# 6 Coping with Abandonment: On Lakes, Pagos and Crosses

In the previous chapter, we saw how governmental attempts to create a culture of risk preparedness and, thus, strategies of time control have led to different forms of resistance and confrontations. We saw how, in a scenario of deep institutional mistrust, fed by the arrival of foreign operations in the region, some voices have questioned the validity of devices such as the early warning system. The precarious situation of many families and neighbourhoods in the region, as we saw in Chapter Four, is accompanied by a climate of mistrust that has helped perpetuate conflict in the zone, creating a categorical rupture between the rural highland population and that of the lower urban zones. The massive efforts conducted by local governments seem to be eclipsed by those historical divisions, raising doubts about the capacity of authorities to deal with the challenges that outburst floods entail.

But are these the only security-building practices currently in place? If there is a widespread mistrust in the measures proposed by the government, how do citizens manage to produce an everyday reality despite the catastrophic consequences that an outburst flood might entail? How, in other words, do they cope with the uncertainties that lie ahead?

This chapter explores the multifaceted ways in which security is produced in areas exposed to various hazards. While the state has initiated crucial – yet contested – strategies of time control and risk management as means to ensure safe environments, they are not the only practices aiming to cope with the threatening forces of the Cordillera Blanca. Often driven by the dramatic consequence of state absence in rural areas, the population has developed other methods for the imminent possibility of floods, droughts and frost. Strategies for dealing with the unruliness of mountain lakes and the unpredictability of climatic events would consider actions beyond science-based approaches promoted by governmental agencies, including forms of communication to engage directly with earth-beings cohabiting the mountain lands. Even the same modernist efforts promoting rational control and management of the highlands appear, ultimately, to be sustained by actions beyond the scientific realm. This complex entanglement of practices reveals, in the words of Hannah Knox (2020, 19), the 'extensive relations that continually worked

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to destabilise conventional methods of accounting and that crossed settled institutional boundaries in awkward and often controversial ways'. This chapter delves into the complex entanglement of practices that coexist with institutional efforts, revealing the unexpected alliances forged to keep lakes calm and the population safe.

In a first part, we will explore how the state abandonment experienced by the population in rural areas of the Cordillera Blanca, together with historic and ongoing cases of funding misuse and corruption that further eroded trust in public institutions, incited a search for support through other types of strategies to cope with extreme events. Events like droughts, hail and frost, or even the control of mountain lakes to avoid outburst floods, would be managed through *pagos*, an ancient form of relating with earth-beings. These practices, however, are not only applied by rural actors. Engineers and municipal workers would also call upon them to keep lakes calm and ensure that technological instruments such as syphons and water pumps could operate adequately.

Later, we will see that *pagos* are complemented by other security devices. Specifically, the figure of the cross would emerge as a fundamental entity ensuring the safety of the population and the protection of crops and lands throughout the year – a safeguard that, in order to function, would require massive organisation and mobilisation. Crosses would be carried from the highest points of the mountains to the lower lands of Huaraz, to receive new dressings and benediction in a celebration lasting an entire week. We will conclude by reflecting on how these efforts, which seem to be partially recognised by the Catholic Church, allow us to talk about an alternative form of encounter, in which the indissoluble union that the *tinku* promotes is replaced by a gathering in which the multiple versions of the cross tolerate each other diplomatically. This coexistence, I will conclude, can be related more to the notion of *topay*: an encounter that maintains the integrity of entities gathered together.

## The absent state

Irrespective of the differing reasons behind the sabotage of the early warning system, explored in the previous chapter, most accounts agree on one point: far from simple vandalism, it was an act driven instead by desperation. The situation of extreme water stress, exacerbated by the figure of an absent state unwilling to provide concrete solutions, would have led people to look for any possible solution to mitigate the drought, even finding the most unexpected connections between foreign machines and the lack of rain.

As in other parts of the Callejón de Huaylas (Rasmussen 2017), feelings of abandonment are a strong driver shaping the relationship between rural actors and the

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state. Nicolás Peje, Hualcán's mayor, explains to me the constant feeling of neglect that he and his neighbours experience, with the following anecdote:

> When I took office at the beginning of 2016, a frost hit everything in the highlands. To face the frost, we called engineers from the agricultural state agencies. … A register was drawn up and sent to the Ministry of Agriculture, but it came to nothing in the end. So, here people have become accustomed to it. We no longer trust that the State will provide support. … I hear a lot that people are doing what they can with the means at hand, on their own. When there is frost, we have to turn [the soils] around to be able to produce something, to be able to sustain our economy.

By 'turning the soils around' (*voltear la tierra*), Nicolás refers to tilling the harvested topsoil, thereby burying frost-damaged crops and bringing fresh soil to the surface, into which crops are re-sown. It is a desperate measure, since the chances of obtaining a good harvest late in the season are rather low. This action, known as the 'aftermath' in English – the same word used for the post-disaster recovery phase – recalls the frantic moments that survivors experience after an extreme event (like a flood or earthquake) impacts their community. As in those cases, the disaster cannot be explained solely as an uncontrollable force of nature; it encompasses the loss of livelihoods, the lack of state support and the desperate responses – the 'aftermath in the aftermath' – leading to the materialisation of the catastrophe.

Nicolás knows what it is to suffer the consequences of extreme events amid scarce state support. Coming from a poor *campesino* family from Hualcán, his parents lost all their crops during an outburst flood from Lake 513 in 1991. He was only five years old when the flood struck at night, destroying everything in its path. Nicolás remembers how the deafening sound of the mass of water, mud and rocks warned them to flee to higher ground. Although the event did not reach their house, it did sweep away their animals and destroy their maize crops, his family's primary source of income.

Having limited saving capacity, the family counted on that lost production to fund school supplies for Nicolás and his siblings. After the flood, they had no means of covering those expenses. Desperate, his parents were forced to start a new business, leaving behind their work at the *chacra*. 'They used to grow, harvest and sell. When [the flood] happened, they started a meat business, a butcher's shop. It's incredible how disasters make you change. When something breaks your livelihood and takes it away, you look for another one', he remarks. That change in his own world is similar to the dramatic transformations that people from cities like Yungay and Huaraz suffered after the 1970 events – transformations that, according to survivors of the event, turned their world upside down. Just like in the aftermath.

Feelings of state abandonment are commonly linked to a strong mistrust of authorities' uses of public funding. The feeling that authorities routinely misused pub-

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lic funds, unfortunately, anything but surprising in Peru. The country's history has been marked by cases of corruption since the establishment of the Republic – paraphrasing Alfonso Quiroz (2016), a paradoxically intrinsic part of the Peruvian state. The diverse illegal practices that corruption entails – including bribery, embezzlement and misappropriation of funds, intentional misapplication of programmes and policies, and electoral fraud, among others – are part of the daily operations of a considerable part of the state apparatus. When corruption becomes a fundamental dimension of state functions, it restricts the state's own capacity to act in accordance with its goals and programmes. It is an invisible yet pivotal dimension of the public sector that has dramatic consequences at a territorial level.

Corruption has been particularly controversial in Ancash's recent history. The *Ancashino* author Julio Villanueva Sotomayor (2015, 16) refers to corruption as a 'vast layer of social mud' (*una enorme capa de lodo social*) covering every department, evidenced by several scandals that have *flooded* local and national media. Ancash has the unfortunate record of having four regional governors prosecuted for corruption almost consecutively in the past ten years. The most emblematic is César '*La Bestia*' (The Beast) Álvarez Aguilar, governor of the department between 2007 and 2014 and articulator of a massive corruption network. Álvarez was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment in 2014 after being convicted of several corruption scandals during his administration, including diverting funds from the Regional Government to buy a regional TV channel and bribing journalists for political purposes. His administration was also involved in the first public case of the Odebrecht Scandal in Peru, Latin America's biggest network of corruption commanded by the Brazilian conglomerate Odebrecht. The company distributed millions of dollars to politicians, executives and former officials in 12 different countries in return for political favours, mostly related to the allocation of large-scale infrastructure projects. Álvarez was accused of bribery after receiving money from Odebrecht for the construction of the Carhuaz–Chacas–San Luis highway connecting the Callejón de Huaylas with Conchucos, a project that was used by the company to divert a massive amount of state funds on their behalf. He was later sentenced to 35 years imprisonment for running *La Centralita*, a clandestine headquarters from where he coordinated the diversion of public funding and even a criminal organisation to murder state officers exposing his criminal activities. It was an extensive clandestine network that included high-ranking members of the judicial, legislative and executive branches, local political operators and even hired assassins.

After Álvarez, three more well-known cases of corruption emerged involving Ancash's Regional Government. Waldo Ríos Salcedo, governor of Ancash from 2015 to 2016, was sentenced to five years for collusion and fraud related to public infrastructure works during his administration as Huaraz provincial mayor in 1999. He was also accused of voter inducement by offering a monthly income of 500 Soles (about USD 100) per family during his campaign for governor in 2014, a promise that he

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never fulfilled. Manuel Rosales Turriate, Ríos' legal spokesperson, openly admitted on a TV show the same year that the promise was a strategy to attract voters, affirming that 'the politician is like a lover; he doesn't tell the truth to get what he wants' (El Comercio 2014). Enrique 'The Chef' Vargas Barrenchea, Ancash's vice-governor who replaced Ríos after his removal from office, was sentenced to five years after lying about his academic qualifications. In his *curriculum vitae* submitted to the National Jury of Elections, Vargas Barrenchea claimed to have a certificate of studies in gastronomy from a Chilean institute, but never completed the course. Lastly, Juan Carlos Morillo Ulloa, governor from 2019 to 2020, was sentenced to nine months for collusion in the construction of a special module for treating patients diagnosed with COVID-19 at a regional hospital in Nuevo Chimbote.

By 2020, Ancash was the department with the highest number of corruption cases nationwide, which included more than 70 cases related to the COVID-19 pandemic response (La República, 2020). More than 400 allegations of corruption have been raised as a result of Álvarez's network alone, a long list of accusations that involves regional and national judges, deputies, prosecutors, municipal officials and police officers. People in Ancash used to tell me, embarrassed, that it is known nationally as Peru's most corrupt region. No wonder, then, that Villanueva Sotomayor (2015, 16) has catalogued corruption as a truly cataclysm in Ancash; an 'obscure brown stain' as a consequence of 'the vile behaviour of a criminal network and the complicit or pusillanimous attitude of the departmental and national authorities', comparable to the dramatic landslide that took the lives of *Yungaínos* in 1970.

As for any other working area of the public sector, corruption allegations have had enormous repercussions for the development of risk management efforts in the region. Early warning systems, such as those at lakes Palcacocha and 513, have not been exempt from this general impression. Many people consider SATs useless devices aiming to warn about an event that most likely will not happen. Members of the *Comunidad Campesina* Tupac Amaru II, for example, believe that the whole installation of the early warning system in Palcacocha was a means for municipal officers to move public funding they could profit from. According to Verónica, a *comunidad's* member, 'the employees in the region say "Danger, danger!" for taking money. But there's no danger. Years ago, there was dead ice in the water [in Palcacocha] that looked like a threat. … That's why it was said that there was a danger. But now it doesn't exist anymore. It's a business run by the employees'. The technical problems that the SAT experienced during its initial months of operation did not help to improve its public image either. Even though it seems to have fared better than the system at Lake 513 and no group has tried to destroy it so far, its relevance has been constantly questioned by a population that consider other issues to be regional priorities, rather than an expensive system that, according to them, does not even work properly.

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Mistrust of the SAT thus encompasses not only its installation but also performance. Many people believe that flood alarms are another means used by authorities to divert public funds. Under Álvarez, the regional administration is remembered for having the highest number of flood alarms of past decades, which people in the region associate with a form of funding embezzlement due to the amount of resources this type of warning mobilises. Early warning systems, in this sense, are associated not only with a form of infrastructure that facilitates the misuse of funds during its installation. The possibilities for corruption that these systems open up refer to their own operation: a source of money that, according to many *Huaracinos*, is activated every time the alarm sounds.

The controversies around Huaraz's early warning show that mistrust of flood risk management efforts seems to be a generalised issue in the Callejón de Huaylas. Efforts to establish a culture of preparedness for GLOFs have been undermined by the SAT's initial technical shortcomings and the widespread corruption that has affected the region. These have jeopardised attempts to build a future around an idea of security that tries to minimise the human losses that could result from an extreme event in Huaraz. As a preparedness device, the early warning system is a way of extending evacuation time by regulating rhythms relating to the mountain lakes – the rhythms of work, as we also saw in the previous chapter, together with the control of data feeds from lakes such as Palcacocha. Yet, the system's technical problems, together with the political scandals affecting the region in past years, make those efforts to regulate rhythms a contested practice. With no certainty on whether the system functions correctly, or whether it is based on honest attempts at risk management, the construction of a safe future is far from being achieved, at least for those questioning the operation of the SAT. What practices, then, do people engage in to make the future a less hostile time on which to rely?

## Pagos and paperwork

During our conversation, Nicolás Peje affirms that the destruction of technological devices is not the only last-ditch resort that people call upon to cope with extreme situations such as droughts. When the rain does not come at the beginning of the harvest season, people 'burn the mountains' (*quemar los cerros*), intentionally setting long swathes of land on fire. The smoke emitted by the burning soil, he and local farmers think, attracts the rain immediately – a strategy with consequences of which they are very aware. 'We know we are polluting the environment, and it's dangerous, but there is no other way. It is an obligation, a response to our own necessity', he affirms.

According to Nicolás, such traditions are ways of communicating with their environments that, although less public than they used to be, are still part of the practices relating people and land:

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> you do [a *pago*] so that you have good production or so that you don't have natural disasters. You do it to the *Pachamama* so that she is watching over your produce, over you. Also, for always looking after your people. To the rivers, you make a *pago*, so it does not harm the population. And also to the *nevados*. … Right now, we are all practising it by ourselves [individually]. You have to make a *pago* to your land so that it gives you produce, and so on. But we would like to do it as a community.

According to Marisol de la Cadena (2015), the word *pago* (payment) is a deviation from the original notion of *despacho* (remittance). Whereas the first implies an imbursement, something that can be acquired if enough resources are provided, the latter has to do more with a delivery, something that is given for its own sake[1]. De la Cadena relates *pagos* to the packages that private companies offer to tourists in Cusco under the label of 'traditional experiences'. *Pagos*, in this sense, refer more to the transactional nature of tourism; 'an ephemeral economic relationship that continues to ignore *runakuna* [people in Quechua] existence, while consuming their practices for what tourists are insignificant exchanges of money and perhaps some sincere emotions' (De la Cadena 2015, 169). However, the idea of *pagos* has also proliferated more organically among people practising them with pure intentions of creating a bond with earth entities. Astrid Stensrud (2019) affirms that *pagos*, or *irantas*, are offered to mountains and lakes in the Colca Valley to avoid accidents – for example, before using dynamite in construction works. Similarly, the few people who refer openly to making offerings to the land, mountains and lakes in the Callejón de Huaylas talk about *pagos* rather than *despachos*. Whether a problematic deviation of the original practice or not, *pagos* is the most common term for the activities that people in the region conduct nowadays to ensure security in the mountains and a good harvest.

Since, as Nicolás suggests, people in places like Hualcán make *pagos* only privately, it is very rare to hear people speaking publicly of such practices. Forms of communication with other-than-human entities are difficult to find in an explicit form in the Callejón de Huaylas nowadays, as other investigations on the matter

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1 This difference vibrates with Michael Taussig's (2010, 224) distinction between the offerings made by *campesinos* and miners to the spirits of mines, known as the Supay, Huhuari, Tío or Diablo (the Devil): 'Peasants exchange gifts with the spirit owner; the spirit owner converts these gifts into precious metal; the miners excavate this metal, which they "find" as long as they perform rites of gift exchange with the spirit; the miners' labor, which is embodied in the tin ore, is sold as a commodity to the legal owners and employers; these last sell the ore on the international commodity market. Thus, reciprocal gift exchanges end as commodity exchanges; standing between the devil and the state, the miners mediate this transformation'. Paraphrasing Taussig, changes in the relationship between local communities and their surroundings would be explained by the new commercial relations that the expansion of capitalism brought to almost every corner of the colonised lands – an expansion that even transformed the offerings provided to earth sentient entities.

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have reported (Bode 2001; Rasmussen 2015; Walker-Crawford 2021). In cases where they have been documented, practices are rather subtle offerings based on an item of food, coca or alcohol left at the foothills of the mountains and lakes – contrasting with the more elaborated *despachos* to be found in regions like Cusco. Even in cases where people still have these types of relations with other-than-human entities, they commonly keep them secret for fear of discrimination.

Few studies have explored why traditional forms of communication with sentient beings in the Callejón de Huaylas are less visible than in regions such as Cusco. However, we may speculate on this. Many of the traditional linkages connecting people with other-than-human entities in the past, which Catherine Allen (2002) and Marisol de la Cadena (2015) relate to the figure of the *tirakuna* or earth-beings, have changed dramatically since efforts towards rural modernisation – especially after Juan Velasco Alvarado's agrarian reform in the late 1960s. These transformations led to a strong division between the former traditional *comunidades* and what emerged as *comunidades políticas* framed within the state apparatus, as Javier Puente (2023) states. The traditional relations that *runakuna* (Quechua people) and *tirakuna* developed within the *ayllu*, the basic social entity cohering Quechua society based on an intimate land cohabitation[2], would be slowly replaced by territorial demands of land restitution that *comunidades políticas*, under the figure of *comunidades campesinas*, raised. The shift from *indígenas* to *campesinos*, Puente suggests, would lead to a bureaucratization of the figure of the *comunidad*, undermining the relevance of public relationships and forms of communication with *earth-beings* within a specific *ayllu*, the community with the inhabited land.

Whereas Puente (2020) affirms that efforts to *campesinizar* (peasentise) the rural world were a nationwide phenomenon as a consequence of the agrarian reform, this political transformation of the social fabric was, according to Mattias Rasmussen (2015), particularly radical in the Callejón de Huaylas due to other two pivotal events: the 1970 earthquake and the creation of Huascarán National Park immediately after the agrarian reform. The former, as we have seen, would be used as the perfect scenario to accelerate Velasco Alvarado's political programme of social transformation

2 Inhabiting the land and creating a bond with it is a fundamental characteristic of the composition of an *ayllu*. According to Allen (2002, 84), '[u]ninhabited places are not *ayllus*. But neither is a group of coresidential people. An *ayllu* exists through the personal and intimate relationship that bonds the people and the place into a single unit. Only when *Runakuna* establish a relationship with a place by building houses out of its soil, by living there, and by giving it offerings of coca and alcohol is an *ayllu* established. The relationship is reciprocal, for the *Runakuna's* indications of care and respect are returned by the place's guardianship'. This inhabitance is, according to Allen, driven by a common focus among the *ayllu's* members, which can include sharing a common ancestor, a common allegiance with a sacred place, or even common specializations and working tasks. This focus-driven bond enables individuals to belong to several *ayllukuna* simultaneously depending on the focus and context.

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in the region, leading to a re-articulation of lowland–highland relationships. Moreover, the political changes in land administration brought by the constitution of the Huascarán National Park would force *comunidades campesinas* to adapt to new forms of engagement with the territory. Sentient entities such as lakes or snowed peaks, which previously perform a fundamental role in the *ayllus* where they belonged, underwent radical replacement by new administrative figures, including new state agencies, regimes of land property and, above all, paperwork. Tonnes of it.

According to Rasmussen, paperwork represents the ultimate expression of a complex bureaucratic reality that *comuneros* had to learn to deal with. 'When an area is designated as worthy of conservation, it happens through a process in which plants, animals, people, practices and territories are reclassified and given new significance. Paperwork is a central strategy in those efforts to enclose resource territories by classifying, indeed claiming, history' (Rasmussen 2018, 430), the author suggests concerning the creation of Huascarán National Park on former common lands. Just like labour regimes, administrative transformations in the Cordillera Blanca, together with the incommensurable lashes of events like the 1970 earthquake, accelerated changes in forms of relating to the territory – and its history – that had a tremendous impact on people's lives. For *comunidades campesinas*, this implied justifying their existence not through their ancient connections with entities in the territory. Documents, particularly old ones, would be the primary strategy to connect people and land across history. As Pedro, a member of *Comunidad Campesina* Tupac Amaru II, tells me regarding conflicts with Huascarán National Park:

> when we started to do the works with concrete [referring to the construction of the fence at the entrance to Lake Palcacocha], they brought us down [off the mountain] with the police. But then we showed our documents. We count on those documents. So, this time we have done new works with concrete, and they haven't said anything.

The documents Pedro mentions are the land ownership certificates that, date back to when his *abuelos*[3] bought those lands in 1886. Those documents, more than anything, are the proof the *comunidad* uses to certify their connection with what they define as their property – and their rights over it.

Although people might not discuss or recognise it explicitly, relations with sentient beings in the mountains still influence everyday life. Mountain lakes are still considered dangerous entities: they provide the population with water and life, but they can also be deadly – and not only via floods. Almost every lake of the Cordillera

3 Whereas the word abuelo/a means grandfather or grandmother, in the Andes is commonly used to refer to ancestors in general.

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Blanca is associated with stories about people being victims of *encantos*: Enchantments in the form of treasures that the lake shows to visitors, to attract them into its waters and swallow them. Sometimes the water opens up, leaving a space full of treasures in the middle of the lake, so the victims can walk inside before the water covers the area again. In other cases, the swallowed victims are turned into stones that remain in the lake's surroundings forever. Lakes are protected by sirens and *toros bravos*, wild bulls wandering around the mountains and safeguarding the lakes' wealth. They are particularly *chúcaros* against people seeking mineral veins without the permission of the mountain or against *huaqueros* looking for *chullpas* and other ruins to loot. There are even rumours of people becoming ill after hunting wildlife in certain lakes. Even when denying the practice of *pagos* or other forms of offerings to mountains or lakes, they recognise these stories as part of their lives.

*Figure 14: Syphons installed in Palcacocha, passing under the retaining wall*
(Usón 2020)

Creating proper relations with sentient beings in the mountains is not only a practice of rural highland communities. Roberto, the engineer behind the draining operations in Palcacocha, recognises that the people monitoring the lake until recently used to make *pagos* to the family of sirens that lives within the water. Eduardo, an older worker from Llupa who used to work for the Municipality as a *lagunero*, was in charge of offering *pagos* to them. 'When he lived upstairs, he stayed in the camp and in his dreams [the sirens] always told him what he had to give them. So, he would

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go down, for example, buy a ham at the market and take it with him. What he never missed was the coca leaves and rum. He always, always gave it to them'. Roberto affirms that Eduardo was forced to leave his job at the lake under pressure from the *comunidad* Tupac Amaru II. According to him, Roberto was very efficient at his job and the *comuneros* felt he was giving them a poor reputation. In addition, some *comuneros* did not feel comfortable with him making *pagos*. 'From then on, it became difficult for us to manage [the lake] because we used to manage it through prayers and *pagos* to the land, right? And that *pago* was continuous, every 15 days or every month'. Without the *pagos*, Roberto affirms, the lake turned more *chúcaro*; the syphons (see Figure 14) stopped working properly and cavitation, a type of hydraulic void affecting the draining tubes to the point of risking their collapse, started occurring more often. Hernán, a *lagunero* from Uncush working in Palcacocha, thinks the same. Although Eduardo is no longer employed as a *lagunero*, Hernán still occasionally offers the lake *pagos*. 'We give coca, cigarettes, corn, wheat, everything. … [We give it] when it starts growing and doesn't stop. It's like it's warning us. We dream with ladies. When we dream, we have to give it its *pago*. It is asking for something'.

The relationship between the people and entities like mountain lakes in the Callejón de Huaylas show us that different strategies for coping with extreme events cohabit in this region. The abandonment felt by highland people as a result of an absent, corrupt state seems to be managed through practices that, although apparently declining, are still a form of relating and communicating with sentient beings in the Cordillera Blanca. Far from being something engaged in only by highland people, practices like *pagos* are sometimes recognised and even embraced by authorities and engineers from urban areas. *Pagos* are considered necessary to manage the lakes like Palcacocha, being applied by workers there and combined with engineering operations for draining the water. Yet, not every practice outside the conventions of science would be embraced. In all its variants and explanations, the destruction of the early warning system was rejected by authorities and workers, even those supporting alternative relations with lakes, and was regarded as a form of superstition at best and the result of political manipulation at worst. *Comuneros*, as a figure, would be condemned for these acts, considering an expected reaction to their idiosyncrasy and lifestyle – even when, in many cases, *comunidades campesinas* would try to distance themselves from what are considered traditional forms of rural life. The entanglement of all these forms of relating with lakes and mountains creates a complex scenario where straightforward connections between figures and environmental responses are ambiguous. The political arrangements across the history of the Cordillera Blanca would create a diverse ecology of practices that, despite its messiness and unexpected connections, would be oriented towards the traditional lowland and highland figuration.

Despite the modest attempts nowadays by people like Nicolás or workers in Palcacocha to maintain good relations with entities in the mountains, practices like

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*pagos* may not be enough to avoid the occurrence of extreme events. The extensive ecosystem of agents, practices and materiality composing disasters and the efforts to prevent them will require inclusion of other types of devices, entities that need to be carried from time to time, as we will see in the next section, to ensure that cities and villages remain safe.

## Carrying protection

The Sun rose just a moment ago. I am joining a group of 15 men on their way to Runtu Hill, close to the village of Paria-Wilcahuaín in the vicinity of Huaraz. Their goal – mine too, I presume – is to bring the Cross Runtu from *his*[4] throne, a cairn made of stones and concrete, to their village about two kilometres downhill. It is a Tuesday in early February, and next Sunday the *Fiesta de Cruces* (Fest of the Crosses) will take place in Huaraz, announcing the beginning of the carnival. Runtu must be dressed up before leaving for Huaraz, where his new *vestido*[5] will be blessed. As living beings, Runtu and the many others crosses gather while waiting for their new *vestidos* to be dressed. This celebration, which will almost entirely consume people's time in Paria-Wilcahuaín over the following days, is fundamental to ensuring that crops will not be affected by frost or hail over the coming year. No *vestido*, no protection; it's as simple as that.

Crosses are central entities in Huaraz and its surroundings. They provide security for the people in the highlands and lower areas, protecting their parishioners from events threatening villages and towns. They can also send messages to their devotees to warn them about possible dangers. Like other entities in the mountains, the crosses reveal themselves in dreams. They can help find something lost or announce something bad that will happen, like a burglary or another significant event such as a flood or an earthquake. But to do this, the cross needs to be cared for. Every year, they need new *vestidos* that must be blessed. The *calvario*, the wooden body of the cross, has received the benediction several times over the years. But the adornments, renewed every year, must undergo the same process (Bode 2001, 303). To protect people, in other words, the cross must be mobilised.

Runtu, the cross we have come to carry, is a massive *cruz mayor* (main cross), one of the most famous in Huaraz's surroundings. It is approximately five metres high and two metres wide, and constructed of solid wood adorned with dried *carrizo* (water-reeds, *Phragmites australis*) and other remnants of last year's *vestido* that

4 Despite their feminine grammatical article (*la cruz*), crosses are normally male entities.

5 Literally meaning 'dress', the term *vestido* refers to formal attire. It conveys the solemnity with which the crosses are treated when they are brought down from the hills each year to be dressed in new clothes.

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make *him* a cumbersome structure. Alcohol, which has been consumed since early morning, helps to make the transportation of such a massive cross more bearable. Red wine, cola with rum and *chicha*[6] *con punto* (*chicha* mixed with pure alcohol) are among the favourites we share from a single plastic cup. One serves, the rest drink. As soon as you receive the half-full cup, which happens every couple of minutes, you drink it fast, almost at once. You do not want to hold the only drinking vessel for too long. Consuming alcohol at this pace fulfils its goal quite efficiently. You can tell that the participants, myself included, already feel the effects of heavy drinking. All this happens while the traditional *caja flauta*, a small band consisting of two traditional drums and two *pincuyos* (a type of flute), repeatedly plays the same traditional rhythms. This scene will set the tone for the next few days – a carnivalesque excess in its purest expression.

After taking Runtu down, we head to the house of the Ortúzar family, where the cross will be newly dressed in the following days. The family was randomly selected to be the *devotos*[7] (devotees) of this year, the hosts of the celebration. They are in charge of keeping Runtu in their house and dressing him for the new year before leading to Huaraz on Sunday. The result of their work, some days later, is exceptional. The old, dry *carrizo* and *machitu* (*Tillandsia latifolia*, a plant endemic to the zone) comprising the structure of last year's decoration have been removed and replaced with fresh branches. Just like in past years, plastic flowers[8] have been used to decorate the *carrizo* and the *machitu*. This year's decoration consists of mixed flowers of different colours: white lilies in the centre, surrounded by pink daisies then sunflowers at the upper tips of the cross. Some wooden butterflies pop up around the flowers in the upper part. Like every year, and according to the tradition, the *machitu* placed over the *carrizo* has been painted silver, leaving only its pink tips uncoloured. At the very centre, the heart of the cross shows a hologram of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Around it, large red letters form the words Runtu and Paria. At the tips of the cross, large amounts of rosemary[9] stick out among the artificial flowers.

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6 *Chicha* is a traditional beer-like beverage of Latin America. In Ancash it is commonly made from malted corn (*chicha de jora*) but sometimes also from quinoa or peanut. It can be both alcoholic and non-fermented. During festivities, it is common for people to add pure alcohol to the *chicha* to increase its low alcohol percentage.

7 Whereas people in Paria-Wilcahuaín refer to the hosting family as the *devotos*, the traditional name of this position has commonly been the *mayordomo* (steward).

8 The use of artificial flowers instead of fresh ones, I later learn, was the result of a long-standing campaign conducted by the Huascarán National Park to avoid people overexploiting endemic species located within the park's protected areas.

9 Rosemary is particularly important due to the healing properties it has for agriculture. In some places, the rosemary is later removed from the cross and burned in order to avoid frost and hail. I also notice that it is commonly taken in little pieces by Runtu's devotees during the celebration days, as a form of keeping the protection of the cross with them.

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Despite the relevance of Runtu for people in Paria-Wilcahuaín, this is not the only cross they take care of. Runtu will be accompanied in the following days by Awaq, another community cross that, however, is considerably smaller than the former: about two metres high and one metre wide. You can tell that Runtu and Awaq are closely related. They even wear similar colours. Awaq is decorated with white and yellow daisies in the centre, pink lilies around it and white and pink daisies at the ends. Like Runtu, silver *machitu* can be spotted beneath the flowers, while large quantities of rosemary overflow to form the tips. Unlike Runtu, however, a bouquet of *ichu* and other wild plants is placed around the heart, also represented by an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Instead of butterflies, five blue-and-white wooden birds are distributed along the cross's length.

Just like Runtu, Awaq offers protection to his devotees in the surroundings. The security he provides, however, is not against frost or hail but floods – specifically, from Lake Awaq (also called Ahuac or Aguak) – located further up in the mountains. The cross was placed there to protect the population against an outburst of the lake. *The lake has been* amansado (tamed) *anyway*, one of the other participants explains to me. In the past, few people would go up to the lake, as it was believed to be *encantado* (haunted) and, like other lakes in the region, it would show visitors jewels and treasures, in order to lure them into the water and kill them. Now, regular visits from *gringo* tourists, a more positive version of this foreign figure, have calmed the lake. However, it is still said that the surface of the lake often becomes rough as visitors approach. Having a cross nearby, in this sense, has been part of the process of taming the lake and ensuring it remains calm.

The connection between Runtu and Awaq extends beyond their geographical proximity. The two crosses are regarded as siblings, bound by a familial tie that renders their existence incomplete without one another. As siblings, Runtu and Awaq get to meet only once per year for *Fiestas de Cruces*, a massive event in Huaraz and the surrounding villages. Hundreds of crosses of all sizes and colours gather during the first day of the carnival, exactly one week before Lent. During that Sunday, *cruces de campo* (rural crosses) and small family crosses come down from the higher villages surrounding Huaraz to have their new 'dresses' blessed, which they will keep throughout the year. It is also one of the few moments in the year when crosses meet, in a real *fiesta* organised for them. When the *cruces mayores* get to see each other, they commonly dance while they greet joyfully but with formality, bowing slightly in front of each other. They are happy to gather with distant friends and relatives. Just like Runtu and Awaq, other crosses are related through family bonds, and it is the only time of the year that they are able to reconnect (see Figure 15). It is like visiting cousins and siblings during a family reunion.

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*Figure 15: Runtu (left) and Awaq (bottom right) dancing during Misa de Cruces in Paria-Wilcahuaín, together with other cruces mayores*
(Usón 2020)

Carrying Runtu and Awaq from Huaraz back and forth and then back to the top of the mountain is an extremely exhausting task. After being dressed up, both crosses are walked about six kilometres downhill together to La Soledad Church in Huaraz, where they will meet all the other main crosses of the zone. I personally experience how heavy Runtu is while walking from Paria-Wilcahuaín to La Soledad, when the participants invite me to carry him at some point. I timidly nod at the time while taking a jacket from my backpack to protect my shoulder from the cross's weight, a technique used by all the *cargadores*. As I slowly approach the cross, I receive an uncomfortable glance from an exhausted man under the head of the *calvario*, the heaviest part of the cross. At a sharp *¡Cambio!* (Change!) the procession stopped for a second, and I quickly dive under the wooden structure in front of the previous *cargador*. While holding the upper branches of *carrizo* with both hands and my right shoulder, and as the other person withdraws, I receive the full weight of the structure. It is almost unbearable. I can feel the weight all the way down my back, from the upper part below the shoulder blades to the lumbar area. Little by little, though, I start to take slow but sure steps. I make pronounced gasps, trying to set tangible goals for where I plan to go. First, a rock up ahead, then a bush, then the entrance to a house further ahead; all those things works to specific milestones on how long to

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walk. Once my turn is over, I feel a massive relief over my back and shoulders. Everything seems lighter. I try to estimate how far I walked. Was it 50 metres? 100 metres? One minute? A minute and a half? Less? I wonder if it was an average distance or if, in the eyes of the more experienced *cargadores*, it was merely a symbolic contribution. Carrying such a massive body is a constant reflection on limits: When it is enough, and when is it too little? When is one crossing a barrier of self-flagellation and when is one, in the eyes of others, eschewing one's communal duties?

The task of a *cargador* becomes more difficult as the days progress. After Runtu and Awaq receive their new dresses, their weight increases considerably due to the fresh branches of *carrizo* and *machitu*. The weight becomes even greater during rain, as the branches absorb the water. Once the celebration in Huaraz is over, *cargadores* must walk the six kilometres along the steep road back to the village, which can take twice as long as the way down. The last day, the *hawikuy*[10], is the most strenuous part, as both crosses must be carried back to their homes over the mountains. The hike to the Runtu Hill takes at least two hours from Paria-Wilcahuaín. It is a massive farewell, bringing together the entire town and people from the surroundings. The hike to Lake Awaq, however, is less crowded. Due to the physical sacrifice it entails, only the youngest participants go up to the lake. It is a three-and-half-hour walk from Runtu's throne up a very steep mountain path. The top of the mountain is reached around nine in the evening, and then another two hours are required for the return. But, as in any other moment of the celebration, the hardship does not seem to matter. To carry Runtu and Awaq, to be their legs, is a blessing worth the burden.

Despite the longstanding tradition of this festivity, *Fiesta de Cruces* has not always been viewed positively by the Catholic Church. As we saw in Chapter Three, the cross came to replace other sacred entities, including *huacas* and *huancas* strategically placed as protectors of the land. The exhaustive campaign by the Catholic Church to eradicate those figures from the daily lives of the colonised population, replacing them with Christian crosses, only led to the articulation of a new being – one that, similarly to their predecessors, was considered a protector of the land. It was a reciprocal relationship, in which the oversight of the duties around the cross could bring dramatic consequences.

As Pierre Duviols (1976) suggests, neglecting the care of entities like *huancas*, or other forms of *huacas*, was not only a neglect of traditions; it was also a form of *jutsa*[11],

10 Quechua for placing, or planting, the cross in his throne.

11 Sometimes translated as 'sin' (e.g. Yauri Montero 2013, 135), the *jutsa* (Ancashino Quechua) or *hucha* (Southern Quechua) refers more to the breach of an obligation, subsequently leading to the occurrence of a major event, like a drought or the death of an Inca ruler (Cockrell 2017). The occurrence of those events, in this sense, reflected the abandonment of the duties, especially those that refer to caring for entities such as *huacas*. In contrast to the concept of sin in the Catholic context, *jutsa* has a strong political connotation and therefore constitutes more than a religious fault.

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an infringement of the obligations imposed by the Inca rule, and could lead to disruptive events like droughts. Taking care of the *huacas*, in this sense, was not simply a religious duty or *costumbre* (custom) – under Christian terms – but a political one. As members of the communities and the Inca state-like apparatus, *huacas* were in direct contact with the Sapa Inca, the main Inca ruler, providing protection while demanding respect and attention from the people cohabiting the lands within their jurisdiction. It is precisely this centrality and relevance that would later be transferred to the crosses, a religious icon that, despite the Church's efforts otherwise, would be treated with the same fervent devotion as huacas in the past.

With time, the Church would make these celebrations an important part of its own traditions. Yet, this respectful coexistence of different traditions would also find some moments of tension throughout history. After the 1970 earthquake, Barbara Bode (2001) affirms, new reformist currents within the Church tried everything in their power to forbid the festivities. In tune with Velasco Alvarado's efforts to create a new Peruvian society from the debris of the disaster, and oriented through the recently celebrated Second Vatican Council that aimed to update Catholic practice, religious authorities used the destruction of the earthquake as an opportunity to reform what they considered old-fashioned traditions that had nothing to do with the liberatory role of the Catholic faith. As Bode (2001, 191) states, 'just as the Revolution saw an opportunity to move beyond agrarian reform and expropriate urban land of the levelled towns, the Church saw the chance to move beyond mere changes in ritual that broke with traditional Catholicism'. Changes, Bode suggests, included what the Theology of Liberation, a Christian theological branch with a deep concern for the poor and the emancipation of those oppressed, defined as the promotion of a radical self-awareness through *concientización* (consciousness-raising). The Church was mandated to make the poor aware of their exploited and precarious existences. From this perspective, devotion to figures such as crosses and saints was just another form of superstitious *costumbres* linked to a primitive Andean religion that kept people in ignorance and underdevelopment. *Indios* and *campesinos*, thus, had to overcome their backward traditions to be conscious of the social injustices surrounding their lives.

But despite the efforts to eradicate those traditions, the Church could not eliminate the festivities around the cross. Bode (2001, 309–12) relates how, two years after the earthquake, despite prohibiting the transport of crosses to La Soledad for the *Fiesta de Cruces*, several people from the higher towns arrived with their massive protectors for the first mass of carnival, begging the priest to bless them. Some people even attributed the earthquake to the downgrading of the crosses, something that people were willing to change by reinforcing their devotion to those entities. Facing crosses coming from all over the highlands, a mass overflowing the lowlands as in other moments in time, the priest had no alternative but to perform the blessing. Although a significant proportion of the mountain crosses were not transported

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to Huaraz for benediction that year, the subsequent festivities recovered in scale as the city started to recuperate from the earthquake's effects. The crosses, just like El Señor de la Soledad, were fundamental figures in preserving the integrity of the destroyed city, with the hope that, by maintaining those ancient traditions, the ruined city would re-emerge from the rubble.

Nowadays, *Fiesta de Cruces* is one of Huaraz's largest religious celebrations, known nationally for the beauty of the crosses that join from different villages and towns surrounding Ancash's capital. Its current large scale, though, has not eliminated the historical friction with the Catholic Church. The institution still considers the *costumbre* around the crosses problematic and a practice that goes against the Catholic faith. Rather than just a symbol of redemption, crosses are portrayed as living guardians, and the connection people build with them is considered a form of worship that borders on the heretical.

*Figure 16: The assistant priest gives the benediction to a mass of crosses gathered in La Soledad*
(Usón 2020)

These frictions can be sensed throughout the Catholic rite. During the *Misa de Cruces*, the thousands of devotees gathered in La Soledad are mandated to stay outside the church, in the square in front of the temple. There, some plastic chairs and

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a large folding table serve as an improvised altar for the priest leading the mass. The priest, a man in his sixties who mixes phrases in Spanish and Quechua throughout the ceremony, seems slightly from the thousands of people gathered in La Soledad square. It is a particularly short ceremony; the priest completely omits the Eucharist, the most important moment of the Catholic ritual. The crosses gathered that day, moreover, are barely mentioned during the ceremony. Only at the very end does the priest curtly congratulate devotees for the great work they have done *decorating* the crosses, never referring to their garments as *vestidos* or acknowledging their protective role in their communities. Some minutes before the benediction, the priest only calls for calm and order, promising that everyone will receive the blessing if they behave properly. Rather than talking to parishioners, he seems like a father preaching to his children.

After giving the main instructions for the benediction, the main priest disappears without saying a word. He does not even conduct the blessing; this is done instead by one of his assistants, an overwhelmed priest who faces alone the massive group of people that starts approaching him, slowly but steadily, carrying their family and community crosses (see Figure 16). They are waiting to receive the holy water he spreads through the air with a branch of wildflowers from a plastic bucket. Instead of a church choir singing Catholic songs, a large band comprising drums and brass instruments plays regional *huaynos* while other participants throw fireworks to cheer the moment. The scene differs entirely from the solemnity of the masses celebrated each Sunday in La Soledad. The celebration is for – and run by – the people; the Church simply endorses a ceremony that is beyond its control.

While I observe the benediction of the *cruces mayores*, Runtu and Awaq included, I notice that none of the *cargadores* of those crosses are attending the mass. On closer inspection, I can see hardly any people from Paria-Wilcahuaín. At some point, I spot one member of the group carrying Runtu and Awaq that morning. As I ask him where the others are, he tells me they have gone somewhere (*por ahí*). *To recover energy*, he says while imitating with his hand the raising of a glass to his mouth. The message is clear: *Cargadores* are not there to attend the ceremony. Their role is to carry the crosses and ensure they receive the benediction, so that they can then be returned to their thrones. What happens in-between is not their business.

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It would be too easy to describe the celebration of the crosses as an example of what Isabel Cruz (1995) defines as a popular mestizo Catholicism – the result of a syncretic relation between two well-constituted worlds: the Andean and the Christian traditions. The festivities around the cross certainly have a direct link to the arrival of Catholicism in the region and its further entanglement with entities like *huan-*

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*cas*. Yet, dealing with these entanglements as the originator of a unified synthesis impedes exploring in further detail the multiplicities that we can find around celebrations like Fiesta de Cruces – and the commemoration of the figure of the cross in general.

As we have seen in this section, for people in places like Paria-Wilcahuaín the cross is not only an icon; it is a being – not a human one, and certainly not an earth-being (*tirakuna*). The direct legacy of the *huanca* – the stone-based guardian protecting and demarking the lands of the *ayllu* – over the cross grants him the status of an entity deeply rooted in the place he aims to protect. In order to safeguard the population, the cross requires the display and mobilisation of a vast network of actors, materialities, practices and relations – in tune with what Brian Cockrell (2017) defines as a real assemblage between components to ensure the *camay*, the energising power, of entities like *huacas*. Without being bestowed new clothing, plus the work of *cargadores* and the constant music of the *caja flauta*, crosses like Runtu and Awaq could not take care of the population. It is a protection that needs to be embodied, to the point of feeling it in every muscle of the *cargadores*' back, as my experience carrying the cross shows. People holding up the cross turn, for the minutes their work lasts, into the cross himself. They are his legs that enable him to reach Huaraz and receive benediction and to then return to his throne in the highlands.

But this living condition of the cross in any case depletes the multiple realities around this figure. In the eyes of the Catholic Church, the cross is still an icon – a fundamental one, but which cannot be related to some concrete being with agency. The Church has fought against what they consider as a misleading interpretation, a *costumbre* representing the ultimate example of superstitious beliefs and a problematic animated world that the Catholic religion is – still now – unable to properly deal with. Recognising the existence of the cross beyond the icon is something that borders on the heretical. But rejecting such practices can lead to strong conflicts with the population, as history has shown. The Church, under these terms, has no choice but to accept the existence of this festivity even if it goes against its own teachings.

The ontological multiplicity (Mol 2003) that the cross entails strongly resonates with what in this work has already been presented under the notion of cosmopolitics – a politics of world-making that challenges the idea of unitarily constituted reality. The cosmopolitical arrangement around the crosses, however, is less about full recognition of all these versions of the cross coexisting simultaneously but more to do with partial recognition – or perhaps simple tolerance. Forced to accept this tradition to avoid social conflict, the priest from La Soledad is reluctant to fully recognise those crosses as what they are for the vast majority of the population: protectors of life and lands. At the same time, *cargadores* do not seem interested in the moment of the benediction, the central action for which Runtu and Awaq have been carried all the way down from Paria-Wilcahuaín. Instead, they prefer to go elsewhere and 'quench their thirst'. This ambivalence towards the other, however, should not be

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interpreted as indifference or, worse, misrecognition. Both scenes show that these realities and their versions of the cross coexist in diplomatic terms (Latour 2004) but without necessarily fully recognising the other. This form of coexistence speaks more about a *tolerated* cohabitation, an exchange that, rather than embracing the otherness in its totality, aims to respect other existences without necessarily fully accepting them as real or genuine. It is a diplomacy that moves beyond unilateral communication and accepts that the positions at hand require instead negotiations, compromises, gains and losses. If the other cannot be persuaded, then peace needs to be found on other terms.

Such an approach to the multiplicity of the crosses reveals an interesting aspect of this encounter worth bearing in mind. The gathering of the two types of crosses seems to diverge from the already explored operation that the *tinku* inaugurates – an encounter with the difference that produces a synthetic union. Rather than a syncretic outcome, the cross embodies a multiplicity that relates more to another type of encounter in the Quechua world, known as *topay* (from Spanish *topar*, to butt or bump into something). According to Catherine Allen (2002, 267), although both concepts relate to a similar semantic field, *tinkuy* refers to a mixture 'whose ingredients lose their separate identity in a new whole'. *Topay*, moreover, denotes 'a coming together of parts that maintain their integrity within the whole', like mixing water and oil. They raise two different types of encounters, one in which the components are merged into a new result – similar to what the idea of syncretism promotes – and another in which the different elements at stance remain autonomous without being corrupted or transformed.

The question of whether these concepts are ontologically applicable to the figure of the crosses or any other of the encounters explored herein is beyond the scope of the present volume. What is interesting is the disposition, the *epistemic mood* these encounters offer, as Andrea Ballestero (2019) suggests. As a thing initiating an encounter, the cross does not provide an ontological unity. It/he is an icon and a living being, a tension oscillating between what María Alba Bovisio (2019) differentiates as representation and 'presentification' (*presentificación*). These different versions of the cross seem to cohabit in peaceful yet contradictory and sometimes tense terms. However, the multiple versions of the cross cannot be associated with a specific world order. People in urban and rural areas show devotion to the cross as a living entity. It is a pulsation beyond particular places, villages or social groups. The *topay* that the cross offers is not between the highlands and the lowlands, but between the multiple realities and temporalities that the cross [him/it]self contains.

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## Building security amid uncertain times

Here and in the previous chapter, we have explored the efforts of governmental agencies to create a secure environment in Huaraz and Carhuaz. We have seen how the installation of a complex network of monitoring devices, educational programmes and the creation of visual materials such as flood hazard maps have aimed to enhance a culture of prevention among the population, in the hope that people will react accordingly in case of an outburst flood or other extreme event. We have also seen how these efforts have been contested by a generalised mistrust of public institutions, fuelled by factors including persistent corruption scandals affecting the region in recent decades. We have also seen how this generalised mistrust towards public agencies has not impeded people from developing their own strategies to produce secure environments – some based on old traditions connecting towns and cities with other-than-human beings. Security, based on these examples, is a complex entanglement of practices and materialities involving diverse actors and heterogeneous efforts.

In this chapter, we have also seen that the moral impulse of anticipatory practices in the Callejón perpetuates a figuration that we have encountered several times in this work: the lowlands and the highlands. However, the management of glacial lakes in the Cordillera Blanca shows us that the boundaries between the low- and highlands are not fixed or static. These two porous regions experience a constant flow of state and private agents, members of *comunidades campesinas*, technical machinery, paperwork and traditional practices of communicating with sentient beings. *Pagos* are required to ensure the proper functioning of drainage syphons and to pacify the highland lakes and the entities believed to reside therein. *Laguneros* depend on messages, which the lake and its entities share with them in dreams, to know what to provide for the *pagos*. Furthermore, documents are used by *comunidades campesinas* to certify their historical land rights to authorities, replacing the relevance that connections with lakes and mountains previously held in validating their relationship with the land. Rather than two dichotomic world arrangements with scarce interactions, the case of the glacial lakes in the Cordillera Blanca shows us a scenario involving a massive amount of information, explanations, speculations and meeting points where all sorts of differences converge. The act of sabotaging scientific equipment is the result of more complex processes beyond simple ignorance. At the same time, the enactment of science is more than pure scientific rationality put into practice to manage the environment. The ecosystem of practices, materialities and affects around glacial lakes and early warning systems becomes a complex entanglement challenging simplistic explanations of highlanders intrinsically rejecting technology and authorities discarding non-scientific practices of engaging with lakes.

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As a region that claims to have suffered chronic state abandonment for centuries, the highlands have known how to generate and perpetuate their own protective practices to cope with threats affecting communities and villages. Besides *pagos*, crosses have been a central figure in this context, protecting crops throughout the season. Massive efforts are involved in ensuring that crosses fulfil their protective roles throughout the year. Besides the transportation of crosses like Runtu and Awaq from one place to another during an entire week, families expend large sums on the new *vestidos*, and food and drink for all those participating in the process. But all these costs are justified with the entirety of the ceremony taken into account. As ambiguous figures tolerated by the urban world in their protective roles, crosses are nowadays one of the few devices people rely on to cope with the uncertainties of the future, which global climate change has only worsened.

According to Mathias Rasmussen (2015, 171), climate change has introduced new temporalities in the Andes that have affected people's sense of their direct environments. Climate change comes with new forms of waiting, in which more stable seasons with predictable rain patterns are replaced by an anxious state of not knowing whether the new season will bring enough precipitation to ensure a good harvest. It has also made other events such as hail and frost more unpredictable. Without adequate capacity to adapt to future climatic uncertainty, and in the absence of state support to cover associated costs, people in the highlands are forced to rely on alternative strategies to mitigate the possible impacts of cold or drought. 'Climate change provides a powerful language and a coherent narrative that emphasises how the social life of agricultural production is being reconfigured by the temporality of water', Rasmussen (2015, 172) suggests. This scenario introduces a new conceptualisation of an ongoing threat that, nevertheless, is interwoven with already existing figurations of abandonment and precarity.

Abandonment, Rasmussen (2017, 2) affirms, is a figuration that operates not only as a material condition but mostly as a critique of governance and its effects. 'As a vernacular of citizenship, abandonment serves as a leitmotif, conveying the distance from power, cities, comfort, security, dignity and general support'. Abandonment, in this sense, not only shows the concrete consequences of years of state absence, itself a disaster, but also reveals how abandonment, as an enunciation, is used among people in the highlands to articulate new political agendas and forms of citizenship, showing how successful these strategies can sometimes be.

When I returned to Carhuaz during my second period of fieldwork in 2022, I met Mauro again, the former officer of the Carhuaz Provincial Municipality with whom I first visited Lake 513 in 2019. We decided to visit Shonquil Pampa, the extensive meadow where one of the monitoring stations was destroyed by *comuneros* in 2016. As we pass by the remains of the station, I ask him about the possibility of reinstating the early warning system. Mauro left his job at Carhuaz Provincial Municipality about a year prior. He is now a private consultant to water infrastructure

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projects, and his work around Lake 513's early warning system feels very distant to him. Nevertheless, he is still acutely aware of the conversations within the local government, due to his contacts there. Mauro thinks it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to reinstall the equipment. The agencies that provided the resources and technical knowledge to establish the system are not willing to give further funding after the destruction of the stations in 2016. Agencies like CARE Peru and COSUDE would provide further support only if the Municipality agrees to cover most of the expenses and guarantee constant security surveillance of the equipment – demands that are beyond the Municipality's meagre budget. Besides, people still do not want the equipment in the area. The region is still experiencing severe water scarcity due to lack of rain, which some groups still think would be exacerbated by the monitoring stations. In such a context, reinstalling the early warning system would simply be political suicide.

Either way, Mauro thinks that the SAT is now less important, and that things have changed since the last flood in 2010. He affirms that the glacier has retreated too far for a chunk of ice or avalanche to fall into the water. Even the 2010 event was not as dangerous for Carhuaz, he affirms; the water did not even reach the city at that time, and only affected some crops and roads. He believes that if a new outburst flood occurs, it would be very unlikely to reach the city due to the Shonquil Pampa buffer zone, which is estimated to halve the severity of any flood event. *A huge earthquake*, like in 1970, *would be required to bring down a piece of mountain big enough to trigger a threatening flood*, he says.

Mauro's new position *vis-à-vis* outburst floods surprises me. His attitude to the issue is completely different from what he told me two years prior, when we faced the angry Herd Association in Shonquil Pampa. At the time, he thought there was an imminent risk of an outburst flood through the Chucchún Valley, and that the early warning system should still be pushed forward. Nowadays, even the population in Carhuaz, strong advocates of the SAT at that time, seem to have reconsidered its relevance. Mauro tells me that there is even an idea of damming the 513, via a larger retaining wall that would accumulate more water, a proposal that – two years prior – would have been unthinkable for its associated risk. The idea is an old proposal that has gained momentum among civil society and the Carhuaz Irrigation Association in the past months due to the lack of water in the region. Although Mauro considers such a project unfeasible, he believes that the priority is now to ensure water supplies rather than deal with an unlikely flood event. It is no coincidence that this coincides exactly with his work as a private consultant: water sowing and harvesting (*siembra y cosecha de agua*), a practice that has been historically related to *campesinos* and indigenous communities in the *sierra*. Mauro is planning to build artificial lagoons, using geomembranes and concrete, for water accumulation – something that has been a quintessential demand of rural communities for decades. He seems excited when referring to those projects. That is where the urgency is now, and also the money.

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