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## **Moving beyond the commons/commodity dichotomy**

*The socio-political complexity of Peru's water crisis*

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## **Moving Beyond the Commons/Commodity Dichotomy: The Socio-Political Complexity of Peru's Water Crisis**

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**ABSTRACT:** How is water best managed – as a common good or a commercial product? This is the key question of this paper that serves as introduction to a special section on Peru's water crisis. The theoretical point of departure is Karen Bakker's (2007) discussion of water as "a commons versus a commodity" and the conceptual pitfalls and political dilemmas the dichotomy poses. The paper argues that in order to understand the social and political tensions not only in Peru but also in other countries suffering chronic and potential water shortage we must move beyond the idea that water is best managed as either a commons or a commodity. Rather, the paper suggests, we need to examine water governance as a multi-faceted and complex activity in which water exceeds the dichotomy and sometimes takes the form of commons and commodity at the same time. Unpacking the conceptual baggage of the commons/commodity dichotomy, as well as that of each term separately, the paper problematises their use in the study of Peru's water governance. To illustrate the intricate and often unexpected ways in which water is claimed, accessed and allocated in Peru, it introduces the five studies that comprise the special section, concluding that only by providing in-depth, ethnographic descriptions of the country's water governance can we gain insight into its socio-political complexity and propose alternatives to its water crisis.

**KEYWORDS:** Water crisis, water governance, commodity, commons, Peru

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### **INTRODUCTION**

If oil was a main cause of conflict in the 20th century, water is a defining feature of the tensions that shape the 21st century. Climate change, population growth and economic development have generated an unprecedented demand for fresh water throughout the world and created a global awareness of water as a scarce good. Water therefore tops political agendas in both the Global North and South, and in some regions water scarcity constitutes the most urgent social problem. Unlike other natural resources such as oil, gas and many minerals that are also in high demand, water is of existential importance for human life and, though renewable, it is not replaceable. In other words, there are no alternatives to water, only water alternatives, meaning more equitable, efficient and sustainable ways of managing and using the world's freshwater supply.

The actual and potential responses to this challenge are many, including radical suggestions such as global governance (Gawel and Bernsen, 2011), larger infrastructure projects (Crow-Miller et al., 2017) or the total privatisation of water (Galaz, 2004), but as this section shows, water alternatives may also be found somewhere in between or even beyond standardised solutions. Responses come in multiple and specific constellations, always assembling political, technical and social worlds and practices, across local, national and global scales. Through five empirically based ethnographic cases and analyses, the section

discusses the political predicaments and social challenges the search for water alternatives in the Peruvian Andes implies (Figure 1). Its aim is to investigate an inherent tension in the water crisis in Peru and many other countries: the interests of some states and the agricultural, mining and other industries to commercialise water against the need for rural and urban populations to access clean and sufficient water for domestic and communal use. The seemingly incommensurability of the two demands reveals not only the political difficulties policy makers and governments face when they legislate water rights and tailor institutional settings for water management, but also the conceptual problems scholars encounter when trying to define the social and political nature of water and explain its opposing meaning as a commercial product and a public good, or as Bakker puts it: commons versus commodity (Bakker, 2007).

Figure 1. Map of Peru and the sites of field study.



To explore the underlying ambiguity and move our understanding beyond this dichotomy, this section focuses on a region that struggles with not only water scarcity but also social inequality and cultural marginalisation. Its regional focus is Peru's southern highlands where biophysical transformations, such as glacier retreat and changes in temperature and precipitation patterns, intersect on a daily basis with disputes between water managers, water experts, water users and other stakeholders in the country's water management. On the one hand, the state walks a tightrope in governing Peru's changing availability of fresh water through its manifold national, regional and local institutions and the water engineers, experts and administrators managing them. On the other hand, a range of water users, organised in different constellations and with varying degrees of power, put forward their claims by different means and strategies, engaging in conflicting practices and values to obtain the water they require. The five papers comprising this section examine these processes of negotiation and contestation in a variety of political, ecological and socio/cultural settings (some examining the water crisis from the perspective of water authorities and engineering practices, others from that of rural and urban water users, or of private-public joint-venture infrastructure projects, documenting conflicting forms of knowledge and water expertise). Yet, they are all based on fieldwork in the same region (and time period) and, more importantly, they share a common focus: the call of Peru's 2009 water law to improve the efficiency of the country's water management by encouraging the cooperation of its stakeholders in a new

institutional setting and enhancing their water accountability in both economic and social terms (Paerregaard et al., 2016; Roa-García, 2014; Roa-García et al., 2013).

### HANDLING SLIPPERY CONCEPTS

The special section critiques the commons/commodity dichotomy as a framework for understanding the economic and political structures that cause water shortage and exacerbate social inequality in Peru. It suggests alternative ways of exploring the social-political complexity of the country's water conflicts and water management. Through ethnographic studies of how water rights are governed, claimed, negotiated and attained in the Peruvian Andes, the papers of this special section show the shortcomings of a commons/commodity framework to grasp the complex relations of negotiations and contestations around water in Peru today. How, for instance, can those looking to privatise water and those hoping for communal management not always find themselves in opposition when it comes to water governance? And why does the idea of water as a common good not necessarily clash with its commodification? Proposals for alternatives in water management and governance in Peru come in many constellations that enmesh in different assemblages and blur the boundaries between the common, the public and the private. And even though Peru's new water law claims water to be a public good it also promotes markets around water management and requires indigenous water users and other marginal communities to form their own user groups to participate in the official management of the country's water resources. At the same time water users of different kinds show mistrust towards the state when it comes to managing and distributing water efficiently and equitably, while large corporations, including international infrastructure construction consortia and mining companies, challenge democracy and state sovereignty by bringing in private capital to finance water supply infrastructure that will bring water to households and small-scale farmers as well as industry and mining.

These moves and tendencies challenge a traditional and dichotomous notion of commons versus commodity and demand that scholarly attention be paid to the specific processes through which water rights and uses are claimed, conceded and practised. This special section investigates these new spaces for socio-cultural and political negotiation around water and examines how, in Peru, they sometimes deepen the tension between commons and commodity in water governance and sometimes complicate and transform it, thereby contributing to the current debate on the global water crisis and analysing the social, political and cultural forces that fuel and respond to it. Our claim is that it is necessary to revise the analytical vocabulary employed in understanding how water is managed as a common, public and private good if we are to propose real solutions to the crisis.

The terms 'commons' and 'commodity' evoke divergent ideas about not only water and other natural resources but also society and its political and economic organisation. Starting with commodity, many social scholars read it as the quintessence of alienation and capitalism, and as a symbol of the neoliberal current that has dominated globally over the past four decades (Harvey, 2005). From this perspective commodification means to measure all goods in economic terms, creating markets around the goods and their services and ultimately privatising them. Yet, as Karl Marx pointedly explained in his main work, *Capital*, in so far as the commodity has a use value and an exchange value it glosses over a double meaning that is at constant play in capitalism (Marx, 2010 [1867]). Other works by Marx and his contemporaries elaborate on this ambiguity, highlighting the exploitative and alienating implications of a commodity production driven by profit, as well as the possibilities of a simple commodity production that merely recognises its use value. The idea that the commodity attains value as both an economic asset and a scarce good that meets basic human need is shared by modern economists who contend that not only the promise of profit but also shortage makes water (and other resources) a commodity. Drawing attention to the underestimated value of water, Mitchell thus asserts: "North American society has traditionally undervalued water as a commodity" (Mitchell, 1984: 30). Foregrounding the significance of community and the commons in water management, Pisani makes a similar claim: "*Res communis*, water

is a scarce commodity that must be managed for the good of the whole community" (Pisani, 1995: 30). And while Brown acknowledges the growing commercial value of water he also argues that, "water has been recognised and treated as an economic good by every civilisation that encountered scarcity of it" (Brown, 1997: 3); he adds that, "by the very definition, for something to be 'economic' means that it is scarce relative to the uses to which it can be put" (ibid). Brown even goes as far as suggesting that, "water has value to traditional societies, and most of the rest of us, even if it is not scarce" (ibid: 4). In other words, water does not merely attain value when it is plentiful and taken for granted or when it is scarce and takes the form of a commodity. Several papers in this section address this observation, which raises critical questions about the use of the concept of commodity to examine contemporary attempts to commercialise water services and tax water consumption, and about conventional definitions of the value societies ascribe to water (Andolina, 2012; Stensrud, 2016; Strang, 2015). A more cautious use of the term 'commodity' in the discussion of the provision, allocation and consumption of water can thus throw new light on both its economic import and social bearings.

If 'commodity' is associated with profitmaking and neoliberalism, 'commons' triggers ideas of autonomy and communalism, particularly when it concerns the management of natural resources such as land and water. One of the most cited works in the social sciences is Hardin's *The Tragedy of the Commons* from 1968 (Hardin, 1968), which describes how human population growth jeopardises the commons by inciting rational self-interest and over-exploitation of shared resources. Rather than building on Hardin's ideas, however, most of the literature citing him, including Nobel Prize-winner Elinor Ostrom (1990), questions his thesis that the commons are disappearing. And despite Hardin's later response to the many readings of his work (Berg, 2014; Bromley, 1992; Hardin, 1998), it is today viewed as emblematic of the growing scholarship on not only common land but global commons, such as water, air and the atmosphere (Ranganathan, 2016). Moreover, 'commons' has become the very mantra by which political movements criticise neoliberal politics and project future hopes in a world suffering from anthropogenic climate change and environmental destruction – the Italian struggle for water rights being a case in point (Belotti, 2015; Carroza and Fantini, 2016). However, the term conceals important differences in the movements identifying with it as well as the environmental problems and political issues they address. Carroza and Fantini have studied Italy's water movement, which in many ways echoes earlier protests in Latin America provoked by attempts to privatise water (Assies, 2003; Loftus and McDonald, 2001). They point out: "The reference to water as a commons legitimises a plurality of claims on various issues – international solidarity, local government, political participation – beyond water governance and management" (Carroza and Fantini, 2016: 117). Some respondents in their study perceived the commons as an antidote to the expropriation by external actors of local sovereignty through the privatisation and commodification of local resources, as well as a euphemism for public management, the re-municipalisation of water services and direct democracy; others saw it as a symbol of human rights and international fraternity. Their research suggests that 'commons' covers a broad spectrum of interests and positions, including a cosmopolitan proposal to make water a global common and a universal right, as well as an anti-neoliberal proposal to re-gain local control over water and strengthen direct democracy.

'Commodity' and 'commons', then, both have multiple and sometimes conflicting connotations, which complicates their use in investigating current attempts to reform public water management and services. The confusion is amplified by the concepts' linkage to other terms that are also charged with morally and politically opposed implications. Thus, commodity is often associated with privatisation, deregulation and neoliberalism; but, as Karen Bakker points out, "reforms can be undertaken in distinct categories, and not necessarily concomitant: one may privatise without deregulating; deregulate without marketising; and commercialise without privatising, etc" (Bakker, 2007: 434). And, even though the privatisation of water is sometimes the outcome of neoliberal politics, as Prieto (2016) recalls, they do not always go together. In fact, water is an "uncooperative" commodity, resistant to neoliberal reforms and "a high

degree of state involvement, therefore, is found in countries that have experimented heavily with neoliberal reforms to water management" (Bakker, 2007: 442).

Another misunderstanding is to contrast water as a commodity with water as a human right (Farhana and Loftus, 2015; Gawel and Bretschneider, 2017; Miroso and Harris, 2012). In Bakker's terms, human rights are, "individualistic, anthropocentric, state-centric and compatible with private sector provision of water supply; and as such, a limited strategy for those seeking to refute water privatisation" (Bakker, 2007: 448). An example of development policies perpetuating this confusion is IWRM (Integrated Water Resources Management, see Allouche, 2016; Tortajada, 2015) – a management tool to further water cooperation. The conflation of commodification, participation and sustainability implied by IWRM's approach prompts Carl Bauer to ask: "One fundamental principle of IWRM is that 'water is an economic good', but what that principle means in practice has been hotly disputed. Is water a tradable commodity, a scarce resource or a human right?" (Bauer, 2015: 148). The mistake of equating cooperation with human rights is paralleled by that of romanticising community as a steward of water management and neglecting the power relations it entails. Just as commons can "be exclusive and regressive, as well as inclusive and progressive" (Bakker, 2008: 246), community may gloss over "inequitable power relations and resource allocation" (ibid). Finally, water is not only an "uncooperative" commodity; its unequal distribution in nature makes it an "imperfect public good" that is "nonexcludable and rival in consumption" at the same time (ibid 442).

These examples and quotes show that every effort to create water alternatives demands detailed analysis, emphasising the specificities at play in a given context. Scholars have expanded analytical vocabularies to address the complexities in empirical processes that cannot readily be understood in binaries of commons versus commodities. Some, emphasising that commons are not given but made through activities and practices, propose communing as a verb rather than common as a noun (Bollier and Helfrich, 2014; Linebaugh, 2008). Introducing a special issue on neo-extractivism, Blaser and de la Cadena (2017) propose "the uncommons" as an analytic to describe how common goods are enclosed, destroyed and translated into homogeneous entities in extractivist endeavours. The uncommons brings our attention to the activity of enclosure and extraction and highlights the violence done when the "common good" in question is conceptually and physically detached from the community that has been living with it – using and governing it on its own terms (Blaser and de la Cadena, 2017).

## NEW FORMS OF COLLABORATION

Rather than offering clarity dichotomies such as commons versus commodity, human rights versus commercialisation, public good versus market and community versus neoliberalism create a conceptual disarray that is inextricably linked to water's resistance to human control, whether as an economic or a common good (Linton, 2010; Orlove and Caton, 2010; Strang, 2015). Water is difficult to tame, regulate and appropriate, which complicates its governance everywhere. While flooding and water pollution represent a growing problem in places where water is abundant, water scarcity is a cause of great concern for people living in arid or semi-arid areas. The hydrosocial territories (Boelens et al., 2016) we turn to in this section are all constituted in arid and semi-arid areas.

Water's obstinate nature also provides an opportunity for political rulers to legitimise their authority and demonstrate their power by developing infrastructure and technology and providing safe and steady water supplies (Paerregaard, 2018; Wittfogel, 1981 [1957]). As Strang points out, "the link between water and power is an expression of material relations. No exercise of power is possible unless it can be expressed in material form, in this instance through the physical control of water bodies or the capacity to determine (from whatever distance) whose interests will benefit from the flow of water" (Strang, 2016: 295). Whether political rulers use water governance to centralise power and privilege dominating economic interest or decentralise control and empower other actors is an open question. In the words of Strang, each managerial regime is "a negotiation between sociopolitical arrangements; the material

infrastructures that contain and direct water; and the vagaries of hydrological processes" (Strang, 2016: 295). This particular quality of water – the link to power – reminds us that talking of "Peru's water crisis" or even "the global water crisis" in the singular may be used for political and economic gain. When assuming office in July 2016, former president of Peru Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (PPK) claimed that the central aim of his tenure would be that all Peruvians have 24-hour access to potable water and be connected to the sewerage system by 2021. The plan was to implement this through microfinance programmes. As a former engineer and banker, PPK used the premise of "a Peruvian water crisis" to uphold his presidential authority and set in motion a particular political and economic agenda: of promoting public services through finance.

For the global water crisis this means that, although for the past two decades neoliberal policies have encouraged the commodification of water and favoured the transfer of control from local water communities to transnational interests, water governance remains a contested field that does not always follow the rules of those in power but leaves room for other agents, human as well as non-human, including water itself. As theory and pedagogy, policies develop in circles. Just as the neoliberal trend of the 1990s emerged as a reaction to state inefficiency and bad public administration, the tendency towards water privatisation may have peaked as policymakers realise that market environmentalism offers no solution to the water crisis (Bakker, 2013; de Gouvello and Scott, 2012). Indeed, it is not only people who object to the politics of commodification, so does the substance they require: water. As Roa-García and colleagues point out: "For neoliberalism, water is one of the most difficult resources to transform into a commodity" (Roa-García et al., 2013: 272). It is therefore pertinent to ask whether we are witnessing a new collaborative mode of operation in water governance that "emphasises values of bargaining, negotiation and compromise" (Harrington, 2017: 257) and recognises disenfranchised humans and non-human actors as important stakeholders in the management of water (Bakker, 2007; Groenfeldt, 2013; Schmidt and Peppard, 2014; Strang, 2016).

This section contributes to the search for alternative forms of water collaboration that eschew such theoretical dichotomies as commons/commodity, state/market, public/private, citizen/consumer, community/individual and even human/non-human. While making all humans water accountable, sustainable governance must recognise the unequal means by which they access and use water and the many values they attribute to it. Through a discussion of the roles played by state institutions, private agents and autonomous communities in Peruvian water governance, the five papers engage in varying levels of analysis.

## INTRODUCING THE ARTICLES

The setting of the five papers is Peru's southern highlands, where water scarcity is an increasingly urgent issue due to climate change and receding glaciers. It is here that the state has built new water infrastructures and established institutions in accordance with the 2009 water law to improve water management and encourage cooperation.

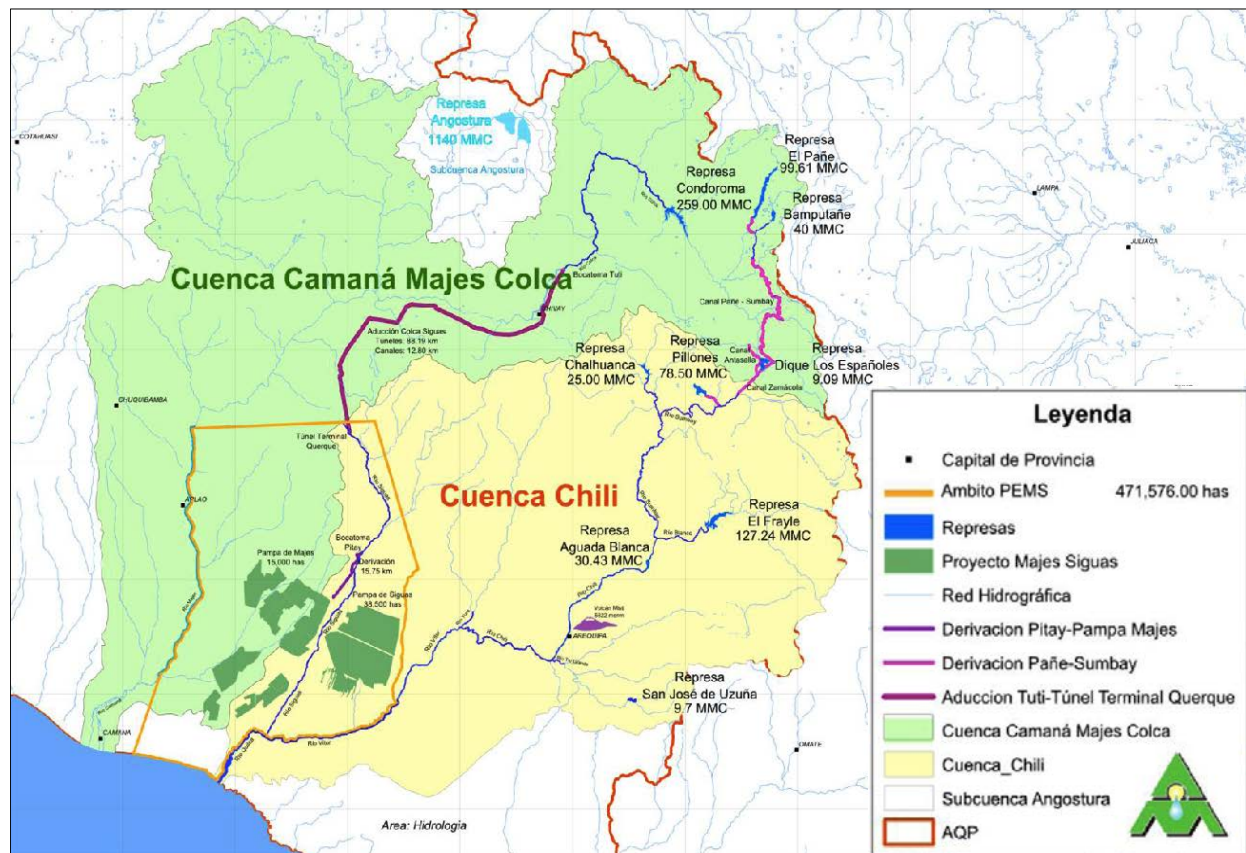
Together, the papers illustrate the complexity of the landscape of water use, management and governance in the Andean region of southern Peru. While the landscape through which the water flows is vertical and rugged, the hydrosocial territory (Boelens et al., 2016) is also socioeconomically and culturally extremely disparate. These papers explore how water engineers and experts, national water authorities, local water committee leaders and private water users navigate the blurred lines between water as an economic, public and common good while coping with the region's water crisis. They illuminate the conceptual difficulties faced by those studying water conflict and cooperation in climate-vulnerable areas, as well as the social and political challenges confronted by those working in water policymaking and practice. Each paper offers a detailed analysis of the different dimensions of water in the southern Peruvian Andes and how water alternatives could be shaped. The papers present multiple perspectives on the commons/commodity dichotomy, geographically located within the neighbouring

river basins of Quilca-Chili and Majes Colca (Figure 2). The two basins are tightly connected socioeconomically, and several canals transfer water from one to the other, channelling water to diverse economic activities. Thematically, the papers span from law and legislation, ownership and formalisation, citizen participation and watershed protection, over infrastructure and megaprojects, to ways of valuing water, and comparisons of water accountability over time.

In "Assembling commons and commodities: The Peruvian water law between ideology and materialisation" Astrid O. Andersen follows the Peruvian water resources law of 2009 (Ley de Recursos Hídricos 29338) through its inception, continuing previous water legislation, and in different moments of implementation in the city of Arequipa and the Quilca-Chili River Basin. While Law 29338 was justified as an urgent response to water scarcity caused by climatic changes, as well as shifts in productive activities, it was guided by ideas of integrated water resources management and of rolling out a new water culture, involving the optimisation of water management and efficiency in all its uses. Andersen describes on-the-ground encounters through which the law is being implemented, where state officials meet different water users, and the establishment of a river basin council. The paper demonstrates how the law comes into being through its everyday 'life', between its existence as legal text and the everyday practices of officials and users. A clear-cut commons/commodity dichotomy, Andersen argues, is of little use when trying to understand the dynamics of governance around water in present-day Arequipa and Peru. Instead, looking in ethnographic detail at how different intentions, interests and values are assembled, or brought together in specific constellations, and at the effects they have on particular relations and practices around water, is more useful in analysing the interplay of public and private, marketised and commodified interests within the implementation of the water resources law and water governance more broadly.



Figure 2. Map of the two river basins Cuenca Camaná Majes (Green) and Quilca-Chili (yellow), where studies of this special issue are set.



Note: Lines in purple show infrastructure that transfers water from one basin to the other (Source: AUTODEMA).

In "Making the megaproject: Water infrastructure and hydrocracy at the public-private interface in Peru" Susann Ullberg uses the case of the Majes Siguas Special Project in the southern highlands to analyse the making, maintenance and management of water infrastructure by hydraulic bureaucracy, or hydrocracy, as she labels it, in times of neoliberal water governance. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among the project's experts, Ullberg describes the commodification of the infrastructure by the new contractual framework of so-called public-private partnerships that Peru's 2009 water law enabled. Moreover, Ullberg reveals how this challenges the very notion of public infrastructure as a common good and paves the way for the privatisation of water and water supply systems alike. Infrastructure is vital to the supply system as it captures and tames the unruly flow of water. Controlling this, Ullberg argues, is therefore critical to controlling access to water. Ullberg's more general point is that because water infrastructure simultaneously constitutes a public good and commercial product, it challenges the very logic of contemporary water governance and the process by which it is privatised. Focusing on water infrastructure, and the hydrocracy that makes and manages them in particular, thus allows Ullberg to question the commons/commodity dichotomy and its apparent incommensurability. The paper argues that infrastructure – particularly the everyday practice of the hydrocracy – plays a critical role as mediator in the messy and entangled processes through which water is commodified and communed.

In "Formalisation of water use and conditional ownership in Colca Valley, Peru" Astrid B. Stensrud discusses the production and negotiation of water ownership among peasant farmers of the Majes-Colca River Basin where Peru's public water administration initiated a process of formalisation of user rights

for potable water in 2011. This is the same basin as that discussed by Ullberg, but rather than looking at the Special Project itself, Stensrud describes the highland peasants of the Colca Valley, who tap water from its infrastructure and thereby contest the extractivist vision of water that drives it. The peasants claim that while the Majes Sigwas irrigation project channels water from the headwaters to export-oriented agriculture in the desert, the supply to their communities is becoming scarcer due to climate change. They also criticise the water resources law of 2009 for acknowledging water as public property yet emphasising its economic value and encouraging private investment. Stensrud gives a detailed ethnographic account of how the highland peasants see water not only as a resource but as a life-giving force that is given by the mountain-beings to the humans living in their domains. Seeing ownership as an on-going and dynamic process, and 'commoning' as made by practices of care and nurture, Stensrud argues that conditional forms of ownership emerge from relationships of reciprocity between humans and earth-beings. These are modes of ownership that exceed the dichotomies of public/private, commons/commodity and object/subject.

Karsten Paerregaard's paper also focuses on highland communities. In "Liquid Accountability: Water as Common, Public and Private Good in the Peruvian Andes" he compares recent changes in the water governance of two rural communities located in the Majes-Colca River Basin. Drawing on the anthropological tradition of controlled comparison, Paerregaard examines the different ways the state and other external agents have challenged the meaning of water rights and accelerated the commodification of water in the communities. His study suggests that water is commodified through three kinds of transaction: as tribute-for-usage that is used to manage water as a common good, as tax/tariff-for-right that is used to manage water as a public good and as ticket-for-product that is used to manage water as a private good. His argument is that, rather than conflicting forms of accountability for their water use, Peru's water users view the three transactions as complementary relations of exchange with the agents that control the water flow in their communities and regulate their water supply. He also proposes that, rather than a one-way route from communal control to commercialisation and privatisation, the commodification of water is inherent in the water management of Peru's highland communities. Paerregaard concludes that, in a time of climate change and growing water scarcity, the communities keep as many options open as possible. Managing water concurrently as a common, public and private good and accounting for their water use to not one but several providers are therefore priorities on their agenda.

In "Water as more than commons or commodity: Understanding water-management practices in Yanque, Peru" Malene Brandshaug discusses a conspicuous contradiction in Peru's water politics. On the one hand, the legal framework of its 2009 water law allowed the state to open the country's water management to increased private involvement, thereby commercialising and, ultimately, commodifying its water services. On the other hand, the state continues to emphasise that water is public property and a common good for its citizens. Brandshaug explores this inconsistency by examining how water is managed in the highland community of Yanque, also located in the Majes-Colca River Basin. She argues that the community engages in a simultaneous process of commodification and what she calls a "communing" of its water resources, which she claims exceeds the commodity/common binary. By analysing Yanque's commoning of water as a process rather than an objectified resource – one that may involve human as well as non-human agents – the article describes water's shifting status in community affairs. It can be a meaningful, shared element or a limited, economic good. Consequently, water rights and water values are always up for negotiation in Yanque, which leads Brandshaug to suggest that water never takes the form of a pure commodity or a simple common good. Due to its ability to move, transform and connect, its embeddedness in social relations and users' perception of it as having cultural as well as economic value, Brandshaug concludes that water is never fully commodified in Yanque.

## CONCLUSION

Each informed by ethnographic fieldwork, these papers together provide a broad and in-depth picture of the complexity of water relations in the Andes of Southern Peru.

They show the different roles played by those working for the state, private or semi-private organisations and rural communities in the country's water governance. They describe the processes of negotiation and contestation over water rights, water allocation and water accountability that unfold within the institutions established by the state since the 2009 water law, as well as in water user committees and other informal organisations. The papers show that tension between water as common good and water as commodity is present at all levels of Peruvian water governance but that, as an analytical framework, the dichotomy falls short of explaining the details of the social and political processes that shape it. Anthropological studies and other forms of ethnographic engagements, we propose, offer a detailed understanding of the many ways water is claimed, accessed and allocated at local and regional levels. When water management regimes are formulated in standardised and generic terms, qualitative research methods can help to unravel the logic and contradictions that drive water management, and fuel water conflict, on the ground. Such insight is critical to proposing and constructing water alternatives and identifying routes to socially and politically sustainable ways of cohabiting with (using, managing, governing) water.

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