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# **‘Eventually the mine will come’: Women anti-mining activists’ everyday resilience in opposing resource extraction in the Andes**

**Katy Jenkins and Glevys Rondón**

**(Final version accepted for publication in *Gender and Development*)**

*This article explores the experiences of women anti-mining activists in rural communities in Andean Peru and Ecuador. The article analyses women activists’ experience of negotiating conflicts with large scale mining companies, as well as within their communities, using the concept of resilience to understand their continued commitment to this work in a context of conflict, intimidation and violence. Women activists’ resilience is demonstrated in their determination to fight the arrival of mining, despite being amongst an increasingly small minority of their communities who continue to oppose the mining companies; their commitment to collective action and to occupying their lands; and their tenacity in campaigning against resource extraction whilst simultaneously recognising that ‘eventually the mine will come’. We emphasise the importance of recognising the intertwining of resilience with multiple vulnerabilities, rather than approaching these as mutually exclusive. Using in depth qualitative data, we foreground narratives of resilience in the women’s accounts of their activism, and argue that whilst this resilience is important in understanding the role they play in contesting the arrival of large scale resource extraction, it will become even more crucial to the survival of their families and communities if full-scale mining exploitation were to occur.*

Key words – gender, activism, extractive industries, resilience, Latin America

## **Introduction**

Women play an important but relatively unrecognised role in opposing large-scale mining developments in rural Andean communities. Conflicts occur at many levels, from intra-community conflict between those in favour of and those opposed to the mine, and also within families, as well as between communities and local-, regional-, and national-level state organisations, and, of course, with the mining companies themselves. In this article, we seek to use the concept of resilience to better understand the position of women activists and the challenges they face, arguing that ideas around ‘resilience’ enable us to frame women anti-mining activists as empowered actors. Focusing on women activists is not to suggest that men are not also important actors in these conflicts, but specifically to contribute to ‘a growing literature concerned with the gendered particularities of resilience in diverse social contexts’ (Lenette et al. 2012, 641).

We begin by outlining the background to this article, before going on to explore the concept of resilience, and apply this to the experiences of the women activists with whom we work. In particular, we recognise women’s resilience in a context of ongoing struggle and adversity, and think through how this resilience might be further strengthened over time. We emphasise the ways in which resilience and vulnerabilities may co-exist, rather than seeing these as dichotomous (Norris et al. 2008).

## **Background and Context**

Latin America’s most recent boom in extractive activities began in the 1990s, with the expansion of large-scale mining by powerful corporations transforming landscapes, livelihoods, economies and communities. A vast literature analyses the myriad consequences of this developmental model across Latin America, as well as documenting the multiple resistances to it. Here, however, we are

specifically focused on analysing women's resistance to proposed mining projects, which has received less attention.

**Latin American Mining Monitoring Programme (LAMMP)** is a London-based charity (number 1080801) committed to improving the lives of Latin American women affected by extractive industries (1). This article draws on LAMMP's ongoing work with Women Human Rights Defenders (2) across Latin America in relation to resource extraction. LAMMP supports women activists at the forefront of the struggle for grass-roots solutions to global problems, working to raise awareness of issues that matter to rural and indigenous women affected by the extractive industries. LAMMP supports these women to respond to serious and urgent problems, including sexual abuse and corporate discrimination, as well as a lack of funding and protection when they are at risk. This work supporting women to act collectively led to the creation of the Unión Latino-Americana de Mujeres (ULAM) (Union of Latin American Women), to which the women involved in this research belong.

The data presented here is from research conducted by Katy Jenkins in 2012, supported by LAMMP. The research aimed to make visible the particular experiences of women anti-mining activists, and comprised 26 life history interviews with women from two women's organisations focused on anti-mining campaigning – the *Asociación de Mujeres Protectoras de los Páramos (AMUPPA)* (Association of Women Protectors of the Highlands) in Huancabamba, Northern Peru, and the *Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama (FMDP)* (Women Defenders of Mother Earth), made up of women from rural communities around Cuenca, Southern Ecuador.

### **The organisations and their activism**

#### *AMUPPA*

In Peru, AMUPPA grew out of ongoing community opposition (from 2001 onwards) to the Rio Blanco copper project, located in the provinces of Huancabamba and Ayabaca, and originally owned by UK-based Monterrico Metals plc. Opposition to the mine was unusual in the sense that it united local authorities, farmers and ecologists in a single front. Thousands of peasants and native communities were concerned about the impact of the mine on the fragile cloud forests of Huancabamba, upon which agricultural farming depends for water, whilst ecologists opposed the mine on the grounds that it would have a major impact on the biodiversity of the region. Local authorities were locked in a power struggle with the Prime Minister on the basis that the national government supported the mining project despite the fact that it lacked social consent. In particular, a high profile protest on 1st August 2005 brought this campaign into the national headlines when thousands of local men, women and children marched on the site where Minera Majaz, (wholly owned subsidiary of Monterrico Metals) had established its mining camp. Their intention was to demand the company stopped its activities.

However, the protest was brutally quashed by heavily armed security guards, as well as soldiers and police allegedly receiving direct orders from the mining firm (Peru Support Group 2012). One man was killed, another lost an eye and several were seriously injured. 28 protesters - among them two women - were arbitrarily detained and kept in the mining camp where they were tortured over several days, and the women were sexually assaulted (Peru Support Group 2012). Once released, the criminalisation of the protesters started, with accusations of terrorism, corruption and inciting public disorder (Mines and Communities 2008). Although many of these charges were later dropped, for years they were required to report weekly to the police. In 2007, Monterrico Metals became a subsidiary of the Chinese Zijin Consortium. Despite several attempts, Zijin has not been able to restart operations, and tensions are very much alive (Business News Americas 2009). In 2008, women activists set up AMUPPA and since then have been very active in their opposition to mining. The group has acquired a very good reputation among national NGOs, and the Local Authority recognises

them as important stakeholders. However, as will be discussed later, not all is positive and as a result of their activism they continue to receive threats.

### *FDMP*

Across the border in Ecuador, the FMDP has been fighting against the Rio Blanco gold project in the province of Molleturo (initially owned by International Minerals Corporation) and the Quimsacocha mining project (originally owned by IAMGold), in the province of Victoria del Portete. The group, set up in 2008, is the only organisation in Cuenca working on extractive issues from a gender perspective.

Most members of the group are farmers and live in areas that will be impacted by the mining operations. Together with several national NGOs, the FMDP has made demands to different government agencies that mining licenses granted to IMC be revoked as they do not comply with the Mining Mandate – a constitutional level norm operating since 2008. Furthermore, they allege that the concession is located in the buffer zone of the Cajas National Park and within the Molleturo-Mollepungo protected forests, areas of great environmental importance where mining is defined as illegal by the mandate. Citing the Ecuadorian constitution which establishes that a corporation without a social licence will not receive a mining licence, the group also asserts that the Quimsacocha project has been rejected by local communities. In 2012, after eight years of sustained community opposition, Canadian IAMGOLD Corporation partially sold Quimsacocha to Canadian INV Metals Inc and the project was re-named as Loma Larga (FIAN 2013). Despite efforts by the FMDP, the mining licence has not been revoked, and opposition continues.

As a direct result of their opposition to the Quimsacocha project, several members of the group have been prosecuted by the national and local governments and there have been attempts to implicate them in serious crimes including terrorism and inciting public protest (FIAN 2013).

The women activists' activities inevitably ebb and flow with the nature and intensity of the mining conflicts themselves but tend to involve a combination of campaigning, organising educational workshops, direct protests against the mining companies, coordinating petitions, and organising events to raise awareness of the problems associated with large scale mining. Often, the women face significant opposition from their own families, but in particular they are targeted by a growing pro-mining contingent within their communities, as well as from the mining companies and their associates. For many of the women interviewed, this has included experiences of violence, harassment and intimidation which have become part of their daily lives over a number of years, as will be discussed below.

In the next section, we explore our approach to resilience, before focusing on the experiences of the women involved in opposing mining operations.

### **Our approach to resilience**

The concept of resilience has become prominent in relation to understanding how communities (and to some extent individuals) respond to unexpected shocks and environmental change. At its most basic level, resilience refers to an ability to "bounce back" to a point of equilibrium despite significant adversity' (Lenette et al. 2012, 637). Ecologists have developed social-environmental systems approaches which have expanded this original notion of resilience into a concept of 'social resilience', based on understanding the inter-connections and dynamics of social and ecological systems. Neil Adger (2000) defines social resilience as 'the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political and environmental change.' (347). Resilience-based approaches, and the consideration of mechanisms to strengthen resilience, have been particularly evident in relation to work on disasters, natural hazards and climate change, also overlapping with broader work on social well-being and social capital.

However, this emphasis on resilience as adaptation, in relation to (primarily) environmental change, is not our main focus here. Whilst adaptation may be one element to consider, the aspects of resilience on which we wish to focus are those which foreground resistance, as well an ability to cope with continued stress and adversity, and mobilise resources. As Donald Meichenbaum notes, 'Resilience is tied to the ability to learn to live with ongoing fear and uncertainty' (2005, 4). Here, resilience is depicted as an ability to survive in challenging contexts – not in the context of sudden disaster or crisis, but in relation to longer-term challenges such as mining conflict, violence, and poverty.

In their review of the diverse resilience literature, Fran Norris et al provide several definitions that we think are useful in framing resilience in this regard: We particularly like these two: 'The ability of individuals and communities to deal with a state of continuous, longer term stress'; 'the ability to find unknown inner strengths and resources to cope effectively' (Ganor et al. 2003 in Norris et al. 2008, 129). In relation to women, this approach to resilience is evident in research on women enduring various stressful situations, including Mexican migrant women living in the USA (Campbell 2008), Quechua women in post-conflict Peru (Barrios Suarez 2015), and refugee single mothers in Australia (Lenette et al. 2012).

It is important to recognise that, if used uncritically, the concept of resilience, which sounds so positive and desirable, can be easily co-opted by neoliberal policymakers promoting economic and social strategies (Cretney and Bond 2014), 'relocat[ing] responsibility for well-being and change' onto the shoulders of vulnerable individuals and communities (Diprose 2014, 51). Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson (2012) also argue that resilience can be seen as inherently conservative and apolitical, 'clos[ing] off wider questions of progressive social change which require interference with, and transformation of, established "systems"' (254). Thus an approach to resilience which emphasises uncovering and challenging unequal power relations is crucial.

Mindful of the pitfalls of understanding resilience in an apolitical way, we argue here that notions of resilience can be used in a progressive way, helping us to foreground the voices and agency of marginalised women, in this case rural Andean women. We use the notion of resilience not to negate their struggles, but rather to recognise the women's strengths. The work of Caroline Lenette et al. (2012) is particularly useful in developing an understanding of resilience as an ability to negotiate challenging situations and cope with ongoing conflict and adversity. They emphasise 'everyday resilience' (637), the determination to overcome daily challenges, rather than focusing on the spectacular aspects of struggle, or moments of particular crisis. They also remind us of the importance of avoiding a resilient/not-resilient dichotomy, recognising resilience as 'an ongoing process achieved daily over time and according to contexts, rather than an atypical static inner state' (639). This notion of everyday resilience particularly resonates with the narratives of women anti-mining activists, reflecting what Jenkins (2014) has elsewhere conceptualised as their 'everyday activism', bound up in daily practices and routines, rather than high profile protest and spectacle.

For the women in both organisations, the process of resisting the arrival of mining in their communities has spanned many years. Whilst initially there was widespread opposition to mining within their communities, this has been eroded over time, as the resources and reach of the mining company have gradually worn down community resistance, to the extent that some women spoke of being one of only a few people in their community still actively opposing the mine, as Marlana, in Ecuador, described in her life history interview in 2012 (3):

*We were many when we started our work, we had the support of more than half of the village but nowadays we are just a few, most have gone. It is not easy to keep up with this work. There are financial reasons, we are poor and lack resources. Those in favour of the mine say the struggle against the mine is useless because they are here*

*to stay. This message works with people and that is the reason why they don't support us.*

**(Marlena, Ecuador)**

In thinking about how the women's resilience is shaped by their context, it is important to foreground this sense of isolation and the relatively sparse social resources they have to support them. However, it is also important not to romanticise this resilience (see also Campbell 2008), but rather to recognise that it is born out of living with conflict every day, in a situation of very limited resources and multiple pressures. This conflict is sometimes the dramatic confrontation of protests and road blockades, but more often the constant presence of low level conflict between factions within the community.

The concept of resilience enables us to recognise women's strengths in exercising agency in this context, and to move beyond framing women activists as simply vulnerable victims of powerful mining corporations. Nevertheless, despite this resilience, their vulnerabilities should also be recognised - they may be, at once, resilient and vulnerable. They undoubtedly demonstrate great resilience, but as poor, rural women they are still nevertheless structurally very vulnerable to - amongst other things - violence, poverty and discrimination.

In the rest of this article, we explore three key inter-related elements of the women's narratives, which enable us to reflect on their resilience and how it is generated and sustained. These are: their determination to continue to fight the arrival of mining in their communities; their commitment to collective action and resistance; and their tenacity in campaigning against resource extraction whilst simultaneously recognising that 'eventually the mine will come'. In particular, these elements illustrate the ways in which sources and manifestations of resilience are intertwined and co-constituted. Finally, we conclude with some reflections around how best to strengthen this resilience, which will become even more crucial to the survival of their families and communities if full-scale mining exploitation does eventually begin (4).

### **Determination to Carry on the Struggle**

Having dedicated several years to this activism, the women's resilience was particularly evident in their frequent emphasis on their determination to continue opposing the mine, to the extent of being prepared to die for their cause:

*For my part, I say, it doesn't matter if I die, if they kill me, I will die defending what is ours.*

**(Florita, Ecuador)**

*I have always said, we will carry on going forward, fighting, until the point where God tells us to stop. Because this is a just battle, we know that what we are doing is right, because it is for the common good, for the whole of our country.*

**(Luisa, Peru)**

This continued perseverance is all the more remarkable given the high levels of intimidation and harassment that the women face in their everyday lives. Many of them spoke movingly about the violence they had endured as a result of their activism. This was particularly the experience of women who had been involved in protests and mobilisations against the mining companies, which have often been met with police and army violence. Their experiences included being beaten by police, having tear-gas used against them and, in two cases, being held hostage and physically abused for several days, as discussed above. Several of the women reported being arrested for their

participation in protests, facing charges such as terrorism and criminal damage, highlighting the increasing criminalisation of anti-mining protesters by the State:

*It worries me a lot because there are many of us defending the environment and they are killing us... they are killing innocent people, because they accuse us of being terrorists, kidnappers. In 2005 I was kidnapped for three days, more than 32 of us were kidnapped, they treated us very badly, I don't want to recall the details...*

**Luisa (Peru)**

*...they massacred us, they threw tear-gas at us, we ran, other people were hit, they kicked them, they twisted their arms, it was a barbarity.*

**Teresa (Ecuador)**

Even for those women activists who had not personally had violence used against them, the fear of violence was ever-present in their lives. The women lived with frequent threats of violence, from unknown people as well as from community members, and several women described receiving anonymous threatening or abusive phone calls due to their anti-mining stance. Verbal abuse from pro-mining members of their communities was also frequently reported by the women activists:

*They call us liars, they say that we are stupid poor people, that we don't know anything, that we are drunks.*

**Florita (Ecuador)**

*Those who are in favour of the mine insult and humiliate those are in favour of the environment.*

**Pati (Peru)**

These experiences of actual violence, and a climate in which the fear of violence is palpable, clearly present a severe challenge to the women's continued participation in anti-mining activism, and demonstrate their resilience in terms of their capacity to absorb long-term stress and find inner strength to cope with challenging and conflictual situations. The interviews with women in both locations capture the women's resilience in their willingness, energy and commitment to continue opposing the mine, despite the negative impacts this has on them and their families:

*I know that people follow me, watching what I am doing, what I am trying to achieve, they think I am campaigning for a political party.*

**Cristina (Peru)**

*In 2006 my personal life changed greatly, I began to be followed, threatened, it is a rather difficult life, but I think that they are personal decisions that I feel very happy with, it is something I believe in and I feel good doing it, even though I know that it is very risky because it also involves my family who always have to be cautious and worried, one cannot live a calm life. It is a bit difficult, above all in our society that is a bit machista, more conservative, and this is the most difficult thing.*

**Eva (Peru)**

As Eva and Cristina emphasise, their decision to continue participating is not one which is taken lightly, exacting a heavy personal toll on the women and their families, a point we will return to later.

### **Collective action as an expression of resistance and resilience**

The women situate their persistence and determination in terms of a strong sense of identity, particularly rooted in a strong connection to the environment and to their local landscape, as well as a clear conviction that large scale mining represents a serious threat to their traditional lifestyle and their ownership of the land, and will bring severe negative impacts for their families and for future generations (5).

As well as their strong rhetorical commitment to continuing their opposition to the mine, women in both locations demonstrate their resilience through their commitment to resisting evictions, and through the everyday activities of continuing to cultivate their lands. The Ecuadorian women activists discussed organising collective activities aimed at strengthening rural livelihoods, as well as enabling women members of the group to cope with the harsh reality of being peasant farmers. Berta, in Ecuador, stated:

*We are helping each woman so that she can own a plot. A family plot for her to work and put food on the table, not for sale, but for her family. We have been supporting this initiative of chemical-free ecologically sound farming plots. We have also reactivated the mingas, this is traditional community work which has been lost. One day we all go to a plot and the following day we go to another neighbour. We have been working this way and we want to continue doing it.*

**(Berta, Ecuador)**

Such activities aim to demonstrate the viability of agricultural livelihoods and generate alternatives to extractive industries for local communities, re-invigorating traditional practices in the face of powerful narratives of 'modernity' and 'progress' disseminated by the mining corporations and promoting contingent. As Raven Cretney and Sophie Bond (2014) observe in a discussion of grassroots autonomous activism in New Zealand, 'Their aim is to create communities which can resist disruptions from environmental, economic or political crises' (29). Albeit on quite a small scale, such activities evidence a high level of perseverance and commitment, particularly in a context in where it is common practice for mining companies to give 'gifts' to community members to persuade them to support their cause (Armstrong et al. 2014).

As well as organising collective action within their communities, the women are involved in strong regional and international networks, and this is key in enabling them to share information, acquire useful technical knowledge and develop collective actions in support of activists facing persecution. Their continued collective resistance is particularly shaped by their understandings of the impact of mining elsewhere in Latin America. The women draw on information gained from contact with other activists, and visits by some of them to other locations where mining is already under-way, as they discuss below:

*...several of us went to a women's gathering in Guatemala, because over there mining, violence, machismo, killings and human rights violations are common. It is sad, I was very sad during the conference. The women's testimonies of their suffering were too much. It is a shame and we don't want that to happen in Peru. In Guatemala the companies have their licences, they don't care about anything, they continue working the mine, they are winning.*

### **Luisa (Peru)**

*Three years ago, I went to Cajamarca (Peru). Nine women from several villages went there for nine days. We were able to see the harsh reality in which they live. All of us could see what mining contamination is doing to them. Contamination is a very serious issue in Cajamarca, it is widespread.*

### **Patricia (Ecuador)**

Women who undertook such visits reported a renewed sense of commitment which in turn contributed to sustaining both groups' determination to oppose mining developments over the long term. Both groups have also developed protection strategies to support activists at risk, including accessing international support as well as through provision of accommodation by group members to activists from elsewhere who are under threat and who need urgent relocation. Such strategies are important in generating stronger solidarities which in turn strengthen the women's collective resolve.

Similarly, in November 2014, there was a "Joint gathering of women resisting the Río Blanco projects in Peru and Ecuador" in Cuenca, Ecuador. This was convened by FDMP and AMUPPA, supported by LAMMP. . The event built on nascent links between the two groups as a result of LAMMP's ongoing involvement with both groups, and enabled the women to come together to share experiences and create new solidarities. This provides an example of how creating collective spaces for reflection can in turn trigger new forms of resilience and collaboration, strengthening the women's resolve.

However, resistance comes at a high price in many ways, not least literally: it costs money. As rural peasant women, the women activists face significant practical and logistical challenges in continuing their collective opposition, in relation to both time and money constraints upon them. Many women spoke about the personal cost of continued activism in terms of the multiple pressures they face in their daily lives. With primary responsibility for tending crops and animals, as well as domestic chores and childcare responsibilities, the women found it difficult to devote adequate time to participating in activist activities. Travelling away from their community to take part in events meant they had to find someone else to look after their animals and children and thus their participation was sometimes sporadic. Similarly, the women noted the financial costs involved in taking part. As poor rural women, even bus fares and buying food away from home represent significant extra expenses. They explained the continual struggle to find organisations willing to provide resources to enable them to carry out their activism – whether this be for community workshops, or to attend an event in a nearby city. This struggle for resources is clearly also another time-consuming activity in itself.

*I would sometimes travel, stiff with cold, with only my return fare, because you know that in the countryside we do not have resources, we have nothing but.... Here we are, always fighting.*

### **Luisa (Peru)**

*For us, to travel here [to Piura], to travel as far as Lima so that our demands will be listened to, the difficulty is that we do not have the money to get ourselves there. Another difficulty is that it is very difficult in the countryside for the women to find the time, the whole day is occupied, but well, the women have managed to get here.*

### **Cristina (Peru)**

These quotes emphasise the women's precarious position, reminding us again of the complex intertwining of resilience with vulnerability in the women's everyday lives. In this context, the activists also emphasise a central role for LAMMP in sustaining and strengthening their resilience, in particular in relation to building solidarities and supporting capacity building work:

*...But thanks to God we are now in contact with LAMMP, with you. Hopefully our organisation will move forward little by little, and we will learn a lot from all of you, with your help, we'll carry on training more women, integrating more women in order that people understand that we are fighting a just war [...] Hopefully, with your help, hopefully you won't leave us on our own, we always want your guidance.*

### **Luisa (Peru)**

The fact of being involved in collective organising is, as we recognise above, central to the women's resilience. They understand the value of becoming organised and the benefits of securing international solidarity. The knowledge and skills gained through the process of resisting the arrival of the mine contribute to their personal growth and provide them with a sense of achieving minor triumphs, in turn strengthening their resilience. Women from both organisations report that an identity as a Human Rights Defender has transformed them into active citizens and strengthened their belief in the importance of continuing their struggle for a better and fairer future.

Bearing in mind Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson's (2012) critique of resilience as *closing off* opportunities to contest the status quo, we think it is crucial to recognise the role of women's collective action in generating spaces of contestation where resilience is both manifested and further strengthened. This also resonates with a question asked by Eliana Barrios Suarez (2015): is women's resilience 'influencing their political participation, or is the political participation enhancing their resilience'? (13).

### **Eventually the mine will come...**

Perhaps the most striking example of the women's continued resilience in Ecuador and Peru is their acute recognition of the magnitude of their battle, and their awareness that 'eventually the mine will come' – whilst they might hope to permanently halt such developments, they are realistic about the powerful economic interests and significant profits at stake and recognise that it is most likely a case of stalling extractive activities for as long as possible:

*... I think it's going to be a very difficult stage when mining activity begins in this country. It's going to be hard because... our resistance at the moment is based on the fact that there are no mining projects. There's a strong sense of hope, that this will not happen. But looking at things realistically it will eventually happen. The government is well disposed towards the entry of mining companies, they don't see a problem. The government is supporting the mining projects, so I think it's going to be a blow that will be difficult to overcome, when the time comes to confront it. We have talked about this with our comrades, we say to them that this is like a war, a war that we can't lose. But we can't say that we are going to win.*

### **Nuria (Ecuador)**

Kristina Diprose's comments seem particularly apt here:

The role of resilience in contentious politics is to reassure people that they will live to fight another day. Unmet demands and disappointed hopes are not entirely given up,

only deferred. Resilience is about reflecting and regrouping, reconciling to temporary defeat or limited success. (53)

This resilience is reflected in Nuria's commentary:

*There are even moments in which the women are affected by depression. They say 'why are we making such an effort? If in the end the government are giving [the mining companies] their full support, they are not going to pay us any attention'. And I think it is understandable that there will be these moments of despair and exhaustion, and that is when we also need the support of other people to help us stand firm in this situation. I explain this to them, I console them, and in the end they say once again that we will carry on until the bitter end.*

### **Nuria (Ecuador)**

Considering the multiple pressures faced by rural women, such ongoing commitment demonstrates their tenacity in the face of adversity. Nevertheless, despite this apparently resilient approach, the multiple pressures and obstacles that women activists face in their continued activism do seriously impact on their mental health. This once again shows that resilience and vulnerability are not mutually exclusive, but may co-exist.

Here, it is important to give due weight to gender considerations. Despite recent social gains including recognition of their leadership role, women are exposed to many stresses, mainly from family members (in particular elderly relatives and men) to abandon their activism. Activists who challenge the dominant narrative regarding women's participation in public activities expose themselves to public criticisms as well as verbal and physical abuse.

Through LAMMP's ongoing involvement supporting activists, we have seen how most women members of AMUPPA and the FMDP have (at different stages of their work) experienced severe forms of psychological stress such as depression, anxiety, lack of appetite, difficulties sleeping, recurrent nightmares about violent incidents, as well as a generalised feeling of being scared and fearing for the future. The women's strategies for coping with the trauma and stress associated with their activism and the mining conflict demonstrate a resilience that has helped them to move on in spite of adversity.

Threats to women's physical integrity include being ambushed, beaten during or after protests, injured as a result of armed attack, attempted kidnappings, threats, and disappearance. They reported a range of strategies to cope, including travelling in groups together with other activists, emotionally distancing themselves from violent incidents, and adopting a cautious approach to providing personal details to unknown individuals:

*You have to be very careful but if it's something you believe in then you have to carry on. (...) I have changed my phone number at least four times, and now I hardly give it to anyone because they phone, they say I am a terrorist, they insult me, say that they know what I am doing, that I should keep quiet if I don't want anything to happen to me. (...) So, of course, it is frightening because it makes me think that anything might happen. So you could say that it is a rather tense life, living in fear.*

### **Eva (Peru)**

In relation to their mental and spiritual health, women activists recognise the value of religion and cultural practices, such as invoking the protective power of certain lakes believed to have healing properties. In Peru, members of AMUPPA organise traditional healing sessions for women activists

whose mental health is breaking down after years of persecution and criminalisation. As Luisa, who is a spiritual healer, commented:

*The struggle against mining debilitates women activists and they come to me. As a spiritual healer I can help them to rebuild the balance between mind and body. Mining 'progress' changes our relationship with nature and the special, spiritual relationship that women 'spiritual healers' have with mother earth becomes redundant.*

### **Luisa (Peru)**

Such practices form part of the repertoire of ways in which women activists strengthen their resilience through everyday collective action rooted in a particular set of social and cultural practices. Similarly, given the high incidence of mental health issues amongst women activists, LAMMP last year provided two groups of Peruvian activists with trauma counselling. During these sessions, the activists addressed not only their isolation, and their fears for their children's future, but also practical issues, including the financial hardship experienced by women who had lost their partners (LAMMP/ULAM forthcoming 2015). The absence of basic public services to support these women, as well as their situation of general poverty, also points to the role played by an indifferent social environment in undermining women's resilience and their abilities to overcome the dramatic events associated with mining activism in Latin America.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Whilst we might applaud these women's resilience and seek to recognise it more widely, that it is needed at all is a reminder of the continued stark power inequalities and dominance of the neoliberal extractivist model that make such a response necessary. As Joshua Tobias and Chantelle Richmond (2014) recognise, in research on the resilience of the land-dispossessed Anishinaabe people in Canada:

That even under these circumstances some communities are able to practise resilience should not be interpreted as an excuse for inaction by their nation states (...). To be clear, the ability of individuals or communities to succeed in the face of widespread adversity (...) does not suffice as evidence that policy and action on these struggles (...) are not urgently needed. (32)

As an academic and a practitioner, we both want to play our own roles in addressing the social, economic and environmental effects of large-scale mining on women and their communities, and we would hope to strengthen the ability of women to continue to resist the imposition of harmful and exploitative extractive practices. Yet as Kristina Diprose (2014) puts it very succinctly, 'The cultivation of resilience is not an answer to austerity and poverty' (44), and the women's resilience should not serve to simply facilitate the continuation of existing unequal power relations and enable further exploitation to take place.

These insights into the current Peruvian and Ecuadorian context also point to the important role resilience might play when activists have no choice but to live next to the mining projects they so vehemently oppose. As Nuria and Berta recognise below, there is a need to further strengthen the resilience of women (and their communities) in order to support them in developing the capabilities to cope with, but perhaps more importantly to challenge, the social, cultural, environmental and economic upheavals that full scale mining exploitation could eventually bring:

*... we can't say that we are going to win. We are not 100% sure of this, so we also need to prepare ourselves for the most difficult part. But when we say this, the women get disheartened, they say that if the mining companies are going to win, what's the point in carrying on, it is pointless. But then we reflect on this, and the situations of women in other countries help us. Our comrades in Peru are struggling, our comrades in Guatemala are struggling, and they now have the mining companies there, and this doesn't mean their problems are over, but rather that their problems have worsened. And that is where we will be. We need to be stronger in order to confront this situation. (...)I hope that we'll be able to carry on moving forward. I hope that other women will become conscious of the situation and of what FMDP does, and start to get involved themselves. I hope that before this time comes, we can build a stronger organisation...*

**Nuria (Ecuador)**

*Whether the mine comes or not we will have to carry on our struggle, because other transnational corporations will come searching for gold, copper, oil, whatever it is they want. We will carry on building women's capacities. Women are doing such important work.*

**Berta (Ecuador)**

Based on our work and experience of supporting women activists it is clear to us that women's own perceptions of their resilience and vulnerabilities change over time. How would they explain their daily struggle in five or ten years' time? In this paper we have explored resilience during the initial exploration stage of the mine. However, given the growing centrality of mining investment to Latin America's economic growth, it will be increasingly important to understand the role resilience plays in sustaining women and enabling them to respond to the everyday challenges of living close to a mine, once exploitation activities start and, even later, after the project has been closed down. How do women activists fare during these mining stages in comparison to pro-miners or women that did not get involved in any form of resistance? We therefore suggest that there is a need to develop more longitudinal understandings of the changing nature of women's resilience, how this intersects with vulnerability, and the role of civil society organisations in building and sustaining this resilience, particularly as patterns of involvement in activism shift, and community circumstances change.

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**Endnotes**

- (1) For more information on LAMMP, please visit [www.lammp.org](http://www.lammp.org)
- (2) The term "Human Rights Defender" is used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights. Human Rights Defenders are identified above all by what they do, and it is through a description of their actions and of some of the context in which they work that the term can be best explained (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/issues/SRHRDefenders/page/Defender.aspx>)

- (3) As stated earlier, all quotations in the article were collected in 2012 from life history interviews conducted by Katy Jenkins in Peru and Ecuador.
- (4) There are obviously connections here to the broader literature on resilience, and the ability of communities to adapt in the face of environmental change, but this is beyond the scope of this paper.
- (5) For a more detailed account of the women's motivations and activism, see Jenkins (2015)

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