

The rights of the Wayúu people and water in the context of mining in La Guajira, Colombia: demands of *relational water justice*

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Abstract

This article addresses how water is being represented and positioned by Wayúu people in order to claim and defend *water's territorial rights* against the expansion of the Cerrejón coal mine, in La Guajira, Colombia. In a semidesertic region in Colombia, Cerrejón (the largest open-pit coal mine in Colombia and Latin America, and the 10th biggest in the world) has created environmental inequalities and control and infrastructure arrangements that transform local water dynamics, affecting Wayúu people in a differentiated way. Cerrejón has intervened the territory technically and environmentally, affecting the river Ranchería and its water streams, which has dispossessed and transformed Wayúu peoples' cultural and daily relationships with water's territories. In response, the organization Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu (FMW) has not only proposed water defense strategies and resistance against mining, but also opened debates about *water's territories and water's rights*. For the FMW the defense of *water's territories* (sacred places in which the spirits of water inhabit) implies that Wayúu territories and water are in an embedded relationship which is not possible to fragment or separate either by mining processes or by institutional policies. Their proposals allows us to rethink the notion of water justice, and access to water by humans and nonhumans.

Keywords

Colombia, mining, relational water justice, water's territories, Wayúu people

Los derechos del pueblo Wayúu y del agua en contextos mineros en La Guajira, Colombia: demandas de justicia hídrica relacional

Resumen

Este artículo aborda cómo el agua está siendo representada y posicionada por los wayúu para reclamar y defender los derechos territoriales del agua contra la expansión de la mina de carbón Cerrejón, en La Guajira, Colombia. En una región semidesértica en Colombia, Cerrejón (la mina de carbón a cielo abierto más grande en Colombia y América Latina, y la décima más grande del mundo) ha creado desigualdades ambientales y acuerdos de control e infraestructura que transforman las dinámicas locales del agua, afectando al pueblo wayúu de manera diferenciada. Cerrejón ha intervenido el territorio técnica y ambientalmente, afectando el río Ranchería y diversos arroyos, lo cual ha despojado y transformado las relaciones culturales y cotidianas de los wayúu con los territorios del agua. En respuesta, la organización Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu (FMW) ha propuesto no solo estrategias de defensa del agua y resistencia contra la minería, sino que también ha abierto debates sobre los territorios del agua y los derechos del agua. Para el FMW, la defensa de los territorios del agua (lugares sagrados en los que habitan los espíritus del agua) implica que los territorios wayúu y el agua están en una relación embebida que no es posible fragmentar o separar ni por procesos mineros ni por políticas institucionales. Sus propuestas permiten repensar la noción de justicia hídrica y el acceso al agua por parte de humanos y no humanos.

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Palabras clave

Pueblo Wayúu, Colombia, territorios del agua, minería, justicia hídrica relacional

Introduction

In Latin America, water governance with regard to mining has been criticized due to the impact mining has on water sources, for example, waste from exploitation, pollution, and drying and diversion of streams, which affect local people's availability of and access to water. Many studies on mining and water focus on increasing socioenvironmental conflicts (Bottaro and Sola Álvarez, 2018; Kauffer, 2018; Ulloa and Romero-Toledo, 2018; Yacoub et al., 2015). There are only few analyses that focus on gender and/or feminist perspectives and their link to mining and water control, and on women and their actions against it (Boelens et al., 2015; Caro, 2018a; Salazar, 2017). For this reason, I will focus on how territorial, cultural, environmental impacts of the Cerrejón mine related to water are deeply connected with gender for the Wayúu people that live in La Guajira department of Colombia.

La Guajira is a semidesertic region highly affected by climate change and desertification. Cerrejón (the largest open-pit coal mine in Colombia and Latin America and the 10th biggest in the world) has generated environmental inequalities and global-local controls of water and territories that affect availability and quality and violate *water's territorial rights* to different social actors (afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, peasants, and the dynamics of rural-urban populations). Most affected of all are Wayúu men and women; their daily cultural practices have been altered in a profound and intensive way by the mine. In response, Wayúu women and men have confronted the mine by defending their territory-water relationship as a part of their cultural identity.

The question I raise in this article is how water is being represented and positioned by Wayúu people in order to claim and defend *water's territorial rights* against the exploitation and expansion of the Cerrejón coal mine. I argue that the Wayúu people have opened up new ways of thinking about environmental and water justice in relational terms by proposing the defense of *water's territories* and by including the nonhuman's rights. This process requires recognizing the Wayúu people's cultural perspectives, concepts of ways of living, and their ontology, in which humans and nonhumans (as living beings in their own rights and as political agents) are in permanent interrelation and reciprocity.

In particular, I will focus on the political and environmental actions of the grass-root organization *Sütsüin Jieyuu Wayúu - Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu* (The Wayúu Women Force, hereafter FMW). FMW is the most representative political organization of the Wayúu people, made up of Wayúu women and men. They began their mobilizations in 2006 in order to claim for human rights, to defend their

territory and their ethnic rights, and to confront the effects of the mine in their territories. FMW centers their protest actions on cultural, territorial, and political representations of water. For the FMW, the defense of the *water's territories* (as a sacred place in which the spirits of water inhabit) implies that Wayúu's territories and water are in an embedded relationship, which is not possible to fragment or separate, either by mining processes or by institutional policies. In that context, I will focus on how FMW confronts mining by demanding water justice and the recognition of territorial, water, gender, and ethnic rights.

From a feminist political ecology (FPE) of water (Bossenbroek and Zwartveen, 2018; Zaragocin, 2018), I will analyze coal mining in the Guajira as an expression of a capitalist transformation and its effects on the access and control of water among Wayúu men and women, as well as on dispossession, land and water grabbing, and transformations of domestic spaces. I will also apply posthuman perspectives that explain the complex interactions between humans and nonhumans and the ways in which they establish relationships and coproduce each other under relational ontologies (De la Cadena, 2015; Elmhirst, 2015; Escobar, 2015). Such an approach explicates the demand for *relational water justice* and water's territorial rights (Ulloa, 2017).

This research is based on a collaborative methodological approach that has been developed with FMW since 2018. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and analysis of narratives (videos, conferences, and political statements made by FMW). FMW's leaders have their own publications that present their perspectives and their voices. They prefer that nonindigenous researchers use these publications as statements of their perspectives based on their own process of research (confronting the idea that the local expressions are only oral testimonials). Therefore, I use quotes from their publications to substantiate my arguments.

The article is structured as follows. In the first part I present conceptual discussions based on FPE perspectives of water, relational ontologies, and environmental justice. The second part will focus on the territorial, cultural, and environmental transformations of water caused by Cerrejón mine in La Guajira. The third part will focus on FMW's resistances and dynamics of defending their *water's territories* and ways of life. Finally, I will discuss the implications to locate a relational, environmental, and territorial justice perspective that allows the continuity of spirituality and materiality of life and guarantees the humans' and nonhumans' existence.

Water's territorial rights: posthumans and feminist perspectives

Notions of water as an economic good or commodity (Villa, 2012) have underpinned development and extractive projects that generate water conflicts and injustices. Mining in particular produces social inequalities, erases ethnic and local rights, increases water grabbing, and establishes hydro-power (understood as a process of water control and instrumental and infrastructure modification of the rivers, streams, and underground water). Mining hydropower relations affect the access, use, and decision making in relation to water and exclude diverse social actors and their gender differences in the political processes. To address the gender and ethnic differences under water control by mining and water injustices, I will focus on the theoretical approaches of gender, FPEs, relational ontologies, and environmental justice, to guide the analysis of this article.

Gender and feminist political ecologies of water

Studies related to gender, mining, and water (Harris, 2009; Lahiri-Dutt, 2009; Sultana, 2009, 2011) have focused on access of men and women to water as well as the participation on water decisions and gender inequality under neoliberal natures. They also have highlighted the impacts on women's lives, emotions, and bodies due to the lack of access to water. In a similar way, analysis of water from different trends of FPEs has generated particular propositions in their critical analyses of unequal gender relations and, from feminist critiques, on the relationships between gender and water political issues. It has also highlighted processes of resistance around access, control, use, decision making, and rights surrounding water. In this way FPE offers a complex perspective to deal with sociowater relationships and gender inequalities (Buechler and Hanson, 2015; Elmhirst, 2015; Resurrección, 2019). Likewise, a new axis of analysis has focused on extractivist processes and the effects on the local social dynamics and environmental management of water and processes of territorial appropriation.

Within these studies water is highlighted as a new center of analysis. Bossenbroek and Zwartveen (2018) thus demand "theorizing water dynamics and gender dynamics as intimately linked: materially (through labor and property relations), and symbolically and discursively (through norms, meanings and symbols), with 'gender' and 'water' continuously defining and redefining each other—moving together, as in a perpetual dance." From this perspective, discussions related to structural inequalities and their effects on water-control for women, which prevent them to have access and make decisions in relation to it, have emerged. Zaragocin (2018) argues for a new viewpoint regarding water and gender that brings together water-territory and body-territory, in order to understand how daily practices, quotidian

experiences, and emotions of women are affected by daily water dispossession (Ojeda et al., 2015).

Hence, in order to analyze gender–mining–water relationships it is necessary to start by studying the effects that the scarcity (as a result of uneven appropriation, power relationships, and territorial control) and the politics of water have on women's bodies, considered as the first territory (Colectivo de geografía crítica, 2018; Zaragocin, 2018). Moreover, it is necessary to consider the interrelation between body and *water's territories* as a place of defense to confront the violent everyday dispossessions.

Relational ontologies and nonhumans: water as a political actor

Feminist perspectives look for new analysis around subjectivities and identities (bodies, human, nonhuman), under new and complex assemblies of power related to environmental discussions. These perspectives open the door for gender debates in the direction of the recognition of identities associated with ethnicity, race, and intersectionality and an opening toward viewing nonhumans as political actors. These approaches allow us to focus on natures–cultures and posthumanism (Elmhirst, 2015; Harcourt and Nelson, 2015).

For these reasons, it becomes increasingly important to position different ways of interaction among humans and nonhumans that decenter the predominant anthropocentric approach to water (center on humans' necessities) by claiming other ways of seeing the nonhuman. Here it is important to start with a relational ontologies' perspective, which understands relationships between humans and nonhumans in non-anthropocentric terms.

There are relational ontologies in which "humans and non-humans (the organic, the non-organic, and the supernatural or spiritual) are integral parts of these worlds in their multiples' interrelations" (Escobar, 2015: 98). This implies the recognition that there are other conceptions of rights for nonhumans that include territory and all beings (De la Cadena, 2015; Escobar, 2015). In this sense water as a non-human entity can be considered not only as a part of the relationships between humans and nonhumans, but also as an important part in the coproduction of the humans–water's territories relationships. Water also has its own place that is shared with other living entities; it is a means to guarantee the life of human beings and other beings, and water is a common good that allows social dynamics of use and collective processes linked with cultural perspectives.

Environmental and water justice: water's territories

Environmental justice debates have a long tradition related to the recognition of rights, distribution, participation and capabilities, environmental injustices, environmental conflicts, social movements, and local confrontations (Holifield, 2015; Schlosberg, 2007, 2013). Water justice also addresses

water conflicts and injustices of access, control, decision making and rights under power relationships and the social inequalities of water use, management, and governance under specific politics of water (Boelens et al., 2018; Budds, 2010; Perreault, 2014). Recently, thanks to extractivist processes on indigenous territories, the dialogue has included nonhuman perspectives leading to new notions of environmental justice. According to Ulloa (2017: 179) “Under these perspectives, environmental justice should be understood as an ethical, political, territorial, and reciprocal action with the nonhumans from indigenous territorial and cultural principles.” Building on indigenous peoples’ identity and political dynamics leads to a notion of *relational indigenous environmental justice* (Ulloa, 2017).

I will propose an approach of environmental and water justice to address water–humans relationship. This approach arises from Wayúu’s notion of *water’s territories*, which include not only the territories of water (as being) but also other nonhumans and spiritual entities as part of those territories, and locate water as a political actor that is in permanent relationship with humans. Under this perspective the rights of water and nonhumans could be called a *relational water justice*.

The above-mentioned discussions allow me to analyze how the Cerrejón generates cultural, territorial, and environmental impacts that affect not only Wayúu’s every day practices, lives, and bodies, but also water and nonhumans’ territories. It allows me to analyze how Wayúu people are demanding *relational water justice* to face mining processes

and how they position their defense of their territories and cultural identity.

La Guajira, Cerrejón, and its cultural, territorial, and environmental transformations

The department of La Guajira (Figure 1) is the most unequal in Colombia (Gini 0.553, 2017). It registers a poverty rate of 55.8%, and 25.7% of the population is in extreme poverty (Gobernación de La Guajira, 2017). Although royalties from the mining–energy sector are an important fiscal source, La Guajira has the highest rate of unsatisfied basic needs (NBI) with 44.6%, ranking above the NBI of the Caribbean region (26.9%) and the national average (14.6%; Gobernación de La Guajira, 2017). In sociocultural terms, La Guajira is very diverse; 44.9% of the population belongs to the Wayúu, Kogui, Wiwa, and Arhuaco indigenous peoples, representing 20.2% of the total indigenous population of Colombia. Additionally, 40.3% are mestizo or white, 14.8% Afro-Colombian, and 0.04% Rom people (Gobernación de La Guajira, 2017).

La Guajira is a semidesertic region. Within Colombia, it is one of the areas most affected by climate change and with greater water complications due to intense periods of drought and desertification that affect sources of water (IDEAM, 2018). The most important river in the department of La Guajira is the Ranchería. It begins in the Sierra Nevada de

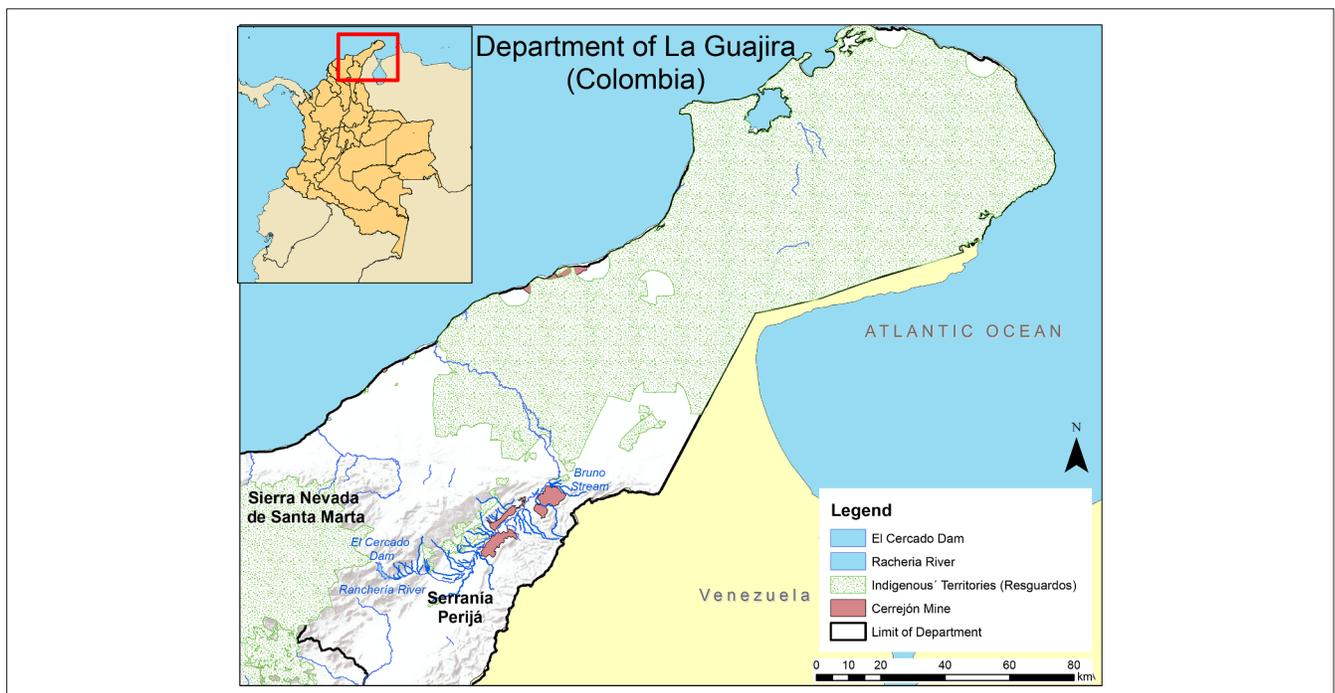


Figure 1. Localization of La Guajira, Colombia.

Santa Marta at an altitude of 3,800 m.a.s.l.; it crosses the region from west to east flowing to the Atlantic Ocean in the city of Riohacha (Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible-MADS, Corpoguajira and Universidad de Antioquia-Udea, 2013). The Ranchería river has been disrupted many times throughout its course. Upstream, the multipurpose dam El Cercado, constructed in 2002 and filled in 2010, has limited water flow. The dam, even though not a megadam, has similar impacts as it deeply affects water and biodiversity cycles and transforms cultural landscapes and ways of living (Boelens et al., 2018). It also affects accessibility of water in the middle of the Ranchería river, due to the use of water for intensive agricultural purposes in the high basin. However, the river stream and the Wayúu people are more affected by the Cerrejón coal mining activities.

Cerrejón's exploitation began in 1983, under the responsibility of the Colombian government in association with Intercor, a subsidiary of EXXON, a US company. Since 2007 the mine is run by a consortium of transnational mining companies called Cerrejón composed of BHP Billiton plc (Australia), Anglo American plc (South Africa), and Glencore plc (Switzerland). Its activities encompass coal mining, a train transportation line, and a maritime port of thermal carbon, all of which affect most of the territory of La Guajira. Cerrejón produces around 30m tons of coal per year and has an operating license that lasts until 2034. Its mining extraction area covers approximately 100 km². Cerrejón contributes to 2% of the national GDP, in the mining and quarrying sector, and generates 44% of the departmental GDP in the same sector (Cerrejón, 2017).

Environmentally, the effects of Cerrejón's mining operation on water are:

violation of the rights to water, food, to a healthy environment and to health, among others; its cumulative effects, such as excessive water consumption (more than 45 million of liters/day in 2015), of the occupation of vast areas of land and ancestral territories (69,393.45 ha) of pollution processes of air and water, of massive deforestation and diversion of sources water (more than eight streams), have contributed, next to the failures of public policies and corruption, to a humanitarian crisis within an entire department. (Fuentes et al., 2018: 27)

Cerrejón directly intervenes in the Ranchería river in the middle of the basin and the Tabaco, Bruno, and Cerrejón streams by dumping waste of the exploitation of coal through 15 dumping ponds that have heavy metals (cadmium, lead, zinc, and manganese) and are thus highly contaminating. Several streams (Aguas Blancas, Manantialito, and Arroyo Bruno, among others) have been deviated in order to continue coal exploit. This is affecting the river flow and decreasing vegetation, agricultural areas, and biodiversity while increasing erosion and water scarcity, which affect the surrounding ecosystems (Fuentes et al., 2018). At the same

time, Wayúu's sociocultural relationships with the river and water dynamics are disrupted (Caro, 2018a, b; Fuentes et al., 2018).

Cultural and territorial transformations

Since the establishment of the mine, several territorial and socioenvironmental conflicts have emerged. These conflicts have affected urban and territorial dynamics of indigenous Wayúu people due to affectations to their territory and territorial rights. The Wayúu people are suffering, due to mining, from environmental impacts, health problems, emission of combustion gases, and vibrations from the use of explosives on the mine. The expansion of the mine required the displacement of different Wayúu communities from their territories; for the Baja Guajira more than 7,000 Wayúu people have been displaced and resettled (Cabrera and Fierro, 2013) since the 1980s. This dislocation affects important territorial dynamics related to places of housing and cemeteries, neighborhoods construction based on clan relationships and access to water, among others.

The coal exploitation in the Cerrejón mine has affected both women and men. Specifically, it brought changes in their territorial dynamics and relations with nonhumans, and access to water due to resettlement for the expansion of the mine. Women have been greatly affected by the relocation of their ancestral territories, which has implied new cultural and spiritual relationships. They use water on a daily basis for washing, cooking, and taking care of humans and nonhumans and are the ones who have to travel to greater distances in search of new water sources (Ortiz et al., 2018). Territorial resettlement leads to intangible damage and new relationships with places, which cannot be measured in economic or material terms since they involve emotional effects.

Women, for example, lost places on the river and the streams, for collective and cultural activities of washing, cooking, bathing, talking, and sharing with other women.

The water level was permanent, but not now, and that has affected women. They have to go find the water to distant places and wells, and when they can't go, they send the girls and boys. Girls are exposed to many problems. There are girls who get pregnant, because while they come and go, they are alone in many places. They have to go because they can't buy water from tank trucks. (Angelica Ortiz, 2018, personal communication)

The cultural relationships of Wayúu men and women have been transformed, specifically the daily dynamics of spiritual relationships with the water. Water as a nonhuman being is sacred, and the *water's territories* are sacred places. Women go to water places in order to perform rituals, clean bad energy or ask the mother of water for protection. For them water is life and is alive. But since it is alive it can also be harmed. The Aguas Blancas stream has been dried up by

the mine, and the *Pulowi* (female water spirit) lost her territories. The water disappeared and with it animals and plants, directly harming Wayúu women. For them, there has been daily dispossession.

At this time, we cannot travel through the stream. The company has put restrictions in our mobility. We can no longer meet in the wells, because there is no water, and its territories are disappearing. The *Pulowi* is not there and we cannot do our rituals. We have no water for life, the water is dying, as well as plants and animals. (Yaneth Ortiz, 2019, personal communication)

Correjón is exerting a hydropower that deeply affects the daily practices of women and men and the economic, food, and symbolic processes associated with water, especially among the Wayúu men and women. These hydropower processes have led to the politicization of water. Monetary compensation for environmental damage, environmental mitigation measures and promotion of “local development” of communities, and the idea of “public good” have been ways of territorial fragmentation, exclusion, and generation of inequalities among Wayúu people. Under mining processes, water has also been affected by physical transformations related to changes in its flows, drainages, and ecosystem dynamics. For Wayúu people, this commodification of water and new power relationships lead to symbolic transformations that decontextualize their cultural dynamics and relationships among humans and water. In this sense, water’s struggles become a political space and as a way of representing unequal power relationships.

Wayúu people’s resistances and dynamics of water’s territorial defenses: *Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu*

The Wayúu people are a binational community (Colombia and Venezuela). In Colombia they live in La Guajira, and they are approximately 270,000 people, 42.2% of the entire population of the department. They have legal rights over 28 collective territories (called *resguardos*), approximately 1,084,027 has (Archila, 2015).

The worldview and the practices of the Wayúu are embedded in their territory. (It has different scales: horizontal and vertical). They consider water (*winkat*) and its manifestation rain (*juyaá-mobile*) as alive beings. The rain moistens the earth (*Mna-immobile*) and life germinates and gives birth to the Wayúu. The earth and water are a vital couple; they are the basic principle of their sociocultural territorial organization that interrelates two places of life (Caro, 2018a, b; Vásquez and Correa, 1993). Dreams are also sacred to Wayúu people; they are ways of communicating with spirits of dead people, who give advice or prevent dangers or

environmental problems, such as those related to water (Vásquez and Correa, 1993). Robles Chávez (2018) states:

Through dreams, the Wayúu believe that the spirits reveal the ideal location to dig for groundwater. Requests made by the spirit once the source has been found must be carried out; a *yonna* (ritual dance), cooked meat and liquor are some of the offerings that people give in gratitude for such a prodigious donation.

For Wayúu people, the places of birth of water are sacred and protected by a feminine spirit of water (*Pulowi*), who allows access to water to humans and nonhumans. Wayúu respect these places and don’t live near them because they are water’s territories; they are the spirit’s home and should have its own intimacy. Thinking about water’s territories implies thinking of water as a political agent that has its own places and territorial dynamics. These notions are related to cultural notions of gender, specifically regarding women, since water and women are seen as givers of life. Women also perform all the rituals related to water and lead the processes of use and decision making about it.

Since the beginning of the mine’s exploitation activities in 1983, the Wayúu people have opposed coal mining in their territories due to its environmental and cultural impacts and everyday dispossessions, and have demanded socioenvironmental justice. Coal exploitation has led to sociospatial segregation, destruction, grabbing of common goods, environmental suffering, and lack of autonomy and self-determination for the Wayúu people (Archila et al., 2015; Ortiz et al., 2018).

FMW builds upon this historic opposition; currently its main objectives are to visualize the violations of human and ethnic rights and showcase the environmental, social, and cultural impacts of Correjón in national and international scales.

FMW has also opened a discussion on how the Correjón mine affects women more than men. Wayúu women state that since mining started, the relationship to Mother Earth has been one of pain, as their leaders state: “we feel it because we are children of the earth, and our elders say it; it is as if all this looting, the fact that they are looting her coal, is like removing a piece of flesh from your child or one’s self” (Romero and Barón, 2013: 28). For FMW, water is a political agent with its own places and territorial rights. However, water seen as a commodity generates inequalities and creates new ways of use, control, and access by humans and nonhumans.

The Wayúu people lead resistances, proposals, and alternative forms of relationships with the nonhumans in their territories. They defend the life and the right to be and to live in their territories. For them, water has been a victim of the mining process. FMW has led different territorial defenses; however, the defense of the *water’s territories* is an imbedded relationship that is not possible to fragment by mining

processes or separate by institutional policies. FMW has generated a repertoire of actions ranging from local protests and national legal actions, to the construction of transnational networks with other actors in defense of their *water's territories*. As Romero (2015a), a Wayúu leader, states:

While “for them” (the extractivists) is an economic resource, for us it is an ancestral and sacred public good. We are not women who seek “resources”, but the uprising of our people to confront these multinationals that are destroying our territory, and just as we are givers of lives, they should learn from our example and be responsible for generating lives. Without this we cannot talk about environmental policies or sustainable development.

FMW's political actions have also supported the defense of the Rancheria river. The governmental construction of the El Cercado dam (in 2010) affected the availability, accessibility, and quality of water, for the Wayúu people, increasing the ongoing conflict with mining. After that, Cerrejón (in 2011) presented an expansion project of the mine, which implied a deviation of the Ranchería river; FMW created alliances with other social movements (such as Comité Cívico de La Guajira en Defensa del Río Ranchería, el Manantial de Cañaverales y las Regalías, and NGO) and on 1 August 2012, they called for a regional mobilization in Riohacha against mining. During August 16–20, 2012, they made an expedition along the Ranchería river calling attention to the implications of its deviation. These actions had regional, national, and international impacts. Cerrejón stopped the project, even though they argued economic reasons. Since then, FMW has had different political strategies and international presence in order to protect the *water's territories* and to denounce the sociocultural, territorial, and environmental effects of Cerrejón's activities.

In December 2017, the Wayúu indigenous communities of Paradero and La Gran Parada in La Guajira asked the Constitutional Court for protection of the Arroyo Bruno (a stream) and its ecosystem against the risk of the mining expansion into its channel. This expansion would change the water cycle, violating the right to water, and impacting territorial, environmental, and cultural practices. However, it was still deviated. In a 2015 declaration on the issue, Fuerza de Mujeres Wayúu (2015: 1) stated:

Based on a suffering that is interpreted as one of the worst historical tragedies due to the permanent mistreatment that has been generated by the transnational company Cerrejón and the impacts of open pit mining, which in fact is interpreted as a constant destruction of *Wounmainkat*, our Mother Earth; we bring this message: This project is part of a perverse strategy of the company [...] and its shareholders, who only seek to generate profits for their own pockets and maintain control over our territory and its natural assets under the protection of consumerist countries and their economic power.

A power that only translates into money and that has been for the Wayúu indigenous people, the cause of their worst tragedies, has brought serious sociocultural implications and the rupture of the social network of an entire community that has historically remained in their ancestral territory.

FMW confronting mining impositions and defending water's rights

Coal mining in the Guajira and the presence of the Cerrejón mine are a reproduction of colonial power relations of exploitation that have reproduced gender inequalities and that exacerbate territorialized exclusions based on gender and ethnicity. In this way, the transnational owners of the mine are exerting a water control in ways that deeply affect the daily practices of Wayúu women and men, especially those associated to water. Wayúu notions of human–nonhuman relationships are not considered or included, generating an epistemic violence against them. At the same time, there is violence against the nonhumans and their lives. Mining economics misrecognize legal, environmental, and cultural rights previously recognized by national and international policies. This misrecognition allows international economic actors the appropriation of, symbolic and de facto, indigenous territories.

FMW's political actions seek to position their cultural perspectives while denouncing the impacts of the Cerrejón mine. As the Wayúu leader Romero (2015b) states:

Territory for us, is a living being and represents the Wayúu women. *Mna* is a woman, she is the earth. *Juyaá* is the one who fecundates, and he is part of everything that has to do with water, rain, water sources, rivers, streams, etc. Our relationship with the Bruno stream means mainly the veins, it is the veins of the earth, the veins of *Wounmainkat* (our territory-mother earth); therefore, for us to cut a vein means death. So, it has a high degree of spiritual representation for us, because from the Bruno stream all the dreams arise. We made spiritual practices in our Bruno stream, for this reason, it has a symbolic meaning. This is not a stream that only matters to La Guajira, it matters to the nation, it matters to the whole world because everything is connected.

The economic processes related to mining bring about/result in economic transformations and articulations that oppose local dynamics. These processes allow us to show how a mining project has wider impacts beyond one specific site or community, and it affects an entire territory, culture, and their practices. A mining process affects the bodies of humans and the nonhumans and the places where they encounter each other.

Wayúu people's relational perspective in which territory and water are living entities allows the critiques of economic development projects such mining and disrupts/decolonizes

the idea of nature and water as commodities. It proposes the notion of water as a nonhuman with rights and as a political actor, which enrich the currents debates of water justice.

The Wayúu people demand the recognition of their autonomy and self-determination and their conceptions about the continuity of life in which men and women are defenders of life. They also claim for the defense of *water's territories* since they belong to water spirits and because these sacred places connect diverse nonhumans at different scales. Wayúu people also demand the recognition and respect of their ancestral rights and legal rights over their territories. They are transforming notions of water and demanding the recognition of their ontology–epistemology and relations with water as a center of the reproduction of life.

For these reasons, FMW provides a new language for defense of life itself in contexts of extractivisms. In fact, FMW demands for the defense of Ranchería river and Bruno stream (and other streams) as vital nonhumans that have the right to be and feel in their territories. This implies that those nonhumans (rivers) are part of humans, because they have always been connected. They consider that relationships between humans and nonhumans are based on reciprocity between different beings that act in the vertical and horizontal places of their territory. Under this vision, humans and nonhumans have agency and capacity for action, related to specific places, and have political power to make decisions on them. The Wayúu people in general, and FMW in specific want this claim to be recognized; they want water to be seen and defended as a place of encounters and interactions.

I consider that the Wayúu people's demands claim for another perspective of environmental and water justice, as *relational indigenous environmental justice* (Ulloa, 2017). But we can modify this concept and, for the Wayúu's context, see it as a *relational water justice*, in which *water's territories* are seen as living entities, in order to be recognized as a political actor with rights to be and to exist. It also allows to demand water justice, and availability and access not only as a right for humans, but also for all species that need water to exist. It allows the continuity of spiritual and material life and guarantees the humans' and nonhumans' existence.

In particular, the defense of FMW and *water's territories* and resistance to mining process have allowed opening debates about territories and territoriality of humans and nonhumans, water's rights and nonhumans' rights, and access to water not only by humans, but also by nonhumans, that allows to rethink the notion of commons and water justice. In this way they are expanding our notion of environmental and water justice debates, specially in the context of water-scarce scenarios like La Guajira.

Wayúu people's perspective, from a situated knowledge, demands the recognition of their identities linked to territories–water. Their perspectives contribute to recent trends of FPEs that broaden their focus on natures–cultures, posthumanism, and indigenous activism movements around structural and daily inequalities related to environmental issues.

Wayúu's actions against extractivisms evidence a new way of doing environmental politics, which has the potential to position other notions of nature and rights and question socioenvironmental inequalities. Their resistances revolve around the search for alternatives not only to mining but also to everyday capitalist dispossession.

The political actions that I mentioned before allow us to understand how FMW has constructed local–national–transnational networks in search of the defense of their ancestral territory. These networks are constituted by environmental NGOs (national NGOs such as Censat-Agua viva, CINEP, and CCajar), human rights NGOs, universities, scholars, and national and international networks of environmental and water justice, among others.

However, FMW's political actions have come at a high cost; these activists are now in danger. Most of the members of FMW are protected by the national government, because they have been threatened by paramilitary forces, which consider that Wayúu people are against development and progress. Despite the threats, they are still defending their territory and *water's territories*.

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on the protest actions of FMW in defense of water's rights and against the effects of mining on their territories. I have shown that through their struggle FMW has presented new notions of water justice. Cerrejón has developed technical and environmental interventions over the territory and the Ranchería river and its water streams that have led to dispossessions and transformations on gender and Wayúu peoples' cultural and daily relationships with their territories–water. Cerrejón interventions on water have been on the river through waste from coal exploitation, pollution, drying, and diversion of streams, among others. These interventions are located on La Guajira, a semidesertic region and the most affected by climate change and processes of desertification in Colombia, increasing more the disavailability and access to water of indigenous people.

However, Wayúu people and in particular FMW have resisted and positioned *water's territories* and *territorial rights* against the expansion of the Cerrejón. They are demanding the recognition of their relational ontology, which is based on the continuity of life. Under this cultural perspective indigenous women are defenders of life due to their belonging to a place and their connection to *water's territories*.

In this way, Wayúu are proposing a *relational water justice*, which locates water as a living being and as political actor with rights. This perspective allows to demand water justice that includes rights of water to its territory, and at the same time availability and access to water not only as a right for humans, but also as a right for all species, which need the

water in order to be, feel, and exist. This notion also entails new concepts of ways of living.

Wayúu's demands can relate and contribute to new critical perspectives around water analysis against the processes of appropriation, exclusion, and dispossession not only of their territories but of their daily practices. In the same way, FMW's political and territorial defense actions confront the globalized and capitalist vision of water as a commodity. These political and conceptual perspectives also contribute to the current debates of feminist political ecologies of water and highlight a posthuman turn, in which nonhumans are beings and political actors. The FMW's demands for *relational water justice* contribute to the contemporary discussions on relational ontologies. This implies rethinking and, in fact, decolonizing the category of "water" and the way in which knowledge related to water is produced. It also allows to rethink the human-territories-water relationship from a plural and diverse perspective. In this sense, FMW's political dynamics are an example of new ways of doing territorial-water politics.

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