

Andean Territoriality in *Mi Ciego, Mi Gallo y Tú* (2003) by Percy Zaga Bustinza

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Keywords

Community
Social inequality
Cultural identity
Nature
Indigenous population

Abstract

Andean territoriality constitutes a contested space shaped by the coloniality of power, extractivism, and dynamics of dispossession that transform the relationships among embodiment, community, and nature in southern Peru. This study examines Andean territoriality in Percy Zaga Bustinza's *Mi ciego, mi gallo y tú* (2003) through the lens of decolonial ecocriticism, focusing on the inscription of a relational ontology in response to territorial dispossession. The research adopts an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach, and a hermeneutic design based on textual analysis. The corpus consists of the poems “Aldea,” “Tierra,” and “Campesina”, selected through purposive homogeneous sampling and analyzed using the categories of the coloniality of power, relational ontology, earth-beings, the *ch'ixi* condition, territoriality, and *r-existence*. The analysis suggests that territoriality emerges as a relational network linking embodiment, community, and nature, in which the land possesses agency rather than serving as a passive backdrop. It also shows that poetic language articulates forms of *r-existence* in response to structural violence, extractivism, and modern Western rationality, while reshaping Spanish so that it can accommodate the expressive structures of Quechua, thereby producing a *ch'ixi* coexistence of heterogeneous cultural matrices. The study concludes that Zaga Bustinza's poetry challenges the colonial separation between subject and territory and contributes to understanding territorial agency, relational ontologies, and the practices that sustain collective life under conditions of structural inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Andean territoriality has become a central concern in contemporary Latin American literature, particularly in contexts shaped by extractivism, structural inequality, and the persistence of colonial forms of power. In the Peruvian highlands of Puno, these dynamics affect not only the material conditions of life but also the relationships among community, body, and nature. Within this context, coloniality operates through mechanisms of racial, territorial, and epistemic classification that subordinate Indigenous ways of knowing to the modern Western project (Quijano, 2020b). Against this backdrop, Andean literature emerges as a critical site of memory, resistance, and symbolic reconfiguration in response to the logics of territorial dispossession that continue to shape the southern Peruvian Andes.

From this perspective, decolonial ecocriticism provides a productive framework for examining how Andean literature rethinks the relationship between territory and collective existence. Rather than treating nature as a passive landscape, this approach foregrounds an ontological understanding of the relational ties between humans and nonhumans (Escobar, 2014). At the same time, concepts such as the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2020b), the *ch'ixi* condition (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010), and *earth-beings* (De la Cadena, 2015) make it possible to interpret territorial representations through a lens that recognizes the contested coexistence of heterogeneous ontologies.

Within contemporary literature from Puno, the poetic and intellectual work of Percy Zaga Bustinza (Puno, 1945; Arequipa, 2017) is deeply embedded in the cultural life of the Peruvian highlands. His association with the Carlos Oquendo de Amat literary circle helped shape an aesthetic project grounded in the lived realities of the region rather than in contemplative essentialism. From this perspective, the significance of his work lies in its revaluation of orality and communal listening as legitimate modes of cosmological knowledge. In contrast to text-centered approaches, Zaga suggests that Andean cosmological understandings are internalized and transmitted through everyday auditory experience (Vilchis Cedillo, 2023).

Zaga Bustinza's poetry is distinguished by its portrayal of the historical tensions that define the rural Andean world through images of poverty, collective memory, and the spiritual bond between human communities and the land. His published works include *A Mayte* (1971), *Mi*

país (1971), *Cinematógrafo de lienzo y bambú* (1992), *Poemas* (1997), and *Mapa sin fronteras* (2011). Particularly significant is *Mi ciego, mi gallo y tú* (2003), the collection examined in this study. Poems such as "Aldea," "Tierra," and "Campesina" articulate peasant experience through a poetics shaped by material deprivation, historical violence, and enduring ontological ties to territory.

Despite growing scholarly interest in Andean literature and Latin American ecocriticism, the ontological dimensions of territoriality in contemporary poetry from Puno remain understudied. Existing scholarship has largely privileged sociological or identity-based approaches, leaving the interconnections among territory, embodiment, and nature comparatively unexplored. Likewise, relatively few studies bring together literature, decolonial ecocriticism, and political ontology to examine how contemporary Andean poetry articulates forms of territorial resistance.

The significance of this study extends beyond literary analysis. The territorial imaginaries that emerge in Zaga's poetry resonate with contemporary struggles over structural violence, extractivism, and the defense of Indigenous territories in the southern Andes. Ongoing conflicts surrounding territorial sovereignty, natural resource extraction, and social mobilization in Puno underscore literature's role as a cultural archive capable of preserving historical experiences of exclusion and resistance. Analyzing these poetic configurations therefore contributes to broader debates on political ecology, coloniality, and collective memory in Latin America.

Accordingly, this article examines the configuration of Andean territoriality in Percy Zaga Bustinza's *Mi ciego, mi gallo y tú* (2003) through the lens of decolonial ecocriticism. It analyzes how the poems inscribe a relational ontology that confronts the logics of territorial dispossession. In doing so, the article contributes to contemporary scholarship on Andean literature by highlighting the ontological and political dimensions of territory in Zaga's poetry, as well as literature's capacity to generate forms of epistemic and cultural resistance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Representations of Andean territory in contemporary poetry require a conceptual framework that moves beyond landscape aesthetics or folkloric interpretations of nature.

To that end, this study brings together three analytical categories: the coloniality of power, relational ontology, and territoriality as a space of *r-existence*.

The first category is the coloniality of power, understood as a global pattern of capitalist, Eurocentric domination inseparable from systems of racial, gendered, and labor classification that operate across bodies and territories (Quijano, 2020b, p. 325). Far from being a historical remnant, this structure continues to organize contemporary forms of domination. As Quijano (2020b, p. 366) argues, corporeality constitutes “the decisive level of power relations”, where exploitation materializes through hunger, disease, and massacre.

Closely linked to this enduring structure, Quijano's (2020b, p. 332) concept of historical-structural heterogeneity explains how multiple forms of domination, ranging from serfdom to financial extractivism, coexist within a single system of power. Complementing this perspective, Rivera Cusicanqui's (2010, pp. 69-70) notion of *ch'ixi* refers to the unresolved coexistence of conflicting cultural worlds without synthesis or harmonious fusion. Contemporary Andean reality is therefore best understood as a heterogeneous space in which long historical memory and colonial modernity remain in permanent tension.

Building on this analysis of historical domination, the second analytical category shifts attention from representation to ontology. Ontologies are not abstract systems of belief but material modes of existence that “operate through practices” and bring distinct worlds into being (Escobar, 2014, p. 96). Within the *runa* worldview of the Andes, the principle of *kawsay* expresses the radical vitality of the environment, recognizing nature as endowed with life, sensibility, and agency throughout the surrounding world (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916).

Within this relational ontology, mountains, rivers, and springs are neither inert objects nor symbolic metaphors. Rather, they are *earth-beings*: entities endowed with their own agency that co-produce territory alongside human communities (De la Cadena, 2015, p. 206). Reducing these relationships to matters of “belief” or “religion” merely reinforces Western epistemic hegemony by presupposing the existence of a single objective world while relegating other realities to the status of cultural perspectives (Escobar, 2014, p. 105). Likewise, the *warmi* is not a passive figure within this relational field. As the “physical body of the Goddess of life and abundance,” she

embodies the complementary principle of *cary-warmi* duality that sustains territorial balance (Sánchez, 2016, p. 60). As an agent of intercultural relations, she weaves forms of social and territorial connection that exceed the boundaries imposed by the masculine logocentrism of borders and jurisdictional mapping (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 72).

The third analytical category extends these theoretical premises into the aesthetic and political domain. Within this perspective, Andean territory is not a geographic backdrop but a constellation of “life-territories” where humans and nonhumans coexist through relational forms of existence (Escobar, 2014, p. 103). Defending these forms of relationality necessarily entails confronting the Cartesian dualism that separates reason from nature and thereby legitimizes unlimited exploitation (Quijano, 2020d, p. 944).

Accordingly, *Buen Vivir* represents the civilizational horizon of this project of resistance. Its realization depends on dismantling the Eurocentric paradigm of development while establishing a radically ecological ethic of shared responsibility (Quijano, 2020d, p. 937). Within this framework, literature functions as a material practice of ontological reconstruction. By reshaping Spanish to accommodate the expressive structures of Quechua, literary language performs what Arguedas describes as a “triumphant intervention” of the dominated culture into the dominant one (Arguedas, 1968, p. 4; Quijano, 2020a, p. 774), transforming the poetic text into a sovereign territory where nature, the body, and the community speak from their own modes of existence.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted within an interpretive research paradigm, as its primary objective was to examine the symbolic and ontological configurations of Andean territoriality embedded in poetic discourse. A qualitative approach was adopted to interpret the texts and explore the relationships among territory, embodiment, and nature through the lens of decolonial ecocriticism. The study constitutes basic research with a descriptive and interpretive scope and employs a non-experimental, text-based hermeneutic design focused on the analysis of discursive units within the literary corpus.

The corpus consists of the poems “*Aldea*,” “*Tierra*,” and “*Campešina*,” all included in Percy

Zaga Bustinza's poetry collection *Mi ciego, mi gallo y tú* (2003). These texts were selected through purposive homogeneous sampling because they share recurring themes related to Andean territoriality, peasant embodiment, human and nonhuman relationality, structural violence, and representations of rural Puno. In addition, each poem contains explicit references to land, community, nature, and territorial dispossession, making them especially suitable for analysis from the perspectives of decolonial ecocriticism and relational ontology.

The inclusion criteria comprised poems from the original 2003 edition of the collection that contain explicit references to Andean territory and allow for the examination of relationships among body, nature, and community. Poems lacking substantive engagement with territoriality, relational ontology, or representations of rural space were excluded. The units of analysis consisted of verses, syntactic constructions, and poetic images associated with the theoretical categories established for the study.

Data were collected through documentary analysis of both literary and scholarly sources. The primary research instrument was a textual analysis matrix organized around categories derived from the theoretical framework: coloniality of power, relational ontology, territoriality, human-nonhuman relationality, and *r-existence*. The matrix was used to identify and record discursive units, recurring semantic patterns, symbolic associations, and intertextual relationships between the poetic corpus and the theoretical framework.

The analytical procedure was carried out in four stages. First, the poetry collection was read in its entirety and the corpus was defined. Second, verses and textual fragments related to the established analytical categories were coded thematically. Third, the resulting discursive units were interpreted through hermeneutic analysis and critical discourse analysis, paying particular attention to the relationships among poetic representation, Andean territoriality, and coloniality. Finally, the textual findings were integrated with the conceptual framework provided by decolonial ecocriticism and political ontology.

Methodological rigor was ensured through theoretical triangulation, which involved comparing interpretations of the corpus across multiple conceptual frameworks addressing coloniality, relational ontologies, and contemporary Andean literature. In addition, the analytical categories and the correspondence between textual evidence and theoretical foundations were systematically

reviewed to ensure consistency between the research objective, the analytical framework, and the interpretive findings.

RESULTS

The Coloniality of Power and Social Classification

The poems examined in this study are situated within a historical context defined by material deprivation, whose genealogy can be traced to the global pattern of capitalist, Eurocentric power that operates through the racial, gendered, and labor-based classification of populations (Quijano, 2020b, p. 325). In “Aldea,” the opening poem of the corpus, the atmosphere of abandonment is condensed into a single image that intertwines sound and embodiment: “Fragments of church bells drift by / with dust upon their backs” (Zaga, 2003, p. 11).

The phrase “dust on the backs” is therefore far more than a descriptive detail. It becomes the sensory expression of what coloniality has deposited onto peripheral bodies: the accumulated weight of a history of subordination made physically tangible. When the poem continues, “the wind moans the echo / of a grandmother with tuberculosis” (Zaga, 2003, p. 11), illness ceases to function as an individual biological condition and instead becomes the most direct inscription of Quijano’s (2020b, p. 366) argument that “in exploitation, it is the body that is used and consumed in work and, in most of the world, in poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease”. The grandmother’s tuberculosis is therefore not a private medical tragedy but the embodied manifestation of coloniality itself, material evidence that the highland territory has been stripped of the conditions necessary to sustain life.

The desolation portrayed in the poem is neither natural nor accidental. For centuries, the Puno highlands have functioned as an extractive periphery, and their institutional neglect reflects the historical-structural heterogeneity through which multiple forms of domination are articulated within a single system of power (Quijano, 2020b, p. 332). The “blurred chapel” (Zaga, 2003, p. 11) stands as the ruined monument of a civilizational project that promised modernization through conditional inclusion while ultimately reproducing entrenched structures of exclusion (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 56). The religious building has not disappeared; instead, it has faded into indistinctness. Its spectral presence

signals the coexistence of worlds that republican assimilationism neither reconciled nor erased. What “pants” within the chapel’s “narrowness” (Zaga, 2003, p. 11) is the labored breathing of a community that continues to survive on the margins of the national project.

A similar logic unfolds in “*Campesina*,” the third poem in the collection, where Quijano’s system of social classification operates simultaneously through labor, gender, and race. The poem transforms the peasant woman’s body into a condensation of the region’s multiple forms of precarity: “In your hungry community / children and empty pots yawn” (Zaga, 2003, p. 15). The collective hunger captured in the everyday image of an empty cooking pot yawning like a living organism materializes what it means to inhabit the colonial periphery, where labor persists in every historically recognizable form at the service of capital without ever producing well-being for those whose work sustains it (Quijano, 2020b, p. 332).

Within this framework, the peasant woman, whose “red skirts” are reflected in the “flooded water” (Zaga, 2003, p. 15), embodies the intersecting structures of gender, race, and labor. She is a woman, she is Indigenous and Andean, and she works the land. Each of these conditions places her at the lowest level of the global hierarchy of power. Rather than explaining these forms of domination didactically, Zaga condenses them into a single poetic image, trusting the density of metaphor to convey what extended exposition cannot.

The poem reaches its most devastating expression of structural violence in the figure of the “grim murdered peasant” (Zaga, 2003, p. 15), introduced in its closing lines. This image adds the biopolitical and necropolitical dimension that completes the logic of the coloniality of power. The murdered body is not an incidental detail but the inevitable outcome of a system that, when economic exploitation and cultural assimilation prove insufficient, resorts to physical elimination. The massacre of June 27, 1972, in Puno, during which Candelaria Herrera, Roger Aguilar, Augusto Lipa Calizaza, and Pablo Mamani were killed by security forces amid demonstrations surrounding the agrarian reform, provides the immediate historical referent that gives material substance to the poem’s murdered peasant (Torres Patana, 2008, pp. 43-44).

The continuity of this historical pattern is equally evident in the publication of Zaga’s collection in 2003, the same year that university student Edy Johny Quilca Cruz was killed by a joint military-police patrol armed with light automatic weapons near the National

University of the Altiplano (Barrantes; Peña, 2007, p. 26). The coincidence is more than chronological. In the highlands, poetic language and sovereign violence inhabit the same historical moment. The murdered peasant in “*Campesina*” condenses decades of impunity into a single verse that subsequent historical events transform into retrospective testimony.

The persistence of this pattern became unmistakable two decades later during the social uprising of 2022-2023, demonstrating that the structures of repression remained intact. The Puno region recorded 33 deaths and 291 injuries, with the January 9, 2023, massacre in Juliaca representing the biopolitical and necropolitical epicenter of state violence (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 49). International organizations such as Amnesty International concluded that the security forces acted with a “marked racist bias” (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 55), reflecting the same underlying structure of racialized violence that enables the state to treat Indigenous Andean lives as expendable (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 48). The grandmother with tuberculosis in “*Aldea*” and those killed in Juliaca are produced by the same mechanism of dehumanization that renders Andean bodies disposable rather than worthy of protection. Read against this historical genealogy, Zaga’s poetry functions as an archive that registers collective trauma before official institutions assign it a name in state reports.

Relational Ontology and Earth-Beings

This analytical category shifts the discussion to a level where territory is no longer understood as a passive setting but as an active participant in a web of relationships that exceeds the assumptions of Western epistemology. In the poem “*Tierra*,” this ontological shift unfolds with a philosophical density that only the compression of poetic language can achieve: “And eaten away by his stubborn habit / of stringing worms, roots and stars” (Zaga, 2003, p. 13). The vertical sequence that stretches from the underground to the cosmos is not merely a rhetorical device. Rather, it poetically enacts a universe in which nothing exists prior to the relationships that bring it into being, where “a key principle is that nothing (no entity) pre-exists the relations that constitute it” (Escobar, 2014, p. 101). The worm, the root, and the star are not discrete taxonomic categories but interconnected nodes within a relational network that the earth “strings together” with deliberate persistence, as though endowed with its own intentionality.

From this perspective, the earth's will is not a metaphorical projection of the lyrical speaker but an enactment of what the *runa* worldview conceptualizes as *kawsay*: the ontological principle through which "nature possesses life, sensitivity, and active will in all dimensions of the surrounding space" (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916). Within this Andean understanding of the world, *kawsay*, or life, is recognized in "all the things that move in the surrounding world" (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916). Nature is therefore not a collection of inert objects but a community of living entities engaged in continuous dialogue with human beings. Zaga renders this ontology in Spanish without diminishing its conceptual integrity. The earth in the poem possesses a "fertile womb" and a "giving eye" (Zaga, 2003, p. 13), qualities that position it simultaneously as nurturing mother and sacred presence.

Against this backdrop, the lyrical speaker's confession becomes especially significant: "We did not understand, savages, / her fertile womb, her giving eye" (Zaga, 2003, p. 13). Here, the word "savages" functions as an ironic act of self-designation that simultaneously acknowledges and subverts the colonial gaze. The speaker adopts the label not because it is accepted as legitimate but because it exposes a temporary condition of blindness imposed by the dualistic logic of Western modernity, which separates reason from nature in order to legitimize unlimited exploitation (Quijano, 2020d, p. 944).

Rather than expressing an inherent deficiency, the speaker's initial inability to understand the earth reflects the internalization, however partial, of the Eurocentric epistemology that reduces land to a resource and conceives mountains as "discrete and inert beings, without life" (Escobar, 2014, p. 96). The poem stages the undoing of this colonial subjectivity, capturing the moment when the modern Quechua subject recovers the capacity to inhabit and enact a relational ontology through poetic expression.

From this perspective, ontological recovery requires recognizing that the geographical features of the highlands are not objects of contemplation but agents in their own right. Mountains, rivers, and springs constitute what De la Cadena (2015, p. 206) conceptualizes as *earth-beings*: "entities with their own agency that co-produce the territory together with human communities". When Andean communities oppose mining projects on the grounds that a mountain is a living, sentient being and therefore cannot be destroyed, dismissing that claim as mere "cultural belief" simply reinforces the epistemic hegemony that

assumes the existence of a single objective world while relegating other realities to the status of cultural perspectives (Escobar, 2014, pp. 104-105). Zaga's poetry operates precisely within this ontological horizon. By attributing to the earth a "giving eye" and the capacity to "string together" the cosmos, the poem rejects epistemological reductionism and affirms relational ontology as a material reality rather than a symbolic metaphor.

The same relational logic appears in "*Campesina*," where the female body mediates between community and territory. The verse "You have the germ of the earth / and the distance consumed in your eyes" (Zaga, 2003, p. 15) places the *warmi* at the center of a relational field in which the human body and the body of the earth share the same ontological condition. Within the Andean worldview, women are understood as the "physical body of the Goddess of life and abundance" (Sánchez, 2016, p. 60). Their presence in the poem is therefore not ornamental but constitutive, embodying the complementary principle of *cary-warmi* duality that sustains territorial balance. The "germ of the earth" carried in the woman's gaze is not a pastoral image but the visible inscription of an ontology in which feminine embodiment and the fertility of the soil participate in the same living reality.

This embodied mediation is further reinforced through the reflection of the woman's "red skirts" in the "flooded water" (Zaga, 2003, p. 15), introducing the aquatic dimension of the Andean worldview, in which "water is a visiting stage and a ritual space for the Andean man" (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 917). The reflection is not incidental. Within a relational ontology, water reproduces reality in order to reveal its sacred dimension. The reflected skirts depict the *warmi* encountering herself through the mirror of the territory, recognizing herself as one of its constitutive beings. Far from representing a premodern remnant, this relational practice remains a living ontological reality sustained through offerings to sacred mountains, springs, and other spiritual beings performed "in order to enter into balance with nature" (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916). The peasant woman inhabits that balance while simultaneously experiencing its disruption, as the hunger that afflicts her community signals the violation of the reciprocal relationship with the *earth-beings* by extractivist forms of exploitation.

A more indirect yet equally significant expression of relational ontology emerges in "*Aldea*" through the poem's soundscape. "From the transhumant sheepfold drips / the shearing thread" (Zaga, 2003, p. 11). The sounds of the

moving flock are not background atmosphere but cosmological signs. Within the Andean worldview, animals function as “indicators of climate and weather” (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916), mediating between territory and community. The bleating that “drips” from the sheepfold is therefore more than an auditory effect. It preserves the acoustic trace of a relational world that endures despite institutional abandonment. Through this soundscape, the poem registers the persistence of a world that modern dualism has never fully enclosed, the ontological excess that, in Escobar’s (2014, p. 108) words, “resists the definition and reduction to the modern”.

Territoriality as R-Existence and the Utopia of Language

The defense of embodied life through territoriality as *r-existence* brings together the recognition of the land’s agency, resistance to the coloniality of power, and the political force of poetic language. The closing lines of “*Tierra*” condense this articulation with the precision of a thesis: “We didn’t even know that she was a mother / and it cost blood to have her, to love her” (Zaga, 2003, p. 13). The “cost of blood” is not a rhetorical flourish. It names the historically verifiable price that highland communities have paid to defend their ontological relationship with territory against extractivism and sovereign violence.

From this perspective, Andean territory in Zaga’s poetry is not a geographical backdrop against which characters and events unfold. Rather, it constitutes what relational ontologies understand as a living space-time of continuous and synergistic interrelation, where “humans and non-humans inter-exist organically” (Escobar, 2014, p. 103). Defending such relationality entails confronting the Cartesian dualism that separates reason from nature in order to legitimize unlimited exploitation (Quijano, 2020d, p. 944), and that confrontation has repeatedly exacted a material price throughout highland history. *Buen Vivir*, understood as one of the oldest formulations of Indigenous Andean resistance to colonial domination (Quijano, 2020d, p. 937), cannot be realized without dismantling the Eurocentric paradigm of development. Across generations, that struggle has cost lives.

The social uprising of 2022-2023 in Puno gives documentary form to what Zaga had already inscribed poetically in 2003. The 33 deaths and 291 injuries recorded in the region, with the Juliaca massacre at the center of the repression, represent the contemporary blood

cost of territorial *r-existence* (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 49). The communities that mobilized were not responding solely to economic or infrastructure-related grievances, as centralist narratives often suggested (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 45). Their actions emerged from a civilizational and spiritual framework in which sovereignty over lithium deposits and watersheds cannot be separated from sovereignty over their own bodies, communities, and dead. Zaga formalizes precisely this connection among territory, embodiment, and community in the movement from “*Tierra*” to “*Campeña*”: from the recognition of the land as a sentient mother to the portrayal of a woman who carries its germ within her and mourns the murdered peasant.

Territorial *r-existence*, however, is not confined to visible protest, street demonstrations, or road blockades. It also takes shape within the communal networks institutionalized by the Front of Popular Organizations of Puno after the 1972 massacre. Founded at the Glorioso San Carlos school as an immediate response to armed repression (Torres Patana, 2008, p. 44), the organization embodies the argument that Indigenous communities, despite their colonial origins in the sixteenth century, have been reappropriated as spaces of direct self-government and local democracy. In this capacity, they provide structures of collective authority capable of confronting the state (Quijano, 2020c, pp. 729-730).

That organizational memory remained active in 2023, when Mallkus, Jilakatas, Mamatallas, and lieutenant governors coordinated the mobilization through community assemblies. Collectively, they rejected the appointment of state prefects on the grounds that President Boluarte lacked “moral authority” (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 51). The *ayllu* and *ayni* operated as autonomous sociopolitical and spiritual systems that provided a collective shield of protection, confirming that peasant communities “go beyond the economic-productive sense and are a cultural, socio-political, ethical-normative, epistemic and spiritual system” (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 49).

Within this communal network, the peasant woman in Zaga’s poem embodies a form of collective life sustained through *r-existence*. She does not represent the passive victimization of a subaltern subject. Rather, she enacts what Rivera Cusicanqui identifies as the intercultural fabric woven by women through their roles as “producer, merchant, weaver, ritualist, creator of languages” (2010, p. 72). The prominent role of the Aymara women of OMABASI (*Organización de Mujeres Aymaras Bartolina Sisa*) during the 2023 uprising, when they

marched with their children on their backs from Puno to Lima, provides a historical and collective counterpart to the woman portrayed in Zaga's poem. They do not embody a static or folkloric identity. Instead, they stand at the forefront of what highland scholarship defines as the "radical nation" (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 59), a political project aimed at constructing territorial sovereignty by reclaiming the foundations of the millennial Andean past without withdrawing from contemporary political life.

The same logic of *r-existence* extends to language, whose linguistic dimension cannot be separated from territory or embodiment. Zaga's poetry puts into practice the central aim of the Arguedian project: reshaping Spanish so that it can accommodate the expressive structures of Quechua, thereby producing a "triumphant intervention" of the dominated culture into the dominant one (Arguedas, 1968, p. 4; Quijano, 2020a, p. 774). The phrase "hilo baladero de la esquila" (Zaga, 2003, p. 11) has no equivalent in standard Spanish with the same sonic force and semantic density. It is Castilian permeated by the cadence of Quechua orality, a linguistic "co-presence" in which two languages remain in conflict within the same material act of writing (Quijano, 2020a, p. 773). Similarly, the line "skewer worms, roots and stars" (Zaga, 2003, p. 13) gives the verb "skewer" a transitive reach that normative Spanish would rarely extend to the cosmos. The result is an Andean textual logic in which language threads vertical life between the underground and the Milky Way, mirroring the generative labor of the earth itself.

The linguistic operation is therefore constitutive rather than ornamental. Language functions as the "linguistic band of society" (Quijano, 2020a, p. 771), an instrument that registers and reveals the historical transformations of a social formation through its tensions and expressive shifts. When Zaga's Spanish enters the "narrowness of a blurred chapel" (Zaga, 2003, p. 11), the language reproduces the constricted space that coloniality has assigned to Andean life. When the same Spanish "skewers" the cosmos vertically within a single line, it recovers the ontological breadth that colonial modernity has attempted to foreclose. The poem thus transforms the text into what decolonial ecocriticism recognizes as a sovereign territory, a space in which nature, the body, and the community articulate their own existence on their own terms (Quijano, 2020a, p. 774).

Within this tense coexistence, the *ch'ixi* condition provides a precise description of the

cultural space inhabited by Zaga's poetry. Rivera Cusicanqui (2010, pp. 69-70) defines *ch'ixi* as the contentious and unresolved coexistence of conflicting cultural worlds without fusion. "*Aldea*" is neither a pure representation of the Andes nor a straightforward document of colonial modernity. It is a heterogeneous space in which the "remnants of bell" coexist with tuberculosis and the sounds of transhumant life persist alongside the blurred chapel. No harmonious synthesis or reconciled hybridity emerges. Instead, the poem sustains juxtaposition, unresolved antagonism, and differences that "coexist in parallel, antagonizing or complementing each other" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 70). Such tension turns Zaga's poetry into a mode of knowledge because it preserves the full complexity of the relationships between deprivation and vitality, death and resistance, and Spanish and Quechua against the reductive tendencies of Eurocentric thought.

DISCUSSION

The body as an analytical category in Zaga's poetry constitutes the first tension raised by the findings, since the coloniality of power identifies embodiment as the decisive site where exploitation is materially inscribed (Quijano, 2020b, p. 366). In this respect, the three poems in the corpus confirm this argument with remarkable precision: the grandmother's tuberculosis in "*Aldea*," the eyes that have consumed distance in "*Campesina*," and the peasant whose death is marked not by a name but by a posture, "grim" and "murdered," are bodies marked by violence before they become objects of interpretation. Yet the poetic operation introduces a trajectory that Quijano's framework does not address with the same degree of clarity. In "*Campesina*," the female body not only bears colonial violence but also redirects it toward the territory, thereby reversing the direction of the model.

From this perspective, if embodiment is the point at which domination culminates within the coloniality of power, the ontology enacted by the poem also makes it the point from which the earth begins. This reorientation does not contradict Quijano's model so much as exceed it, and that excess becomes legible only when *warmi* is read simultaneously as an embodiment of the *cary-warmi* principle (Sánchez, 2016, p. 60) and as an agent within the intercultural fabric that male logocentrism cannot fully contain (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 72). Poetry

thus produces a third conceptual term that neither theoretical tradition could have generated on its own. This raises a methodological question that scholarship on Latin American decolonial ecocriticism has yet to resolve explicitly: under what conditions does a literary text function as a form of theoretical production rather than as an illustration of preexisting theories?

This extension leads to a second tension concerning the ontological status of terrestrial agency. Latin American literary studies have long tended to read animate nature in Andean poetry as a rhetorical device, a subjective projection that attributes sensitivity to inert matter in order to produce aesthetic or political effects. Such an interpretation would reduce the “giving eye” and “fertile womb” of “*Tierra*” to culturally meaningful but epistemologically harmless tropes. Political ontology, however, makes it possible to argue that this reduction is not neutral but colonial, since it presupposes the existence of a single world in which the earth is inert and human subjects merely project meaning onto it (Escobar, 2014, pp. 104-105).

For this reason, the principle that nothing exists prior to the relations that constitute it (Escobar, 2014, p. 101) means that the land's agency in the poem cannot be treated as metaphorical without first reproducing the epistemic hegemony that the analysis seeks to question. The text resists this reduction not through an explicit philosophical argument but through syntax. The verb “string,” applied to the sequence “worms, roots, and stars,” establishes terrestrial agency as a grammatical fact rather than as a figurative image. Mountains, rivers, and springs, conceived as *earth-beings* endowed with agency of their own (De la Cadena, 2015, p. 206), are not objects of contemplation in the poem but subjects that co-produce territory with a persistence that Zaga's Spanish registers without fully domesticating.

This argument, however, also raises difficulties that the existing scholarship has not adequately resolved. To claim that poetic writing enacts ontologies rather than merely representing them exposes the analysis to an objection that the ontological turn in the Latin American social sciences has often avoided. If ontologies are produced through material practices (Escobar, 2014, p. 96), and if writing in Spanish is itself a material practice shaped by colonial history, then the poem cannot fully escape the asymmetry it denounces. Zaga writes in the language of domination, even as he unsettles it from within. The findings suggest that he does not attempt to escape that asymmetry. The self-designation “savages” in

“*Tierra*” assumes the colonial gaze in order to destabilize it internally rather than ignore it. This is precisely what the *ch'ixi* condition names: the contentious, unresolved coexistence of cultural worlds that do not fuse (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, pp. 69-70). It is also what distinguishes Zaga's poetics from both an indigenism that speaks about the Andes from an external position and a nativism that claims access to an uncontaminated cultural purity. Acknowledging the *ch'ixi* condition, however, does not settle the question of the limits of ontological enactment in literary writing. Instead, it turns that limit into a theoretical problem that the analysis must sustain without resolving prematurely, a problem that studies of contemporary Andean literature have treated with less rigor than it deserves.

A third tension concerns the relationship between historical genealogy and aesthetic form, and it is here that the analysis enters its most productive disagreement with existing scholarship. The connection between the “murdered peasant” in “*Campesina*” and the genealogy of sovereign violence in the Puno highlands, from the massacre of June 27, 1972 (Torres Patana, 2008, pp. 43-44) to the 33 deaths and 291 injuries recorded during the 2022-2023 uprising, with the January 9 massacre in Juliaca as its biopolitical and necropolitical epicenter (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 49), is historically verifiable. Yet it also raises a hermeneutic problem that scholarship on Latin American political poetry has not resolved consistently: what kind of knowledge does a text produce when it gives form to a structural pattern before history reiterates it? The conventional answer appeals to anticipation, but that explanation is inadequate because it turns poetry into an instrument of prediction and diminishes the complexity of its operation.

A more precise answer requires distinguishing between the prediction of singular events and the formalization of persistent structures. Coloniality does not produce isolated occurrences but recurring patterns whose logic literature can capture before a specific historical event gives them renewed expression (Quijano, 2020b, p. 332). Zaga's 2003 collection did not anticipate the 2023 massacre. Rather, the massacre confirmed that the structure formalized by the poems had never been interrupted. The convergence between the collection's publication and the killing of university student Edy Johny Quilca Cruz, who was shot by a joint military-police patrol armed with light automatic weapons while demonstrators carried only stones (Barrantes; Peña, 2007, p. 26), is not merely a

coincidence to be handled cautiously. It is evidence that, in the Altiplano, poetic writing and sovereign violence inhabit the same historical time. The concept of the invisible foundation of structural racism (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 48) helps clarify the mechanism at work. The poet does not foresee particular events. Rather, coloniality produces conditions of possibility so stable that a literary text registering their bodily and territorial symptoms also inevitably registers their homicidal logic.

This same imbrication between the massacred body and contested territory gives rise to a fourth tension within debates over *Buen Vivir* as a political horizon. If *Buen Vivir* is among the oldest formulations of Indigenous Andean resistance to colonial domination (Quijano, 2020d, p. 937), and if its realization requires dismantling the Eurocentric paradigm of development, Zaga's poems introduce a temporal dimension that this normative horizon does not address with equal force. *R-existence* is not only the affirmation of an alternative future but also the everyday practice of sustaining, amid present conditions of precarity, the relational ontology that extractivism and sovereign violence seek to destroy.

Understood in these terms, *Buen Vivir* does not appear in the poems as a utopia in the classical sense of something that does not yet exist. It emerges instead as an active memory of what has existed and continues to persist in damaged forms, such as the bleating that "drips" from the sheepfold in "*Aldea*" or the red skirts reflected in the flooded water of "*Campesina*." The distinction between *Buen Vivir* as a normative horizon and *Buen Vivir* as an active memory of resistance has not been sufficiently developed in the available decolonial scholarship, where the tension between a desirable future and a sustained present is often resolved in favor of the former. The findings suggest that literary writing can articulate this distinction with a precision that political essays do not always achieve, precisely because poetry works through bodies, sounds, and sensory forms rather than through programmatic propositions.

The recent political context of the 2022-2023 uprising complicates this distinction even further. The communities that mobilized through the *ayllu*, under the leadership of Mallkus, Jilakatas, Mamatallas, and lieutenant governors, collectively rejected the appointment of state prefects because they regarded the central government as morally illegitimate (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 51). They did not mobilize solely around economic or infrastructure-related

demands, as centralist narratives often suggested (Vera Vera, 2023, p. 45). They acted from within structures of direct self-government and local democracy that Indigenous communities have reappropriated as spaces of collective authority in relation to the state (Quijano, 2020c, pp. 729-730), and from a conception of territorial sovereignty that links the defense of lithium deposits and watersheds to sovereignty over their own bodies and their dead.

From this relational field, the connection among territory, embodiment, and community is precisely what Zaga formalizes in the movement from "*Tierra*" to "*Campesina*": from the recognition of the land as a sentient mother to the representation of a woman who carries its germ within her and mourns the murdered peasant. The prominent role of Aymara women from organizations such as OMABASI, who marched from Puno to Lima carrying their children on their backs, offers a historical and collective counterpart to the subject constructed by the poem. They do not embody a static or folkloric identity. Instead, they enact what the category of women's intercultural weaving makes it possible to name as the political practice of the producer, merchant, weaver, ritual specialist, and creator of languages (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 72).

A fifth tension concerns the poem's linguistic operation and the limits of the thesis of "triumphant intervention." The interpretation of Arguedian writing as a reshaping of Spanish capable of accommodating the expressive structures of Quechua is analytically powerful (Quijano, 2020a, pp. 773-774), but it tends to portray literary language as a battlefield on which one side can ultimately prevail. The analysis of phrases such as "the bleating thread of the shearing" and "stringing worms, roots, and stars" reveals a more complicated dynamic. There is no unambiguous triumph. Instead, the poem derives its productivity from the impossibility of final victory. Zaga's Spanish does not defeat colonial Castilian. It inscribes within it a disturbance that makes the language inhospitable to cultural monolingualism, without resolving that cohabitation through harmonious synthesis. This is precisely what distinguishes the *ch'ixi* operation from hybridization as conceived by hegemonic cultural theory (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 70): not fusion, but tense juxtaposition and difference sustained within the material form of the verse itself.

Within this framework, language operates through what Quijano's (2020a, p. 771) concept of the "linguistic register of society" makes it

possible to theorize: an instrument that records the historical transformations of a social formation through its tensions rather than through their resolution. When Zaga's Spanish vertically "skewers" the cosmos within a single line, it does not conquer Castilian territory but inhabits it conflictually. That conflictive inhabitation is the condition of possibility for the knowledge the poem produces about Andean territoriality. In this sense, the corpus suggests that the category of co-presence (Quijano, 2020a, p. 773) describes Zaga's linguistic practice more accurately than "triumphant intervention," because co-presence acknowledges the persistence of conflict, whereas the language of triumph tends to resolve it through the image of victory. This distinction has methodological consequences for Andean literary studies that the existing scholarship has yet to develop systematically.

An additional tension, less fully explored in the literature, emerges when the corpus's acoustic dimension is read alongside the symbolic world documented in the Quechua and Aymara communities of Puno. The sounds that organize "*Aldea*," the fragments of bells, the bleating thread of the shearing, and the wind's moaning, are not merely descriptive background but expressions of what Andean ontology understands as the radical animation of the environment: the principle that nature possesses life, sensitivity, and active will throughout the surrounding world (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916). Within this worldview, animals function as mediators between territory and community and as indicators of climate and weather (Chambi Apaza, 2019, p. 916). The bleating that drips from the sheepfold is therefore not simply a sound effect but the acoustic record of a relationality that persists despite institutional abandonment.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reading Andean territoriality requires moving beyond purely descriptive approaches in order to engage its historical and structural dimensions. Poetic production from Puno, particularly the work of Percy Zaga Bustinza, functions as both a documentary and an aesthetic archive that gives form to the region's historical tensions. Rather than merely illustrating the victimization of subaltern subjects, the corpus examined here reveals a central conflict among processes of dispossession, the colonality of power, and communal forms of relating to the environment. What emerges is a social order in

which the defense of life is inscribed directly into the workings of language.

From this understanding of language as territorially embedded, the intersection of decolonial ecocriticism and necrogeography makes it possible to redefine the status of discursive representation in the Andes. The analysis demonstrates that the natural environment does not occupy a passive position. Instead, it actively participates in the production of territory alongside human communities. The findings also point to an important conceptual shift in the interpretation of linguistic assimilation. Rather than proposing a harmonious synthesis or a definitive victory over the dominant language, the poems enact a *ch'ixi* condition of tension and coexistence in which Spanish is transformed grammatically and acoustically so that it can accommodate a different relational logic.

For this reason, understanding Andean territoriality as an interconnected fabric rather than as a mere repository of material resources also requires a reassessment of recent social uprisings in the highlands. Community mobilizations become legible not only as demands for infrastructure or economic inclusion but also as efforts to defend a way of life against the expansion of extractivism. This approach is especially relevant to fields such as political anthropology, environmental law, and public administration because it cautions against reducing conflicts grounded in ways of life and forms of territorial organization to matters of bureaucratic management or domestic security.

At the same time, the complexity of these historical and structural tensions opens several avenues for further systematic inquiry. More attention must be given to the methodological limits of these forms of representation when they take shape through linguistic and cultural codes inherited from the colonial tradition. It is also necessary to expand the corpus to include other aesthetic, historical, and testimonial works from the southern Andes in order to determine whether the literary formalization of state and extractive violence follows comparable patterns across different media. Another important line of research would be to establish empirically the differences between *Buen Vivir* as an institutional and normative horizon and its concrete expression as an everyday practice of sustaining life under conditions of extreme material deprivation.

Against this background of unresolved tension, the persistence of Andean relational forms in the face of dispossession reveals the endurance of a social order that resists

dissolution. Historical memory, subaltern embodiment, and territorial agency together constitute a system in which collective life persists despite profound structural asymmetry. Recognizing this dynamic means acknowledging that Andean communities inhabit a conflict-ridden modernity in which sovereignty is defended through the materiality of the land, the integrity of the body, and language itself. As long as structures of domination continue to reduce the environment to an object of consumption, practices of *r-existence* will continue to assert their autonomy.

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