



## CHAPTER 9

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# Stories of Resistance: Translating Nature, Indigeneity, and Place in Mining Activism

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### INTRODUCTION

In April 2016, Máxima Acuña, a *campesina* (peasant farmer) from the highlands of Cajamarca, Peru, was one of six people awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize,<sup>1</sup> considered one of the most prestigious awards for grassroots environmental activists. For many who had followed her struggle against *Minera Yanacocha* (the Yanacocha Mining Company), Máxima's international recognition as an 'environmental hero' was a welcome turn of events following years of fierce opposition to the Conga mining project. Marches, roadblocks, confrontations between police and protestors, and five lives lost in the conflict ultimately led to the suspension of the project and the company's retreat. Máxima's award, the publicity that followed, and the sharing of her story in documentary films, media articles, and activist campaigns are a testament to the global reach of recent controversies over extractive activity in Latin America. Her struggle, along

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with those of other women activists, also illustrates the way grassroots efforts are transformed by (and in turn help shape) forms of political action beyond their immediate localities.

Over the past two decades, resource extraction in Latin America has generated numerous conflicts throughout the region but perhaps nowhere as intensely as in Peru. Two factors are important for understanding the context of these emerging conflicts. The first is that the rapid expansion of mining is linked to economic reforms in the 1990s that created a favourable climate for transnational investment. This meant a dramatic increase in mineral exploration and mineral concessions, which affect more than half of Peru's *campesino* (peasant) communities. Secondly, the diversification of the global mining industry, the high price of metals, and new mining technologies made it profitable to mine very low-grade ore. Consequently, mining has expanded into areas never before used for mining activity, including areas formerly devoted to agriculture and farming.

As we have explored elsewhere, mining conflicts have brought about forms of political action that disrupt and exceed nature-culture divides (Paredes Peñafiel and Li 2017). Water, glaciers, lagoons, and sentient mountains have acquired political significance and helped shape the outcome of campaigns against transnational mining (Li 2015, 2016). In these cases, opposition to mining activity defies the dominant view of nature in which humans are the primary agents and rejects managerial and technocratic solutions embraced by mining companies and the state. These conflicts around mineral extraction do not *only* involve indigenous peoples; rather, they are about the defence of local worlds threatened by the aggressive expansion of extractive activity. As the chapters in this collection suggest, alternative world- and life-making projects are being formulated in South America that have the potential to challenge the politics of extractivism by destabilising established ideas about nature, indigeneity, and development.

In this chapter, we focus on some recent cases of resistance to mining activity in Peru's Northern Highlands, home to the country's largest gold mine. The Yanacocha mine, owned jointly by the US-based Newmont Corporation, the Peruvian company Buenaventura, and the World Bank's International Finance Corporation, has generated numerous conflicts with local communities since it began operating in 1992. In recent years, the mine's continued expansion and ongoing protests against the proposed Conga project have attracted widespread local and global attention. Grassroots opposition to mining results from a connection to local land-

scapes as well as linkages to national and international NGOs, solidarity activists, the media, and other actors. In some cases, environmental campaigns and media representations of mining conflicts have evoked local ways of relating to a powerful landscape. However, the ways in which other-than-human elements of the landscape come into being and emerge as important political actors involve a confluence of different factors that cannot only be explained by ‘tradition’ or ‘local knowledge’. At times, these forms of activism invoke indigenous identity, environmentalist discourses, and global justice. More generally, they enact different ways of knowing and being, attesting to the resilience of local worlds in spite of potentially destructive forces that encroach upon them. These emergent forms of activism and identity require theoretical approaches that recognise the existence of multiple worlds without essentialising or romanticising indigenous knowledge.

In the Brazilian context, some anthropologists (Goldman 2015; dos Anjos 2006) have called attention to counter-discourses that defy dominant ideas about mestizaje and syncretism and can work as guarantees against the homogenising pressures from the nation-state. These studies show how a group’s self-identification comes from forms of creative expression, inventiveness, and characteristics derived from internal debate and reflection within the group itself. In the context of Cajamarca, people involved in mining conflicts have similarly sought to resignify concepts such as ‘campesino’ and ‘indigenous’, changing the meaning that has been attached to them by mining corporations, the state, and international institutions.

Our analysis of campaigns against the Conga project sheds light on the dynamics that shape grassroots activism as the testimonies of local leaders travel through documentaries, news media, lawsuits, and activist networks. We focus primarily on three women who have become spokespersons on an international stage: Máxima, Nélica, and María, three *campesinas* who have spoken out against the abuses of mining companies and in defence of Conga’s lagoons. The first two are featured in the documentary *La Hija de la Laguna* (2015) and their stories have been shared around the globe, inspiring actions locally and internationally. We also consider the impact of the Conga case on solidarity activism, specifically focusing on María’s role in bringing the Peruvian case to activism against resource extraction in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. We show the international reverberations of the Conga conflict and activist efforts by focusing on these three activists, highlighting the role of women in the

conflicts. As Walsh (2017) has noted, it is no coincidence that women are often leaders in struggles against extractive activity. She cites Lourdes Huanca (a Peruvian peasant leader<sup>2</sup>) who links extractivism with ‘the territories of our bodies’. According to Walsh, this invasion and violation of the body is felt due to the changes that these industries produce in social relations, social structures, and community dynamics (the rise in alcoholism, the encouragement of *machismo*, the mistreatment and sexual abuse of women, etc.).

A notable aspect of the campaigns against mining is the way women describe their opposition to mining activity in terms of their relationship to the land, their connection to place, and their identity. In some cases, gender is highlighted by activists or their interlocutors, and in others, their identity as *campesinas* or indigenous people is key. These identities facilitate the translations that take place as local experiences are made globally accessible. Postero and Fabricant (this volume) suggest that indigeneity (especially when combined with representations of gender) ‘provides useful cultural and ethical material on which to base political and economic contestations, because its tropes are well known and malleable’. This malleability is crucial in the performance of indigeneity, which is expressed differently by various individuals and variously portrayed in media representations of them. In some cases, the depictions rely on simplistic explanations and romanticised representations of indigenous peoples. In others, they may challenge these stereotypical portrayals and provide new ways of talking about resource extraction.

As Descola (1998) and others have noted, many activist organisations derive inspiration from indigenous peoples, turning them into symbols of a harmonious relationship with nature. Concepts like ‘mother earth’ or ‘the sacred forest’ become generic representations of indigenous wisdom, even though these terms may not be equivalent to those used by indigenous groups. Collaborations between indigenous and nonindigenous activists have their limits, especially when certain local practices do not coincide with the sensibilities of foreign activists. In the cases we examine, for example, different conceptions of justice, ‘spirituality’, and ‘earth-beings’ may destabilise the premises on which solidarity efforts are built. This is where the role of women like Máxima, Névida, and María becomes key, as they are able to move between worlds in order to share their message with diverse audiences. In this chapter, we examine what their stories reveal, what they conceal, and their potential to challenge the logic of extractivism by proposing alternative life-making projects.

## ‘ENVIRONMENTAL HEROES’, INDIGENEITY, AND STRUGGLES AGAINST MINING

The Conga conflict erupted in July 2011, when the Yanacocha Mining Company officially announced its proposal to construct an open-pit copper-gold mine. The mine would be located at the head of the water basin for the provinces of Celendín, Cajamarca, and Hualgayoc and would require draining four lagoons (Perol, Azul, Mala, and Chica) to make way for the infrastructure of the mine. The company planned to construct four reservoirs to compensate for the loss of the lagoons. According to Yanacocha representatives, these reservoirs would store twice the amount of water that the lagoons regularly collect and would be distributed to communities so they could harvest one additional crop per year (de Althaus 2012). Water and lagoons have played a prominent role in campaigns against mineral extraction, and actions in their defence have sought to decelerate the aggressive expansion of extractivism in Latin America. The importance of Conga’s lagoons stems from the relations that they embody, as well as *campesinos*’ concerns with having access to the water that nourishes their land, crops, and families (Paredes Peñafiel 2016). These nourishing relations are sustained by *campesinos*’ ‘designs on the land’ (Paredes Peñafiel and Li 2017), which encompass water resources such as streams and artisanal channels used for irrigation. The centrality of water in people’s lives made the lagoons politically significant in struggles against the mine.

As the conflict attracted attention beyond the region, the lagoons also established connections between *campesinos* living near the project site and environmentalists, solidarity activists, international journalists, and other actors. The lagoons emphasised the dependence of local people on water resources while mobilising global concerns around biodiversity and the protection of a unique ecosystem. Within the diverse alliances that were formed to oppose the Conga project, people did not necessarily share a common stance on mining or environmental protection. As the Conga conflict gained notoriety beyond Cajamarca, various narratives incorporated the concepts of ‘indigeneity’ and ‘nature’ to express criticism towards Minera Yanacocha’s operations. Drawing on the iconic images of three women (Nélida, Máxima, and María) associated with mining conflict in Cajamarca, we explore how these local actors and their national and international allies recast these discourses and practices in their struggles.

### *La Hija de la Laguna*

Activism related to mining activity has taken an international dimension in recent years, aided by extensive solidarity networks, social media, and global environmental and indigenous rights movements. Documentary filmmaking has also been an effective way of drawing international attention to mining conflicts. Nélica was 31 years old when she was featured as the protagonist of *La Hija de la Laguna* (*The Daughter of the Lake*), a 2015 documentary about the Yanacocha mine produced by Guarango, a Peruvian association of documentary filmmakers. Guarango had previously produced three films dealing with mining issues.<sup>3</sup>

The film synopsis for *La Hija de La Laguna* reads: ‘At the height of the Peruvian gold rush, Nélica, a Peruvian woman able to communicate with water spirits, uses her powers to prevent a mining corporation from destroying the body of water she considers her mother’ (daughterofthelake.pe). In promotional materials, Nélica is described as a peasant farmer and environmental leader with a love for the Cajamarca countryside. She also studies law in the city of Cajamarca in order to protect her community from corporate interests. The film emphasises her relationship with water and Mother Earth,<sup>4</sup> imbuing it with a ‘spiritual’ quality (as it is popularly understood in Western conceptualisations of religion and spirituality): ‘Like other indigenous citizens in the Andes, her relationship with nature is sacred and respectful’ (*La Hija de la Laguna* 2015).

In the film, Nélica serves as both narrator and subject, a guide to the majestic landscapes threatened by mining expansion, and a fighter resolute in her stance against a powerful mining company. The documentary trailer begins with Nélica addressing *Madre Agua* (Mother Water): ‘When they destroy the lagoons, where will their owners live, the spirits (*duendes*) of the lakes? Do they not understand that you are a living being?’ Nélica’s charisma comes in part from her ability to speak passionately and directly regardless of the audience or setting. She moves with ease from her native Porcón, a hamlet near the mine, to her life as a law student in the city, and more recently, to meetings with various national and international supporters.

In the year following the release of the documentary, Nélica travelled the world to promote the film and speak out against mining injustice. Her interviews—whether addressing farmers in Colombia or European journalists—evoked the sentience of nature and the need to respect and reconnect with the *Pachamama*. In an interview for a Spanish newspaper during a promotion tour of the documentary, she explains:

*The mountains are sacred for us Quechua. My grandfather ... taught me many things about the Andean cosmovision. What for you here might be just a mountain, for us has much meaning. An apu is sacred because it protects us. It protects us from the cold, it has natural medicines, it has wild animals. In order to enter a mountain, one has to ask for permission .... You have to take a fruit, or throw a little stone and ask for permission.*

While Névida refers to the *apu* as a mountain protector, this terminology is more commonly used in the Southern Andes and only gained currency following the Quilish protests in the early 2000s, another controversial expansion project of the Yanacocha Mining Company. The emergence of Quilish as an *apu* resulted from local practices and forms of relating to the environment, together with the intervention of NGOs, the media, activists, and environmentalists (Li 2015). As this and other examples have shown, grassroots activism defies the separation of nature and culture by emphasising people's connections to an agentic landscape (de la Cadena 2015; Kohn 2016). Névida is part of this landscape and she is connected to it, but this is a landscape that is always in the making, acquiring new uses and meanings as it is transformed through extractive and other activities. She is also connected to her grandfather, who was an influential figure in her life and, like Névida, was linked to NGOs and political networks. In the 2016 elections, Névida ran as a candidate for Congress for the *Frente Amplio*, a coalition of parties that emerged in part from people's dissatisfaction with current policies of extractivism. Prior to that, she was involved with the local NGO *Grufides*, the organisation dealing most directly with mining issues in Cajamarca. Guarango's press materials identify Marco Arana, former priest and founding member of *Grufides*, as her mentor. Mr Arana won a seat in Congress and has become a divisive figure, but before his political career, he was most well known for his role in protests against Yanacocha. His involvement in disputes with the mining company began because of his close relationship with people in Porcón, where he was a Parish Priest in the early 1990s (when Minera Yanacocha first arrived in Cajamarca).

As a Catholic priest living alongside *campesinos* in the highlands, Marco Arana sought to understand and celebrate other ways of being and living in the world, including people's relationship with a powerful landscape. This relationship exceeded the state's definition of *resources*, but it also exceeded Mr Arana's own translations into the language of environmentalism and the sacred (Li 2015). Névida's ways of expressing human-nonhuman relations

should not be seen as simply a reflection of an indigenous cosmology and part of a traditional or peasant worldview. Rather, it exemplifies the coproduction of knowledge—influenced partly by local practices, indigenous practices from other parts of the country (such as the Southern Andes), and widespread discourses on indigeneity—in response to the threat of extractive activity. Rituals to honour the lagoons or the *Pachamama* are not only part of ancestral practices; they are changing forms of engagement with a landscape that is itself in the process of transformation. They are also a form of critique and resistance to an extractivist model of development built on the destruction of livelihoods.

Yet the way that mining issues are portrayed in the media and recent documentaries sometimes rely on simplified representations of nature and people's relationship with it. Our conversations with the director of *La Hija de la Laguna*, Ernersto (Tito) Cabellos, provided some insights into how decisions are made when filming a documentary and how these decisions in turn shape public opinion. In his telling, there were a few things that made Nélide stand out. Among them was her previous experience with a documentary, *Yakumama (Mother Water)* (*Yakumama* 2009). Her experience with filmmaking was an advantage, but there was another key reason: what he called the 'spiritual' aspect of her relationship with the environment. As his team began filming, they also realised that the lagoons became a powerful theme. He recalled: 'What impacted me—in addition to the activist component, the political mobilisation—was the spiritual dimension. It wasn't something that we had considered in our previous documentaries.' Tito was implying that Nélide's struggle was not simply an argument about the environment or human rights; it was about the *Madre Tierra*, which has become a prominent concept in the environmentalist vernacular in Peru and internationally (shorthand for a more complex and not always harmonious set of human-nonhuman relationships). His documentary was to focus on a young protagonist who could help us see the world otherwise. Tito's role was to relay what he interpreted as Nélide's message through images that he wove into a narrative. However, something that is not made visible in his translation of Nélide's world (or in her own statements to the media) is that *duendes*, spirits that inhabit the *puquios* (water springs), are not considered benevolent beings and are generally feared by *campesinos* in Cajamarca because they are said to take away the vitality of people who venture near them.

Tito said that, on screen, Nélide displayed strength but also a kind of 'fragility'—this comes from her realisation (and the viewers') that 'the conflict



is much bigger than her' (Personal Communication). While the documentary plays up the usual trope of a powerful multinational against vulnerable (but courageous) individuals, Tito tried to introduce some complexity into the narrative with two other stories told in the film which also focus on female protagonists. In addition to the Yanacocha mine, he included the story of women working in a Bolivian mining cooperative. He was interested in the idea of portraying these indigenous, poor women who are also contaminating the earth but who have to do so in order to support their families. 'Are they good or bad?' he asked rhetorically. 'They have to help their families succeed.' Tito alluded to the ambiguity and contradictions in their lives, which he also shows in the third story of a jeweller from Holland that is interwoven into the film. The jeweller is torn between her art and her need to make a living from an industry that contaminates (but she is only just realising this as she visits the places where the materials she works with are mined).

If there is something tying these stories together, it is the connection between the past, present, and future of mining. The Bolivia story is about old-style mining that has existed and polluted the earth for centuries, while the Yanacocha sequences show the current (and expanding) operation of a so-called modern mine. But according to Tito, the scenes from Bolivia also represent 'the future that Nélica fears' meaning that the pollution and environmental destruction associated with older mines would be the legacy of mineral extraction in Cajamarca. The possibility of a 'clean' gold that could be used in the jewellery industry is a view to a less polluting industry, an alternative for the future. The director's efforts to show the nuance and complexity of people's lives are offset by the tendency to depict a more heroic narrative, as is often the case in documentaries about environmental conflicts. This heroic narrative downplays the divisions within communities, including people who support the project and those who have a more ambivalent position, one that may oscillate depending on their needs and the benefits that they can acquire from the company.

The documentary's story about the Peruvian Andes (focusing on the Yanacocha and Conga mines) shows the resolute opposition to mining embodied by Nélica and the film's other key protagonist, Máxima. At the time of filming, Máxima was a Peruvian peasant woman living on the land where the Yanacocha Mining Company wanted to develop the Conga mine. Máxima fought Yanacocha in court and received the support and admiration of people around the world for her valiant fight (as well as significant hostility from her detractors). Coincidentally, Máxima has been

called the ‘Lady of the Blue Lagoon’ (*Dama de la Laguna Azul* was the title of a newspaper article by Miranda 2012), while Néliida (who was made into the titular ‘daughter of the lake’) does not reside near the lagoons but is shown in the film with Máxima. Néliida’s community of Porcón is located downstream from the Yanacocha mine, near the city of Cajamarca, but these geographical referents and other contextual information are absent from the film, which shows both women together, interacting with the lagoons. When asked why he did not make Máxima the protagonist of the film, Tito responded that at the time he started filming, Máxima’s case was not yet well known. But he also pointed out that her struggle was different: It is about *property*. This was not, to him, as compelling as Néliida’s narrative, though it was nevertheless important to show. He felt that this particular story (about property) was the one that is usually told in the mainstream media, while Néliida’s perspective (the poetic and ‘spiritual’ dimension of her struggle to defend the lagoons) was not given sufficient attention. In other words, Néliida’s story makes clear that these struggles are not only about property, but the language of property is one that people like Máxima must rely on when presenting their case to the courts, the company, and the state.

### *Máxima’s Story*

Like Néliida’s story, the case of Máxima Acuña illustrates the local and global dimensions of resistance to mining. Following the approval of the Conga project, Máxima refused to move from her plot of land at the site of the proposed mine. The mining company claims that it bought land from the community in 1996. Máxima insists that she purchased the land two years earlier from her husband’s uncle and never gave up her rights to it. Máxima’s house is located near the Laguna Azul, one of the lagoons that risks being turned into a toxic waste deposit if the mine is built. In an interview for the Spanish *El País*, Máxima is quoted as saying: ‘I am poor and illiterate, but I know that our lagoons and our mountains are our true treasure, and I will fight so that the Conga project does not destroy them’ (Ramírez 2015). Máxima and the *Guardianes de las Lagunas* say they are fighting first and foremost against the destruction of their sources of water. The Guardianes are *campesinos* and *ronderos* (members of the *Rondas Campesinas* or rural patrol),<sup>5</sup> most of them from the *centro poblado* (hamlet) El Tambo, who have set up camp to protect the lagoons from the encroachment of mining activity.

Since 2011, when the company built a road near her house, Máxima has faced a number of aggressions from company personnel. In May 2011, her small house was burnt down and her potato fields destroyed (Zárate 2015). In August, she and her family were confronted by the police and the mine's security guards, who tried to evict them and did not hesitate to use force against them. This aggression was documented with a cellular phone but denied by the company in court and in their statements to the press. To them, and to many of her enemies and detractors, Máxima was selfish and stubborn, squatting on land that did not belong to her, and preventing others from benefiting from the mining project.

The role of social media and international solidarity networks have been crucial for legitimising and raising awareness about Máxima's plight and have brought other women into the spotlight. A group of *campesinas* featured in documentaries such as *Las Damas Azules* (the Blue Ladies), by the Catalan Association of Engineers Without Borders, exposed the abuses committed against Máxima during vigils held at the San Francisco Church in the city of Cajamarca. These women also witnessed the actions taken by the company against Máxima when they accompanied her at her house in Tragadero Grande to lend their support. One of the women also acted in defence of Milton Sánchez, Secretary General of the *Plataforma Institucional Celendina* (PIC), when he was intimidated by the police during a march against the Conga project in 2014. After confronting the police, she was arrested along with some of her companions and taken to the police station in Cajamarca. When Milton Sánchez told this story, he affirmed: '*Hay Máximas aquí*' (There are [many] Máximas here). As we can see, 'Máxima' refers not to one person but became a symbol for the many women who defended their right to protest and denounced the state for not recognising this right.

Another woman who emerged as a prominent actor in Máxima's legal battles against Minera Yanacocha was Grufides lawyer Mirtha Vasquez, who became one of her closest allies. The courts initially found Máxima guilty of illegal land occupation, handing her a prison sentence of almost three years and a fine of USD 2000. Máxima appealed and in 2014, a higher court ruled in her favour and lifted the charges against her, a decision that was supported by the Supreme Court in spite of Minera Yanacocha's objections. Regardless of the court rulings, the company has continued its efforts to evict Máxima, through both intimidation and force. But Máxima's struggle—often described as a battle between David and Goliath—also attracted the support of people in Peru and internationally.

An important moment in building alliances was when delegations from various countries arrived in Cajamarca for the First International Encounter of the *Guardianes de las Lagunas* in El Tambo. Held in the first week of August 2014, this event was attended by people from Colombia, Argentina, Spain (the Basque Country and Cataluña), Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and the Netherlands. Particularly noteworthy was the participation of delegates from France, among them the group *Solidarité avec Cajamarca, Aynne-France*, associations of Peruvians in France, and the French Senator Laurence Cohen. Also present were members of the NGO Grufides and the *Plataforma Institucional Celendina*, and Hugo Blanco, a well-known political figure and leader of the *Confederación Campesina del Perú* (Campesino Confederation of Peru).

In the evening programme the documentary *The Guardians of the Lagoons* (*Los Guardianes y Guardianas de las Lagunas*) was shown, along with a preview screening of the first part of *La Hija de la Laguna*, with the presence of members of Guarango. The French delegates also showed a documentary that told the stories of several *campesinas* active in the campaigns against Conga (e.g., *La Ronderita Shilica*). The construction of figures like Máxima and Névida, as well as other female leaders, was influenced by the activists' intentional focus on gender, considered to be a crucial aspect of social justice work. Though it may be the case that the mining-development discourse tends to exclude women, it is necessary to also keep in mind the risks identified by Spivak (2010) and Abu-Lughod (2002) of 'Western' women constructing an image of the 'Third World woman' as lacking agency. However, in the documentaries mentioned, activists took special care not to 'speak for' the women but to let them tell their own stories and to be the protagonists of the films.

On the first day of the encounter, participants received the news that Máxima and her family had been ordered to vacate their land and pay 5000 soles for allegedly usurping Minera Yanacocha's property. The following day, as planned, event participants marched to the El Perol lagoon, passing by Máxima's house where people, including the French senator, expressed their solidarity with Máxima.<sup>6</sup>

Though her case is not an isolated one, Máxima has become a national and international icon of popular resistance to extractive industries. She has travelled to meet with activists in France and Belgium and, most recently, to the United States, where she was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in a ceremony in San Francisco. In lieu of an acceptance speech when receiving the prize, she sang a melancholy song that

told of her hardships and her desire to protect the lagoons in the face of police and corporate aggression. Máxima's habit of using song seems to be inspired by her Evangelical faith (combined with a strong Andean lyrical tradition), and she usually sings religious hymns. Her Evangelical faith is not usually mentioned in media or activist accounts and is a significant difference from Névida, who invokes her grandfather's teachings about what she calls the *cosmovisión andina* ('Andean cosmovision', a term that has been popularised by the media and used by Névida in her interviews with the press) and whose community of Porcón is traditionally Catholic.

Máxima's case has inspired comparisons with other women involved in environmental struggles, including the case of Bertha Cáceres, another Goldman Prize winner who was tragically killed in Honduras after speaking out against the construction of the Agua Zarca dam. But Máxima's story is also different in some respects: she does not consider herself an activist and is not a leader with previous experience. In one of the many news profiles written about her, Máxima's struggle is portrayed a personal one: 'Máxima Acuña explains that she only wants to preserve the only life she knows and that belongs to her: harvest potatoes, milk cows, knit blankets, drink water from the springs and fish for trout in the Laguna Azul without a guard telling her "that's private property"' (Zárate 2015). Máxima's struggle could be said to be about property and resources, but it is also more than this; it is about the defence of life that can only be made *in place*.

During a visit to her home in Tragadero Grande in September 2014, Máxima said to us: 'The land will shelter me until god takes me to heaven; is a van worth all of that?' This statement was reminiscent of other comments about Yanacocha's relationship with communities. For example, a Cajamarca-based teacher claimed that the kind of development encouraged by Yanacocha was intended to make it possible for everyone to acquire a Hilux (Toyota) van. The teacher, Nora, explained that the van corrupted the autonomy of the *campesino*: 'If [the van] breaks down, you have to take it to the mechanic. On our land, we plant, and if something happens, we plant again.'<sup>7</sup> This vision of life is based on people's relationship with the land (and water), and emphasises the need for *campesinos* to design their own life projects, to depend on others in a way that does not compromise their autonomy and to sustain their relationships with the human and nonhuman world. From the perspective of Máxima and Nora, the act of sowing is done in relationship *with* the land, which, as Máxima says, never abandons you (*nunca desampara*).<sup>8</sup>

Shortly before the announcement of the Goldman Prize winners, Newmont announced that it would not pursue the Conga project due to the ‘current social and political environment’ (Newmont Mining Corporation 2016). Among other considerations, the company acknowledged that local opposition was one of the factors leading to the decision (Jamasmie 2016). Welcoming the announcement, Máxima stated: ‘The fact is our way of life, and the clean water we need to sustain it, is more important to us than Newmont’s new gold mine ever could be. We know from Newmont’s Yanacocha mine that, no matter their promises, we can’t have both the mine and our way of life’ (Earthworks 2016). Máxima’s statements, unlike Névida’s, do not appeal to a sentient, agentive nature. It could be said that her ways of expressing her connection to the land are based on her everyday survival, which depends on having access to clean water. For her, mining is incompatible with her way of life—the two cannot coexist, but she refuses to accept that she must make way for extractive activity.

As an article in *The Guardian* notes, ‘environmental activism was probably not what Máxima had in mind when she refused to sell her 60 acre plot of land’ to the mining company (Collins 2016). Yet Máxima’s struggle is representative of new forms of activism that are shaping conflicts over extraction in Latin America. These forms of activism do not necessarily conform to the values or discourses of international environmental or indigenous movements but are sometimes embraced by them. In some cases, the global embrace of anti-mining campaigns by international media and solidarity activists can reinforce simplistic narratives about traditional knowledge and stereotypes of indigenous peoples. Simultaneously, however, activists are complicating these narratives with practices that challenge nature-culture binaries, break down divisions between local and global, and disrupt assumptions about indigeneity, local knowledge, and ‘authenticity’.

### SOUTH-SOUTH ACTIVISM: LA HIJA DE LA LAGUNA AND RIO CAMAQUÃ, BRAZIL

In a recent Facebook post, the producers of the film *La Hija de la Laguna* showed the wide availability of the documentary, which, through the streaming service Netflix, has been made available in 190 countries. The opportunity to work with Netflix signified a major break for Guarango, giving the film much more attention than its earlier films. The documentary

has also travelled in the film festival circuit and through academic and activist networks. We want to focus on one of the film's many journeys, to São Lourenço do Sul, Brazil,<sup>9</sup> to show the international appeal of the film, its local uptake, and its impact on a mining conflict in the region.

Since 2016, professors and students from the São Lourenço do Sul campus of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG) have been giving their support to the organisation *Rio Camaquã-União pela Preservação* (UPP). The UPP is made of residents, farmers, and teachers fighting against the development of a mining project to extract lead, zinc, and copper from Minas Camaquã in the district of Caçapava do Sul. This mining project, called Projeto Caçapava do Sul,<sup>10</sup> is being proposed by the Votorantim Metals Holding (now Nexa Resources) and would be located 2.2 km from the Camaquã River in a reserve called *bioma pampa* (Pampa ecosystem) (Votorantim 2016). This river is a tributary of the Laguna de los Patos and provides water to São Lourenço do Sul and 27 other municipalities such as Caçapava do Sul, Cristal, Camaquã, Bagé, and Pinheiro Machado.

In 2016, a biology professor from the São Lourenço do Sul campus of the FURG noticed on Facebook a pronouncement by the UPP against the development of the mining project at Caçapava do Sul. Students and faculty members visited the municipality of Pinheiro Machado for one of the public hearings for the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Some days prior, the faculty members had met to review the EIA, and they were prepared to provide an independent evaluation of the document and speak publicly against the approval of the project. It was also an important opportunity because it brought together members of the university and UPP representatives, primarily cattle ranchers from the municipality of Bagé.

Since 2016, family farmers, academics, and residents of the affected municipalities have organised to prevent the development of Votorantim's lead, zinc, and copper mine under the slogan *Mineração, Aqui Não!* (Mining, Not Here!) proposed by local organisations. The FURG professors supporting the struggle (primarily through the programme in Environmental Management) decided to organise a conference on the impacts of mining activity (*Seminário Regional sobre os Impactos dos Projetos de Mineração*) jointly with the Faculty Union to raise awareness about the problems in the southern part of their state. They also planned to invite activists from other Latin American countries, including Peru. Adriana Paredes Peñafiel (a faculty member at FURG) was also approached because of her previous research on the Conga conflict in Peru. She suggested inviting María—a female 'guardian' of the Mamacocha Lagoon in the area of the Conga Project and

a *rondera*—who had been one of her primary collaborators during her fieldwork in El Tambo, Cajamarca. Since the organising committee did not know María personally, Adriana emailed them the link to the documentary *Las Damas Azules* (available online) so that they could acquaint themselves with her. Once they watched the film, they made the decision to invite María to participate in the conference. In this way, documentaries can serve to legitimise the struggle of grassroots activists and facilitated María's participation in the event.<sup>11</sup>

Also before the conference, *La Hija de la Laguna* was screened in São Lourenço do Sul, followed by a group discussion with professors, students, and activists.<sup>12</sup> Since most people had not heard about Máxima's ordeals, they focused their attention on Nélide. Many of the students sympathised with the 'mysticism' of the Andes that they saw in Nélide's story (mainly when Nélide talks to *La Duenda* [water spirit]), but they made explicit that it was absent in the south of Brazil, where many people of European descent did not share the same relationship with water as was depicted in the film. This 'exotic' aspect defined the film's Andean protagonists for many viewers. Nevertheless, students in particular seemed to identify with Nélide, who is shown studying law as a way to help her community; the Brazilian students envisioned their own courses in Environmental Management as a means to work against the impacts of mega-development projects in their own country.<sup>13</sup>

On the day of the conference, María was invited to speak as part of a panel about her experiences fighting against the Conga project in Cajamarca. She presented herself as 'indigenous' (a term that she previously did not use) and as 'daughter of the land of the Collemarcas'. Performing indigeneity in these ways may help generate 'authority for making claims on institutions and forging alliances' (Pratt 2010: 402), lending credence to her story and helping to forge commonalities with other communities affected by extraction. María then sang, as Máxima has done in public events. Alvira Briñez (2017), who also writes about María and Máxima, explains that songs and poems are more than artistic forms of expression. Inspired by Walsh (2017), the author calls them 'esthetic-pedagogical practices', which are described as feelings and thoughts that resonate with the ways of life of *campesinos* because they come from lived experience. In order to be shared and understood by others, the recipients of the messages have to feel/experience too. María concluded her intervention by saying: 'I will fight until the last cartridge has been fired' (*voy a luchar hasta quemar el último cartucho*).<sup>14</sup> These last phrases had a strong





Fig. 9.1 Maríá singing, São Lourenço do Sul, Brazil. (Photograph: Sedufsm, 2017)

impact on the families who had been impacted by the mining project, who said that they, too, like Maríá, would resist ‘even if blood must be shed’.

According to one of the students in attendance, Maríá’s story was the subject of much discussion among the audience members: ‘She spoke from memory, she wasn’t trying to please anyone, she just told her story.’ Her song, the strong feelings that it evoked, and the energy she transmitted reminded them of Nélide. ‘She’s wonderful, strong.... I feel her strength when I’m by her side’, the student commented (Fig. 9.1).

The events during the conference show how people create new connections and reflections based on the images and stories that activist networks present them. The images transmitted through documentaries and social media are powerful: the Yanacocha mine transforming the landscape, the women fighting for their land, Father Arana being dragged away by the police, the water march, and other images resonated with activists from the UPP and other residents of traditional communities who attended the conference. Invited Brazilian activists of the UPP spoke about childhood memories and oral stories of their ancestors: the *gauchos* who inhabited the Pampas. They wrote poems inspired by the River Camaquã, like the ‘Prayer for a clean Camaquã River’ (Oração de um rio Camaquã limpo), that opens an online petition against the mining project:

Oh! Your man,  
 Above law and order  
 In this your lack of consciousness  
 You want to kill your beloved home  
 Without the children agreeing  
 But, too late, you will understand  
 Even if you are not alone,  
 Even with your gold dust,  
 To simple dust you will return.  
 (Diogo Corrêa, member of the UPP)

*Oh! Tu homem...  
 Acima da lei e a ordem,  
 nesta a tua inconsciência  
 queres matar a querência,  
 sem que seus filhos concordem,  
 Porém, tardio, entenderás,  
 que mesmo não estando só,  
 por mais que teu ouro em pó,  
 ao simples pó, voltarás...*

The Brazilian activists did not talk about the *bioma pampa* that was threatened by the mining project as ‘nature’ in the sense of being separate from culture, according to a dualist modern ontology (see Descola 2013). Rather, they talked about their relation to place, the importance of the River Camaquã, and the need to protect it at all cost. This brings to mind the testimony of a teacher from the Cajamarca city region, Nora, who spoke of her memories of playing in the Maschcón River (in the vicinity of the Yanacocha mine). Nora recounted that people avoided going near the river in fear of getting sick: ‘My family is from here, we cohabited with the Río Maschcón when it had life, frogs, cobras. Since the arrival of the mine (Yanacocha), there is no life, now it only brings allergies. Now my nephew can’t play in the river and he doesn’t even believe that the river once had life’ (Paredes Peñafiel 2016: 188). Nora alleged that her older nephews at least have memories of playing in the river, but the younger ones have not had these experiences. These relationships to the land create a sense of place and of belonging to that place.

How do people interpret stories about experiences that have touched them personally? One of the audience members in the conference at the FURG commented that, when he arrived on the first day, he heard María sing, and that singing was fundamental to social movement organising because there is feeling in these struggles. A student also noted that María’s song communicated with the audience through feeling, something that would escape those who only want to understand through reason. It is through this emotive dimension that the Brazilian activists and people who are also victims of mining projects could connect with Nélide, Máxima, and María and recognise their common struggle for the defence of place.

Documentaries, conferences, and other activist spaces of exchange provoke sympathies (maybe what de Castro would call ‘uncontrolled equivocations’<sup>15</sup>) that allow these environmental heroes to travel around the world. However, these exchanges can also produce friction and disagreement. During María’s stay in São Lourenço do Sul, she was invited to speak to university students and professors about the role of the *Rondas Campesinas*. María spoke eloquently about the ‘traditional customs’ of the *rondas*, including the discipline that they administer as a form of justice and that sometimes involves physical punishment, depending on the crimes or infractions committed. This aspect of *rondas* justice caused some controversy in the classroom. The rejection of these practices was evident when the professors, in future events that made mention of María’s visit to Brazil, limited themselves to describing the *Rondas Campesinas* in terms of their role as ‘guardians of the lagoons’.

The stories told by María, Névida, and Máxima are translated and transformed as they are discussed in political and academic spaces. These women do not speak the language of the audience, but their stories—and, perhaps most powerfully, their songs—are forms of expression that the audience (at least, those who are open to it) could take seriously. Alvira Briñez (2017) explains that aesthetic-pedagogical practices have different roles and objectives (pedagogical, self-recognition, form of expression, political, among others) and one of them is to transmit meaning to others.

After the seminar, María sang to the lake (*lagoa dos Patos*) that is threatened by the Votorantim company and her video (posted on Facebook) was presented at another conference to show that there are other relationships with water and that Brazilians can learn from them. Adriana was invited to ‘explain’ the video and discussed it with other invited traditional communities. The organiser wanted to know about the ‘religiosity’ of Andean people and their relationship with water in order to teach the students why people are against mining. At the event, an indigenous Paxató leader responded to the video by explaining that nature has an ‘owner,’ and when someone wants to take something without asking for permission, there are consequences. Various audience members translated María’s relationship with the lake from their own perspective, adapting it to their own struggles but nevertheless extending María’s original message and the voices of other women leaders whose stories have reached a global audience. As the anthropologist Luisa Elvira Belaunde told us when she listened to the songs of María<sup>16</sup>: ‘Lots of Peruvians are not interested in listening to these songs, but the soul of the lakes sing within them.’

## CONCLUSION

Recent conflicts in Peru have attained unprecedented international media exposure, forcing companies and the state into the spotlight and galvanising those opposed to mining expansion. Campaigns against Conga and other extraction projects have had a significant impact on local, national, and global debates around extractive activity, demonstrating the transformative nature of grassroots activism and its capacity to reinvigorate environmental politics. As we have seen from the cases discussed, resistance against extractive activity does not only involve indigenous people. As de la Cadena (2015) notes: ‘Among other demands, local worlds—labeled indigenous or not—defy the monopoly of modern practices in making, inhabiting and defining nature.’ Regardless of their various iterations, these local worlds defy the dominant view of nature that sees humans as the principal agents and proposes technocratic solutions like building reservoirs to replace natural lagoons. Yet international coverage of mining conflicts often presents communities and activists as indigenous, even though they might not necessarily identify as such. These representations of indigeneity may be problematic, in that they perpetuate the romantic ideal of indigenous people being environmental stewards of the land, ignoring the diversity of opinions about mining development that often divides communities.

In spite of the elements of romaniticisation displayed in *La Hija de la Laguna* and other documentaries, their impact and potential to inspire activism is also evident. According to one professor who participated in the Brazilian conference on mining: ‘Perhaps the tools we use in the struggle are different (in the Andes, there are popular movements, and here we try to stop the mining project by finding errors in the Environmental Impact Assessment). Nevertheless, *La Hija de la Laguna* has shown us that the *modus operandi* of the company is similar to what is happening here, and that what is happening to the *campesinos* in Peru is like what is happening with our traditional peoples in Brazil—fishermen, small rural producers, all those who are ignored in the process.’ The Conga conflict resonated with the Brazilian situation in spite of the differences involved and the particular lens of the spokespersons (whether filmmakers, activists, or *campesinas*) who transmitted their accounts of the events.

The stories of Máxima, Nélide, and María have some similarities. The three women defy the classifications and positions of subalternity assigned to them by the state and Peruvian society. Máxima refused to sell her land, as did the rest of the families in her community, challenging the logic of capitalism. At the same time, each of these women needs to know other

languages and worlds in order to reclaim their rights. Máxima has done this through legal channels, alongside her lawyer and ally Mirtha Vasquez, and in the process gained the support of environmentalists. In Nélica's case, connecting worlds means speaking about 'water spirits' to international audiences and also studying law as a way of working for justice. Meanwhile, María transmits her feelings and captivates her audience through songs that tell of her struggles as a *rondera* and *campesina*, while also expressing the suffering of the lagoons. The three are able to move between worlds, and doing so allows them to make themselves understood.

Nélica, Máxima, and María have been involved in struggles over mining and engage with local worlds in ways that challenge the definition of nature proposed by the mining company and the state, even if they do so in different ways. This difference is not simply one between 'spirituality' and 'property', since neither term fully captures the relationship that they have with the land or with the various local and international actors entwined in their struggles. Rather, they are alternative life-making projects that are inspiring activists in the global North and South. Stories of local resistance take form, travel, and are rescripted along the way by participants, journalists and filmmakers, solidarity activists, and their various audiences. Their effects can be unpredictable, unintended, and far-reaching. By destabilising established ideas about nature, indigeneity, and development, these life-making projects (amplified for a global audience) may pose a growing challenge to the politics of extractivism.

## NOTES

1. Established in 1989 by San Francisco philanthropists Richard and Rhonda Goldman, the prize is presented each year to six people representing each of the world's inhabited continental regions ([goldmanprize.org](http://goldmanprize.org)).
2. Huanca is part of the FENUCARUNAP, the National Federation of Peasant, Artisan, Indigenous, Native, and Working Women of Peru.
3. *La Hija de la Laguna* marks a shift in style from these earlier films on mining. This may be due in part to the departure of Stephanie Boyd, the earlier films' codirector and coproducer, leaving Ernesto Cabellos in charge of the direction of the most recent film.
4. While the meaning and usage of *Pachamama*, *Madre Tierra*, or mother earth changes over time and in different contexts (from new-age spirituality to ecotourism), these terms have been adopted in recent political struggles to include environmental justice, indigenous autonomy and the defence of worlds, and the rights of nature within a biocentric worldview (Walsh 2017).

5. According to Gitlitz (2013), the *rondas* from Cajamarca emerged in 1976 as a communal response to cattle rustling, theft, and sexual assault. With the passing of time, the *rondas*' system of justice dealt with other types of problems, including the circulation of rumours, disagreements between neighbours, disputes over inheritance, property rights, and even sorcery. Today, the defence of the lagoons and other sources of water has also come to be part of some *ronderos*' duties.
6. Another action in support of Máxima, with the help of social media, was a call for photographs of people holding signs that read 'solidarity with Máxima'. This action was spearheaded by a European woman who was active with a Celendín-based organisation and took place during the court case brought against Máxima by Minera Yanacocha. Máxima was ultimately absolved of the charge of illegal land appropriation.
7. According to Walsh (2017: 40): 'to sow is an insurgent act'.
8. This relationship could also be seen in the chapter by Stensrud (this volume), who discusses the meaning of *ownership* that involves diplomatic pacts (like *pagos a la tierra*) between people and earth-beings that are ignored by the state and its project of development.
9. This is a municipality in the southern part of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, with a population of 44,561 people (IBGE 2017) and a diversity of traditional communities such as the *quilombolas*, fishers, cattle ranchers, the *cigano* people, the *pomerano*, indigenous collectives, and others who cohabit around the Laguna de los Patos (Los Patos Lagoon) (Mazurana et al. 2016).
10. The project will consist of three open-pit mines and a beneficiation plant. The life of a mine is expected to be 20 years and it is estimated to start in 2019. The goal is to achieve a production of 36,000 tonnes of lead, 16,000 tonnes of contained zinc, and 5000 tonnes of contained copper, plus a small amount of silver, per year.
11. More than legitimising the struggles they depict, documentaries like those on mining conflicts are part of what the anthropologist Albert (Kopenawa and Albert 2015) identifies as an *ethnographical pact* that entails mutual obligations between the researchers and their interlocutors. People accept being objectivised if researchers (or in this case, filmmakers) adequately represent their struggles to the same society that violate their rights (see Viveiros de Castro 2015).
12. *La Hija de la Laguna* became available on Netflix a few months before the conference. A FURG student saw the film and passed the information over Facebook to a member of the conference organising committee. She circulated the information over social media, with images of the 2012 *Marcha del Agua* (Water March) in Peru. The conference organisers used a photograph of a mural in El Tambo (painted during the Conga conflict and taken by Adriana Paredes Peñafiel) for the poster and T-shirt for the event, along with a phrase from the documentary: 'Water belongs to the people, not to the

- mining companies' (translated into Portuguese as *A água é do Povo*, referring to the traditional peoples opposed to the Caçapava do Sul mining project).
13. Another part of the film that seemed to resonate with the audience was archival footage showing Father Marco Arana (at the time a key activist in the conflicts against mining in Cajamarca) sitting in the main square of the city holding a protest sign when a group of policemen drag him away violently and arrest him. The screening of the film coincided with protests of the coup against ex-President Dilma in 2016, in which students and faculty members had participated. Against this political backdrop, the arrest and police treatment of Father Arana were much discussed and associated with the treatment of protestors in the marches that audience members had experienced. Clearly, the political context and lived experiences of the viewers of the film have a significant influence on the associations, meanings, and reflections that *La Hija de la Laguna* provoked.
  14. A national slogan supposedly originating in the War of the Pacific (1879–1884).
  15. Viveiros de Castro describes an uncontrolled equivocation as 'a type of communicative disjuncture where the interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, and do not know this' (2004: 9).
  16. Personal communication. Belaunde's work focuses on the political dimensions of visual and performance arts.

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