

WATER IN THE PERUVIAN ANDES: Ecojusticia and José María Arguedas' "Agua" (1935)

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Abstract: This article highlights the ongoing environmental challenges faced by Andean Indigenous peoples. By putting the work of Indigenous, decolonial and race scholars from across the Americas in conversation with one another, I lay the groundwork for an approach that blends racial capitalism, ecofeminism, and ecojusticia that is rooted in gendered and Indigenous perspectives and spiritual practices that aim to decolonize the allocation and distribution of natural resources that are the result of centuries-old colonial conflicts over water distribution. I then turn to José María Arguedas's short story "Agua" (1935), analyzing it through an ecofeminist lens to identify the racial capitalist logics undergirding the long-standing colonial water distribution practices and the environmental justice demanded by the Quechua Indigenous peoples to challenge the exploitation of their natural resources that have persisted in the Peruvian Andes for over one hundred years.

Keywords: *ecojusticia, environmental justice, Indigenous peoples, José María Arguedas, Peruvian literature, Quechua women, water rights*

I begin this essay sharing personal photographs (Figs. 1, 2, 3) depicting the dire need for water in marginalized Peruvian urban communities —sometimes called pueblos juvenes or *barriadas*. The pictures show the low red brick houses of many urban Andean hillsides, corrugated tin roofs and walls, and piles of dusty dirt mounds against a bright blue sky. Graffitied on the red brick walls are phone numbers for Wilson, Waldir, and Señor de Huanca, advertising delivery services providing *agua*—water—an essential element for life. I took these photographs in 2016 and 2017 during international service learning trips to Cuzco, Peru, where I supervised students from Binghamton University. In 2017, we worked on a project in Alto Qosqo, a community of over 25,000 inhabitants on the hillsides above Cuzco and the district of San Sebastian. The rudimentary



Figure 1. Alto Qosqo. 2017. Photograph by Giovanna Montenegro.



Figure 2. Alto Qosqo. 2017. Photograph by Giovanna Montenegro.



Figure 3. Alto Qosqo. 2017. Photograph by Giovanna Montenegro.

advertisements in the photographs reveal the strategies residents rely on to access clean water: private water delivery services which often charge the mostly Indigenous and impoverished community members exorbitant fees for access to water.¹ Unfair water distribution systems in the shape of urban underdevelopment is the reality many Indigenous Quechua people (*runakuna*) who have migrated from rural communities within the province of Cuzco face on a daily basis. Moreover, while water shortages affect all community members, women—who often act as caretakers—particularly struggle with providing access to clean water for their children.

In this article, I lay the groundwork for an approach that addresses the environmental challenges to water access faced by Andean Indigenous Quechua peoples. It is rooted in gendered and Indigenous perspectives and spiritual practices that aim to decolonize the allocation and distribution of natural resources that are the result of centuries-old colonial conflicts over water distribution. To ground this approach, I heed the call of environmental justice scholars to center both women and Indigenous perspectives by putting the work of Indigenous, decolonial and race scholars from across the Americas in conversation with one another. In particular, I draw on the work of Chicana geographer Laura Pulido who offers the concept of racial capitalism to articulate the devaluation of non-white bodies in capitalist systems, primarily the capitalist economy that has evolved in the United States. Pulido argues that racial capitalism constructs “Indigenous peoples as less than fully human,” arguing that this principle is a necessary component of colonial projects (Pulido 2017, 4).² I extend the notion of racial capitalism to Peru, abiding Pulido’s call to apply this concept to other parts of the world. I then couple this notion with environmental justice and ecofeminism to identify the ways Indigenous women in Latin America, who call themselves *defensoras de la tierra*, advocate a gendered approach to the allocation of water. *Defensoras*

can be likened to the female Native American water defenders of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe who have fought against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) since 2016, and I highlight them and other Indigenous Andean women in environmental justice movements to center their knowledge and these practices. Finally, I turn to José María Arguedas's short story "Agua" (1935), analyzing it through an ecofeminist lens to identify the racial capitalist logics undergirding the long-standing colonial water distribution practices and the environmental justice demanded by the Quechua Indigenous peoples to challenge the exploitation of their natural resources that has persisted in the Peruvian Andes for nearly a century.

Environmental Justice, Ecofeminism, and Ecojusticia in Latin America

In a U.S. context, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." In particular, the term environmental justice critiques environmental movements that leave people out of conservation campaigns and places an emphasis on justice for marginalized groups whose lands are prone to toxic dumping and illegal resource extraction (Jarratt-Snyder and Nielsen 2020). Michael MacLennan and Leisa Perch from the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth write that in Latin America, environmental justice is "based on historical deprivations and marginalization, both economic and social, and on newly created inequalities and burdens" (2012, 291). Marginalized groups there are more likely to face environmental degradation fueled by natural-resource extraction and the effects of climate change due to their dependence on the environment for their livelihood and having their homes located in high-risk areas (2012).

While there has been much attention directed at the environmental history of Latin America, this research suffers the same predicament as environmental movements that eliminate humans from the environment and seldom include an environmental justice perspective that considers race and gender. As a result, historian Emily Wakild (2013) has argued for scholars to bring the long tradition of Latin American environmental history in conversation with the environmental justice literature on Latin America, in order to “make history more policy relevant” (163). Indigenous peoples, often erased from environmental histories and preservation movements, continue to face incredible exploitation and marginalization in the region. As David Carruthers argues, the struggle “for Indigenous recognition and autonomy are often inseparable from environmental and resource claims” (2008, 10). Indigenous rights have always necessitated access to and custody of the resources in ancestral lands and for Indigenous communities in Latin America, it has meant resisting natural resource extraction.³ Indeed, Article 32 of the 2007 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) asserts the right of Indigenous groups to opt out of extractive economies. Water is but one of the natural resources which Indigenous communities have been attempting to protect and preserve as part of their stewardship of the natural environment, and, often Indigenous women lead the fight for access to clean water.

As in other parts of the world, the fight for environmental justice in Latin America cannot be divorced from the ways Indigenous women have taken up the demands for basic human rights. Often, women have mobilized because there are food insecurity issues and environmental threats that affect their households and the health of their children (Carruthers 2008). While women’s grassroots and community organizations throughout Latin America have recognized this link between gender and environmental health, agencies arguing for sustainable development and effective governance have started to

identify how poverty, gender, and race factor in the fight for environmental justice. Evolving international legal notions of environmental justice are beginning to center Indigenous peoples and women in light of the history of colonial, post-colonial, and nationalist development in Latin America and the Caribbean which has exploited natural and labor resources for economic growth. For example, in 2012 the Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System noted the importance of social inclusion that prioritizes rural areas, Indigenous people, and women. They observed the need to ensure justice and social inclusion through public policies and state intervention (MacLennan and Perch 2012). Ecocritical perspectives in the humanities should pay attention to the ways through which indigeneity, race, and gender hinder environmental justice for the region's vulnerable populations.

Critical race studies provide a theoretical framework from which to analyze the profit-making that drives the exploitation of natural resources and impacts the lives of Indigenous women (Melamed 2011; Pellow 2016; Pulido 2017). Pulido insists that “a focus on racial capitalism requires greater attention to essential processes that shaped the modern world, such as colonization, primitive accumulation, slavery, and imperialism” (2017, 3). Additionally, studying how expendable human and non-human populations face socioecological threats from “states, industries, and other political economic forces” can help us understand deep patterns of social and ecological inequities (Pellow 2016, 3). Recognizing how capitalism relies on racialization illuminates how Indigenous women in the Global South suffer the consequences from extractivism, which can be defined as the extensive extraction of natural resources from the earth by states and global corporations to be sold in the world market, without a regard to their renewal. To counter these damaging practices, a gendered and Indigenous approach to land use and maintenance that values spiritual beliefs would not only honor

Indigenous peoples' sacred relationships to the earth and its water but it would also challenge the destructive extractivist practices of racial capitalism.

I find it useful to turn to ecofeminism to best understand how a gendered Indigenous perspective on environmental justice can achieve this. Like feminism, there are many types of ecofeminism, but broadly speaking, ecofeminists believe there is an inherent connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism is thus situated within environmental justice efforts, but it has a specific focus on how Indigenous women and other women of color are unduly oppressed by capital exploitation of the land and its resources. Indeed, environmental justice, sometimes called ecojustice or, in Spanish, *ecojusticia* is environmental justice that includes Indigenous peoples, one of the main victims of exploitation and environmental destruction (Puleo 2011). Specifically, this perspective analyzes how extractivism under capitalism results in marginalized groups being burdened with environmental degradation and toxicity. *Ecojusticia* necessitates the perspective of Indigenous women. Hence, I employ environmental justice as a broader term that seeks to maintain a healthful environment for marginalized communities, with ecofeminism as a particular approach that considers gender, while *ecojusticia* is a distinct type of ecofeminism that considers Indigenous rights as inseparable from the protection of the environment.

To elaborate the particulars of ecofeminism, in their seminal work, *Ecofeminism* Shiva and Mies (2014) demonstrate how the relationship between capitalism and the exploitation of the world's natural resources depends both on the devaluation of women's work in the Global South and the systems of patriarchy, misogyny, and sexism work to minimize their voice and needs. They write, "the devaluation of women's work, and of work done in subsistence economies of the South, is the natural outcome

of a production boundary constructed by capitalist patriarchy” (2014, xv). That is, women are treated as “non-productive” and “economically inactive” (xv). This remains the case for Andean Indigenous women who struggle to have a voice over the management of natural resources, especially water, within their communities. This “model of capitalist patriarchy that excludes women’s work and wealth creation in the mind deepens violence by displacing them and alienates them from the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend— their land, their forests, their water, their seeds and biodiversity” (xv). Not only are Indigenous women struggling for basic needs the earth should easily provide, but they also work to hold the land and its resources as sacred. For them, the material and the spiritual cannot be separated when thinking about Mother Earth.

In Latin America, ecofeminism links a respect for the earth as a divine being with some of the values and tenets of the theology of liberation movement, incorporating both social and environmental justice as one of its goals.⁴ However, many of the Latin American Indigenous women fighting for *ecojusticia* know that not only does their livelihood and sustenance depend on the environment around them, but they also are guided by an ancestral charge to defend the Earth and its resources. A Latin American ecofeminist approach seeks justice that affirms the rights of native peoples to access the resources of their homelands and protect it from extractivist practices. It encompasses a spiritual perspective that respects the divine nature of the Earth’s resources. These beliefs drive Indigenous women to fight for food sovereignty and clean water for their families and communities. They refer to themselves as *defensoras de la tierra*, rather than activists. For example, Nina Gualinga, a young Quechua *defensora* from the Ecuadorean Amazon who has fought against oil drilling in her community of Sarayaku, discusses her use of the term *defensora* in a TEDx talk she gave in Quito: “Yo no soy una

activista. Soy una defensora. Yo soy lo que me enseñó la selva. Qué cliché que una mujer de la Amazonía les invite a defender la Amazonía. Pero tu cliché es mi forma de vida” (Gualinga 2018, 0:28-0:49). Gualinga enacts the role of the defender and guardian of the Amazon, a role she has taken on along with her sister, mother, and other women from her community.

Another example of the gendered understanding of the defensoras connection to the land occurred just before the IV Cumbre Continental Indígena de Pueblos y Nacionalidades de Abya Yala⁵ was held in Puno, Peru when Indigenous women decided to hold their own summit called “I Cumbre Continental de Mujeres Indígenas” which took place in the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano in Puno in 2009. The mujeres of Abya Yala stated, “unimos nuestros vientres al vientre de la madre tierra para parir los nuevos tiempos,” likening their collective wombs to the fruits offered by the earth. Amongst their demands were the institution of a Court for Climate Justice that obligated developed nations and multinational corporations to repair environmental damage they have incurred and prevent them from further harming Indigenous communities or the biodiversity of *Pachamama*, or Mother Earth. They also called for an end to the commodification of daily life (land, forests, water) and food sovereignty and social justice for all Indigenous peoples.⁶

Another notable example is in the particular struggle for clean water. Lourdes Huanca, an Indigenous woman and President of the National Federation of Female Peasants, Artisans, Indigenous, Native, and Salaried Workers of Peru, spoke about the organization’s environmental resistance strategies in the context of various mining projects in Peru in the North and South of the country in an interview on June 3, 2016 with George Ygarza for *North American Congress on Latin America* (NACLA). When addressing the

pollution and contamination caused by Southern Peru Copper Corporation's fifty years of mining in Maquegua, she notes that "you can't just tell them to get out because they are rooted there. What you do is confront them—'Hey, you have to pay me. You have to pay for all the damage you have done to the land because the land is life.' You have to demand their compliance with the laws, that they stop poisoning and killing" (Ygarza 2016). However, Huanca proposes a different strategy for the Yanacocha mine in Cajamarca, one of the most impoverished regions of Peru, as it causes irreparable damage to the water sources there: "Now, what is different is the situation with the Yanacocha mine which in order to sustain itself, it wants to kill the water. And what is water? It is life, without it we cannot live" (Ygarza 2016). A recent example occurred in May 2020, during the "Primer Encuentro del Grupo Regional de Género y Extractivas" in which many environmental organizations led by Indigenous defensoras in Peru, Mexico, and Ecuador drafted a list of fourteen demands, including the guaranteed inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples (DAR 2020) in the decision-making bodies regarding their lands and resources.⁷ In all, these defensoras call for an *ecojusticia* that considers the impact on Indigenous lives and on *Pachamama* and one that resists the commodification of natural resources needed for human, animal, and plant sustenance.

This lack of representation of Indigenous women's voices is paramount. Although a report authored by ONAMIAP (Organización Nacional de Mujeres Andinas y Amazonicas del Perú) called "Hacia la operativización de la mujer indígena en la implementación de los instrumentos de gestión integral frente al cambio climático" underscored the importance of Indigenous women in the fight against extractivism, natural resource allocation, and in minimizing climate change (ONAMIAP 2020). As the report emphasizes, the links between Indigenous women and their

environment is a source of their identity, culture, and spirituality. They consider themselves “daughters of Mother Earth (2020, 7).” However, the report cites a study that found within the community-based Water Users Boards, only thirty-one point six percent of the members are women and only ten percent of the leadership posts are occupied by women, despite the fact that women are the main users of water (6-7). Indigenous women have been marginalized in communal processes (7) and remain underrepresented as leaders and landowners despite the fact that “[they] are the guardians of forests, headwater basins, and natural resources and today they are important agents to combat climate change” (8).

Informed by Pulido’s work on racial capitalism (2017), Mies’ and Shiva’s work on ecofeminism and capitalism (2014), and the work of defensoras and Latin American Indigenous women’s environmental organizations, I offer an articulation of an ecofeminist approach to decolonizing access to water that connects the work of U.S. based Latina/Chicana scholars to those of Indigenous women of Latin America. Rooted in Indigenous cosmology, this demand for ecojusticia resists a capitalist economy intent on exploiting the natural resources of Indigenous peoples. It demands a gendered approach that reconsiders violence done upon the earth and upon women and children, recognizing the spiritual connections between all living things on earth.

To contextualize this approach, I now look to José María Arguedas’s short story “Agua” (1935) as it offers both a historical sense of the colonial logics that drive unjust use of the land and its water, and the resiliency of Andean Indigenous people to contest its misuse.

José María Arguedas: Portraying Quechua Life in Literature

José María Arguedas’ short story “Agua” reveals how Indigenous Quechua

children experience extractivism and environmental injustices in the Andes. Arguedas' story shows the remains of a gendered colonial system that infantilizes, subjugates, or kills Indigenous men and relegates Indigenous women to the margins. This ecofeminist reading considers how Quechua peoples experience the commodification of resources needed for human sustenance—such as water—and shows us the destructive impact of extractive practices guided by racial capitalism. Blending Andean spiritism with Catholicism in a syncretic practice that worships *Pachamama* (as the Andean natural world is often gendered), the water in Arguedas' "Agua" acts as a deity worshipped by the community, while the mestizo landowners only see it as resource to extract and use as a tool of social control.

Although Arguedas was of European descent, his fluency in Quechua and familiarity with Andean culture resulted in powerful storytelling about the environmental injustices faced by the Quechua peoples in Peru's Andes. Arguedas (1911-1969), a Peruvian anthropologist and author of literature, set "Agua" in the Peruvian Andes one hundred years after the country gained independence from Spain. His tale reveals a semi-feudal, hierarchical and racialized society predicated on colonial logics, including the unjust distribution of its natural resources, like water. Arguedas' impact is still felt today. Fernando Olea Vargas wrote, "¿Por qué Arguedas? Porque amar lo nuestro implica conocer lo nuestro, y aunque cliché, es cierto que no se puede amar lo que no se conoce, y Arguedas nos muestra ese Perú desconocido donde los ríos hablan, los cerros caminan y el cielo canta y las piedras brillan," (2006, 213).⁸ Arguedas, a Peruvian who was fair-skinned and light-eyed, but who grew up speaking Quechua, serves as an intermediary figure who explains the language and secrets of the Andes for coastal mestizo Peruvians. Through his portrayal of Indigenous communities' marginalization in Andean society and the Peruvian nation, Arguedas' literary works aimed

to change the colonial hegemony that began when Francisco Pizarro and his men set foot in Cajamarca, Peru in 1532 and captured the Inca emperor Atahualpa.⁹ Arguedas, though, was a stranger in his own country, especially to coastal Peruvians (Hernández Nieva 2016).

Arguedas' understanding of the Andean environment developed within the Quechua rural community in which he grew up. Arguedas, born in 1911 in Andahuaylas, a semi-rural town in the department of Apurímac in the southern Andes of Peru, recounted how as a child he ended up in the town of Puquío in the department of Ayacucho. His widowed father came to Puquío to work as a judge, and because of his white skin and job, he was welcomed with great pomp. Soon after, Arguedas' father married a woman who lived outside of Puquío and Arguedas went to live with her while his father worked in town. It was at the stepmother's house, mistreated and abused, that he took refuge in the kitchen with the Indigenous cooks who only spoke Quechua (Castro-Klaren 1975). He also spent time with an Indigenous family for two years in San Juan de Lucanas after conflicts with his abusive stepbrother escalated. Like many privileged mestizos, Arguedas benefitted from the teachings of those Indigenous servants who helped raise him to the point that he was primarily a Quechua speaker and learned to speak Spanish only at the age of eight. This bilingualism helped him earn a name in the literary and anthropological circles in Lima. The privilege of his European lineage allowed him to disseminate his work and be listened to in a way unavailable to Indigenous Quechua (whether bilingual or monolingual).

Arguedas often referred to his childhood as a period where he grew to love nature, and the love Quechua Indians have for one another, as well as the hate they have for those who try to hurt them (Arguedas 1985). Arguedas learned that loving nature formed part of loving the communal self—and

this includes communal labor. The cleaning of irrigation canals brought the collective community in a working relationship with the natural resources available in the environment and Arguedas often wrote about what loving nature—as a Quechua community, as part of the *ayllu*¹⁰ (Quechua people live in collective communities known as *ayllus*)—meant as a process that resisted and ruptured colonial practices.¹¹

Arguedas' interest in Andean peoples' relationship to nature informed his work as an anthropologist when he studied Andean water ritual practices, and also, as an author when he fictionalized episodes from his childhood in novels and short stories. Arguedas followed Peru's *indigenismo*—a movement intended to center Indigenous interests but characterized the country's Indigenous peoples primarily as lost and abused—as promoted by intellectuals such as the Lima-based Marxist thinker and literary editor José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) who advocated for a return to the Andes' Indigenous cultural legacy and Incaism in his avant-garde literary magazine *Amauta* (teacher in Quechua) (Montenegro 2017). Arguedas' writing crosses several genres, and as such, remains difficult to categorize. His novels and short stories are ethnohistorical in nature, his frequent combination of Quechua and Spanish turn his texts into Andean linguistic sources, and his knowledge of the many *huaynos* sung in Quechua are also evidence of his insider knowledge of Quechua musical culture and his identification with the Quechua people.¹² Arguedas' portrayals of the Andean world and its Indigenous communities are also found in two short-story collections *Agua* (1935) and *Diamantes y pedernales* (1954) and in three novels, *Yawar fiesta* (1941), *Todas las sangres* (1964), and *Los ríos profundos* (1958). For this essay, I focus on his 1935 short story, "Agua," which he wrote as a nineteen-year-old university student in Lima. An outcast in the capital because of his Andean upbringing,

Arguedas reflected upon those experiences in his fiction and addressed the misrepresentation of Native peoples in the country's cultural production.

“Agua” and the Colonization of Water

The short story, “Agua” is set in the town of San Juan de Lucanas (where Arguedas lived) and describes the townspeople's differing experiences with drought, based on their class and race. The story, written in the typical innovative Arguedean style, combines Spanish with Quechua and gives an Andean syntax to his characters' dialogues.

With this tale, Arguedas offers a critique of the chronic water shortages and expresses sympathy with the Indigenous community's struggle to decolonize the water distribution system. In “Agua,” the mestizo or ladino landowners of large estates (called *misti* principales) receive most of the water reserves for their crops while the Indigenous comuneros (members of free Indigenous communities) are forced to ration so severely that their crops suffer and they experience food scarcity. The story, which details an Indigenous community's attempt at decolonizing the water distribution system, critiques the way that *mistis* (a Quechuacized abbreviation for the Spanish term “mestizos”) control the water to irrigate the lands where their crops grow, while disregarding the livelihoods of the Indigenous peoples that till their lands.

A child, Ernesto, narrates the story, detailing events that occur after Pantaleon/Pantacha, an Indigenous young man from San Juan who spent six months on the coast in Nazca, returns home with a newfound consciousness regarding the social and environmental injustices faced by poor Indigenous workers. Pantacha critiques the mestizos' exploitation of the Indigenous comuneros (peasants) in San Juan. Ernesto recounts the confrontation between the town mestizo landowner, Don Braulio, who takes all the water in the community, and the

Indigenous comuneros—some of whom, encouraged by Pantacha, rebel against this injustice. Don Braulio, is the *misti* landowner hated by most, especially the *ayllu*. He steals water from them, mistreats them, and threatens their lives. When he is drunk, he fires a couple of shots from his revolver into the street to scare the comuneros. Don Braulio's Indigenous helper is Tayta/Don Vilkas, an elderly Indian who is friendly towards the *misti* landowners, respected still by the *Sanjuankuna*:¹³ “En los repartos de agua, en la distribución de cargos para las fiestas, siempre hablaba don Vilkas” (Arguedas 1983, 60).¹⁴ In return for his allegiance, Don Braulio had previously given Tayta Vilkas a few parcels of his fields he could plant on his land and a home, though in reality, it was not much more than a rudimentary shelter in a cave (Arguedas 1983, 60).

The story opens with Pantacha explaining to Ernesto the unjust water distribution practices in San Juan, as they are monopolized by the wealthy mestizo owner Don Braulio, and only favor him and the other *misti* landowners. Ernesto, though not Indigenous himself, identifies with the plight of the *ayllu* (Quechua collective community) members through his relationship with Pantacha:

- Agua, niño Ernesto. No hay pues agua. San Juan se va a morir porque don Braulio hace dar agua a unos y a otros los odia.
- Pero don Braulio, dice, ha hecho común el agua quitándole a don Sergio, a doña Elisa, a don Pedro...
- Mentira, niño, ahora todo el mes es de don Braulio, los repartidores son asustadizos, le tiemblan a don Braulio. Don Braulio es como zorro y como perro. (57)¹⁵

In the passage above, Pantacha explains how Don Braulio acts as a predator; he first limits access to water then denies it to the comuneros. Appropriation

and access are ways through which land and resources were taken away from Indigenous peoples, as Pulido notes: “Once land was severed from native peoples and commodified, the question of access arose” (2017, 4). This exchange, then, demonstrates how racial capitalism facilitated by colonization shaped the Andean social and environmental world.

As Pantacha and Ernesto sit outside the jail waiting for the weekly water distribution ritual to begin, Pantacha reminisces about the time that San Juan was rich, when it depended on the exploitation of the Ventanilla silver mine, long since abandoned. To Pantacha, there is a need for land; however, Ernesto corrects him: “Chacra hay, Pantacha, agua falta” (58).¹⁶ Here, Arguedas reveals the plight of the San Juan community as the extraction of silver failed to have a measurable social impact on any of its members. Ecologies of resource extraction and disposal depend on keeping social inequities that capitalism demands. San Juan’s racialized comuneros suffer—the mine brought wealth to its owners and continued to dispossess the Indigenous comuneros around it of its clean water. An example of this in Peru today is how an abandoned silver mine contaminates the water of the Río San José (also called Utec/k).¹⁷

While they wait, Pantacha plays his bugle and the people of San Juan, the Indigenous comuneros, curious and entranced come out of their houses. First, school children in tattered clothes gather, followed by the elders. Together, they sing the song of the harvest and dance until Don Vilkas, the old Indian who is friendly with the white landowners and whose face “como de misti es” (60), interrupts the fun. He complains: “*Sanjuankuna*: están haciendo rabiari a Taytacha Dios con el baile. Cuando la tierra está seca, no hay baile. Hay que rezar a patrón San Juan para que mande lluvia” (60).¹⁸ While Don Vilkas invokes Christian prayer as a possible appeal to end the drought, he is at odds

with desires of the comuneros of San Juan—especially the rebellious Pantacha. Pantacha instead plays a pre-Columbian tune from the puna (the high, cold arid plateaus of the Andes), and when he stops, his eyes scan the landscape destroyed by the drought. The hillsides are barren:

—“Así blanco está la chacrita de los pobres de Tile, de Saño y de todas partes. La rabia de don Braulio es causante. Taytacha no hace nada, niño Ernesto.”

—“Verdad. El maíz de don Braulio, de don Antonio, de doña Juana está gordo, verdecito está, hasta barro hay en su suelo. ¿Y de los comuneros? Seco, agachadito, umpu (endeble); casi no se mueve ya ni con el viento.”

—“¡Don Braulio es ladrón, niño!”

—“¿Don Braulio?”

—“Más todavía que el atok’ (zorro).” (62)¹⁹

In this exchange, Pantacha’s bugle-playing is an Indigenous spiritual practice meant to harmonize humans with the animal and natural world. The bugle’s sound also mimics the music of the *punas*, played usually “para animar a las ovejas y a las llamas” (61).²⁰ This act brings earth beings, or *tirakuna* (earth spirits that inhabit powerful natural elements such as the Ausangate mountain situated in the Vilcanota range in the Peruvian Andes) into the conversation. Marisol de la Cadena (2015) argues that *ayllus* are woven together through both the humans and other-than-humans (plants, animals, *tirakuna* spirits) that occupy its space. The *ayllu* is the network between all these beings. De la Cadena articulates what Arguedas narrates: Andean Indigenous political practice is inextricably intertwined with spiritual practice. Pantacha’s bugle playing for the sheep and llamas as well as for the Indigenous comuneros of San Juan means to animate them to seek justice for themselves and Mother Earth.

As he looks around, Pantacha compares the fields of the Indigenous peasants of Tile and Saño. According to Pantacha, Don Braulio's anger has caused the drought, and meanwhile, God, or *Taytacha*, does nothing. In turn, all of the *misti*'s fields are filled with beautiful green corn and moist earth while the *Sanjuankuna*'s are low, dry, kneeling, waiting for their impending death. It is this injustice that makes Pantacha scream out that Don Braulio is a thief, a reality that takes a while for Ernesto and the other school children, such as Bernaco, to accept despite their recognition that their fields and vegetation are dying for lack of water. For example, when considering this possibility Bernaco asks fearfully, "¿Don Braulio es ladrón, Pantacha?" (62). Another boy, Ramoncha, asks "¿Robando le has encontrado?" (62).²¹

Pantacha, painfully aware of the lack of social and environmental justice in San Juan, has to explain, that yes, Don Braulio, as a colonial overlord, steals more than a fox (62). He understands that taking natural resources that collectively belong to the community is the same as stealing from the store or from a house. He explains: "¿Dónde hace plata Don Braulio? De los comuneros pues les saca, se roba el agua; se lleva de frente, de hombre, los animales de los 'endios.' Don Braulio es hambriento como galgo" (62).²² Pantacha's time working outside the village in a city environment allowed him to recognize how the practices engendered by racial capitalism only benefit mestizo or white landowners. Don Braulio depends on the racialized bodies of the "Indians" to exploit their land and resources.

The schoolchildren take a while to recognize this exploitation. Bernaco somewhat doubtfully whispers into Ernesto's ear: "Este Pantacha a regresado molesto de la costa. Dice todos los principales son ladrones (62)."²³ By this point Ernesto has begun to realize that Pantacha is correct in his critique and so he tries to convince Bernaco that all the *misti* landowners are thieves, that

Pantacha knows about such things. Soon, the children begin to understand the injustice that excludes Indigenous peoples' access to the environmental resources for both corporeal and spiritual nurture.

After hearing Pantacha's bugle music, *Tinkis*, residents of a neighboring *ayllu* named Tinki, arrive in the village of San Juan de Lucanas. Pantacha tells them about his time on the coast away from San Juan: "Primero habló de Nazca; de los carros, de las tiendas, y después de los patronos, abusivos como en todas partes" (65).²⁴ Modernity in its every-day splendor and consumer capitalism only served to remind Pantacha of the misery of oppressed Indigenous laborers everywhere and the rampant resource extraction. Just like Don Braulio, the coastal landowners also steal water from the people:

En la costa también, el agua se agarran los principales no más; los arrendatarios lucaninos, wallhuinos, nazqueños, al último ya riegan, junto con los que tienen dos, tres chacritas; como de caridad le dan un poquito, y sus terrenos están con sed de año en año. (65)²⁵

Angered by the widespread inequitable water distribution system, the *Tinkis* and the *Sanjuankunas* (comuneros of San Juan) exclaim "¡Carago! ¡Mistis son como tigre! Comuneros son para morir como perro!" (65).²⁶ Here, the comuneros realize how the *mistis* enjoy surplus while they are left to die like thirsty dogs. Once both the crowd of about two hundred *Tinkis* and San Juan comuneros become conscious of the racialized abuse to which they are subjected, Pantacha asks them to rise up against the *misti* principals. However, the people become scared remembering the repressive consequences of past uprisings. As Don Vilkas tries to stop Pantacha from disrespecting the *mistis*, Don Wallpa (Pantacha's supporter and the *varay'ok* or leader of the *Tinkis*) challenges him to fight. In the end, Don Vilkas runs to tell Don Braulio

everything, reminding the comuneros that they will have to answer to the landlord. The *Tinkis* and the San Juan comuneros divide into two camps—the former, along with Don Wallpa and Pantacha talk about uprising, while the latter listens to the priest who recommends they stay on Don Braulio’s good side. Don Pascual, the repartidor (water distributor) of the week says to the two groups:

Con músico Pantacha hemos entendido. Esta semana k’ocha agua va a llevar don Anto, la viuda Juana, don Jesús, don Patricio... Don Braulio seguro carajea. Pero una vez siquiera, pobre va agarrar agua una semana. Principales tienen plata, pobre necesita más sus papalitos, sus maizalitos...Tayta Inti (sol) le hace correr a la lluvia; k’ocha agua no más ya hay para regar: k’ocha va a llenar esta vez para comuneros. (68)²⁷

While the *Tinkis*, strong in their sense of community, speak first against the abuses of the *mistis*, the *Sanjuankuna*, those comuneros under the thumb of the landowners, timidly listen to the “humilde” Don Pascual as well as the recently-deemed “revolutionary” Pantacha. Don Pascual quietly begs for the comuneros to stand up against Don Braulio and the *Sanjuankuna* “parecían carneros mirando a su dueño” (69).²⁸ It is Don Sak’sa, one of the first comuneros from San Juan, who speaks in favor of rising up: “Don Braulio abusa de comuneros. Comunidad vamos hacernos respetar. ¡Para ‘endios’ va a ser k’ocha agua!” (1:69).²⁹ As the young men, *mak’tas*, come together they demand water for “Indians;” they refuse to accept Don Braulio’s unjust water distribution system maintained by his never-ending violence. The *mak’tas* understand that their power lies in their number, and they call for justice and equity in the distribution of resources:

—Verdad, compadre: en nuestro pueblo, dos, tres mistis no más hay; nosotros tantos, tantos...Ellos igual a comuneros gentes son, con

ojos, boca, barriga. ¡K'ocha agua para comuneros!

—¿Acaso? Mama-allpa (madre tierra) bota agua, igual para todos. (69)³⁰

To encourage the *Sanjuankuna* to join them in solidarity, the *Tinkis* argue that Mama-allpa (mother earth) gives water equitably for all, and they point out that the Indigenous *runakuna* outnumber the *mistis*. Lastly, to indicate they all have the same basic needs, they state that *misti* landowners also have bellies that grumble. Persuaded, the timid *Sanjuankuna* ally with the *Tinkis* and Don Pasqual and Pantacha come together to fight against the unequal colonial water rationing system. The San Juan villagers desire to exit the cycle of the colonial and racist social system where they work for an overlord who “protects” and “abuses” their personhood for their labor, yet simultaneously deprives them of the very natural resources their bodies need to thrive.

In a crucial confrontation scene, Don Braulio, drunk, staggers into the plaza with the other landowners. Don Pasqual shouts out the more equitable water distribution plan he previously proposed which called for water for the comuneros to irrigate their fields at least for a week, Don Braulio silences him. Yet the *Tinkis*, firm in their resolve to stand up against Don Braulio, remind him that water is a common resource:

— ¡Don Braulio, k'ocha agua es para necesitados!

— ¡No hay dueño para agua! gritó Pantacha.

— ¡Comunkuna es primero! habló don Wallpa (73).³¹

Don Braulio shoots his revolver and scatters the crowd. Despite Pantacha's efforts to have the comuneros stay and fight, most *Sanjuankuna* run to their houses and hide from the violence while those who stay are jailed. Pantacha, angry, then yells out to Don Braulio: “¡Carajo! ¡Sua! (¡Ladrón!) ... Mata

no más, en mi pecho, en mi cabeza” (73).³² Don Braulio shoots and kills Pantacha, thereby ending the water activist’s life and the *Sanjuankuna*’s dream of a decolonized water distribution system.

Finally, Ernesto—a mestizo boy who functions as a stand-in for the author—becomes painfully conscious of the profound unjust system which only benefits Don Braulio at the expense of the comuneros. When he sees Pantacha assassinated for trying to defend the water rights of the comuneros, he insults Don Braulio: “¡Taytay muérete, perro eres, para morder a los comuneros, no más sirves!” (74).³³ The death of Pantacha signifies the sacrifice of the Indians at the hands of the *misti* class of principals, who disregard human life, at least that of Indigenous peoples. After Pantacha dies, the story ends with Ernesto escaping to the land of *Utek*’ *Pampa* from the wrath of Don Braulio. Here, the residents were owners of their land, and were not scared and demoralized like the comuneros of San Juan and the *Tinkis* of the *puna*. Before arriving at Utek, Ernesto breaks down crying, wishing for Indians to have the right to a fertile land, and for access to water to make that a reality. The tale ends with Ernesto begging the great Chituya mountain to let death come to all of the landlords of the world.

“Agua” and Environmental Injustice in the Andes

As hydrologists have remarked, the struggle of Quechua peoples for agua has been ongoing since before Arguedas fictionalized it, and will only be exacerbated due to climate change. Unfortunately, as Yolanda Westphalen (1967) writes, the lost towns of the Andes—like Arguedas’s San Juan in the 1930s—lacked a socially just water distribution even through the 1960s:

The reason why the indians [sic] rise up is the rationing of water, a theme which is of the most ethical importance. Water, a vital element for man and even more for the farmer, is a necessary

resource, and as such, must be shared out justly. The law establishes that water has to be given out in equal conditions among the farmers, but in the lost town of the Andes the law and justice are useless rules. There, the only rule is that of the “principals” of the town, who take over the rights of watering, denying water—which in this short story—means life and justice—to the commoners who see that their fields do not shine, that only in the hillsides some dried trees hang in, brown, and devoid of leaves. (212)

Westphalen’s reading of “Agua” in 1967 recognized the need for a lawful and ethical water distribution system that would not penalize the Indigenous farmers as in the short story. A few years after her critique of these continuing colonial practices, the military government in Peru under Juan Velasco Alvarado introduced a new agrarian reform law in June 1969. It broke up large estates and often transformed them into cooperatives. The cooperatives were often led by traditional *ayllus*, preserving the communal labor system in place already in these large estates and haciendas. Arguedas captured the essence of this semicolonial estate three decades before agrarian reform upended the colonial rule of the landowner, or hacendado, who routinely denied water rights to the *runakuna* to enrich himself.

Nonetheless, unequal water distribution continues to affect Andean Indigenous communities. In 1986, hydrologist Jan Hendriks complained about the lack of emphasis on studying the impact of social relations on unequal water distribution in Andean communities that practiced irrigation. Fifty years after Arguedas wrote “Agua,” Hendriks noticed that “social, political, cultural relations between peasants, small business owners, money lenders, the *misti*, the most poor Indian, the *caudillo*, political and family groups, and those in power” had to be considered when implementing just water distribution

models (Hendriks 1986, 7). In the 1980s, Hendriks was commissioned by various communities in the Ant'a district (department of Cuzco) to help with "falta de agua" or water scarcity. What he discovered was that "falta de agua" was related to "falta de regulación" and unjust distribution systems directly related to social hierarchies. The hydrologist proposed more transparent technical measures for water diversion and distribution to combat feudal and colonial practices, such as those described in Arguedas' "Agua." Indeed, Arguedas could be considered one of the first whistle-blowers who documented the illicit Andean water distribution practices.

Conclusion

Arguedas' "Agua" reveals Quechua peoples' generational struggle for equitable access to water. Water, deified, and birthed by the gendered Pachamama, is essential to human life, including both Quechua peoples and the landowners, and it is the need for its equal distribution that provokes the Indigenous communities to protest in Arguedas' story. "Agua" reveals the racial capitalist logics that exacerbate environmental injustices against Andean Indigenous peoples. First, Don Braulio, a mestizo representative of the wealthy landowning class, abuses his power to take more water for himself and other landowners, thereby accumulating natural resources at the expense of the racialized Indigenous comuneros who are denied water to nourish their fields and their families. Second, the presence of the abandoned silver mine only underscores how the community's natural resources are extracted to accumulate wealth for absentee owners, in turn, the comuneros only experience the environmental injustice of the contaminated and toxic remnants of the abandoned mine. Third, Pantacha's lived experience of racialized capitalism on the coast remind him of the misery of oppressed Indigenous communities everywhere—there, too, *misti* principales denied Indigenous communities their share of a communal resource, water. However, the youths' perspective and spiritual outlook underscore an approach that is ecofeminist in

nature and demands *ecojusticia*. They know that *Mama-allpa* (mother earth) gives water equitably for all—and they demand that justice be served in water distribution practices. While there are no significant female characters to speak of in “*Agua*,”³⁴ Arguedas shows us how children (and by extension—their absent mothers) remain vulnerable to patriarchal and racialized power relations manifested even more so through environmental injustice. Arguedas chose a child to focalize the story in accordance with the demands of women who demand *ecojusticia* for their families and children. In short, it details why an ecofeminist Indigenous perspective demanding *ecojusticia* accounts for the ways gender exacerbates injustice, is necessary to eliminate extractivist policies rooted in the racial capitalism catalyzed by colonialism.

My service learning trips to Cuzco drew my attention to the lack of access to potable water for many Indigenous women and their families living in *barriadas* on the outskirts of town. I found it necessary to reread Arguedas with this lived experience. Later, informed by Pulido’s racial capitalism and Mies and Shiva’s ecofeminism and capitalism (2014), as well as the work of Indigenous *defensoras* such as Lourdes Huanca and Nina Gualinga leading the fight against extractivism in their communities, I read “*Agua*” through a framework for *ecojusticia* that considers a gendered and spiritual Indigenous perspective focalized through young people’s experience of environmental injustice. Such a vantage point is necessary to decolonize the allocation and distribution of natural resources in a way that resolves the racialized colonial conflicts over water distribution that appear in Arguedas’ story and continue today in communities such as Alto Qosqo. Only then will Indigenous women, children and their communities receive equitable access to natural resources.

Finally, the struggles of Indigenous water defenders who fight against the exploitation of natural resources within Indigenous lands in both Peru

and the United States highlight the transnational nature of this campaign against global racialized capitalism. In the story, the plight of water defenders like Pantacha and the motif of “Water is Life” reoccurs communally and individually first in confrontations between the landowners and the Indigenous *Tinkis* and later between Don Braulio and Pantacha. Like Arguedas’ Pantacha, young Indigenous water defenders continue to fight for environmental justice and their communities’ access to clean water. Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, a young Indigenous Chicano in 2015 addressed the UN General Assembly on climate change in Nahuatl, Spanish, and English and reminded them that “every living thing is connected because we all draw life from the same earth and we all drink from the same waters” (United Nations 2015, 01:32). Likewise, between 2016-2017, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe water defenders like Tokata Iron Eyes, a young Indigenous woman, fought against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and demanded respect for Lakota peoples’ access to clean water. They all demand an ecojusticia, which resists a capitalist economy intent on the exploitation and commodification of natural resources needed for the daily sustenance of Indigenous peoples. Only a gendered approach that reconsiders violence done upon the earth, women, and children, and which recognizes the spiritual connections between all living things on earth will begin to undo the damage caused by the primitive accumulation of racial capitalism fueled by colonialism.

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this article to the Mujeres of the Comedores Populares of Cuzco, especially Marlyn Jordan Pariona, coordinator for the municipality of Cuzco, as well as Sra. Hilda Rodriguez of the Comedor Popular San Camilo of Alto Qosqo.

As a Venezuelan Latinx woman working from the United States and writing in English, I understand the complex imperial and colonial legacies at work that marginalize Indigenous perspectives within North American and Latin American academic spaces. I do not aim to speak for Quechua peoples, but I do hope to shed light on racist environmental practices and support actions that address systemic change.

Notes

¹ A couple of years after I took these images, Peru's Minister of Housing, Construction and Sanitation, Carlos Bruce, visited Alto Qosqo to inspect the ongoing works to bring water services and sewage lines to the district. While there, the Minister stated he would work on bringing safe water to the district. While his projected 2019 deadline was missed—with challenges exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic—time will tell if the Minister will be able to meet his stated goal in the future (2019). Municipal authorities have been working to install sewage and water lines to the community for years. In September 2020, these efforts were in a pre-operation stage.

² Pulido, author of *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (1996), also introduced the term of “subaltern environmentalism” to describe rural Chicanos’ environmental struggles to restrict the use of pesticides: “what is usually at stake are multiple forms of domination, exploitation, and resistance, that narrow applications of class may prevent us from appreciating” (107).

³ Climate change is also an issue: “The negative impact on local Indigenous communities [. . .] cannot be understated in regards to health, livelihood stability, social disturbance, cultural resilience, and their critical importance and adaptive capacity in the context of changing climactic patterns” (MacLennan and Perch, 2012, 289).

⁴ For example, Brazilian theologian and nun Ivone Gebara practices ecojusticia, see her *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (1999). See also the work of Maryknoll Lay Missioner Mary Judith Kress’ *Ecofeminism in Latin America* (2006).

⁵ Abya Yala is a term that has been accepted by Indigenous peoples as an ancestral name for the American continent as opposed to the “America” name given by European colonizers. It is originally an expression from the Guna language of the Guna Indigenous peoples that inhabit the isthmus of Panama and means “land in its full maturity” or “land of vital blood.” Many

Indigenous organizations prefer to use the term instead of America.

⁶ See all demands at Mujeres Indígenas de Abya Yala “Mandato de la I Cumbre Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de Abya Yala” at <https://www.latice.org/kvin/es/ilaay0907es.html>.

⁷ Among the other demands was the protection of ancestral and communal lands (and common resources including water, wind, and subsoil), the end of all violence against defensoras, the respect for communal forms of governance over the community’s resources, the recognition of women’s economic, political, and social contributions (made even more visible by the COVID-19 pandemic), the visibility and promotion of economic initiatives led by women, and the recognition of community plans that take into account women’s needs and include proposals made by women (DAR 2020).

⁸ (Translations are mine throughout, unless otherwise specified). Why Arguedas? Because to love what is ours implicates knowing what is ours, and even though it is a cliché, we cannot love that which is unknown, and Arguedas shows us this unknown Peru where the rivers talk, the mountains walk, and the sky sings and the stones shine.

⁹ Irina Alexandra Feldman has also offered this perspective in her reading of Arguedas through Frantz Fanon in her article “Las metáforas de colonialidad y descolonización en José María Arguedas y Frantz Fanon” (2012).

¹⁰ A Quechua clan-based community that can mean family, *ayllu* has many nuanced characteristics. Anthropologist Catherine Allen sees the *ayllu* as based on the connection between the Quechua people, *runakuna*, and their land; “only Runakuna live in *ayllus*” (2002, 18). Irene Silverblatt established that the pre-Columbian Andean *ayllu* “exercised ultimate control over the productive resources which formed the basis of subsistence. Rights to agricultural land, water, herds, and pasture lands were vested in *ayllus* as a whole” (1987, 218). Moreover, since the *ayllu* “was an endogamous unit, women’s inheritance of rights to land (or men’s inheritance) was compatible with the *ayllu*’s having ultimate claim over factors of production” (1987, 220). Finally, “with respect to the distribution of critical factors of production, women obtained access to labor, land, and other material resources by virtue of their *ayllu* membership, as did men” (1987, 223).

¹¹ According to Allen, the *ayllu* is maintained by various kinds of work: by collective labor on communal land, irrigation canals, the road, and the church; by the people’s decision-making duties in communal assemblies; and by the defense of the *ayllu*’s interests vis-à-vis governmental agencies and the law. The *runakuna* also form a bond with the land and their *ayllu* through ritual work—the *ayllu*’s leaders learn about wisdom and discipline through such service, and the people’s moral health and physical health comes from the bond they share with the land (Allen 2002). See also Inge Bolin’s definition: an *ayllu* may be a political group with a shared local boundary, a group of kin relatives, or a community who shares a common focus (1998).

¹² Quechua is used to determine the group of Andean peoples who speak the Quechua (Inca) language in the Andes (Peru, Bolivia Ecuador), where it is an official language. It is also spoken in Argentina and Colombia.

¹³ The suffix- *kuna*- implies the plural. *Runa*- is a singular person; hence *Runakuna* means “people” in plural form and that is what Quechua people sometimes call themselves. Hence, *Sanjuankuna*

are the people of San Juan in Quechua.

¹⁴ In the rationing of water, in the distribution of work roles for feasts, Don Vilkas always spoke.

¹⁵ “Water, Ernesto. There is no water. San Juan will die because Don Braulio gives water to some, and he hates the others.”

“But Don Braulio says that he has made water available for everyone by taking it from Don Sergio, Doña Elisa, Don Pedro.”

“Lies, boy, now the whole month is Don Braulio’s. The water distributors are cowards. They tremble before Don Braulio. Don Braulio is like a fox and like a dog”.

¹⁶ There are plenty of fields, Pantacha, but we lack water.

¹⁷ See the map and report on abandoned mines created in 1999 by the Ministerio de Energía y Minas, Dirección General de Asuntos Ambientales titled “Ubicación de Minas Abandonadas Departamento de Ayacucho” at http://www.minem.gob.pe/minem/archivos/file/DGAAM/ mapas/ minas_abandonadas/ayacucho/minas_ayacucho.pdf. The area was mined again in the 1980s but the San Juan de Lucanas mine was abandoned by the Empresa Minera San Juan Lucanas in 1992. The report recommended that a collector canal be built above the tailings dam, as well as a trench for tailings waste, and a passive treatment system.

¹⁸ People of San Juan: you are making God angry with your dance. When the earth is dry, there is no dancing. You have to pray to the patron Saint Juan so that he will send rain.

¹⁹ “The fields of the poor in Tile, Saño, and everywhere are dry like that. Don Braulio’s rage is the cause of it, God does nothing, Ernesto.”

“That is true. The corn of Don Braulio, Doña Juana, and Don Antonio is plump and green. There’s even mud on the ground. And the corn of the villagers? It’s dry, crumpled up, bent, it doesn’t even move now even with the wind”.

“Don Braulio is a thief, kid!”

“Don Braulio?”

“Even more than the fox.”

²⁰ to energize the sheep and the llamas.

²¹ Is Don Braulio really a thief? Did you catch him stealing?

²² How does Don Braulio make his money? He takes from the villagers, he steals the water, he snatches the Indians’ animals in front of their very eyes. Don Braulio is as hungry as a hound.

²³ This Pantacha came back from the coast to annoy us. He says that all of the landlords are thieves.

²⁴ First, he spoke about the city of Nazca, about cars and stores, and afterwards about the abusive bosses, as in every other place.

²⁵ On the coast the landlords also take the water; the sharecroppers from Lucanas, Hualhuas, and Nazca irrigate last, along with those who only own two or three fields; out of charity the landlords give them a little bit of water, but their land is thirsty year after year.

²⁶ Damn! *Mistis* are like tigers!—Villagers are born to die like dogs!.

²⁷ We have made a pact with the musician Pantacha. This week Don Anto, the widow Juana, Don Jesús, Don Patricio will get the water from the reservoir. Don Braulio surely will blow up. But at least for once, [the] poor will get water one week. Landlords are wealthy, the poor need more for their potatoes and corn. Our Precious Sun has made the rain run away, there is only reservoir water left to irrigate our fields. This time the reservoir will be for the villagers.

²⁸ looked like rams staring at their owner.

²⁹ Don Braulio abuses the villagers. The community has got to make itself respected. Now the water from the reservoir will be for “Indians”!

³⁰ “It is true, compadre. In our land, there are maybe two or three whites. We are so many, many in comparison. . . . The landlords are people just like the villagers, they have eyes, a mouth, and a belly. Reservoir water is for the villagers!”

It’s true! Isn’t Mother earth’s water for everyone?

³¹ “Don Braulio, the reservoir water is for those who need it”

“There are no owners of water!”

“The villagers come first!—said Don Wallpa.”.

³² Damn! Thief! [. . .] Go ahead and kill me, my chest, my head!

³³ Die, Sir! You are a dog. You only exist so you can bite the villagers!

³⁴ When female characters do appear in Arguedas’ other works, Castro-Klaren claims they demonstrate “la posición secundaria y cosificada de la mujer en la(s) sociedad (es) que Arguedas recrea y reconoce como realidad en su obra entera” (1983, 55), which argues that Arguedas uses heterosexual sexual encounters only to demonstrate the disparities in that patriarchal, racialized, and classist Andean world (57).

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