

# Liquid landscapes

Human-water interactions and water scarcity in Yanque, Peru

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## Abstract

In the farming district of Yanque in the Southern Peruvian Andes, everyday life revolves around acquiring enough water for irrigation. This thesis concerns water scarcity and focuses on a range of water management practices. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted among small-scale farmers from January to December 2016, the core chapters of this thesis scrutinise how water is searched for in physical and bureaucratic landscapes; how it is captured in canals, reservoirs and fields; and how it is paid *to* and *for* through offerings to earth-beings and through money transfers to the state and water organisations. By paying attention to human-water interactions, the thesis not only explores what people do with water, but also the variations in what water is, becomes and does in Yanque. Hence, this study is situated within an anthropology concerned with more-than-human relations.

In an Anthropocene world marked by increased water scarcity, *Liquid landscapes* also addresses the relation between national and regional politics of water governance and local water management. It argues that a historical continuity of water scarcity in Yanque is exacerbated by environmental changes concerning disappearing glaciers and irregular rains, as well as by a continued coloniality. The thesis shows how indeterminacy is created in political spaces, in the mountain and valley landscape, and through emotion and affect. Furthermore, by describing and analysing heterogeneous practices that Yanqueños prove to be remarkably skilled in navigating and evoking, the thesis seeks to move beyond what can appear to be opposing water realities.

*Liquid landscapes* concludes that by enacting water as a sentient person *and* as a passive substance, Yanqueños do not simply adopt the dominant way of valuing water as an object to be used efficiently. Rather, they creatively combine divergent water management practices, use distinct yet entangled irrigation infrastructures, and make relevant multiple versions of water to deal with water scarcity. Moreover, the thesis ends by holding that although Yanque farmers are especially vulnerable to environmental and ecological changes, which are intensified by inequalities and marginalisation, the indeterminacy of their water situation is not only characterised by vulnerability and uncertainty, but also by strength, creativity and possibility.

Keywords: Water scarcity, human-water interactions, small-scale farming, Peru, water management, more-than-human, entanglements, coloniality, Anthropocene