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"Migration as a Failure to Adapt? How Andean People Cope with Environmental Restrictions and Climate Variability"

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This article analyzes how people in the Bolivian Andes cope with environmental stress. Specifically, it examines the role environmental migration plays in how people cope with climate change. In the Andes, the climate is highly variable, forcing people to cope with extreme weather conditions that range from extreme droughts and intensive rain and floods to rising temperatures and unexpected frosts. When mobility takes place in such a context, it is often portrayed as “environmental” migration (reflecting the failure of people to adapt to environmental pressures). Though migration in the Andes is in part an adaptive response to adverse climatic conditions, this article argues that environmental limitations do not play a decisive role. Instead, it shows how migration is a strategic mechanism to build up financial, productive, and social capital, opening opportunities to stay. We contend that migration—rather than being a flow of people “moving away”—should be perceived as people building webs of relationships to reduce their vulnerability. Migration allows them to engage in multi-local livelihoods, “catching” opportunities at various localities while remaining connected to their area of origin. The article concludes that migration is not a failure to adapt; rather, it is a choice that reflects agency of local actors to build new lifeways. Thanks to migration, people are capable of enduring in spite of increasing environmental stress.

— Text from The White Horse Press website

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