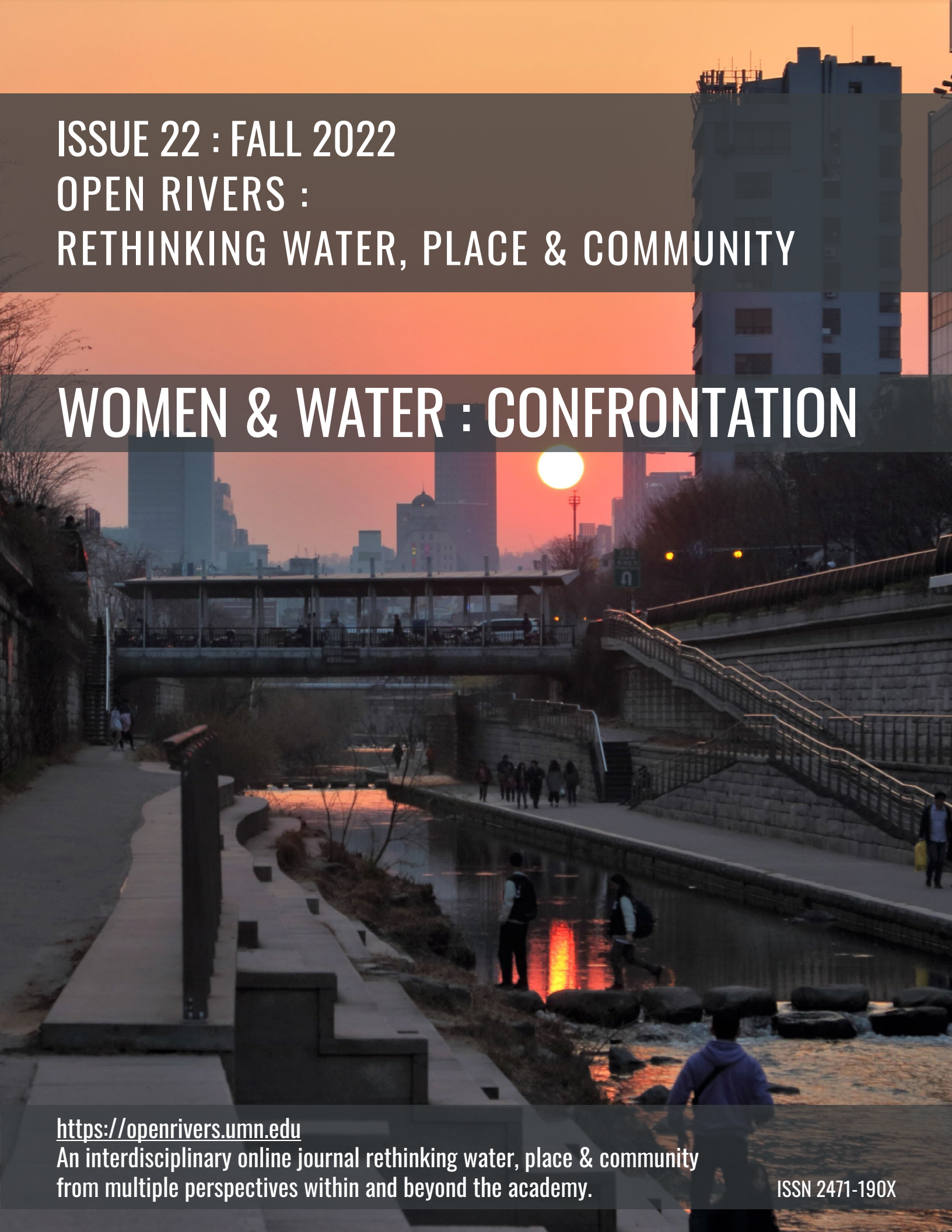
ISSUE 22 : FALL 2022

OPEN RIVERS : RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

WOMEN & WATER : CONFRONTATION



https://openrivers.umn.edu

An interdisciplinary online journal rethinking water, place & community from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

ISSN 2471-190X

The cover image is sunset in Seoul along the Cheonggyecheon stream. Image by Stefan K on Unsplash.

Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community is produced by the University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing Services and the University of Minnesota Institute for Advanced Study.

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ISSN 2471-190X

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FEATURE (PEER REVIEW)

FORMLESS LIKE WATER: *DEFENSORAS* AND THE WORK OF WATER PROTECTION

By Natalia Guzmán Solano

Editor's note: This feature article has been peer reviewed.

If you ask the cloud, "How old are you? Can you give me your date of birth?" you can listen deeply and you may hear a reply. You can imagine the cloud being born. Before being born it was the water on the ocean's surface. Or it was in the river

Defensoras and allies on retreat in Celendín. Image courtesy of Natalia Guzmán Solano.

> and then it became vapor…sooner or later the cloud will change into rain or snow or ice. If you look deeply into the rain, you can see the cloud. The cloud is not lost; it is transformed into rain, and the rain is transformed into grass and the grass into cows and then to milk and then into the ice cream you eat…You can also see the ocean, the river, the heat, the sun, the grass and the cow in the ice cream. –Thich Nhat Hanh (2002, 24)

When Thich Nhat Hahn wrote about transformation and the continuation of our being beyond how we presently manifest in this life, he reminds us how we are already water. We continue through and in the plenty that constitutes us. Water is life. It is in us. It is us. Water also has a lot to teach us. Or, rather, there is much we might learn from water. This is precisely how—or rather why—the "grammar of animacy" (Kimmerer 2013) works; in perceiving our relationship with water on these terms, we begin to notice water as animate.[1] And so, I ask with Robin Wall Kimmerer: who among us is attuned to the ways of water? Perhaps *you* who have fished or farmed or lived with bodies of waters, becoming water's familiar. You, who are coming into an ever-growing understanding that there is something wildly potent about this translucent, wet substance. Others among us simply know water as essential; a fact so basic to our existence that we might take for granted the great luxury of running the tap. Water, however, can also show us how to sustain water's defense—and how we might protect our territories.

Agua Sí, Oro No / Yes Water, No Gold

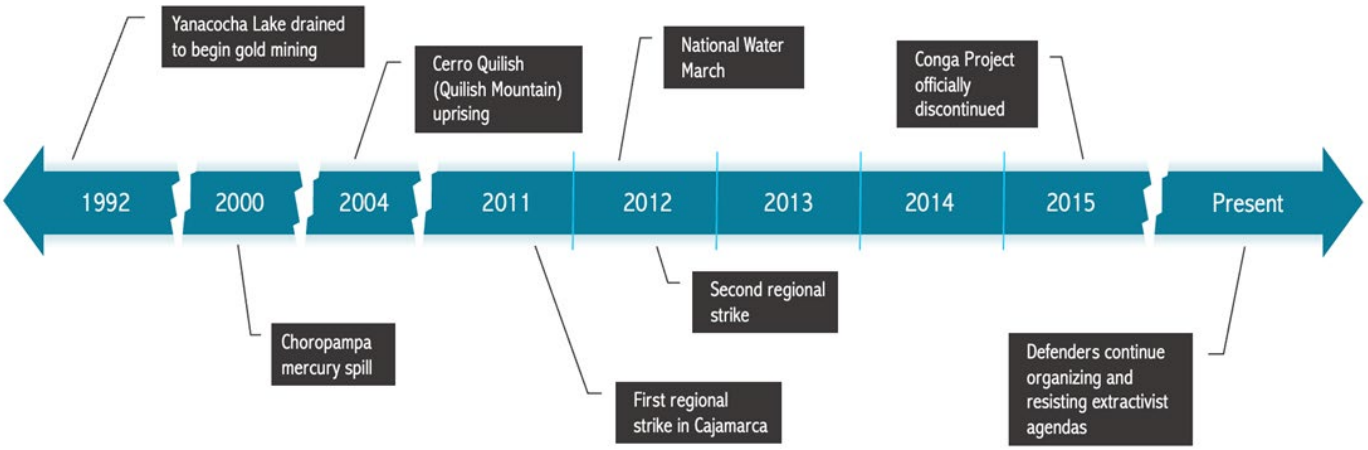
In this article, I write about *defensoras del agua y medio ambiente*, water and environmental defenders: the women participating in an anti-extractivist struggle in northern Peru. *Defensoras* (women defenders), *luchadoras* (women fighters), or *compañeras* (fellow or comrade women) are some of the ways they refer to themselves. I alternate between these labels, overwhelmingly deferring to the preference for *luchadora* in Celendín, a province of Cajamarca, Peru and stronghold of water defense.

The struggle to defend water against the expansion of a large-scale mining operation in Celendín's headwaters mobilized a social movement against state and corporate forces attempting to expand the Yanacocha mine to nearby territory. The expansion sought to drain four alpine lakes, creating what would be the Conga mine, one of the largest gold mining operations in Latin America. The struggle, therefore, was and continues to be inherently about water: *la lucha del agua* (the fight for water).

The following timeline[2] of pivotal events in the anti-Conga movement gets us started on common ground:

As a fight for water, this is primarily a struggle about protecting water and the integrity of the territory. Today, Cajamarca's defenders remain active participants in a struggle that has shifted from mass mobilizing to strategic organizing among their bases. This ongoing anti-extractivist movement grew from standing against mining to opposing other large-scale extractive projects, such as dam proposals on the Río Marañon. The Marañon, the largest river feeding into the Amazon River, also traverses Celendín Province. Today, defenders face small-scale and illegal mining operations as added threats in this extractive zone.[3]

Cyclical in nature, *la lucha*, as defenders call the struggle, goes through periods of mobilization, slowed reflection, and agitated action to further consciousness-raising and strengthen collective forces. As metaphor, water's rhythms and



Timeline of pivotal events in the anti-Conga movement from 1992 to present day. Image courtesy of the author.

flow can reveal something about the nature of commitment to the protection of our territories. In the years that I have known luchadoras, they have talked to me about how participating in the struggle changed them. They attest to new abilities to offer opinions in mixed-gender spaces, to travel to meetings on their own (without their husbands), to lead activities, and to represent their organizations in national or international meetings. Defensoras have learned water's mutability, becoming formless, shape-shifting, but ultimately being of one substance as they carry on struggling.

In the flow of their daily lives, luchadoras become water. Defenders' practices of struggle are embodied as aqueous mobilizing—a condition permitting them to integrate the rhythms of their daily lives into the struggle. I look to the hydrologic cycle to elicit the patterns by which luchadoras *do* the defense of water and the environment. I want to note here that these metaphoric analogies to water emerge from a decolonial feminist lens where cycles and relational, changing forms run counter to Anglo-European scientific epistemologies. Women's aqueous embodiment critiques the hegemonic notion of linear time and (pre)determined object/subjectification that exist in present iterations of colonial knowledge-based regimes of power. Water's ability to fill and expand, adopting the shape of its vessel without sacrificing integrity, is a key quality that defensoras manifest. Being like water demands a keen sense of adaptation. And water's flow—even when a trickle—can erode rock, filling crevices where few other substances could move through.

To "be formless, shapeless, like water," a concept martial arts icon Bruce Lee famously coined, signals strength and the cultivation of flow and intuition, all things that defensoras hone in the struggle. La lucha demands of defensoras constant movement and the ability to reshape themselves to occupy myriad spaces. The creation of the women's organization itself was evidence that luchadoras understood the assignment: change or be consumed and silenced by the masculinist spaces of the extractive zone. The heteropatriarchal capitalist systems of knowledge and power that structure the extractive zone inform both the geopolitics of mining and the mixed-gender defense struggle. Therefore, to enter masculine spaces of social organizing as fuller political actors, women united to form a stronger voice in a gendered terrain that required their participation and yet presented obstacles to their full participation.

In writing this piece, I was inspired by Alexis Pauline Gumbs's *Undrowned* and Joanne Barker's consideration of water from the location of Indigenous feminisms. Gumbs's intimate narrative of marine mammal life gestures at what is possible when we explore our nonhuman relations expansively. I owe much gratitude to her guidance in showing us this way. I write with confidence that we can learn of and from many worlds if we look closely enough, if we are still enough, if we are quietly listening. My treatment of defensoras' political practices converges with Joanne Barker's (2019) important contributions to reconceptualizing intersectionality and power through Indigenous feminist perspectives. Barker's consideration of water and confluence as an analytic aids us in arriving at more precise accounts for the territorialized locations of power and the nuances of racialization within colonial-imperial state structures. I follow, albeit from a different direction, North American Indigenous understandings of water's "mutability" (2019, 14). Water, Barker writes,

> is not about the continuity of equation or sameness between its forms; it is about the continuity of perpetual movement and form-changing…Confluence understands the interdependence of life and human responsibilities for reciprocity and humility. (2019, 14-15)

Consequently, I attempt to articulate a new frame of reference for how we might (re)imagine the struggle to preserve our territories.

I write from my position as an independent scholar who lived over eighteen months in Cajamarca between 2014 and 2019, the bulk of which was in 2017 when I worked and communed with defenders as I did ethnographic research. At the same time, I write with and for the murmur of water's soft landing on the banks of Flushing Bay's wetlands, in the occupied territory of Munsee Lenape, Matinecock, and Canarsie Nations, in northwest Queens, NY. I live a ten-minute walk from Flushing Bay, a waterbody that many of us, including the grassroots group Guardians of Flushing Bay (GoFB), are attempting to reclaim and protect.

I have organized this text topically, jumping around spans of time from section to section, asking us to drift with a narrative not restricted by linear time but rather ushered by the flows of the water cycle. In some sections, I narrate the work of luchadoras' water defense by following Yovana, a luchadora from Celendín with whom I developed a deep bond. Yovana, a central figure by whom I tell some stories of water protection, is present through her multiple roles in varied contexts. Throughout this piece, I invite us to be open to the possibilities offered by an immersive text narrated through various styles, moods, and voices—sometimes human, sometimes nonhuman.

Evaporation

Of an energized existence,

nanoscopic frazzle.

In evaporating glory, evermore

ceaseless activity.

Through ever-changing watery contexts,

a constant motion.

Yovana's pace was indefatigable. Yovana, who was living in Lima in 2016 and returned to Celendín in March 2017, was committed to the movement despite any circumstances life presented her with. When I met Yovana in March, I didn't know that she was newly-expecting. What I learned in the months when I lived in Celendín and Cajamarca was how defense had become a part of life for luchadoras. Interwoven with Yovana's responsibilities as a mother, sister, friend, and daughter, was her identity as luchadora. This meant that Yovana, like other defensoras, managed to fit everything into her day. But perhaps more than others, Yovana sustained a fast-paced rhythm for months on end.

There were days when I met with Yovana at seven thirty in the morning, after she had already been up doing laundry and other household chores. Sometimes, I would accompany her to serve breakfast at her son's school.[4] After volunteering, we would return to our homes, meeting again later in the morning to run errands for either the women's organization or Jóvenes Organizados de Celendín (JOC).[5] A few weeks prior to the water martyrs' anniversary, in July, Yovana was running around town trying to secure locations for the new murals JOC intended to paint.[6] One Sunday morning, I received a phone call from Yovana to discuss the mural project. As we talked through our plans to begin painting, she casually mentioned having spent the night at the town health clinic. Her doctor had released her to bedrest at home for several days. Yovana did not take her health lightly, but she held her activist work with an urgency and a sense that what she did also mattered for the future of her unborn child. An hour after we had spoken, we were meeting at the plaza to see about fundraising for mural repairs.

Yovana's unabating drive serves all causes that she takes on. This was how we painted three murals over the span of two days, from eight in the morning until five in the evening, in the last week of June. Although most of the painting was done by the artists who work with JOC, Yovana and I assisted them the entire time. In addition to assisting the artists, on the first morning we painted Yovana and I took a break to go to a compañero's radio show. Yovana was determined to appear on the show to publicly denounce the water utility company which was charging a disproportionately high fee for the same services her house had received in the past. After the spot on the radio show, we made it back in time to have lunch with the artists and resumed our mural work in the afternoon. Once finished with the day's painting, Yovana and I rushed to get ourselves ready for an evening meeting at the headquarters of the movement's organizational coalition in Celendín.

Evaporating water is abuzz with energy, bounding off itself. Absorbing and emitting heat. Luchadoras embody this aqueous movement, becoming water. Simultaneously being and doing like water, Yovana's dynamism was a force to be reckoned with. Hers was an energy that was infectious and, not in the least, remains a significant contribution to sustaining the struggle among various groups in Celendín.

Condensation

I am the dew drop, collecting. Merging with my sister droplet. Your life force attracts me. Mistiness that defies your grasp, teases your eyes. Are we woven lattice or suspended in the air by our sheer will? We envelop the microgreens growing in the *jalca*.[7] Drip. Click. Toc. Do you hear the sounds of our becoming?

Coalescing at the *Escuela*

See the video Volver Volver, Yovana.

Yovana, eight months pregnant, was lip-synching Ana Gabriel's "*Volver, Volver*," a romantic ranchera ballad. Her four-foot-eleven stature and her noticeable pregnancy did not stop her from performing in the *Noche Cultural* (Cultural Night) at the fourth Escuela Hugo Blanco in Celendín.[8] Yovana was clearly having a good time. She playfully and repeatedly glanced back at the evening's disc jockey, singing to him and exchanging complicit looks as she sang along to a song she clearly knew to the letter. "Volver, Volver" is a song about nostalgia and the yearning for a love lost but not entirely disappeared. Perhaps Yovana chose "Volver, Volver" because it is a favorite of hers. "Volver, Volver" could just as easily be referring to the anti-extractive struggle defenders have been participating in for nearly a decade. In dizzying madness, the singer oscillates

Jalca. Image courtesy of Isabel Del Pilar López for Instituto de Internacional de Derecho y Sociedad – IIDS.

between letting go and continuing to lovingly hope for a return. Sometimes the struggle can be that way, too.

Six years after the Conga mining conflict had erupted in Cajamarca, social leaders—environmental defenders and fighters—carved spaces to share and articulate their experiences, to learn from those experiences, and to apply theory to further their struggle. The conflict had taken a lot from Celendín, most significantly the lives of four of their own during the militarized suppression of a regional strike in 2012. It had harmed and maimed defenders physically and emotionally. Participating in the struggle required sacrifices that strained and ruptured family ties. And yet, the Escuela emerged and reinforced the ties of this new chosen family in struggle. The Escuela is a type of *encuentro* (meeting or gathering). An encuentro, like condensing vapor, brings together defenders, essentially aggregating resistance from the various parts of the province to create a stronger front.

Regular organizational meetings do not provide the same kinds of opportunities to connect and create solidarity as encuentros and retreats. At times, routine meetings, whether at Celendín's organizational coalition or the women's organization, are precisely the location where worn nerves and strained relationships bear upon the integrity of the group. The underlying tensions brought on indirectly (or directly) from participation in the struggle exacerbate intraorganizational relations. As a result, organizational meetings may intensify these same tensions and do not necessarily provide space for reflecting on the issues and reparative strategies.

A retreat for luchadoras

If condensing vapor is formed through releases of energy that result in organized bonding, the energized pressure that flows through and out during encuentros allows to bonds to form and strengthen among participants. Energy flows through compañeros and compañeras who have not seen each other for months, or years. Encuentros provide a contained space to debrief and reflect on the changing nature of conditions in the extractive zone, where vibrant ideas and exchanges gush in the coming together to resolve issues. Encuentros are not meant to be free of disagreement, but in fact channel energy where grievances may be aired and also where luchadores collectively brainstorm new solutions to present problems.

Like "Volver, Volver," luchadoras' love for their territory has been an enduring commitment to the struggle even when it causes heartache and requires repairing damage. For luchadoras, *resentimiento* (resentment) can be a source of strife among their group members. Disagreement about using their organization's funds to help compañeras in need contributed to much of the resentimiento between them. After the Escuela, a retreat was designed to provide luchadoras a dedicated space for themselves where the compañeras tried to work through some of these issues. Their commitment involved working through their misunderstandings in order to strengthen the organization.

That afternoon, at the post-Escuela women's retreat nothing was solved in reference to budget allocations and, more specifically, the precise goals for using the organization's limited monetary resources. But in removing themselves from their regular routines, defensoras gave themselves and each other the time to reflect and envision together. This vital collective practice and necessary stage of mobilizing functioned to repair and (re)build internal solidarity and cohesion.

Precipitation

We gather. United. Collected. We feel the temperature warming. You know what it's like to have want from thirst. The dry air of the preceding months attunes you to the subtle changes in the air. Moisture returns. We cloud, the sunlight. A harbinger of wetness that will soak the parched soil below. You will notice us by what now becomes visible.

I-we-I—in our luxuriously wet roundedness fall upon the ground. On your woolen outer layers. Our coolness on your skin betrays the warmth that brought us together to bear upon you.

A drop

Two

Five, twelve

Rhythmic drumming on your roof.

Rain is hard to ignore in the subtropical highlands; it beckons forth life from the earth. The rainy season starts in late November through April. The rapidly changing climate is extending rainfall into winter, lasting through May and even June. Lasting as long as it lasts. Rain is a reality that is hard to escape. February's Carnival is hard to decouple from the expectation of soaked costumes and wet parades.

On the night of World Environment Day, the women's organization coordinated an action in town. The organization held a vigil with *chocolatito* (hot cocoa) honoring the environment. Other groups, including local political parties, had also held activities earlier in the day. But the chocolatito and the vigil almost were not. The women's organization initially had trouble choosing a date on which to hold it. Later, many tasks were taken on by Yovana when other luchadoras were unavailable to coordinate logistics. Celendín's organizational coalition had been a passive supporter and although they lent a laptop for the projection, its leaders (all men) made no attempts to help organize video files or teach the compañeras how to project videos. Attendance by townspeople was low compared to past actions—partially due to the late announcement and lack of publicity. These complications appeared like boulders obstructing the flow of water in a river, at times creating backflows, eddies, or where the flow was great enough, water overflowed the boulder.

The vigil is representative of the actions defensoras organize in the struggle and the fluidity with which luchadoras move to see these actions through. To be formless like water looks like being resourceful. Adapting to the circumstances, the luchadoras reoriented their energies. With agility, compañeras shifted directions and resourced their materials to put the event on. If the first compañera whom they had depended on for firewood was not home, then they rushed to another compañera, a catholic nun and member of the women's organization, to ask for donated firewood. As soon as the firewood arrived, the luchadoras quickly got started on the hot cocoa. Meanwhile, I sorted through the laptop's folders to find the videos that a compañera wanted to project. Diverting, skirting, flowing around, under, or over, luchadoras embodied the aqueous movements of water in order to obtain their goal.

In this instance, aqueous mobilizing had precipitating effects, bringing to life actions that are felt, seen, and otherwise sensed in Celendín. Offering a chocolatito to observers, to warm and nourish them as they participated in the vigil, was a symbolic exchange. From a collectivist perspective, the provision of nourishment, as minimal as hot cocoa and a roll of bread, created a dialogue of reciprocity between everyone involved. From water's viewpoint, water was passing through, in the process of transforming itself. Water was, is, the *chocolatito*: an integral part of the vigil.

We persist as water, among other things, beyond our lifetimes. The water that defensoras continue to fight for made the chocolatito possible. Luchadoras offered it to their neighbors as the bounty that their territory was still able to provide—an "element" under constant threat in the extractive zone. If the vigil attendees looked closely, deep enough, in their cups they might see the mist off the jalcas, the clouds from the rainy season, the seeping groundwater of the Río Grande watershed. They might see themselves, too.

Vigil with "chocolatito." Image courtesy of Natalia Guzmán Solano.

Percolation

I am the blood that courses through your veins. I become you, and I pass through you. You defend me and understand that you are defending your life through me.

When former president Ollanta Humala visited Celendín during his presidential campaign in 2011, he asked the people of Celendín if they wanted water or gold.

"Nosotros dijimos el agua, porque sabíamos que el agua es vida."[9]

–Santos Huaman Solano

(Interview with the author in 2014)

Conciencia Ambiental / Environmental consciousness

The groundwork for the defense of water and territory was laid years before the Conga Project exploded into social conflict. The Rondas Campesinas (Peasant Rounds) along with provincial health promoters were important mobilizing forces in the region. Like the Rounds, art also occupies an integral role in the struggle. In Celendín, a series of murals were painted by anti-extractivist artivists in the years following the deadly strike in 2012. The first mural, painted by an art collective from Lima (Tomate Colectivo), depicted the timeline of the struggle. Starting with that mural, subsequent murals continue to be painted on street-facing walls of private homes, making the murals a hard-to-miss visual record of their history.

Mural painted by Tomate Colectivo. Image courtesy of Natalia Guzmán Solano.

Yovana is one of the co-founders of Jóvenes Organizados de Celendín (JOC), the youth art group that arose from the art activist intervention of Tomate Colectivo. By the time I arrived in 2017, JOC had painted at least four murals on their own with funds they had raised in town and, sometimes, with monetary support from ally organizations in Cajamarca and Lima. Over the years, weather and petty vandalism—sometimes by mining supporters—had worn the murals. In the weeks and days leading to the water martyrs' anniversary, Yovana sped up to get murals in shape before the commemoration.

When we repaired the existing murals, and painted two new ones, I heard compañeros and compañeras refer to the murals as visible memories of the struggle. As public memory, they were reminders of the social and material costs of mining and the risks of environmental degradation. One of the newer murals I helped to paint showed Cornelio Falls, a waterfall located a couple of hours away, to emphasize the beauty of place in Celendín. Water is central to the murals, overtly as with the waterfall, or subtly—through its omission—as signaled in another mural by the emptied landscape consumed by an open-pit mine. In this way, JOC hoped to educate *el pueblo* (the people) about their territory and what was at stake.

The steadied filtering of knowledge that creates awareness among el pueblo occurs as gradual percolation. If activity around the memorial anniversary picks up, like a rush of water making its way down a dry riverbed after rains—or when dammed water is released—the murals remain after the hubbub of activity. Yovana once explained: "cada mural habla de nuestra lucha y nuestra defensa por el agua."[10] Murals are a passive, but visible materialization of the struggle. They keep the struggle in the consciousness of town-dwellers and persist as a public record of what luchadores and the people of Celendín have gone through to stave off extractivist projects. Artivism, art activism, then, is a trickle method adopted by luchadores to regenerate *conciencia ambiental*.

Pooling

> "Bofedal: Turbera de altura, lugar pantanoso donde por acumulación y transformación incompleta de vegetales forman la turba, cuyos residuos se acumulan en el sitio. Almacenan aguas provenientes de precipitaciones pluviales, deshielo de glaciares y principalmente afloramientos superficiales de aguas subterráneas. En la zona se ha identificado grandes extensiones de bofedales que prácticamente son las nacientes de los ríos y quebradas."[11]
>
> –Inventario de Fuentes Hídricas Superficiales
>
> en las Cabeceras de Cuencas de los Ríos Chirimayo y Chugurmayo (2013)

During the rainy season, water can flow at an uncontained rate. Mudslides and flooding are all possible. Lakes, creeks, and rivers benefit from the bounties of the rain. The Río Grande, which passes through provincial Celendín, is evidence of abundant water in the *bofedales*. The headwaters feed a growing current as the Río Grande makes its way down the watershed. The Río Grande eventually makes the Río Marañon, finally becoming the great Amazon.

Initiations and commitments: Yovana's merging into la lucha

Yovana joined the struggle for water on November 16, 2011. Yovana's mother, a vendor at Celendín's market, had talked to Yovana about the upcoming mobilization in defense of water. When the anti-Conga movement started, Yovana had not paid attention to the struggle or to questions surrounding Celendín's water sources. It was only upon joining mobilizations in 2011, and observing the magnitude of support in the defense of water, that it became her struggle. The mobilizations in the middle of November anticipated the broader general strike that the regional President of Cajamarca would declare at the end of the month.

Yovana continued participating in actions: "yo para salir, teníamos que sacrificarse con mi mamá porque yo tenía que levantarme a las cinco de la mañana. Cuatro de la mañana a hacer la limpieza de la casa. A lavar los pañales, la ropa, y hacer el fiambre."[12] Yovana took care of the household while her mother attended to her market stall between the hours of five and seven in the morning, when vendors were allowed to sell, before they, too, joined the daily mobilizations. And although Yovana did not attend university, she was invited by a group of students from the National University at Cajamarca satellite Celendín campus to join their protests. Yovana gives them credit for having taught her "*lo que es lucha*" (what struggle is), learning with them what it meant to unite and be part of a struggle.

The gravity of what was at stake for her people struck Yovana at that first mobilization in Celendín. She recalled to me, during an oral history interview, that compañeros talked about what the Conga project was proposing—to drain their lakes and mine at their headwaters. "Entonces yo me di cuenta que el agua estaba en peligro."[13] Yovana was stunned by the presence of thousands of people at the mobilization; its magnitude impressing on Yovana the force of the struggle.

Convergence: A surge of mobilizing strength

People power the struggle, like the swelling of the Río Grande when the rains come. If the regional strikes epitomized the struggle at a local scale, the Marcha Nacional del Agua (National Water March) in February 2012 would signify the strength of the forces these provincial regions could muster in a spectacular national mobilization. The National Water March arguably remains one of the largest and most profound displays of support for the struggle. The march started in Cajamarca and ended in Lima. Along the way, town and city residents offered defenders food and drink. Communal kitchens were organized at each stop with provisions donated by locals. The march also set off similar actions and local marches in highland and lowland Amazonian cities alike.

Aída[14], a luchadora from Celendín who participated with her husband, described the march:

> Bueno, fue una experiencia bien…conmovedora, como la gente este como dice un río de agua por todas las partes. Se unen a nosotras por una sola causa y eso nos daba alegría. Nos daba más valor para seguir nosotros luchando, seguir adelante y no dejar que estas mineras nos quiten lo que Dios nos ha dado, [que] son la naturaleza, que es el agua para vivir, que sin ella no podemos vivir. Oro hay, pero sin el agua no se puede. Morimos.[15]

It was not coincidental that the National Water March slogan was "*Seamos Un Río*" (Let's Be a River). Aída had felt this as she participated in the march. Like a swelling river, defenders and allies engulfed the streets in a peaceful demonstration of care, solidarity, and valor in the face of state-corporate mining interests.

Mobilizations such as the regional strikes and the National Water March are analogous instances of aqueous mobilizing—true to the essence of the struggle and its luchadores. Marchers were currents of water flowing through the streets. In Lima, the movement achieved this outpouring by uniting its efforts through a strong defense front supported by a sympathetic regional president that was assailed by a repressive central state. This was the accumulation of defenders who had created a strong foundation early on and people who had been galvanized by a threat to the integrity of water-life.

Conclusion

I pulled our focus to the hydrologic cycle to tease apart movement, qualities, and cyclical phases that actually take place simultaneously. Water evaporates as it percolates in the ground and condenses in the sky. Water may concurrently precipitate, percolate, and pool. Luchadoras may shape-shift, come together, and work feverishly at the same time. Yovana proved this best. Yovana, mother, sister, daughter, friend, and luchadora, seemed to fit everything in, and some things all at once. While not all luchadoras devote an equal amount of time to the struggle, they are creating lives that incorporate their commitment to the struggle into their present lives, long after the height of the mining conflict passed. By comparing how women in la lucha enact their defense and the water cycle, I seek to reflect on how taking one water perspective helps us to connect various modalities and strategies of water and territorial defense. What sensibilities arise or desist when we embody water?

To fully consider this last question, I invite us to go beyond the metaphoric: we are already what we are looking for, or invoking Thich Nhat Hahn's teaching, we are the changing cloud.

National Water March poster. Image from Comisión de arte y kontracultura.

We have already been water, we are water, and we continue to be water. Just as Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes about the narwhal, the beluga, and the bowhead whale, but mostly about the Black body, "there are at least three ways to love you: as you were, as you are, as you will be. I love you. That means I choose all three" (2020, 22). To love water is to love ourselves, and coming to water's defense means defending our lives. Defensoras intuit this and embody water in their aqueous mobilizing.

Defensoras have no issue claiming water as their particular purview. They claim as their own the capacity to nourish and be caretakers in community. The women's organization in Celendín arose out of women's need for a safe space from which to participate in the movement. Women's agency entailed working through, around, and against barriers and silencing sustained by the colonial legacy of territorialized ethnic, racial, and gender norms. Luchadoras' discernment and response to the masculinist terrains of extractive zones—which includes mixed-gender movement and heteropatriarchal capitalist political spheres—led them to enact aqueous strategies from within spaces where they have greater sway.

The anti-extractivist movement in Cajamarca is as much a territorial struggle as a water struggle; in fighting to protect headwaters, defenders are fighting for self-determination in their territory. Corporate and state interests vie to make an extractive zone out of their territory. In some ways, these interests appear to have achieved that; Yanacocha is after all an operating gold mega-mine in the region. But water remains, remember. Transformed. People will come together, collect, and cleanse the territory as they run the course of water's defense.

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Footnotes

[1] There exist ancestral lineages of knowledge among Indigenous, Native American, and First Nations communities about relational kin engagements with water and other sentient beings. The relational ideas on water I present here, therefore, precede my time and thought.

[2] There is irony to including a timeline in an article that beckons us toward exercises in nonlinear temporalities. Reference to a timeline acknowledges a common, and dominant, language for understanding the placement of events through the passage of time. When integrated into the narrative in this way, plural worldviews begin co-existing in the text.

[3] My use of "extractive zone" references Macarena Gómez-Barris's concept, which denotes spaces marked out to "reduce life to capitalist resource conversion" (2017, xvi).

[4] As a public school in the province, parents (usually mothers) volunteered certain days of the month to serve breakfast and lunch for their children's class.

[5] Organized Youth from Celendín.

[6] During the second regional strike in 2012, state police and military killed five civilians in mobilizations in Celendín and Hualgayoc-Bambamarca Provinces. In 2015, Celendín's municipal government announced "Día de la Dignidad Celendina" (Day of Celendín Dignity) to honor the four who died during the protests, naming them *mártires del agua* (water martyrs) ("Perú: Celendín Recordará a Mártires Del Agua Fallecidos En Protesta Contra Conga" 2015). In Celendín, townspeople regularly refer to the deceased from the protest as martyrs. Among luchadores, the families—especially the mothers and wives—of the martyrs are referred to as the *deudas* (debt), referring to what is owed to the families for the loss of their kin during the protest.

[7] Jalca is Quechua-derived term that refers to the moorlands of the ecological highland regions in the northern Peruvian Andes.

[8] The Escuela Hugo Blanco was established in 2016 as a learning space for movement members in Celendín Province to educate each other, train, and share experiences about issues related to their struggle. Held periodically, about every six months, escuelas are events with daylong workshops spanning over the course of two to three days. At the escuela, defenders engage in conversations or teach-in style presentations on topics previously agreed upon. With no fixed location, organizers rent spaces based on availability.

[9] "We said water, because we knew that water is life."

[10] "Each mural talks about our struggle and defense of water."

[11] "*Bofedal* [high altitude wetland]: High elevation bog, a marshy place where peat forms due to the accumulation and incomplete transformation of vegetation, whose residues accumulate on the site. They store water from rainfall, melting glaciers, and mainly from the surface outcrops of groundwater. Large tracts of wetlands have been identified in the area, which are practically the headwaters of rivers and streams."

[12] “For me to go out, we had to sacrifice with my mother because I had to wake up at five in the morning. Four in the morning, to do house cleaning. To wash diapers, clothes, and prepare a cold meal.”

[13] “Then, I realized that water was in danger.”

[14] Aída is a pseudonym for a luchadora who preferred to keep her identity confidential in public references.

[15] “Well, it was a very…moving experience, how people were as you say, a river everywhere. They joined us for one cause and that brought us joy. It gave us more courage to keep on fighting, to move forward, and to not allow these mines to take what God has given us, [which] is nature, which is water to live, because without her [water] we cannot live. Gold is there, but without water we can’t. We die.”

Recommended Citation

Guzmán Solano, Natalia. 2022. “Formless Like Water: *Defensoras* and the Work of Water Protection.” *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community*, no. 22. https://openrivers.lib.umn.edu/article/formless-like-water/.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.24926/2471190X.9710

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