaeology in the context of mega-mining operations in San Juan province, in the Argentinean Andes, where 43 mining projects are now underway at different stages, including Veladero and Pascua-Lama (a binational exploitation called Pascua in the Chilean side and Lama in the Argentinean side) among the largest gold and silver extractive projects in South America. I also want to show that this neocolonial entanglement, hegemonic as it is, has been challenged from the borders. As Mignolo (2003) noted, border knowledge embodies the potential to articulate alternative projects. In the case I want to discuss, processes of counterpatrimonializacion are occurring in San Juan in which places of Indigenous memory are the center of an ongoing struggle between natives communities, the state, and capitalism, in which different economic, cultural, and social models are at stake.

Colonial Difference, Heritage, and Mega-Mining

Economic, ecological, and cultural conflicts are a part of a single process whose starting point is colonial difference (Escobar 2011). In terms of the issues dealt with in this paper, I hold that the patrimonialization of places of Indigenous memory currently occurring in the context of mega-mining projects responds to conflicts of cultural distribution whose modern/colonial roots can be traced to back to the end of the fifteenth century. Seen this way, the close relationship between mining and the dominant cultural order represented by cultural heritage is evident. While heritage is a modern product that involves the invention (or intervention) of traditions for the consolidation of communities imagined as new nation-states, mining is intimately linked to the emergence, constitution, and political vicissitudes of colonialism/coloniality, the denied dark face of the modern order (Dussel 1992). Heritage and mining are thus products of modernity/ coloniality. As Machado (2011, p. 141) has noted "The historical development of modern mining emerges, simultaneously, as *a product and as a fundamental means* of the system of power relations that shapes and characterizes the modern world" (italics in the original).

In recent decades, cultural heritage integrated diversity by transforming cultural differences into colonial differences. The notion of cultural heritage, which dates from the nineteenth century, is modern and linked to the nation-state and to the expansion of capitalism (Candau 2002). It involves the invention (or intervention) of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2002) and it "redefines the past as a framework of meaning" (Hernández í Martí 2010, p. 629). Candau (2002, pp. 89–90) argued that "heritage is a result of a work of memory that, as time runs by and according to varying criteria, selects inherited elements from the past to be included in the category of heritage



objects." That is why heritage "works effectively as an ideological apparatus of memory." Candau differentiates between heritage and patrimonialization, understanding the latter as an "act of memory" that creates heritage. Through the invention of traditions and by the selective formation of memory, modern societies define, physically and symbolically, their cultural assets and establish origins which serve as historical bases for the ideological construction of the collective present of an ethnic group, region, province, or nation. Accordingly, I have elsewhere (Jofré 2011a, 2013a, b) argued that archaeological patrimonialization is an act of memory whose purpose is the production of heritage for provincial and national states. I have referred to patrimonialization processes as those practices and institutionalized mechanisms through which modern acts of memory are created. In the case of San Juan I contend that archaeological patrimonialization articulates well with mega-mining. As such, contract archaeology serving mining projects is just an effect of the neo-colonial takeover of territories and memories—turned into heritage in a transnational context.

Prats (2005) argues that patrimonialization processes involve two types of social constructions or representations of heritage, different yet complementary. The first, the "sacredness of cultural externality," is "an easily recognizable universal and intercultural mechanism by which every society defines a cultural ideal of the world and of the existence and of everything that does not fit in it or contradicts it" (Prats 2005, p. 18). This refers to heritage as an absolute and unquestionable right, as a set of sacred symbols that condenses and emotionally embodies certain values and a worldview; they are shown as inherently consistent with the lifeway of a group, society, or culture. This sacredness that embraces culture as a modern product is a "patrimonialization of culture," a new civil religion of the past that operates through heritahe rituals and through the production of meaning linked to memory and the past. The second social construction is "enhancement or heritage activation" (Prats 2005, p. 19). It is dependent on political actors, yet it is negotiated by various stakeholders in the community. It implies a dominant discourse and it is a hegemonic representation of heritage in which science and technology as modern epistemologies play a prominent role.

Cultural heritage (and the archaeological heritage as a part of it) participates of the formation and cohesion of ethnic, local, regional, and national identities. It simultaneously suppresses other symbols and meanings. Mega-mining in the province of San Juan offers an opportunity to understand how these mechanisms of cultural control respond to global strategic plans whose final goal is the constitution of transnational sovereignties. Archaeological patrimonialization is an active part of this global design.

Mega-Mining, Contract Archaeology, and the Production of Heritage in San Juan

In the past decade the government of San Juan has moved the economy into an extractivist model. Promoted as "The second reconstruction of San Juan" (the "First reconstruction of San Juan" occurred after an earthquake that severely hit the province in 1944) the economic plan seeks to consolidate mega-mining operations as inherent to the subjectivity of provincial identity and as a desirable development model, ensuring social acceptance. Communication strategies at the local and national levels, controlled by the provincial government and sponsored by mining corporations, have been



devoted to position mining as a benefit provider. Through expensive advertisement in journals, movies, television, and radio; museums, art exhibits, and theatre performances; and all sorts of cultural, social, sporting, and recreational events, mining operations are widely heralded and promoted.

The processes of archaeological patrimonialization carried out in the context of mega-mining were shaped by the political and economic situations I have described. These processes created new conditions for professional recruitment and rearranged heritage policies and the role of universities as sources of scientific and technological knowledge; they were also instrumental in the creation of new standards that legitimized the extractivist development model that has impinged the dynamics of dispossession and plunder of vast territories and populations. In San Juan, this scenario can be described as follows:

- (a) The last 10 years have witnessed a significant decrease in academic research, with a concomitant stagnation in the production of archaeological knowledge.
- (b) In sheer contrast, contract archaeology has increase alongside mega-mining projects. Its results are rarely published and its reports display a theoretical and methodological framework that adopts a depoliticized, scientific narrative (Jofré et al. 2010b). The canon for these reports has been established by manuals devoted to set the terms of all EIA (e.g., Ratto 2014).
- (c) The academic standards of EIA are rather low, allowing flexible assessments by state agencies and the rapid release of impacted areas for mining. The only parameters used to assess the EIA are those of archaeology as a discipline and of archaeologists as a guild; the interests and expections of the local communities are all but ignored.
- Notable is the formation and strengthening of small corporate groups of researchers/ archaeologists favored by these state policies because of their contracts with private companies. This situation favors rivalries in archaeological research, increasingly aiming to a professionalization geared to development. In San Juan, contract archeology in mega-mining projects often employ professional archaeologists ideologically positioned as opposing processes of Indigenous resurgence and anti-mining environmental and social movements. Given that there are few archaeologists and/or anthropologists in the province it is increasingly common to hire professionals from outside recommended by consulting firms or by the mining companies. It is for this reason that the EIA carried out for mega-mining projects in San Juan endorse and promote anthropological and archaeological theories on ethnic discontinuity and aboriginal extinction, once serving governmental policies enacted towards the end of the nineteenth century that lead to the extermination of most Indigenous communities. Nowadays these scientific narratives help to legitimize the new ways of expropriation associated with the extractivist mega-mining model.
- (e) The lack of independent archaeological research has created a "protectionist fiction" that places mega-mining companies in the protective role of patrons of the local archaeological heritage (Jofré et al. 2010a, b). Local media constantly spread news that link megamining companies with the provincial state in heritage practices inside and outside mining areas or through educational activities with local institutions. This is part of a "sustainable development" agenda that features



- "mining as a sustainable activity" and mining companies as "socially responsible." The provincial state relinquishes its legal role as protector of heritage and asks mining companies to pay for the costs associated with its protection and promotion. (For instance, a booklet on cultural heritage destined to serve in elementary and high school education, published in 2011, was sponsored by Barrick Gold.)
- (f) What is currently happening is a blatant "mining privatization" of places of memory through the EIA. Places of memory turned into archaeological sites by the disciplinary narratives of EIA reports may enter into the list of provincial heritage sites; yet, access to them is restricted by mining operations. The "mining privatization" of places of memory (converted to provincial and national cultural heritage) reflects the fact that they are located within tracts of land leased to mining companies for years or decades; in some cases, as in those projects favored by a mining agreement between Chile and Argentina, the states grant sovereignty in the high Andes to transnational mining companies. On the Argentine side, Barrick Gold and Glencore Xtrata Copper, which operate Pascua-Lama and El Pachón, respectively, have full territorial sovereignty over the areas they exploit.
- (g) Even though the provincial state and the mining companies claim to be fully transparent in communicating their activities, access to EIA reports is limited to a narrow bureaucratic circle or is simply denied because the documents are considered exclusive and confidential. Although a summary of the reports is posted in government websites, full versions are almost inaccessible.
- (h) It is undeniable that there is a tight control over the information produced by contract archaeology, also evident in the confidentiality clauses included in the paperwork signed by the archaeologists working in contract settings. This situation goes against provincial and national laws that consider heritage as a comunal asset (see Jofré et al. 2010b).
- (i) Although international provisions endorsed by the Argentinean government, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169, call for mandatory consultation with Indigenous peoples before the execution of development works potentially affecting their territories and lifes, mega-mining projects and contract archaeologists in San Juan disregard them knowingly (Jofré et al. 2010b).
- (j) EIA reports feed the ideological illusion that controlling and monitoring the socio-environmental impacts of these monstrous mining works is possible (Colectivo Voces de Alerta 2011; Jofré et al. 2010b). They feed the fantasy that scientific studies and state control over these large-scale works in its different phases (exploration, construction, operation, and closure of the mine) are geared to protect the interests of citizens and of nature and not the interests of the mining companies. Yet, the latter often, if not always, coincide with the interests of provincial governments. Science and technology are in the service of the neo-colonial project of modernization, as shown by national and private universities and national agencies for scientific and technological advancement accepting monies from mining companies. (For instance, the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán has rights over the mineral deposits of Agua de Dionisio—Yacimientos Mineros de Agua de Dionisio, YMAD—exploited since 1994 by Minera Alumbrera, a joint extractive project in which several transnational mining corporations participate. YMAD



distributes money to Argentinean universities, few of which have turned them down. The Universidad Nacional de Tucumán has been accused for its complicity in environmental devastation and the violation of Indigenous rights. Since many public universities still receive money from mining operations, their level of critical independence towards these sensitive issues is rather low.)

In this socio-political contex the role of contract archeology in Argentina (inside or outside universities) can only be that of releasing areas of interest for mining operations. Contract archaeology is reduced to an expedient and burocratic work, subjected to economic and political pressures. At most, archaeological interventions may delay the destruction of sites and places and the disruption and violation of local memories. Yet, it seems pretty obvious that the archaeologists hired to work in contract settings tend to side with the employers, facilitating environmental licensing by providing swift, technical, and non-conflictive EIA reports. Besides, it usually is the case that most EIA are carried out when mining operations are already underway, adding additional pressure to the archaeologists and showing that regulatory policies are highly flexible (Jofré et al. 2010b). The whole situation is symptomatic of the interests of transnational corporations (and those of the state, of course, at several levels), which activate cultural interventions that disrupt local memories, perceptions, and representations: the invention of the new mining. No matter how damaging mining operations are, the social credit of the corporations is constantly enhanced by the simultaneous operation of an epistemic apparatus (that authorizes the production of knowledge) and by a mining aesthetic geared to a sensibility and a sentimental education, the philanthropic ethics of capitalism (Antonelli 2009, pp. 56–58).

Challenges to the Global Order: Narratives of Aboriginality in Northern San Juan

If heritage is an eminently hegemonic social representation, built by dominant sectors of society, it means that there are other social representations at stake. Places of Indigenous memories, in particular, establish a continuity between past and present populations, shaping landscapes with palimpsests of symbols and meanings that usually transcend the linear chronology of modern time, and reproduce alternative, anachronistic, and rebellious histories characterized by their persistent desire to remember (Jofré 2011a, b, 2013a). This issue is essential for understanding the complexity of the cultural struggles currently taking place in the context of mega-mining in San Juan, especially as they relate to the politics of patrimonialization championed by mining corporations and contract archaeologists, on one side, and to Indigenous historical narratives, on the other. The latter are produced in zones of intercultural contact and are expressed in terms of co-presences an interactions immersed in assymetrical power relations; nevertheless, they are genuine and legitimate local responses to the global order on which mega-mining and contract archaeology partakes.

To briefly describe and interpret some aspects of these local responses I shall define the key concept "places of memory." Pierre Nora proposed the term, which he borrowed from Frances Yates (Candau 2002), to refer to a commemorative ritualized consciousness that materializes in significant places of social and cultural memory. A



will to remember and to affirm such a place, character, or event persists in its uniqueness shown through toponymy—infuse if centered in the place or diffuse if with branches in other parts (Nora 1984, p. 65). It is the living heart of memory. In the words of Candau (2002, p. 112), "a place of memory would be a meaningful unit, material or ideal, which the will of men or the work of time turned into the symbolic element of a given community." For that reason the destruction of a place of memory does not mean the disappearance or death of memory "while someone lives to remember" (Candau 2002, p. 112). Places of memory do not pre-exist memory; they are constituted in it. This means that they are not just locations where memory materializes but are produced by it, they belong to it (Candau 2002) or, what is the same, "are producing memory." The subjects do not pre-exist this act of remembering neither. As Trouillot (1995, p. 16) noted, "the subjects who remember their past did not exist as such by the time of the facts they claim to remember... their constitution as subjects is simultaneous to the continuous creation of the past. As such they do not follow their past: they are contemporaneous with it." These locations of memory allow knowing it in present time, in the struggle for the determination of hegemonies in power; they permit to oppose and resist the replacement of space by time, paramount in the modern narratives of history (Fabian 1983).

Indigenous and peasant communities affected by the largest mega-mining projects in San Juan (Veladero and Pascua-Lama) have launched what I have called antipatrimonial processes. They take the form of narratives of aboriginality, discursive productions linked to ethnic revival which usually contest the territorial legitimacy of the nation-state as well as its policies of inclusion, cultural homogenization, and representation of identity (Briones 2005; Escolar 2007). In the communities of Iglesia district, in the northern part of the province, such narratives are produced and circulated in a complex network of social and political relations that do not respond to the multicultural rhetoric of diversity but brandish local symbolism on aboriginality, territory, and places of memory. This is can be seen, for instance, in the claims for the repatriation of the so-called mummy from Cerro El Toro (Jofré 2013a).

In 1964, and inists, journalists, and archaeologists exhumed the frozen body of a young man who had been sacrificed in a *capacocha* in one of the highest peaks of the Andes, Cerro El Toro, at 6400 m above sea level. (Capacocha was one of the most important public Inca rituals. The participants were drawn from the four quarters of the empire to honor and rever huacas. At one point in the history of Tawantisuyu the capacochas incorporated human sacrifices.) The body was eventually stored in a museum of the Universidad Nacional de San Juan, in Rawson. The event managed to install one of the most powerful scientific images in the local political discourse, the "dead Indian" converted into provincial heritage (Jofré 2012a, 2013a, b, 2015; Jofré et al. 2011). In early 2000, stimulated by more comprehensive demands by the Warpe Indigenous peoples, students, and teachers from a rural school in the small town of Malimán sent a letter to the governor of the province calling for the repatriation of the body (see Jofré 2013a; Jofré et al. 2011). The lack of response prompted them to start more permanent activities supported by members of the Collective of Cayana Archaeology at the local, national and international levels. (The repatriation of the body from Cerro El Toro was endorsed by the plenary of the Archaeological Theory in South America meetings in Catamarca, Argentina, in 2007, and by the plenary of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress in Dublin in 2008.)



At the local level, especially in Colangüil and Malimán, the discovery of the body was orally transmitted by those who participated in the expedition. The narratives highlight moral and magical meanings attached to the mountain and its beings, forming the memory of "the Indians." The wisdom or knowledge of the territory raises — sometimes veiled, sometimes explicitly—a historical link with the "Indians before" through the continued use of old hunting shelters and *tambos* ("houses of the Indians"). The narratives also incorporate elements drawn from the media and scholarly texts (e.g., Beorchia 1985; Schobinger 1966, 2008); for example, they tell the saga of the "pursuit of the dead Indian" which subverts the academic heritage discourse and operates as a founding local myth whose central topic is the appropriation of the "sacred" places of Indigenous memory, taking them away from the state, science, and private capital. The narratives usually end asking where the body is now, who has it, why is it not back.

The claim for the repatriation of the body from Cerro El Toro was included in a petition submitted to the provincial state by the Warpe community from Cuyum (Jofré 2012b), seeking to prevent that the institutional apparatus agrees to the repatriation as a veiled way of exchanging bodies for territories. The claim invokes the right of the body (an ancestor) to return to his territory, stating that the Warpe worldview conceives the territory alongside its beings. The Warpe say: "We are territory; the territory is all; the territory is our life." Above all, the claim seeks to establish the coexistence of the past in the present, dispelling the regime of Othering in which the patrimonialization of the body of the Indian is enacted. The spatialization of memory, its performance in places of Indigenous memory, enables a space-time convergence of past and present identities in a common territory. These narratives of aboriginality, which in this specific case revolve around the repatriation of a body desecrated from an ancient *huaca*, symbolize that ancient histories and worldviews refuse to disappear, to be just another archaeological monument of discontinuity.

As a part of an extended struggle against mega-mining and the complicity of contract archaeology in the patrimonialization of places of Indigenous memory, in 2011 the Diaguita peoples from Huasco Valley, in Chile, filed a complaint with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights against the Pascua Lama mining operation for severe environmental damage to ancestral Indigenous territories, including the pollution of several glaciers and waterways and the desecration of places of memory (Yañez and Molina 2012). Later in 2012, the local court in Copiapó accepted a similar complaint and halted mining operations in the Chilean side of Pascua Lama, calling public attention to the struggle.

Finally, I want to stress the relationship between contract archaeology, mega-mining, and the patrimonialization of places of Indigenous memory. I have shown that transnational mining corporations in western Argentina promote a global development discourse that is directly related to the public heritage policies enacted by national and provincial states. In order to produce this global discourse of "heritage for development" a series of contractual relationships between universities, archaeologists, and the corporations is encouraged. These relationships are responsible for the production of all EIA, which define a context of power relations that subordinate native and peasant communities, precisely those very communities that are the object/subject of global heritage policies.



Heritage policies occur in the context of production and consumption of multicultural diversities; yet, processes of counter-patrimonialization are activated from below by educational, Indigenous, and peasant communities for whom the memory located in the territory challenges the discourses of development implemented by mining companies, the state, and archaeology. Places of memory foster dialogues with "other worlds" that coexist in the territory seized by transnational capital. These dead—no so dead after all, as the *capacocha* of Cerro El Toro witnesses—claim an insurgent territory, emerge from the body of memory itself, and resist erasure and forgetting, creatively weaving the "heterogeneous time" of the nation (Chatterjee 2004).

Acknowledgments My postdoctoral research, "Procesos de patrimonialización y contra-patrimonialización de lugares de memoria indígena en proyectos mega-mineros transnacionales en el Norte de San Juan," was funded by CONICET, a sign that the interstices of institutional power can be used by counter-hegemonic voices.

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