

Authors

Hannah Trachtman
Yale University

Researchers

Dean Karlan
Northwestern University

Global Lens: The Longstanding Tradition of Incorporating New with Old

Hannah Trachtman is a project associate with the Group vs. Individual Liability Project in Peru.

Normally a relatively small city, Puno in Southeastern Peru floods with visitors in late January and early February. They come to Puno for one of South America's most important religious festivals, brimming with symbolism as well as cultural expressions from various local peoples such as the Quechua, the Aymara and the mestizos of the Andean Altiplano. The multi-week celebration is for the ***Fiesta de la Candelaria***, a festival honoring the town's patron saint, the Virgin de la Candelaria.

One of many versions of the biblical virgin Mary, this virgin is so named for a passage from the bible in which Mary, who has just given birth to her child, fulfills her duty to tradition by presenting him in the temple of Jerusalem and performing various post-partum rituals. The virgin is thus a symbol of both fertility and purity, of the earth and the nearby Lake Titicaca, symbols dating back much farther than the advent of Catholicism.

The woman I've captured in this photo is one of nearly 40,000 dancers who take part in this celebration, not just to honor their city's patron saint, but also to honor the much older cult of Pachamama - the Andean earth mother deity - and the traditions of this region's many indigenous cultures. All throughout the day in various parts of the city, you can see dancers dressed in colorful traditional dress and hear the diverse rhythms of the region's cultural groups. . On the eve of Candelaria, there is a Catholic mass, followed by a procession through the city. It is also common practice on this day for locals to invite visitors to eat regional dishes in their homes. This combination of local traditions, dance, food, and religious symbolism with Catholic and Spanish religious traditions creates a rich blend of old and new that is unique to Puno, yet the concept is ubiquitous.

Peruvians, especially Peruvian women, are quite familiar with this process of incorporating new realities into traditional ways of doing things. In today's Peru, the same woman who wears traditional garb and carries a small child on her back in the *K'eperina* must also learn to survive in the modern marketplace. Pro Mujer,

IPA's partner in fighting poverty in Puno, defines its mission as helping Latin America's poorest women improve their and their family's lives through small loans, business education, and healthcare assistance. Ongoing research with Pro Mujer on group vs. individual liability expands on an idea tested in the Philippines to explore ways to improve loan conditions for individuals based on actual behavior in the current socioeconomic environment.

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