

# “Water is life”: politics, memory and experience in conflicts over mining in Cajamarca, Peru

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyze how the defense of life and water is constituted in socio-environmental conflicts in the region of Cajamarca, northern Peru. The dispute for water has become in recent years a central issue in people's lives in a region that water is the focus of mining exploration and for which discourses and appeals are used to evoke the benefits in terms of the development it can achieve. Throughout the ethnographic research, people and collectives have witnessed the effort to defend the waters of rivers, lagoons and irrigation canals in the Andes, in parallel with the way they defend life. In doing so, they articulate memories, local learning and collective experiences to break with the roles that the conventional political order assigned them, creatively constituting their own ways of thinking and putting into practice life projects and resisting the opulence of mining companies or state authorities.

## KEYWORDS

Collective experience, memory, water, socio-environmental conflicts, Peruvian Andes

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**ABSTRACT** In this article, we analyze how the defense of life and water is constituted in socio-environmental conflicts in the region of Cajamarca, northern Peru. The dispute for water has become in recent years a central issue in people's lives in a region that water is the focus of mining exploration and for which discourses and appeals are used to evoke the benefits in terms of the development it can achieve. Throughout the ethnographic research, people and collectives have witnessed the effort to defend the waters of rivers, lagoons and irrigation canals in the Andes, in parallel with the way they defend life. In doing so, they articulate memories, local learning and collective experiences to break with the roles that the conventional political order assigned them, creatively constituting their own ways of thinking and putting into practice life projects and resisting the opulence of mining companies or state authorities.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

It was a rainy afternoon on September 15, 2014 when several people who had participated in struggles against the Yanacocha mining company in the Cajamarca region of northern Peru gathered for the deliverance day anniversary of *Cerro*<sup>2</sup> Quilish (Mount Quilish). Quilish was the target of expansion plans by the Yanacocha<sup>3</sup> mining company, already working in the region, in 2004 and the population of Cajamarca significantly opposed this until the project was declared unfeasible (Li, 2015, 2016).

Many gathered at a point on the way between Cajamarca and Bambamarca to celebrate the event, with the presence of Máxima Chaupe<sup>4</sup>, the music group Tinkari, foreign activists, teachers and others who at that time sympathized with the struggle against the project of Conga mining. After the conflict over Quilish, Conga was the most serious and involved the same company. At the most euphoric celebration moment, the group occupied the road, crowded by the traffic of trucks, buses, cars and vans that go to and from Cajamarca. People danced to the loud music, shouting “Water yes, gold no!” and between the music and the sound of the horns, cars in both directions were forced to stop (and wait). The screams of those who were in the vehicles were different, as they said “Conga goes”<sup>5</sup>, defending this project, and followed the shouts of “go back to work, idle people”. However, for the protesters celebrating this important achievement involving the mountain – emblematic for the local populations of this region of the Andes – it was necessary not to be hit by the insults of those who argued in favor of mining as a central activity for economic development. Contrary to the massive presence of passersby against the mining project, the following day local newspapers reported that there were a few people present at the manifestation. The local media also questioned the participation of environmental activists from other countries, defending the argument of national development through mining activities.

We retrieve this episode related to Quilish here because precisely the media incitement is that people could not be wasting time celebrating when they should take care of their own business: women were neglecting their homes, peasants were not in the fields, and the foreigners involved were not spending their money; on the contrary, they were holding the supposed progress. The particularity of this situation is that, in addition to dividing the world into an order in which each party has its role and place, it strives for an ordering based on work, identities, the role of each one in economic development.

In Peru, the experience with mining has been going on for a few centuries, evidenced in the innumerable mine mouths and tunnels built into the Andean mountains since the colonial period. What is known today as modern mining appeared in 1990 and, although the assumptions of extractive activity were continued, this modality proposed another dynamic. The environmental impact assessment began to work when the legal and economic norms to attract international investment were

<sup>1</sup> | The authors would like to thank CAPES and FAPERGS for their support to the research and also very especially to the reviewers of *Revista de Antropologia* for the careful reading of the work as well as the suggestions given to the article.

<sup>2</sup> | The text presents a set of words used locally, expressions in a foreign language and the speeches of the people interviewed. For clarification to the reader, italics are used for local concepts and foreign expressions (usually followed by a translation the first time they appear in the text). For interview excerpts – as well as reference quotes – up to three lines long, double quotation marks are used and kept in the body of the text.

<sup>3</sup> | The Yanacocha mine works about 45 km from Cajamarca through the company of the same name. One of the most emblematic conflicts occurred in 2004 when the Yanacocha company announced the expansion of its operations on the *cerro Quilish*, a few kilometers from the city of Cajamarca. In this conflict, the impossibility of its exploitation was affected by popular protest, mainly by residents of the city of Cajamarca. As of 2010, another conflict arose over the Conga region, which preserves five river basins. The Conga project is suspended due to a regional strike that took place in November 2011.

<sup>4</sup> | Máxima Acuña de Chaupe received the Goldman Environmental Award in 2016 for defending the right to live on their own land in the face of threats from the Yanacocha company. Máxima lives in front of Azul [blue] Lagoon, the site of intervention for the Conga mining project in the Peruvian Andes, and has become a symbol of the struggle against the advance of mining companies.

<sup>5</sup> | In the sense that the mining project will be carried out.

implemented and turned out to be an instrument for disciplining nature and people. The small mining companies that keep the colony's undertakings declared themselves in crisis at that time because they were unable to implement the requirements of the new environmental policy.

Thus, with an improved regulatory framework, companies with large capital contribution, such as Yanacocha, appeared in Peru with a policy of social responsibility and began to be well regarded by proposing to improve the quality of life of the population through the nature redesign. It is not without surprise that one of those interviewed during the research stated with such reverence: “Thank you God who has given us [Peru] so many resources to explore. And the technical part allows us to make the best use of them (Telmo, engineer of the Conga project, in an interview)”. The explanation by Yanacocha's representative reveals the argument that the intervention would bring about a better dynamism in the economy. This is how the mining companies and the State collaborated so that several large-scale development projects were present in Peru as gifts to be used in a planned manner. In this article we see a recent struggle process and demonstrations against mining initiatives in and around Cajamarca, Peru. It is being analyzed how the defense of life is made in association with the water defense, a main axis in the socio-environmental conflicts in the region. Furthermore, for such an argumentation, it will be necessary to resort to some aspects that helps the interpretation, such as ways of collective learning for struggles, social experience and memory. The development theme will be painted throughout the text before a specific section on the subject, as it is also at the epicenter of this plot on mining and economic dynamism.

The ethnographic research completed by one of the authors of this text was made between 2013 and 2014, concluding nine months of research and was carried out especially in the municipalities of Cajamarca, Celendín and in *centro poblado*<sup>6</sup> El Tambo, which is also located in the region of Cajamarca, places where a significant population group expressed opposition to mining. As part of the ethical-methodological aspects, it is important to stress this: one of the authors has been carrying out research in the region of Cajamarca for some years (including for the conclusion of her doctoral thesis). The authors dialogue and write together since at least 2007 and the second author is dedicated to a theme that cuts across this article – the relationship between biopolitics and development.

The context of those years was one of conflict around the Conga mining project, a vast proposal for open-pit gold and copper exploration that would be placed in the highlands of Cajamarca region. Similar to the Quilish case, mentioned above, Conga is part of the expansion plan for the controversial gold mine that has been working in the outskirts of Cajamarca since 1992, named Yanacocha, whose company responsible for the venture is the largest in Latin America in this sector<sup>7</sup>.

6 | Comprises one or more legally recognized settlements. It is the seat of government, local and communal authorities. The centro poblado El Tambo has 26 hamlets, which express a legally recognized settlement. It does not have collective land titles, but is recognized as an organizational unit for the purposes of government services.

7 | A consortium made up of the American company Newmont Mining Corporation, which holds 51.35% of the shares, the Peruvian Buenaventura, with 43.65%, and the International Finance Corporation, a sister organization of the World Bank, with 5%.

In 2010, the media highlighted those well-known lagoons in the Cajamarca region (called El Perol, Chica, Mala and Azul) would be directly affected by the insertion of infrastructure for the mining project. Water, we argue, is fundamental in different senses for groups in the region. For mining company water is a resource to be exploited through a technical procedure that consists in the construction of reservoirs for the rainwater storage. The resident's memories and experiences in the political sphere show, on the other hand, water and life can be lived as multiplicity. It was precisely this artificial redesign that provoked the anger of the cajamarquinos, some of whom had already participated in the demonstrations for the release of Quilish and lived daily with the effects of Yanacocha. The company's argument is further reinforced as technological improvement and guarantee of greater water uptake compared to the amount kept by the lagoons (Knight Piesold Consultores, 2010). Several of these aspects will be discussed in this text and we seek to emphasize ethnography, establishing theoretical connections based on social events and processes.

#### **EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING: WATER, VITALITY AND ACTION OF THE RONDAS CAMPESINAS [PEASANT PATROLS]**

Nora was born and lives in the city of Cajamarca, she is 44 years old, is a school teacher and usually takes to the streets when there is something against the Yanacocha mining company. “I don't have a fixed group, if I see a group of women protesting, I stand to the side and shout together”. Like other testimonies during ethnographic research, this process of resistance to the mine is common and commonplace, as the supply and water quality are recurrently affected. At the time of this conversation, in April 2014, the people of Cajamarca city had a few hours of water per day and this water, which arrived through the pipe, had a dubious appearance according to several reports.

Nora remembers having played since she was young, with her family, on the Maschcon River, which is important in the region. In this dialogue, she makes her reflections on the river, which joins the Rio Grande, another significant one for the local population.

Since the mine came, there is no life. We enter (the river) and the skin burns and hurts. The little one [nephew] cannot go to the river. The [nephew] who is 19 years old until the age of five enjoyed the river. The youngest nephew was born with the river dead. He doesn't believe me. Who among us lived and enjoyed, went out to wash, it was a river with life. [...] Here today we have *acequia* [canal] that comes from three mills, we had plants, flowers, there were cypresses; the mine has arrived and the cypresses die, as if they had been burned. The water comes down yellow and destroys everything: animals, plants and our children. They've been dying of cancer for many years, like my neighbor. My 46-year-old sister and my 47-year-old neighbor. We had

never heard of anyone dying of cancer at such a young age. Neighbors died. A Cajamarquino died before from the flu, peritonitis, but never from cancer. Now everyone is dying of cancer. Without being scientists, we see destruction, but we are told that we have to scientifically prove it. Only a blind man doesn't see it. (Nora, teacher and activist from the city of Cajamarca, in an interview. All interviews were transcribed and translated into Portuguese).

Throughout this conversation, Nora insisted that whoever is fighting (against Yanacocha) is because they had played in the river and enjoyed the waters, in general.

This testimony turns out to be similar to what Cruikshank (2005) studied about how landscapes anchor memories and reflections. What stands out in Nora's speech is precisely the rupture of her relationship with the river, where she played with her family, a relationship that cannot be reproduced with and among younger people. Telling her younger nephew about this experience is possible, but something she cannot share with the same intensity. For Nora, that relationship with the river, her memory, is what drives her to protest in the streets without naturalizing the constant transformations that are taking place in Cajamarca.

However, it is not a question of affirming that the experience has died, perhaps what is impressive is how it relates to death. Today, as Nora points out, the experiences that Cajamarquinos feel in the city of Cajamarca are the consecutive deaths in their neighborhoods. Nora commented that neighbors die of cancer, including her sister, who had recently passed away: before they died of peritonitis, flu, but now everyone is dying of cancer. That was not an exclusive comment because many people spoke of similar phenomena. Before, people were *beautifully* fat and, today, they are *skinny*, as they say, with body fatigue, an effect that, as they understand, could only come from contaminated water.

We have a game, therefore, quite different in the attribution of blame. While the blame attributed by state leaders and businessmen for the suspension of the Conga mining project is applied to peasants and social movements—and thus becomes blame for the lack of development<sup>8</sup>—, these people blame the companies and the contaminated water—the result mining in different locations and thus the effect of development—by disease. On the one hand, the focus is on the dynamism of the economic sector, on the other, life itself, a subject that we will deal with later in this text.

It is worth noting that, based on what was heard in the field, cancer was a different disease. This illness seems to have introduced another relationship with death in the region. A *rondero*<sup>9</sup> [patrol] in Celendín city once reported that, before, the *mayores* [elders] fought against death, they clung to the door, to the bed, so that death would not take them away; they faced suffering to the end. Nowadays, also confirmed by Nora's report, the body seemed not to have this resistance to fight against death, the cancer caught them before, weakened them, soon they died. Another *rondera* [patrol], Bianca, had mentioned the same: young people have “weak bodies”, tired; “It must be from this

8 | Despite the polysemy to be noted throughout the text, we start from the idea that development can be understood from a reference to Olivier de Sardan (1995) quoted by Carneiro (2012: 134): “the set of social processes induced by voluntary operations of a social environment transformation, undertaken through the guidance of institutions or actors outside that environment, and which are based on the transplantation of resources and/or techniques and/or knowledge.”

9 | The term *rondero* (patrol) refers to the person who carries out community surveillance rounds in the region, a topic briefly explored in this section of the article.

water” she blurted out.

From the conversation with Nora, we understand that people captured the vitality of the river in communal experience in those years before 1992-1993. In dialogue with one of the technicians from the Department of Environment of Cajamarca Government, she reported that the river is a very important reference for the Andean communities because people meet there to fetch and carry water, wash, drink, and new families emerge from these encounters. Today, differently, they caught some disease, and the option was to have a life in which the river was no longer part of that relationships. Experience, in other words, does not seem to be just a social or cultural matter as the classical approaches in social science supposed (nature versus culture), it involves a relationship with the world, the environment and, here, water acquires an impressive centrality. Thus, the water vitality has parallels with the people’s vitality. For Nora, destroying these experiences with the waters is a way of appropriation, because it changes everyday, but the main aspects of life, such as family outings, expeditions with school students and, above all, health. Experiences with the river—playing, walking and even flirting—had been disrupted since the Yanacocha Company arrived, as it is a river with a nauseating smell. The new experience consists of receiving phone calls with the news of a death or invitation to funerals and burials. However, Nora struggles, trying to reconstruct an experience of being able to autonomously design her own life projects.

One can ask how to relate this experience to history and the collective. One possibility, as it is often related to many people and also mentioned by researchers, is the emergence of the peasant patrols<sup>10</sup>. Our intention in this part is not to carry out a thorough study of this process, which is already well known in the literature on alternative ways of justice, but it is relevant to place this experience in order to understand the other aspects of the text.

The study by Gitlitz (2013) discusses on the *Rondera* justice of Cajamarca. This does not consist of a set of defined rules and specific procedures to be followed little by little, as happen in an investigation and the conventional post-trial. On the contrary, the objective of *rondera* justice is the reparation for victims and the reintegration of the offender so he understands his mistakes and does not continue harming the community. In some cases, the offender has to patrol to feel the suffering that prowls at night to protect the people of the offender harms. According to a *rondero*, Nectar, some former robbers of the village themselves produced the best *ronderos*. Fulfilling this task is a duty in the community, all families have to do it, and if a person cannot because he is old, he must collaborate with food for those who do this work.

In *centro poblado* El Tambo, for years, the *ronderos*, who are also peasants, have shared a lived knowledge about water. Water is something very precious. As one of them explained, if the spring is leaking water, people who live below water (land of lower altitudes) know that it is raining in the *jalcas* (heights); if there is a little water, it is because it is in a dry season (no rain). At the same time, they have become knowledgeable about

10 | Cajamarca’s peasant patrols emerged as a communal and organized response to cattle raiding and other petty theft (Gitlitz, 2013; Starn, 1991) in the 1970s, even the police itself. Thus, in 1976, the peasants of Cuyumalca, a small village in Chota (region of Cajamarca), organized the first peasant patrol.

the water canal system. The *ronderos* who manage watershed relationships and uses *within* the community, they change the rules, design and reinvent sanctions to prevent one from harming the other through “water thefts”<sup>11</sup>. When someone realizes that his land needs water, permission must be given by the main administrator, and the user must irrigate until his planted plot is finished so that another has access to the canal. If a user holds water *on a whim*, there is a penalty, because it is a serious offense to retain water and leave another one unable to irrigate its land. This kind of attention to the good use of water is strictly enforced so that everyone can *feed* their lands.

<sup>11</sup> | In Caballero's research (2017) in the south-central Peruvian Andes, water theft is defined by the author as a selfish action that hurts the community's collective.

However, the opposition to the mining projects on the side of the El Tambo *ronderos* was not immediate, but a process of continuous learning for which memories acted. Galindo, a professor and also a *rondero*, said that today he is the opposite of the Conga project, and reported that at one point he himself invited the Yanacocha Community Relations Manager to visit the community with a peculiar purpose:

At the beginning of 2006, when I was a Councilor for Centro Poblado, we wanted to develop at El Tambo. City halls did not support it. We brought in the Community Relations manager from Yanacocha to support with infrastructure: construction of the parade ground, market, roads. They came and committed, but they pulled certain people to their convenience, for personal support. Seeing this, we realized that we didn't want development through mining. Mining only gives crumbs to a few people. Mainly to the people who will work for them (Galindo, *rondero*, professor and President of the Frente de Defensa, in an interview).

Galindo still saying that:

In October 2011 there would be a public hearing to approve the social license. They sent a letter to the teachers. We had to have a position. Before the public hearing, we organized an Environment Committee. After the hearing, we founded the Front for the Defense of the Environment interests of centro poblado El Tambo. At the hearing they explained that the Project was underway. On the 9th of November we went to Amaro, between the Azul lagoon and the Perol lagoon, and we saw a large amount of machinery on the road, and we agreed as the Defense Front to give an ultimatum to the Conga mining project to remove its machinery. That's when we realized that they were going to destroy all our lagoons at the head of the basin. We got the Executive Summary of the Environmental Impact Assessment. Then we saw that the lagoons would disappear. On November 24th we started with the Shutdown. We went to the small villages with documentaries about Cerro de Pasco to show how centro poblado El Tambo would look like. We raise awareness among people in Cajamarca and in other provinces. And when we held the National Water March, other regions, such as La Libertad and Ancash, supported us.

Apparently, something usual here happens in large development projects. Almost everyone approve when they hear about a large investment in their region. Normally, people imagine the amount of resources and jobs to be created. Initially, the peasant patrols found themselves in this situation, with many people supporting the mineral exploration initiative even though they were not well acquainted with the different cases involving mining in Peru. However, according to the above testimony, the *ronderos* had to see the possible effects through their own eyes, but for those who already knew about the problems, communicating this to others was difficult – a job that could not only be convincing through speech. They had to show videos of other mining situations, such as the controversial case of Cerro de Pasco<sup>12</sup> in order to demonstrate the several mine effects. The possibility that the *ronderos* would act in the collective learning process about mining projects was imminent.

The apprenticeships set in motion by the *ronderos* understand that what is at stake today is not just about the problem of defending one's property. No doubt that this was one of the main motivations for the emergence of these ways of justice, but when the territory is increasingly a target of mining prospection, another type of situation comes into play. Faced with Conga's problematic, some changes can be seen from what Starn (1991) proposes. The *ronderos* renew their own customs of local justice and today include the lagoons care in the Conga region. Since 2012, the *ronderos* of El Tambo have been calling themselves the Guardians of the Lagoons, extending the surveillance of what was once their territory, the community, to the Conga region, where the iconic lagoons are placed.

There are families in *centro poblado* that do not have members with the age to patrol around. These people do not call themselves *ronderos*, even so they participate in the Assemblies, collaborate with food and are subject to the *ronderos* rules; they often say "our *patrols*" or "our guardians". Even some sing in support: a well-known peasant from the community, who is already advanced in age, sings routinely on the small village's radio station and his voice is heard in the *jalcas* to encourage the Guardians in their important task of watching over the Mamacocha lagoon, one of the possible victims by mining. Reciprocally, Guardians always have to report what they observe by eye inspection: any modification in the landscape, traitors leaving near El Perol lagoon (in Celendín) and passing by Mamacocha (in Hualgayoc), presence of policing, machinery, and change in the neighbor's behavior, among others. On the other hand, they were also watched by their neighbors (those in favor of the company) and by the police, and that is why, during the ethnography, so much care was noted in providing permission for researchers who want to study these problems. The *ronderos* always made a point of mentioning: "they can be infiltrated" [from the company].

The struggle teaches us, said Paredo, another patrol and interlocutor in the field and who has enough group knowledge to explain the process over time: despite having always been a collective project, he added that "before the *ronderos* were to take care of

12 | Cerro de Pasco is one of the largest open pit mines in Latin America, located in the region of Pasco, Peru. The case is famous for the fact that the mine is close to where people live, many of whom have serious health problems.



our belongings, today is to take care of what belongs to everyone”.

#### **WATER AND LIFE: BEYOND THE PARTS AND WHAT WOULD BE ABLE TO EACH**

Gradually, it is possible to connect individual stories to collective ones and political processes involving mining, life and water. For Nora, presented above, water-related problems are more than simple accidents in the course of supposed development, nor they are divided exclusively as environmental or health. Water, we can assure it, is a fundamental bond of relationality. The problems arising from open-pit mining harmed people's lives, who had to forcibly apart from the river, understand the loss of body vitality and seek other ways to prevent disease. However, these same damages are what ended up giving strength to the struggle, as Nora once said: “they made us people in struggle”. See here that Nora, being a teacher by profession, does not deny being a Cajamarquina and, she adds, a “fighter”, as discussed in Vieira and Maizza (2018) when presenting how women question their category (woman) at the times of disagreement and become politically visible and intertwined with non-humans.

Before (the river) was our entertainment place, life was beautiful. The popular fifth, when a person dies, on the fifth day the house was washed and the clothes of the deceased were washed in the river Maschcon. On a tour, the teachers brought us to the Maschcon River, and told us: let's study the river. Now the river has no life; an [individual] who makes sense knows what it stands for, feels nostalgia, euphoria; enough, we want to live as before. Now it can't, it's all dead. In my sister's fifth we wash in the Baños del Inca so that she goes well. You have to follow the belief, it's a tradition that comes from generation to generation, it's like relaxing, water means life, purification, washing her clothes so she can go well beyond. Water is life, it is the provision of life, of our soul, of plants. [...] A neighbor exchanged her land for a four-story house in the city, two vans... see, coming from the countryside. She said: “I can no longer raise my pigs”. My mother used to say, if you burn your crop, go back to plowing and planting again. Now, she's never going to do it again. [...] Before [the ground] gave potatoes, oxalis [an Andean tuber], barley, rye. (Nora, a teacher from the city of Cajamarca and activist, in an interview).

Around the phrase “Water is life”, Nora summarizes well what she feels, articulating religiosity, purity, work, relationship between generations, harvest, thirst-quenching and food. These struggles for life are a sample that many come out of that explanation – that depoliticize – in which they are enclosed: as a teacher, peasant, housewife, woman, etc., to act politically, rescue possible experiences, design life projects.

The same goes for the *ronderos*, of which for other people, many are peasants. These identities are overlapping and activated at certain times, in general they are not mutually exclusive. This can also be an aspect of the extension of relationships,

which can never be assumed by the researcher, as Strathern has clearly shown about networks and their complexities in a text marked by a critical dialogue with Bruno Latour (Strathern, 2006). Police power, by the way, precisely seeks to separate and distinguish what can gain strength in the political struggle.

Another very emblematic case is that of Father Sergio. It was precisely Nora who suggested contacting him during the field research. The priest was an activist when the tragic case of mercury spill occurred in nearby Choropampa. Thus, many people have some experience of the region's political and environmental problems. After having participated in several protests during the 2000s, Sergio reported that he was banned from the city of Cajamarca by the religious authorities themselves for participating in the manifestations. According to his superiors, he as a priest did not have the competence to be involved in the policy.

During the time they lived together in the Andes, from the comments of several people, it became clear that there was an effort by powerful forces to separate politics from other functions, such as the case of Nora presented above. The State did politics (probably more in the sense *policy*), the others that did politics were for favoring some political party from which they would get some benefit, build a combative policy or put themselves in the market to receive money for their silence. If we follow Rancière (1995), it seems that in this case the State carries out policing and manages public policy, dividing and functionalizing parts of society. This curious tension also come on in Foucault (2004) and Agamben (2007): the first showed how, a few centuries ago, in Western Europe, Police means many types of state action towards society, including welfare management. The idea of police as we know it today – security and public order – is more recent. For the second, there is a historical tendency in the West to think of politics as the government and economy of things, of souls and of others, a theme of reflection by Foucault when it comes to the question of the governmentalization of the State.

Sergio explained that, since 1979, and especially in the 2007 Aparecida document<sup>13</sup>, it was determined that the environmental issue was a matter to be considered by the Catholic Church, and this is what Pope Francis stressed today through his Joy of the Gospel, from 2012, and the encyclical *Laudato Si*, from 2015. The priest carried out his argument and emphasized: "nature is the most oppressed it has. The poor are revived, but the damage to nature is irreversible<sup>14</sup>". Influenced by the writings of liberation theologians and philosophers (Boff, Gutierrez, Dussel, among others), he worked with these references together with six other clerics from the Dioceses of Cajamarca. It is worth mentioning that, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Liberation Theology stated that it was not enough for the Church to simply have empathy and care for the poor. Rather, the Church needed to be a crucial means to push for political and structural changes in order to eradicate poverty (Boff, 2007). As Sergio declared, this is the religious role, while the bishop under whom his parish was

13 | "This heritage is often shown to be fragile and defenseless in the face of economic and technological powers. Therefore, as prophets of life, we want to insist that, in interventions on natural resources, the interests of economic groups that irrationally destroy the sources of life to the detriment of entire nations and of humanity itself, do not prevail". This is one of the passages dedicated to the environmental issue in the 2007 Aparecida Document.

14 | Father Guille, from Celendín, made a point of showing, during an interview, the Joy of the Gospel, introduced by Pope Francis, and which was discussed in his meetings.

linked, made a point of clarifying that this is not the competence of priests, a typical discourse of the movement within the Church to fight Marxist tendencies. In 2006, the current bishop of Cajamarca, Martinez Lazaro, published a letter in the daily *El Correo*, addressed to the Diocese of Cajamarca, in which he justified that priests would be forbidden from participating in any political action. For this argument, the bishop alludes to Paul VI's speech to the United Nations, in 1965, which exposes that development is the new language of peace, and to Paul's assertion that the evangelical concept of Christianity is not about helping the poor to keep them poor; on the contrary, it's about those deprived leaving their poverty and moving to a higher level.

What can be observed, therefore, is that the ordering of the world is based on categories, competences and roles that each one would have (as defined by Rancière, 1995), and many of the acting in the field perceive themselves transgressing these limitations.

There seems to be politics in this case precisely when some functions that are intended for people are disrupted, just as identities become political when they implode the environment of domestication reserved for them. Even so, we would like to point out that development – a theme that has recurred in this text when mentioning or promising the positive effects of mining – is a powerful language for mitigating conflicts.

#### **DEVELOPMENT: ARGUMENTS AROUND TECHNIQUE, SUCESS EVIDENCE AND PRODUCTIVITY**

What higher stage would this be and how to accomplish it through the language of peace, as said before? Precisely what overcomes underdevelopment and its constitutive qualities of the theories of modernization it claims (poverty, lack of purpose-oriented rationality on the part of social actors, economic stagnation, problems of productive dynamism for a society of mass consumption and others).

Although we could focus on the theme through a critique in terms of conceptual debate, it will be more useful to return to the problem of development and some connections made by the interlocutors in the field. In one of the moments of talking to Nora, she had not even mentioned the discussion to the topic of development, and she, however, began to explain that the development spread by the Yanacocha company is precisely to make everyone buy a “Hilux van”. Development, therefore, is linked to the acquisition of material goods to be shown to others, also a way of seduction by mining companies. Of course, development, based on Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995), has real effects and this is what matters to check, not how development theorists would like it to be<sup>15</sup>. The van and the house in the city, in the case cited by Nora, are goods considered external to the peasant way of life, certainly

15 | This is a long debate in the social sciences and will not be detailed in the text. The discussion about how development has been versus how people would like it to be, cause a lot of confusion, both in studies and in public policies, the latter partially answering why this ideology has not yet been left behind and we believe in the possibility of one day building a “good” development. On the subject, see Perrot (1991), Rist (1996), Ribeiro (2008), Ziai (2007, 2015), and Mosse (2013).

seductive and signs of power or social ascension. Her abilities for design are carried out by others, e.g. engineers and architects. Opposite to this, the people we present throughout the text invoke their right to decide on their life projects, in which the design of their world is important. Walsh (2010) drew attention to the spelling of the word as in "develop", a process of breaking people's relationships with what their world is and, thus, annulling the autonomy of their life design projects (See also Escobar, 2018; Ryn and Cowan, 1996).

As she continued to talk, Nora showed some parallels, because if the truck's engine broke down there wasn't much to be done; repair would be required by a third party, usually a specialist. It's different with the land, if the potato harvest doesn't work, Nora carried on, she can design on it again. It is a testing process, but also an experience lived with the land (and with the irrigation canals, that is, water). When talking about development, she was emphasizing the ability to design her own life project, not having a dependency on others, in short, still having the autonomy to articulate her relationships with things. More importantly, for her, development makes a person bond with something that is not in their reality.

Some of the accounts coincide with the critical literature on development, because while it is observed that it is a political issue, it can be – for this very reason – placed on an environment outside politics. Working, consuming, progressing, less than discussing which power relations can involve it, is applied a kind of conquest (individual or collective). Ferguson (2005) showed that from the mid 20th century onwards development took the place that in other times belonged to the words evolution and progress, now in a new architecture of international relations: development is something to be stimulated and all peoples, with time and resources, could overcome stagnation and underdevelopment. But it is in his well-known monograph (Ferguson, 1990) that the author indicates how development programs can be depoliticizing, as they replace political debate with technical knowledge (and the administration of policies or management of social groups). Thus, taking part in social protests is not a matter for religious people, much less hindering the opportunity of these people to get out of poverty – an argument by pro-mining groups. Nevertheless, this way out always seems to be guided by the State, by companies or by charity and so poverty becomes a matter of intervention, management and focused policies, not a political problem related to structural inequality.

Sergio suggested that the region of Cajamarca was divided between those in favor and those against mining and development was a term from which he was also seeking freedom. He criticized the idea that development was unique and driven by linear progress. In real life, if development has to exist, he said, it would have to be "from the person's point of view." For some, it's about to have a van; for others, it is to be able to live off their agriculture, and there would be other conceptions. So, this division did not seem to accept the multiplicity of meanings (and life options) that

the term could assume. On the one hand, mining and, on the other, all those who were not in favor of the mining activity were also labeled “against development”. The ethnographic material allows us to affirm that, for opponents of mining projects, their alternatives could never be understood as legitimate ways of building individual or collective life projects.

Even so, it is worth highlighting a relevant fact related to these options. According to Father Sergio, many of the clerics in Cajamarca had chosen to support the mine because they received money for their social works. During protests against the Conga project, only a few priests helped the resistance. The offer reached Sergio and, as he reported, was sought out in his parish; at stake was the question of whether he would receive gifts from the mining companies. However, he refused to receive this offer, he had the courage to deny the second moment of the gift well described by Mauss (1925), receiving it, because that money would come with a commitment. It has been known since Mauss, how gift and power are intertwined and the priests who chose to receive the gift from the mining companies, now need to speak well about mining. So, if you beat the companies, then “*te lo sacan en la cara*” (they charge the favor), said Sergio. The time between the receipt and the consideration can be maintained, but the debt is evident and it can be difficult to escape from it.

#### TECHNIQUES TO IMMUNIZE

Telmo, already mentioned in the introduction of this article, is an engineer who worked on the Conga mining project. Talking with him allowed the understanding of how part of the technical staff of mining projects or consulting companies understand the problems in the region. The engineer claimed that it is the technique that makes it possible to take advantage of natural resources. For him, if the peasant could understand that the technique is to make better use of resources, it would be in favor of mining because it acts as a lever for agriculture: “*Who is the ganadero [rancher?], those above? This is subsistence agriculture. Everyone has his role. They only harvest to eat*”. For Telmo, those who were able to see the mine with better eyes are also betting on something different and stand out. They take the peasants to southern Peru to see what it’s like to be a real rancher and they are surprised. Here we are in the field of persuasion by productivity and by the promise of an increase in monetary income.

With regard to the water issue, it is still the technique that helps Cajamarca to have more water. Telmo explains that the reservoirs expand the capacity of the lakes.

We have made a big reservoir, it is something additional to what it was before. People who are far away do not benefit and so on. In this case, those who are already entrepreneurs changed their view of development perspective. They are going elsewhere with their enterprises. But as a technician, with all the studies that I have, I have seen that the case of the lagoons differs

from what people think. For example, the water restrictions of the lagoons with the spring. First, we have to know the hydrological cycle: clouds and winds condense, there is rain, rivers, streams, make lagoons, water infiltrates the soil and this water makes springs. Many people said in Combayo that we have 500 springs that come from above (from the Conga lagoons), but it doesn't come from the lagoons, it's infiltrated water. In the Conga case, the soil geology does not allow water to infiltrate. That's why the lagoons are impermeable. We cannot say that there is 100% connection. We cannot say that the lagoons feed the lower parts. As a technician, I speak with technical studies. I have been explaining the water cycle to people for a long time and they don't believe it. We've been talking from the technical position and it's very difficult. We go with friendly language to make someone else believe and for them to say OK. (Telmo, engineer of the Conga project, in an interview).

All arguments are given due to engineering capacity to respond well – with scientific designs – to problems posed by the environment or by human action. In previous parts of the text, we showed that there is a strong support of local agents in the communities to the explanations of oral histories and everyday experiences with the world. The water connections in the territory are widely known and verbalized by the peasants, who build irrigation canals and manage them collectively. The problems experienced, both lack of water and contamination (diseases and deaths), have no other explanation than coming from mining initiatives, as they coincide in time. Any changes in the canals, and this has been verbalized by many, are felt in the land below and are a sign that something happening somewhere affects the water flow.

However, Telmo is emphatic in dismissing such explanations through geological science with its technical design – even contesting the much-repeated testimony of residents that the lagoons feed the lower parts. In addition, in his view, talking about technique is something difficult, since others do not understand. Thus, both productivity and specialized knowledge is the rise of advanced techniques and also development. Everything that Sergio and Nora told us about development to a subject that would allow for a conception of plurality and understanding of the world, is reduced to a version of truth that, as Blaser (2010) showed about the West and its way of thinking about the relationship between reality and knowledge, seeks to encompass the others, suggesting that these are incomplete, imperfect and inefficient versions of science. However, another interlocutors in the field pointed out to us a different favorable situation for this issue, particularly in terms of knowledge and place and the way in which it challenges the *establishment*.

After the congress organized by the Tambo Defense Front in August 2014, one of the authors of this text participated in a vigil night in Celendín and visited Professor Chavito, who was responsible for the radio program in the city. He had worked together with an environmentalist in the region, Mr. Nero, with whom he visited the

28 | The anointing is the action of the Holy Spirit on the person at a given time. A person can hear from God what needs to be spoken, acting on His behalf.

Cornelio Falls, a known waterfall in the region. In the conversation, the professor told a story in one of the *Jueves de diálogo* meetings that caught our attention. He reported that one time an engineer who worked in the state of Texas, in the United States, explained the effects of the transvase [transfer] to the invited public. The situation, as usual, was related to trying to make the work of mining companies easier and more accepted in the region. The word transvase refers to the transfer of water, in the case of four lagoons that would disappear due to the construction of the pits and the dismantling and *tailings* for the constructed reservoirs. According to information from professors and *ronderos*, this word was circulating in the city of Celendín and in *caseríos* (hamlet) near this region. Its meaning, however, was not clear among the population let them confused.

According to the professor's report, the engineer made a presentation arguing that the landscape of the *Jalca* in Celendín province would be the same after the transfer of water from the lakes to the reservoirs. After the presentation, the professor, suspicious, raised his hand and asked: "Sorry, do you know the region?" and she replied that it was not necessary to know, because for that there was virtuality. Then, he questioned: "this is not how you say". Immediately, the Peruvian engineers took the floor and said to the professor: "you are going to have your Cornelio". The appeasement phrase indicated that nothing would change in what the professor liked, since Cornelio is the name of a waterfall much admired by the people of Celendín. Its waters belong to the Jadibamba River and this one is born from the Azul lagoon, precisely one of the lagoons that would be moved to the placing of mining waste retainer. The engineers continued: "If Blue Lagoon Azul dries up, we will install a water pump that works for 24 hours and that way you will have your Cornelio". The professor replied: "cynics, it's because of this cynicism that I never believed you."

For the Texas engineer, the analysis and confirmation that what is really going to happen can be carried out without being present at the location that is, in total isolation from the experience of that lived by the interviewee, perhaps protected against local influences. This discussion about the transfer is relevant because a new space of communication opens (Bhabha, 1990), where a controversy emerges capable of shaking the security of the domain and the "colonized" carries out an immediate contestation: you are cynical; you don't even know the region. The virtuality said by the Texas engineer, typical of modern and universalist scientific thought, is not a legitimate methodology for local teachers and peasants who are against the project, but the daily coexistence with the waters. For this, it is necessary to resort to the notion of "third space" by Bhabha (1990), which is described by Carvalho (2001) as the possibility that the subaltern has to return the inconsistent and fragile character of that order that presents itself as legitimate and unquestionable. The work of Mantovanelli (2016) also suggests that this dispute is in question, as in the construction of Belo Monte, in northern Brazil, her ethnography emphasizes how the

Xikrin were not heard on their own terms and did not accept that techno-scientific knowledge, well presented in graphs and numbers, it supplanted what was in-depth knowledge of the environment: "The Indigenous [wanted] that engineers listened to their knowledge to learn about the Bacajá river and about the relationship of this river with the Xingu river." (Mantovanelli, 2016: 170).

The experience in Cajamarca ended up emphasizing several aspects. The first concerns the appeal of technique in relation to political debate, as previously underlined from the well-known study by James Ferguson and the anti-political machine. A second is consistent with the first in noting that development works as a magic word that can, some suppose, be above political contestation, as it seems to be difficult to counteract it—it sounds like being against good things. The problem with this is when the mining company's gift becomes debt that overshadows or destroys the gift of/debt to the community. In what sense? Particularly, when Telmo, mentioned above, showed the advent of techniques for development, he was indicating that, in his view, the functioning of modern science and technology escapes community controls, which, as he outlines, hinder adherence to universal institutions of modernity. Interacting with companies that are *outsiders* can move towards severing such relationships in the community, and then to develop alludes even more the intentions of the word: to develop, that is, to withdraw communities from involvement in themselves.

A very brief overview of *Communitas* by Roberto Esposito's (1998) on what community means in the Western world can be instructive. Having origins in linguistic roots who have a sense of giving to the common and belonging, for us, what mining companies do is to remove the difficult bond that communities want to maintain in an individualistic world. As such they don't do it without putting new debts into practice, now with loyalty to the companies. In Esposito, the entire discussion about the meaning of community in the West is a testimony to the loss of this burden placed on its members. The subject was born in a community and therefore, since his appearance in the world, he is indebted to the society which provides him with identity and shelter. *Communitas* is a collection of people linked by debt to their common environment. The capitalist and liberal world gradually destroys this community bond in favor of immunity, factor that for the author defines modernity, the negative protection of life. The individual is protected against excessive repression and debts that the community imposes on it, so individual life becomes protected (it is biopolitics itself), but under penalty of being disciplined, controlled by bureaucratic apparatus (Esposito, 2002).

A third problem lies in what may or may not be associated with democratic weakness. In the police role by the State against the opposition to mining there is both a discursive appeal (development = mining) and physical violence to stifle the manifestations. This way of not leaving the democratic field open works against the



political act in fact, as Rancière understands it – to choose to force consensus, hence the effects of development are used as self-evident. Ferguson had shown that one of the most exciting ways to incorporate Foucault's work into development studies is to show what development does, what it produces (and not what it fails to do, as earlier perspectives pointed out). Its effects analyzed here, among others, are in the dissemination of the criminality idea around a mining project, that is, that criticism and politics become a disturbance of peace and order susceptible to policing, judicialization, and for which the State sees itself in the right to cut in.

## CONCLUSION

In 2012, with violent events in Cajamarca, activist Silva Santisteban (2013) released a text that itself became the point of more conflicts. Entitled *Por qué son perros*, the author published after the arrest of an environmental leader during a period in which the Peruvian government declared a state of emergency in Cajamarca, a time of brutality and partial suspension of current regulations. The author highlights the speech of a young woman who asks a police officer: “Why are they treating us like this?”. The latter answers: “because you are dogs (...)” (Silva Santisteban, 2013: 451). Blame is always on the side of those who change the order of things (*perros*, that is, dogs) and here we see clearly, the path of progress. Because of these people, there was bloodshed, interruption in the development processes, mess and problems of all kinds. To the voice that politicizes events, there is another that depoliticizes it.

What is most aggravating, however, according to what was experienced with the interlocutors in the field, especially with the women, is that many would feel guilty if they stopped fighting. The attempt to governmentalize does not mean that it is successful. The women used to say: “my children will question me: why didn't you fight for the water, what water will I drink?”. This sentence is in the song of one of the acting women, Bianca, who is also part of the patrol group. It's a fight that gives meaning to life.

The collective experiences, memories and learning acquired over time make people prone to face these challenges. The peasant patrols and the success of an organized community with alternative ways of justice were and have been crucial in making sense of what is happening today.

Water, for everything described in this article, is primordial to conflicts, a point that is also the trigger for the experiences related in the oral stories, in addition to pointing to a world that existed, that was beautiful and full of life, in which vitality of waters and people found convergences. Thus, the ethnographic material allowed us to conclude that the fight against mining is not only due to the problem of lack or loss of water quality, but also because water connects with life and with the ways of existence of local groups. If the struggle is there today, it is because this place

does not want to remain in the past and the future is also dreamed on what water can represent for communities, as well as for the future of all of us. Water indicates the strength of the collective and the extensions that people make to increasingly expand their power and their associations showing how much understanding the different relationalities configures the world as it is for different collectives.

This relationality also seems to be the target of corporations and state entities when they seek to separate, order and distinguish the world, attributing places and functions, establishing relationships, repressing behavior, creating great divisions and functionalizing the social in relation to the economy. However, what has been witnessed in Cajamarca is the effort of people to destroy their supposed intended role, making solutions to control and creatively organizing their own ways of thinking about collective projects and ways of resistance to the companies and the forces of the State authority. Identities are actively made complex and it can be said that the form of conflict spaces is fundamentally related to how to articulate them.

If mining and the way in which it is equated with development also act in a coercive way, here we are in an even more delicate issue, as science and technology are used for the well-being of all, hopeful speeches recovering some of the most nefarious components of the old evolutionism. Not only, as Ferguson (1990) has shown, is there depoliticization, but, in the case of Cajamarca, together with this problem comes the criminalization of those who are against development. Speaking or doing something against development seems to be an act against the nation. The donation and debt to the community are faced with the onslaught of large companies in replacing them with donations and debts to mining. It is dreamed that development is the promotion of well-being and life, however, conversely, frequent cases to illnesses and deaths point to the opposite and what is heard are voices of pain and exhaustion.

Gold, copper, zinc, iron... in short, mining; it is not life, it is a sign of death, say many Cajamarquinos. Fighting, in this context, is fighting for life, just as water is also life and produces life. We are facing projects that make the politics of life not biopolitics as Foucault carefully studied that represent the world in which we live. On the contrary, in an interesting way, Esposito (2007) proposed another life politics that does not lead as usual to necropolitics, but one that is, in the manners of what many Cajamarquinos want, affirmative and constructive.

These distinct historical forms of “construction of the self” depend on a sterile concept of “power” as an explanatory artifact that encompasses them. Thus, the possibility of taking the divine preeminence seriously (Bialecki, 2014) in conceptions of human will and life in medieval and modern Christian worlds is neglected.

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