

The Performance of Water Governance as Cultural Heritage in Peru

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Abstract

In this article, I apply performance theory and analysis to the examination of a performative community-based water governance system in the Peruvian Andes. I weave together performance studies and natural resource governance practice through Jacques Derrida's concept of iterability – the inherent capacity of an iteration to be deciphered and re-iterated beyond its immediate, present context. I ask what idea and what practice of natural resource governance are enabled through the performative iterations of a rural community's ancient ritualised relationship with water. I focus my analysis on the town of Corongo, in Northern Peru, and its water management system, whose heritage status was globally recognised through its inclusion on UNESCO's 2017 Representative List of Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This analysis leads me to a wider consideration of some of the types of contributions that performance studies can make to environmental political theory and environmental policy making as well as to political and critical discussions about how to transition towards more environmentally sustainable societies. I argue that ritual performance is the language with which Coronguinos (people from Corongo) carry out water governance at a local level and the means by which they produce and transfer a consciousness of themselves as a water heritage community. Performance operates in Corongo by means of an ancient chain of restored behaviours, structuring Coronguinos' lived relationship with their natural environment as well as shaping their awareness of the key role that embodied, performative water governance plays in the definition of their cultural identity and heritage.

Keywords: Performance and ecology, Ritual performance, Andean water rituals

Article

San Pedro de Corongo's Water Judges (WJs) are the heads of a political and administrative system for the ritual and practical management of the river waters that flow through this town, nestled in an inter-Andean valley in central Peru at 3,150 metres above sea level.¹ The office of WJ is filled yearly on a voluntary basis by two adult men, who are mandated to execute two related functions.² The first is administering and supervising everyday on-the-ground water management tasks, including water distribution among all users for agriculture and livestock purposes, as well as settling disputes and potential disagreements over misuses of water. The second function involves organising, presiding over, and hosting Corongo's four main ritual celebrations: the ceremonies for the inauguration in office of the incoming WJs (January), Carnival (February), Easter and the Fiesta de San Pedro (Saint Peter's Feast, a celebration of the town's patron saint in June).

In this article, I focus on the January festivities, which are Corongo's welcome to their new WJs at the start of the year and include a swearing-in ceremony day, on the first day of the month, and a ritual cleaning of Corongo's water infrastructure on 7 and 8 January annually. Through a performance analysis of this festival, I show how water governance is enabled through ritual performances that relate to Coronguinos' ancient lived, embodied relationship with their natural surroundings. Indeed, WJs are not only a natural resource governance system for Coronguinos but also a core part of their communal and personal identity, history, and heritage. The current iteration of this system and the rituals that structure it date back to at least the nineteenth century and, as I will explain in greater detail in the first section of this article, they are the result of a process of syncretic interactions that can be traced back millennia.³

I argue that each successive iteration of this festival is a re-iteration of a system of knowledge and values that integrates water governance and its performance into a unified set of practices: the everyday technical tasks of water administration and the performative rituals related to it. Both inform, shape, and confer authority upon each other. The extent to which this practice of performative water governance *is* Corongo's heritage can be best understood through Jacques Derrida's concept of iterability or recitation. This is 'the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication'.⁴ Iterability acknowledges the inherent capacity of any sign to detach itself from the context of its immediately discernible production in the absence of the sign's sender or receiver and, thus, its ability to be read and recited in new contexts. In this article, I claim that each recitation of the WJs' festivities is ghosted by previous iterations and it carries in itself,

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² To serve as WJ one must own or farm land in Corongo and have sufficient material means and local social connections to organise and host the town's major fiestas. Historically, men have largely occupied the role, as Corongo is a highly patriarchal society. There have been some instances of female WJs (in 1948, 1949, 1954, 2008, 2016, and 2018) but they had to be 'represented' by a male relative during both everyday managerial tasks and ritual ceremonies.

³ Surviving written records first register the names of Corongo's WJs in 1895, but the tradition is older. Records are incomplete due to a fire in the early twentieth century. Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, ed., *Jueces de agua. Sistema tradicional de Corongo* (Lima: Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, 2016), 131.

⁴ 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 12.

because of its ability to be cited and re-cited, the possibility of its sustainable transmission into the future. In this sense, the yearly repetitions of Corongo's WJs' rituals are the performative recitation of a chain of iterations, 'which are implied in the present act and which perpetually drain any "present" act of its presentness'.⁵

Because performance rituals play a vital role in the ways in which communities worldwide engage with their ecology, it is important to develop in-depth approaches to understanding how performance operates and effects natural resource governance. The United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes natural resources, and water in particular, one of its key focal points. A central pledge of the Agenda is that 'no one is left behind'. I argue that an inclusive sustainable development plan needs to encompass both the concept of performance and the many forms that local performative traditions can take. For many peoples around the world, performing their cultural memory is indispensable to their sense of identity. It is an explicit, vital mode of sustaining communal culture as well as place and environment attachment. Performance is how they express, shape, enact, and manage their relationship with the places where they live and their natural environments. Should these performative languages not be included in international and national climate change discussions and policies, these peoples will be inevitably left out and left behind.

This article inscribes itself in the field of performance and ecology, which is progressively gaining traction in the Anglophone academy.⁶ I offer an interdisciplinary approach to the field, applying performance analysis and theory to the examination of local-level community-based water governance in order to ask broader questions about the contributions that performance studies and analysis can make to environmental political theory and environmental policy making. I develop this examination in three sections. First, I concentrate on the events that take place in Corongo on the 1 January, when the town's WJs are sworn into office. Here, I analyse the ways in which performance enables and produces water governance practice and heritage locally. Then, in the second section, I place these performative traditions within their wider national, regional, cultural, and sociopolitical backgrounds in order to contextualise these practices as well as their makers and their target audiences. Finally, I focus on the town's ritual maintenance of their water infrastructure, which takes place on 7 and 8 January. I conclude by considering some of the implications of the performance analysis model that I propose for the fields of environmental theory and policy making.

1 January: The Water Judges' Installation

It is a crisp early morning with clear blue skies on 1 January 2019 in Corongo. The start of the new year marks one of the most important days in the calendar of Coronguinos. It is the day when the town celebrates the inauguration of its WJs. The air is cold this January morning as the town gets ready for the swearing-in ceremony, which will take place at mid-morning. Coldness in the air is to be expected at this time of the day in the Andes, but today the air's dryness is rather unusual. Late December is normally the start of the rainy season in the Peruvian Andes and, as the locals often

⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 244, note 5.

⁶ See, for example, Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May, eds., *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Birgit Däwes and Marc Maufort, eds., *Enacting Nature: Ecocritical Perspectives on Indigenous Performance* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2014); Rachel Fensham, Eddie Paterson, and Paul Rae, eds., 'On Climates', *Performance Research* 23, no. 3 (2018); Deirdre Heddon and Sally Mackey, eds., 'Environmentalism', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 17, no. 2 (2012); Carl Lavery, ed., *Performance and Ecology. What Can Theatre Do?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

remark, the region's climate is changing, making rainfall scarcer and more unpredictable, and the air temperature warmer. The outgoing WJ, Nilo Lezama Asencio, asserts the link between the office and changes in local weather patterns: 'climate change is making the office of WJ all the more important because not anyone can be WJ. You have to know the land and how to distribute available water fairly. Only a local WJ would be able to do this now rain is so capricious'.⁷

The streets are still quiet at 7am but in the next few hours, this small town of only around 3,000 inhabitants will burst with music and people.⁸ In 2018, Lezama Asencio had been WJ of *Parte arriba* or Upper Part, one of the two sectors into which the town's territory is divided. As the Corongo river flows from higher grounds in this mountainous region, it cuts the town and its arable lands into Upper Part (the upstream riparian area) and *Parte abajo* (Lower Part, the downstream area). Each sector is overseen and managed by its own WJ who lives and farms or owns lands in their local area. Thus, the office of *Juez de agua parte arriba* (Upper Part Water Judge) ought to be filled by someone who lives and farms in Upper Part as they lead and coordinate the management of waters that irrigate this sector. In turn, *Juez de agua parte abajo* (Lower Part Water Judge) mirrors their counterpart's role for the waters in their sector. The river thus structures Corongo's spatial and political orders, mediating between, but also integrating, both sides of the town, their people, and the use they make of irrigation water for their own subsistence.

This confluence of the spatial and the political results in a dual form of governance of communal natural resources which dates back to pre-colonial Peru (before 1533) and is part of Corongo's larger water heritage. A dual political and administrative division of the territory was indeed characteristic of the native Inca Empire (approximately 1438-1533) and is still widely present in the Peruvian Andes. The Incas divided towns and cities into two basic administrative sectors: *hurin* (lower part) and *hanan* (upper part), assigning to each equivalent political authorities called *varayoqs*.⁹ As the Inca spread across the Andes, they dominated less militarily and economically powerful civilisations and imposed their own forms of territorial and political administration on them. Corongo was one of the many places inhabited by such civilisations where an Inca bipartite system of territorial and natural resource management was imposed through local-level water authorities (*yaku kamayoqs*).¹⁰ During Peru's colonial era (1532-1824), the Spanish assimilated such authorities and denominated them as 'water judges'; the first of these officials was appointed in Lima in 1555.¹¹

But Corongo's water heritage is steeped in a tradition that runs deeper than the Incas. *Yaku kamayoqs* replaced similar administrators from pre-Inca cultures that had ruled the wider region in which Corongo lies today: the Wari (approximately 600-1200) and before them the Chavín (approximately 1300-300 BCE). These cultures possessed complex hydraulic knowledge and built and managed reservoirs, irrigation canals, and wells, among others forms of water infrastructure.¹²

⁷ Personal interview, Corongo, January 2, 2019.

⁸ José Antonio Salazar Mejía and Jorge Trevejo Méndez, 'Los jueces de aguas de Corongo. Tradición y modelo ancestral de gestión de recursos', Unpublished document, 2.

⁹ Billie Jean Isbell, 'Parentesco andino y reciprocidad Kuyaq: los que nos aman', in Giorgio Alberti and Enrique Mayer, eds., *Reciprocidad e intercambio en los Andes peruanos* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1974), 110, note 2.

¹⁰ Corongo's pre-Hispanic culture has been largely understudied but some scholars maintain that the two major ethnic groups that developed in the area were the Koriyungas and the Conchucos. The only apparent traces of these cultures today are place names and archaeological remains. Ministerio de Cultura, *Jueces de agua*, 24-5.

¹¹ Gilda Cogorno, *Agua e hidráulica urbana de Lima. Espacio y gobierno, 1535-1596* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2015), 55.

¹² Pedro Roel Mendizábal, 'Apuntes históricos sobre Corongo', in Ministerio de Cultura del Perú, *Jueces de agua*, 25-26.

Some scholars argue that this ancient history of water heritage in Corongo is still perceptible in the town's very name, maintaining that it means 'water country' in Culle, a local language spoken in Corongo until about 1940 that is now extinct.¹³ Today the majority of Coronguinos self-identify as *mestizos* (mixed Spanish and indigenous origins) and are monolingual Spanish speakers with passive command of the native Llaqwash language.

This chain of iterations from various pre-Hispanic indigenous cultures to colonial Spanish traditions and into modern republican times (from 1821 onwards) has been in a continuous state of becoming – both reproducing and producing anew year after year Corongo's long history of water heritage through iterative performance practices.¹⁴ Every new instantiation bears the trace of what Joseph Roach describes as a genealogy of performance. That is, a series of reiterated behaviours remembered and passed on via 'expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it, a psychic rehearsal for physical actions drawn from a repertoire that culture provides'.¹⁵ Without an identifiable, specifiable origin, the office of WJ has continued over millennia through a process of performative surrogation. As interruptions have occurred with the dominion of one culture after another and another, the role of water authority as well as the behaviours and values that flesh this role out have endured by staging such behaviours and values as annual regulated sequences in which Coronguinos perform for themselves, and thus produce and reproduce, a consciousness of themselves as a water-heritage society. In this 'progressive becoming', as Derrida describes iterative practices, produced 'by degrees of forgetting',¹⁶ or substitution, Corongo's water heritage has been created and recreated as social memory through performed embodied practice. While there have been immense cultural upheavals in the region, water heritage has remained constant across vastly different historical epochs and governing authorities. Ritual performance has been the mode of historical transmission of this continuity of water conservation knowledge.

The town's dual spatial division of its territory and river is mirrored in the structure of all ritual performances carried out in the town. Throughout the year, all rituals are performed twice and consecutively: the first iteration of the ceremony is led by one WJ and their constituency and the second iteration by their counterpart. To promote and procure the equitable sharing of duties and resources, Corongo's two sectors receive the prerogative of performing the first iteration of a celebration alternately so that Upper Part takes the lead during even-numbered calendar years and Lower Part during odd-numbered years.

On this particular morning in 2019, when I am present to observe these rituals, it is an odd-numbered year and the Upper Part's turn to carry out the first iteration of the celebrations. Every so often someone rushes into the WJ's house to help with food and drink preparations. The WJs' houses are key focal points of all fiestas in Corongo. They are the spaces where these authorities enact their role of orchestrators of the communal sharing of products made or sourced through collaborative labour. From food to drink to music, all of the central components of these celebrations are planned, organised, and delivered in the WJs' houses. It is only natural that as the sun rises on the inauguration day of the men who will assume this public office, organisers of the

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁴ Corongo is one of a number of Andean towns in Peru with water authorities rooted in pre-colonial traditions that are expressed through ritual performance. For more information and examples of both indigenous and *mestizo* water authorities, see Juan Ossio, *Etnografía de la cultura andina* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2018), 281ff.

¹⁵ *Cities of the Dead. Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 26.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 217.

day's festivities go in and out of the incoming WJs' houses making last minute checks. Walking hastily along the unpaved, narrow streets of Corongo, women carry dishes, cakes, or bread and men transport heavy loads of wood as they help to get the house ready for the breakfast that will soon be offered to everyone in town who comes to the house to salute their WJ for their new appointment. The houses' heavy wooden doors are left slightly opened, signalling that these otherwise private domestic spaces are now communal.

As one enters the house of the Upper Part WJ, it is clear that its neo-colonial architecture readily lends itself to such fluidity in the use of the home space. Its design follows the Spanish colonial house model used in the Americas, welcoming the visitor into an interior open courtyard as a central point around which all houseroms radiate. During periods of civic festive celebrations like today, when the WJ's house becomes a place of communal labour and gathering, the reception and dining rooms as well as the kitchen spill out onto the courtyard, transforming the privacy of the house into an ambiguous space where the borders between private and public, individual and communal, outdoors and indoors are blurred. None of today's houses in Corongo date back as far as the town's Spanish foundation around 1573, early in Peru's colonial era.¹⁷ However, most houses have maintained this architectural design, which allows the inner courtyard to accommodate a number of long dining tables as well as gutted pigs and guinea pigs hanging from interior balconies, and improvised fire places that heat up large pans and cauldrons next to buckets full of vegetables. The WJ's house thus retains its domesticity while transforming itself into an ebullient place of cooperative work and communal hosting.

Throughout the morning, guests are seated around the tables arranged in the courtyard as they arrive at the house of their WJ. Large steaming plates of goat's head soup warm them up during this shared breakfast until it is time to walk together to the council hall, where Corongo's elected mayor and other authorities will lead the new WJs' swearing-in ceremonies.

The Upper Part WJ is the first to march towards the town hall, followed by his wife, family, and neighbours. Accompanying this retinue are two musicians playing *roncadoras* – a regional tradition whereby two musicians perform the same tune at unison, each of them playing two instruments at the same time: with a flute they play the melody and with a drum the rhythm. As the Upper Part WJ and his retinue walk towards the town hall, the *roncadoras* break the still silence of this morning and fill Corongo's streets with music as they announce the presence of the new WJ. Once in the town hall, not only the WJ but also his wife and closest collaborators are all sworn into office. Although the position of WJ is headed by two men, it very much entails a collaborative effort. Without their network of collaborators, the WJs would not be able to fulfil their duties.

Collaboration, reciprocity, and equity lie at the heart of how Coronguinos view and understand their life together. Since these values are the foundation of the town's understanding of water governance, they are also central to the two functions that WJs perform: the day-to-day tasks necessary for water distribution and the re-presentation of water governance by means of performance rituals. Routinely, water management requires the participation of all water users in both the decision-making process (of water allocation amounts and distribution times) and its implementation. To execute these tasks, each WJ appoints a group of close collaborators – normally about four to six male mid-level officers called *campos* (fields), who accept the position as a favour and commitment to their WJ and the broader community. Implicit in this agreement is the duty of the WJ to return the favour at some point in the future in a reciprocal way to the next WJ. This economy of collaboration and equitable reciprocity, called *rintin* in Llaqwash, the native local language, also forms the basis of the town's performative fiestas. Organising these events is a labour- and resource-intensive responsibility. The most expensive of these, Saint Peter's

¹⁷ Ministerio de Cultura, *Jueces de agua*, 33.

celebration, cost around 325,000USD in 2018.¹⁸ Covering these costs would be impossible without Corongo's *rintin* cooperation system.

All members of this system, comprised of social connections, take part in the swearing-in ceremony of their respective WJ, thus reinforcing the idea that duties, privileges, and benefits associated with this performative form of water governance are collectively held. After repeating this civic ceremony twice, once for each WJ, the office is then ratified by the local priest in the name of Saint Peter, the town's patron saint, in a Catholic mass at the local church. While the ceremony in the town hall infuses the WJ with civil power, the mass increases this power by bestowing symbolic spiritual capital on the WJ, thus becoming an office executed to honour the town's patron Saint, and through him, to serve the town as a communal entity.

Once this mass is over, the WJs and their retinues come out of the church into the streets that surround the town's main square, where they dance, moving around the square in a parade that proclaims Corongo's newly appointed water authorities. Each retinue is followed by their own brass band made up of ten to fifteen musicians playing drums, bass drums, cymbals, clarinets, trumpets, saxophones, a French horn, and a trombone. A cacophony of music and laughter fill up the atmosphere as both bands play different tunes simultaneously with both WJs and their troupes making every effort to show they have attracted the most substantial and liveliest attendance. It is a competitive display of each WJs' convening capacity and their leadership skills.

On this first day of the year, performance provides Coronguinos a means to confer on two of its members and their extended social networks the necessary authority to collaboratively manage the town's freshwater resources. It is the community as a whole – as water stakeholders and users – that invest the WJs with political and ritual power. This accretion of uninterrupted historically grounded power will enable the recently appointed WJs to perform the necessary rituals during their first on-site managerial endeavour: supervising the annual maintenance of the town's water infrastructure. But before I examine this next part of Corongo's January fiestas, I will situate these performative practices in more detail within their regional sociopolitical and cultural contexts to articulate their specific meaning, dimension, and significance. By providing the following context, I aim to show the extent to which Corongo, like many rural communities in the Andes, is facing increased climate change vulnerability because they remain largely marginalised within the nation.

Corongo within Andean Peru

The practices that lie at the core of Corongo's WJs system correspond to a wider performative genre that dates back to pre-colonial times: Andean fiestas.¹⁹ This is a ritual performance genre that runs across Latin American Andean countries and incorporates a wide number of examples, each of which is highly site-specific and thus only interpretable within the particularities of its own immediate locale.²⁰ The genre, widely prevalent in both rural and urban settings, gives performative expression to annual celebrations of communal identity and belonging through the symbolic figure of a local Catholic patron saint, lord, or virgin.

¹⁸ This approximate number represents the expenses for the activities organised by both WJs in 2018. Estimation of this cost is the product of doubling the total expenditure of WJ Nilo Lezama Asencio in 2018 (personal interview with Nilo Lezama Asencio, Corongo, March 28, 2018).

¹⁹ For more detailed studies of the genre, see Deborah A. Poole, 'Accommodation and Resistance in Andean Ritual Dance', *The Drama Review (TDR)* 34, no. 2 (1990), 98-126; Zoila S. Mendoza, *Shaping Society through Dance: Mestizo Ritual Performance in the Peruvian Andes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

²⁰ Well-known examples include Bolivia's Fiesta de la Candelaria (also of significant importance in Peru) and Chile's Fiesta de La Tirana.

During these events, the community performs their belonging to the place where they live as an offering to the town's patron deities. The purpose of *fiestas andinas* is not only to carry out live actions for an audience but also, chiefly, to do so as a religious offering and an expression of spiritual beliefs and practices, often rooted in a relation to nature and agricultural cycles. They are dutiful tokens of communal and individual gratitude, reverence, and intimate emotional attachment to what a community considers sacred. Such practices often entail elements of religious syncretism as traces of ways of understanding life in the community and with the surrounding natural environment that date back to pre-colonial times.

Andean fiestas are a key part of a community's cultural heritage. In the case of the fiestas that lie at the base of Corongo's water governance system, these celebrations structure the town's agrarian calendar year. To borrow Diana Taylor's concept – communal water administration is at the core of the 'repertoire' of cultural traditions that make Corongo the community they are.²¹ Such is the standing and significance of these performance rituals in the town that during festive periods Corongo's regular population increases threefold. Coronguinos who emigrated to other parts of the country, particularly Lima, in search of better education and employment opportunities return to their town of origin every year to articulate and express through performance feelings of place-belonging and reaffirm communal ties. They do so even though to reach Corongo they need to take a road journey that is arduous, long, dangerous, but also breathtakingly beautiful. The journey involves narrow roads and long tunnels as one travels deep inside mountains and high up their crests traversing the Cañón del Pato (Duck Canyon), where the two mountain ranges that form the Andes meet. After countless twists and turns across the mountains, a slim single-lane unpaved road reaches the town of Corongo, located in the Corongo province, which lies in an inter-Andean valley. The challenging route to reach Corongo and the town's small scale explain in part the town's relative isolation from the rest of Peru and why it has been systematically neglected by Peru's central government more or less since Corongo was founded in the sixteenth century, even though the town constituted a strategic access point to the nearby Conchucos silver mines.²² Drinking water is supplied to most houses through pipes and is sourced from a nearby spring rather than a modern water supply network. Sewage is disposed of in pit latrines or directly into the river that runs across the town.

The national government's neglect of Corongo town is also explained by the fact that regional geographic differences matter a very great deal in Peru. The stark differences between its three principal natural areas (the coast, the Andean mountain range, and the Amazon rainforest) not only determine how rain falls in the country and runs across it, and thus Peru's water availability, but also how the people of each region experience and perceive social class and racial identity.²³ The Andes constitute a continuous highland that runs the length of South America. These vast mountains are part of a larger highlands chain, the American Mountain Range, that traverse the western side of North, Central, and South America as well as Antarctica. Lengthwise, the Andes split into various smaller ranges at whose feet fertile depressions known as inter-Andean valleys are harboured. The town of Corongo is one of these.

In Peru, the Andean mountains form a natural barrier between the coast and the rainforest. The coastal plains are arid and receive very little rain. The highlands have more regular rainfall patterns,

²¹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

²² Ministerio de Cultura, *Jueces de agua*, 32.

²³ I concentrate only on the different geographical characteristics and cultural meanings that the coast and the Andes have produced in the country's social imaginary and how they influence understandings of social class and racial hierarchies. These contrasts become more complex when considering Peru's third natural region, the Amazon rainforest – widely different from the other two and not part of the focal point of this article.

although these have been changing in the last decade due to climate change. It rains during spring and summer (October to March) and winters are arid. Precipitation falls largely over mountain ranges rather than in inter-Andean valleys, forming snow peaks and glaciers in places of high altitude. These constitute essential natural freshwater reservoirs that run down the mountains, feeding lakes and rivers throughout the country.

Because of the greater availability of water in the Andes than on the coast, the Incas settled in the former and made the present-day city of Cusco, in the Southern Peruvian Andes, the capital of their empire while also establishing a network of commerce and geopolitical dominion with less powerful civilisations based on the coast and in the rainforest. While the Incas concentrated their political power in the mountainous regions, the Spanish did so in coastal areas, founding Lima as the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru. This gave them access to the sea and therefore important strategic global connections with ports in the Americas, Africa, and Spain, while also maintaining agricultural and mining activities in the Andes and using the indigenous Andean populations for low-paid or unpaid forced labour. Spaniards and their descendants settled largely on the coast thus contributing both racial and class differences to the geopolitical disparities that developed between the two regions. Spaniards were at the top of the colonial social hierarchy while indigenous people, as well as black peoples imported from Africa as slaves, were at the bottom.

Preference for coastal settlement during colonial times meant that the region developed economically much faster and more widely than in the Andean regions, and this has continued since independence from colonial rule (1821). Today, the coast, although arid, produces export agriculture thanks to irrigation projects that depend on groundwater and river flows that descend from the highlands. In the Andes, mining is the main economic activity and agriculture is largely for subsistence. The Andean region has also the highest poverty indices in the country and is home to most indigenous peoples: according to the latest national census (2017), almost 26% of the country's population self-identifies as indigenous and about 96% of this sector is formed by cultures that reside in the Andes (Quechuas and Aimaras).²⁴

These geographical and historical factors have had enormous influence on the economic development of Corongo. In the Corongo province people depend mostly on subsistence agriculture although water is scarce during winter and in the last decade rainfall patterns have become much less predictable. Poverty indices thus run high in the province: 38% of the population is poor (in comparison to 22% nationally), 8% is extremely poor (4% nationally), and 96.6% of children under the age of one are in need of additional medical attention due to low birth weight (under 2.5 kilograms).²⁵

Poverty, historical marginalisation, geographical remoteness, the lack of sanitised water infrastructure, limited access to education, and dependence on rain-fed agriculture are all factors that contribute to the town's susceptibility to environmental change. They are considerable stressors that make Corongo particularly vulnerable as they limit the town's material ability to respond to unpredictable extreme weather events. This is why Corongo's ancient performative water governance system, comprised of accumulated local environmental knowledge, is so vital for the town's capacity to adapt to climate change. In this performance heritage lays the key to Corongo's existential sustainability and to the long-term sustainability of many communities across the Andes

²⁴ Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, Perú, *Resultados definitivos de los censos nacionales 2017*, vol. 1 (Lima: INEI, 2017), 51.

²⁵ Extreme poverty is defined in Peru as the sector of the population whose total income cannot cover a basic food basket. Centro Nacional de Planeamiento Estratégico, *Información departamental, provincial y distrital de población que requiere atención adicional y devengado per cápita*, <https://www.ceplan.gob.pe/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Informaci%C3%B3n-departamental-provincial-distrital-al-31-de-diciembre-VF.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2020).

that share this performance heritage. Such a heritage, expressed during the first day of the year at the WJs' houses and at the town's church and main square, continues its January reiteration again one week later – during the ritual celebrations of Corongo's annual maintenance of their water infrastructure. In what follows, I examine these two final days of the town's January festivals in order to consider how they bring about water governance practice and heritage through performance.

7 and 8 January: Performing Water Governance On Site

After the bustle and liveliness of the public celebrations of 1 January, Corongo returns to its habitual calm and quiet. On the surface, all activities related to the town's January fiestas seem to have ceased altogether. Work and services at the town hall and at the town's only, state-owned bank resume their normal pace; and streets and the main square are now notably less busy, almost empty. The fiesta activity continues, although it is now concentrated on the WJs' houses and at the river. The focus is exclusively around preparations for the activities that will take place during the second phase of the fiesta on 7 and 8 January. In the houses, female relatives of the WJs and their collaborators are peeling and slicing vegetables and placing them in large buckets. Men and women have slaughtered more cows and pigs, which are hooked up and hanging from the neo-baroque balustrade that surrounds the houses' central courtyards. Other women are gutting hundreds of guinea pigs and washing them in the river. Once cleaned, they are dried, hanging on laundry lines in the WJs courtyards next to the rest of the meat that is thus stored until it is time for its communal preparation just before the festive days. Food will be served on the two subsequent days, during the ritual cleaning of the town's water infrastructure, when everyone in town enjoys the lunch provided by the WJs, their *campos* and their wives on the communal grass plains by the town's two water reservoirs – one for each of the two parts of the town. Following Corongo's principle of repeating all elements of its rituals, activities organised on the seventh of the month by one side of the town are repeated on the following day by the other side.

In 2019, at the first light of dawn, all men who own or farm arable land in Corongo's Upper Part hurry towards their sector's irrigation canals and reservoir. Carrying hoes and machetes, they begin the annual maintenance of this infrastructure, which continues throughout the morning. Some men concentrate on the canals, removing overgrown tree branches, grass, and plants, as well as inspecting and fixing locks when necessary. Others work tirelessly cleaning the 5,000 m³ concrete Upper Part water reservoir. Around mid-morning, the Upper Part WJ and his *campos* leave the Judge's house and, donning fine ponchos and hats, walk to the first lock that connects the river with the Upper Part canals. Headed by the WJ bearing his sceptre, they walk along the canals accompanied by the rhythmic tune of two musicians playing *roncadoras*, inspecting the work that has been done since the early hours of the morning. They stop every time they find a group of workers along the route and encourage their labour by approaching them, dancing, and offering them drinks and coca leaves, which workers chew to suppress fatigue and hunger. Music amplifies the group's actions and contributes to the framing of this event as ritual – something outside and other than everyday work and life.

In the meantime, Upper Part women leave the house of the WJ in a group of their own. Led by the wives of the two WJs and dancing to the tune of two *roncaderas* musicians, they head towards the Upper Part reservoir and everyone in the town joins them along the way. When they reach the reservoir, trucks loaded with cooked food and drinks are waiting for them. The Upper Part women start laying down narrow hand-woven woollen cloths in long lines, one next to the other all across a field of grass that lies by the reservoir. Serving as tablecloths, the women place elaborately adorned cakes as well as bottles of beer and other alcoholic beverages on the cloths. Guests sit at both sides of each line of cloths, drinking and chatting joyfully. Increasingly, one can hear the sound of *roncadoras* approaching at a distance, announcing the imminent arrival of the WJ and his cohort of

workers from the path that leads into the canal. As this sound becomes louder, the wives of the Upper Part WJ and *campos* gather together in a group and start dancing to the tune of their own pair of *roncadoras* musicians. Dancing with short, rhythmic steps, the women move towards the junction where the canal meets the reservoir. There, at that junction, both parties meet each other and they dance to the dissonant sound of tunes played simultaneously by the men's and the women's musicians. All together, they dance around the plain and drink until, eventually, the music begins to subside and the dancers and musicians proceed to join the guests seated beside the tablecloths. Generous plates of food are then served: fried guinea pig with corn, fried pork with potatoes and cake in plenty. The entire community eats together and lunch extends well into the afternoon as people dance and drink on the plain. As daylight fades and the sun starts to set behind the surrounding mountains, they all make their way back to the town dancing in a jubilant procession that will continue until dark in the town's main square. When the evening is over, everyone returns to their homes for some necessary rest before they partake, the next day, in the same rituals but led then by the Lower Part WJ and his social network in their sector of the town.

During these last two days of Corongo's January celebrations, Coronguinos take commensality out of the space of the house and bring it into the outdoors spaces of the town's built water infrastructure. Spatially practising the town's human-engineered water-management loci through eating, drinking, and dancing together as a community, Coronguinos keep an embodied, lived relationship with their water-related built environment as well as with the values of reciprocity and equality and the managerial skills that underpin and inform their means of governing water.

By walking along the canals towards the reservoir, the WJs and their *campos* uplift the mundane action of maintenance work from its everydayness and transform it into part of a ritual carried out for devotion to Saint Peter and for the sake of creating and preserving the natural resource management traditions that are embedded in the town's feelings of communal belonging. Within this frame, the walk emits a 'meta-message', to use Gregory Bateson's term,²⁶ addressed to the townspeople that the new WJs are able to enact the ethos and skills that lie at the base of the town's water governance system. Work and performance ritual, everyday water governance, and the performance of water governance are carried out simultaneously. This effortless swirling of water governance and its performance reveals a double-consciousness at play in the participants, one that positions them as performers both of a concrete action and of the enactment of their community's water legacy.

During the January celebrations – the day of the swearing-in of the WJs as well as the days of their ritual cleaning of the town's water infrastructure – it is performance that enables the production and reproduction of community, and collaborative natural resource governance. It facilitates the display and transference of a common ethos based on reciprocity and cooperation as well as the demonstration of water governance skills. Through patterned behaviours that are repeated twice every year – once for each of the two sides of the town – Coronguinos perform their collective cultural identity as a water-heritage society. Each instantiation places Coronguinos as simultaneous players and audience members of their water heritage both in the present moment of the rituals performed in 2019 and in a chain of iteration that drains the present moment of its immediate here and now. Each iteration is the syncretic recitation of performances offered by previous local WJs, each surrogated by another in a sequence rooted in a number of cultures going back over millennia. Performing water governance in this way both replenishes and draws from a well of 'expressive movements of mnemonic reserves' that make up Corongo's cultural identity and roots it in a genealogy of performance defined by natural resource governance.²⁷

²⁶ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 177-93.

²⁷ Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 26.

Conclusions

Through this article, I have sought to demonstrate how performance studies can engage with ecological politics. I have used performance theory and analysis to offer a model for identifying and analysing the ways in which a community takes responsibility for sustainable resource governance by means of performance. This model has shown how performance constitutes the main language with which local communities articulate their cultural identity and heritage as deeply immersed within their natural surroundings. I have focused on the rural community of Corongo, whose historic context and current socio-economic reality place it, like many similar communities across the Andes and beyond, at the forefront of climate change vulnerability. I want to argue that performance studies can give specificity to what I call local-environment attachment. This idea both departs from and extends the concept of place attachment, and refers to the feelings and lived experiences of attachment that individuals and communities associate with the natural and built environments where they live. From rural to indigenous communities, to urban dwellers, we all develop feelings of attachment to our local environments.

My investigation of Corongo's WJs reveals how an ethnographic performance analysis of a highly local, very specific, small community in the Peruvian Andes unlocks larger questions about environmental sustainability and policy making for performance research methodologies. By way of conclusion, I want to concentrate briefly on two significant contributions that performance studies can make to environmental policy and theory as well as to contemporary political and critical debates about how to transition towards more environmentally sustainable societies.

First, my analysis of Corongo's WJs has shown how performance studies can extend and make more nuanced and inclusive the concept of a natural resource stakeholder. The practices that accompany and enable Corongo's WJs provide an eloquent example of the cultural significance and stature of performative modes of natural resource governance for many rural communities. Such modes play a vital role as civic performances that regulate communal life and cultural heritage while placing environmental sustainability *as a communal responsibility* at the heart of performance. By applying performance theory and analysis to performative customs that bring about community resource governance, I have demonstrated the extent to which performance can provide a language with which to enunciate, and reiterate over time, a community's relationship with its environment. Understanding this language is vital if we are to recognise communities such as Corongo as legitimate stakeholders in natural resource governance at both national and international levels.

It is important to note, however, that the idea that performance can extend the definition of who has a legitimate stake in local natural resource governance does not only have implications for rural communities who carry out such governance through performative rituals. Even though my analysis has relied on an ethnographic approach to performance analysis, this does not mean that its implications pertain only to rural or indigenous communities. Using rituals to express individual and communal relationships with the environment is not exclusive to these communities. From the Western ritualised behaviour of washing every morning, soon after getting out of bed, in places where water supply and adequate sanitation are taken for granted, to the religious and spiritual rituals of communities such as Corongo, water flows – literally – into the performances of everyday life. The difference between these cultural spaces, I would argue, is one of worldviews or ways of being in the world. In many countries in the Global North, social relationships with natural resource ritual performances is largely unseen, reified, commodified, and no longer community oriented. Arguably, while many in the Global North may not necessarily experience themselves as 'active' agents within their local ecosystems, many rural and indigenous communities do. There is a predominant tendency in the Global North to be alienated from natural resources, which are regarded in terms of consumption and service provision: how much water a household consumes

monthly or how reliably commercial organisations provide water and sanitation services, for example. This worldview inevitably loses sight of the role that natural resource ritual performances play in our lives.

Understanding this difference – the difference between how natural resources are conceived of in large parts of the Global North and how they are comprehended within indigenous and rural communities – as one of worldview rather than of essence is key for two main reasons. It avoids exoticising communities that express local-environment attachment through performance rituals. Also, it allows for nuanced examinations of the wider role that such rituals play in local and global transitions towards environmental sustainability. If every society performs an interconnection with its natural resources and environment through rituals, be they everyday rites or spiritual ones, performance studies can ask, for example, how we do so, for what purposes, and to what extent those articulations endow each and every one of us with the status of natural resource stakeholders. It might be argued that this perspective ‘dilutes’ the notion of a natural resource stakeholder, or that it adds unnecessary complexity to the already difficult process of designing and implementing international and national environmental policy by bringing too many actors to the table. I would claim that, on the contrary, the concept of performance and the varied shapes that performance practices take can expand the ways in which stakeholder identification has been understood and implemented, realigning it towards a more sustainable approach that is rooted in participation as well as in local communal and individual responsibility. Instead of favouring unsustainable top-down approaches to natural resource policy design and implementation, a performance studies perspective might consider: who the actors of a specific performance of natural resources are, what their performative articulations reveal about their invested interests in their environment, and whose voices such practices highlight and whose they hold back.

The second contribution I want to advance here is aligned with the trend of performance theory that emphasises the capacity of performance to act as a key means to transfer cultural and social memory (Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor). I would argue that applying this idea of performance to natural resource theory and practice broadens mainstream Western definitions of natural resource governance. My analysis of Corongo’s WJs reveals water governance as a performative practice imbued with highly specific beliefs, ethical values, and worldviews. Ritual performance functions here as a vehicle for water governance. If global policies regarding natural resources, such as the ones outlined in the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, are to be implementable locally, they need to make space for performance as a language through which local communities convey local-environment attachment. In particular, those communities for whom certain natural resources, such as water, lie at the core of their shared identity and heritage. Ecological sustainability is highly contingent on inclusion and multi-stakeholder participation at a local level. Only global environmental policy that is in accord with local action and built on consensual local bonds can be truly sustainable. By showing the ways in which performance expresses local communities’ relationships with their environment, performance studies can make manifest the local environmental knowledges that these communities have produced and safeguarded. This analysis can in turn inform and shape climate change adaptation strategies locally, nationally, and globally. Ultimately, performance studies can play a major role in the global goal of attaining long-term environmental sustainability by making sure that no one is left behind.