GROUND TRANSPORTATION AND NEW INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN AYMARA SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY

TRANSPORTE TERRESTRE Y NUEVAS INTERCONEXIONES ENTRE SOCIEDAD Y ECONOMÍA AYMARA

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This article explores the development of a transport market which moves passengers and goods over the road system currently connecting Bolivia and Chile. An elite of aymara transport entrepreneurs has emerged in both Colchane and Pisiga to provide these services. This elite has currently been put under pressure by the appearance of new national and international actors. In a context of rural depopulation, migration between cities in both Chile and Bolivia and deterioration of the farming economy, we will see how participation in this transportation market has implied an important source of economic accrual in which indigenous actors have found a place. This process has reconfigured pre-existing political structures and generated new forms of social mobility and economic and political leadership.

Key words: Colchane, Pisiga, aymara, transportation, economy.

The object of this article is to characterize some of the social, political and economic transformations within the world of the aymara -as a dominant ethnic group in the region-in localities close to national frontiers. The area studied was that dependent on the Colchane-Pisiga border complex, which connects the Tarapacá Region in northern Chile with Oruro Department in western Bolivia. The economies of these areas have become more dynamic due to the development and growth of goods and passenger transport in recent decades (Figure 1). The work is based on two periods of ethnographic work in the towns of Colchane, Pisiga, Bolívar, Cariquima, Enquelga, Chijo, Pozo Almonte and Alto Hospicio (Iquique), between January and March 2013.

During the 1980s, International Route 15-CH (formerly A55), linking the Chilean town of Huara with the Colchane-Pisiga border crossing, was paved and generally improved. Since then, passenger and goods traffic has increased greatly. According to Chilean Customs statistics (Aduanas 2012), passenger traffic between 1997 and 2004 barely reached 85,000 per year, but numbers have increased strongly since 2005 reaching 400,000 in 2012. In terms of goods, measured in tons, there is also a significant increase to 317,330 tons in 2012, according to the same source. Although these numbers are still well below those of the Chungara Pass, which captures traffic between La Paz and the port of Arica, they nevertheless reflect strong growth in flows across that part of the border (Tables 1 and 2).

Based on ethnographic observation, we attempt to show some aymara practices which have sometimes been presented as pure economic

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