

## VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

*“Does the government want development of people in the highlands? Or development of people outside, based on what they can get out of the highlands?” Himalayan farmer*

As the pace of development accelerates in mountain regions, more often driven by the needs of urban, lowland populations and industry than by highland communities, so the social and physical environment is changing. The implications for the wider world are likely to be significant.

Panos has been working with community-based environmental, cultural and development organisations to record the oral testimony of local people, and to communicate their experiences and their understanding of the challenges ahead.

The project has involved local people as both interviewers and narrators. Ten collections have been gathered: in the Himalaya (**India and Nepal**); the Karakorum (**Pakistan**); the central Andes (**Peru**); the Sierra Norte (**Mexico**); Mount Elgon (**Kenya**); the highlands of **Ethiopia** and **Lesotho**; southwest and northeast **China**; and the Sudety mountains (**Poland**). Each booklet contains a selection of the interviews gathered in that locality. The full international archive holds the views and experiences of some 350 individuals, and represents a wealth of material – vivid, challenging, full of human detail and variety – to complement and illustrate other forms of research into sustainable mountain development. For more information on the themes, projects, participants, and the unedited but translated transcripts, visit [www.mountainvoices.org](http://www.mountainvoices.org).

Each collection is a snapshot, and does not claim to represent an entire mountain community. But the range of individual voices provides a remarkably comprehensive picture of highland societies, their changing environments, and their concerns for the future. The challenge is to meet national development needs without further marginalising mountain peoples. They are the custodians of diverse – sometimes unique – environments, essential to the survival of the global ecosystem. Further erosion of mountain people’s ability to care for those assets will be the world’s loss, not just theirs.

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ORAL TESTIMONY



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## VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

ORAL TESTIMONIES FROM  
CERRO DE PASCO, PERU



**— VOICES —**  
**FROM THE MOUNTAIN**

ORAL TESTIMONIES FROM  
CERRO DE PASCO, PERU

The Panos Institute exists to stimulate debate on global environment and development issues. Panos' main offices are in Dakar, Kampala, Kathmandu, London, Lusaka, Paris, Washington.

*Voices from the Mountain* is a series of booklets published by Panos London's Oral Testimony Programme (OTP) as part of its international Mountains project. The OTP has been working through partners with a variety of highland communities for several years, involving local people both as narrators and interviewers. The aim is to explore the changing environment and culture of these regions through the direct testimony of those who live there; to raise awareness and understanding of the accelerating impact of development; and to communicate people's experiences and perceptions of the changes—social, economic and environmental—taking place as a result.

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Booklets are free to the media and resource-poor non-governmental organisations in developing countries. Copies otherwise are £5.00; bulk discounts available. For copies or further details, please contact [oraltestimony@panoslondon.org.uk](mailto:oraltestimony@panoslondon.org.uk).

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## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

The interviews are only a selection from those originally gathered. Extracts have been chosen for interest and to represent, as far as possible, the range of concerns, views and experiences found within the overall Peru collection. They have been edited, primarily to remove repetition or confusion (and questions). Similarly, some re-ordering has taken place. Square brackets indicate “inserted” text for clarification; round brackets are translations/interpretations; and three dots indicate gaps in the text. Words that are glossed appear in **bold** the first time in an interview. All interviews have been translated, with varying levels of professional experience and in some cases from a local into a national language and then into English, so some misinterpretations may have occurred.

The numbering of the testimonies (eg PERU 3) relates to the full collection: to view the rest of the material, unedited transcripts, more background information and any new developments in this project, please see [www.mountainvoices.org](http://www.mountainvoices.org).

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# INTRODUCTION

“The hillsides of the mountain range were pure pasture so we were able to keep livestock and also plant crops... That's what my early days were like, with nothing to worry about...now there's a mountain there, but it's a mountain of pure rubbish from the mine.” With these words, Ignacio sums up the decline of the region where he has lived for more than 70 years.

The Andes mountains stretch 7,250 kilometres along the western margin of South America, from the equator to the Antarctic. They contain extreme variations in landscape, vegetation and climate, but the Central Andes is characterised by large high plateaus above 3,500 metres. These are the most densely populated areas of the whole range. In Peru, 50 per cent of the population lives in the mountains and 33 per cent in these high plateaus, where they grow frost-resistant crops, especially potatoes, and graze hardy llamas, alpacas and sheep. The Central Andes was also the heartland of several highly sophisticated, pre-Colombian indigenous empires, most notably that of the Inca.

In the area around Cerro de Pasco, where these interviews were gathered, people's herding lifestyle has undergone great change, principally as a result of Peru's most important industry: mining. While it has brought employment and infrastructure to the region, the industry paid scant regard to its environmental impact: waste from the mines seeped into the water supply, and polluted the springs that run through the pastures; lakes once full of fish, and a magnet for birds, are discoloured, empty of life and their surroundings silent. Fumes from the smelter and other processing plants have polluted the air and stripped the nearby slopes of vegetation. The health of people and livestock has been badly affected, animal numbers have dramatically declined and few farmers now make a living from herding alone. And, as many narrators point out, working in the mines has weakened people's bonds with the environment on which they previously depended.

The mining industry today is increasingly being mechanised and jobs are harder to come by, but its social, economic and environmental legacy remains. People cannot simply return to the old lifestyle. Changes in livelihoods and social customs are not easily reversed—nor is the damage to the land. But many narrators have been active in the fight for improved working conditions and environmental controls. There has been some success in gaining compensation and the testimonies are full of ideas about how to diversify local livelihoods and build up small-scale industries using the communities' own resources, rather than simply supplying resources for others to process.

**Themes**

The impact of the mining industry underlies most narrators' stories, which were gathered in 1995. Some stress social and cultural change; others highlight the economic impact. Almost all bear witness to the effects on the land, livestock and people's health. The focus on industry, and the positive and negative results of being a mineral-rich highland area, is particular to this collection. But as resource extraction in mountain regions accelerates, these narrators' experiences will be of interest to many other communities. In Peru alone, the area taken over for mining activities had expanded from 6 million hectares in 1992 to 24 million hectares by 2000.

As in other areas in the Central Andes, out-migration is a major issue. Young people's need for education and employment takes them away from the highlands. Some return, but most—without adequate job opportunities in their home area—end up staying in Lima or other cities. But many would stay if they could, say narrators, and faithfully return to celebrate their community fiestas. These testimonies bear witness to a still vibrant culture, mixing Catholic, Andean and other influences, and distinguished above all by a still powerful bond with the land and the mountain.

**Partner and project**

Cooperación (Acción Solidaria para el Desarrollo), our Peruvian partners, were already working in the region of Cerro de Pasco. A social development organisation, they had some experience of oral history collection as a cultural exercise. They wanted to use this project to learn more about the different viewpoints and experiences within the communities where they worked, as well as to generate compelling material with which to argue their case for improved environmental controls and compensation, and measures to restore the least damaged land.

They first mounted an exhibition using extracts from the testimonies to promote public discussion in the communities. People of all ages responded and an environmental network was created, bringing together miners, union members, *campesino* communities, schools, students, mothers' clubs and the retired. Cooperación also produced an illustrated book, *Minería y Comunidades: testimonios orales y gráficos*, which has been widely distributed. Local coordinator José De Echave says "it has been an excellent tool in the campaign" waged by local organisations to defend their right to "a dignified life on the land".

**THE TESTIMONIES****Juan**

PERU 1/1a

*Juan, 45, lives in Rancas which, as he explains, has seen many changes—not all them good. Juan was interviewed twice and talks of the mining industry and farming life, both of which he has experienced. He currently works as an industrial relations advisor.*

Rancas is a busy crossroads. In the past 18 months it's become the main communication thoroughfare to the capital of the province... [Before,] Rancas always survived on its livestock, but now there are other things going on... There's a lot of trade with other villages...

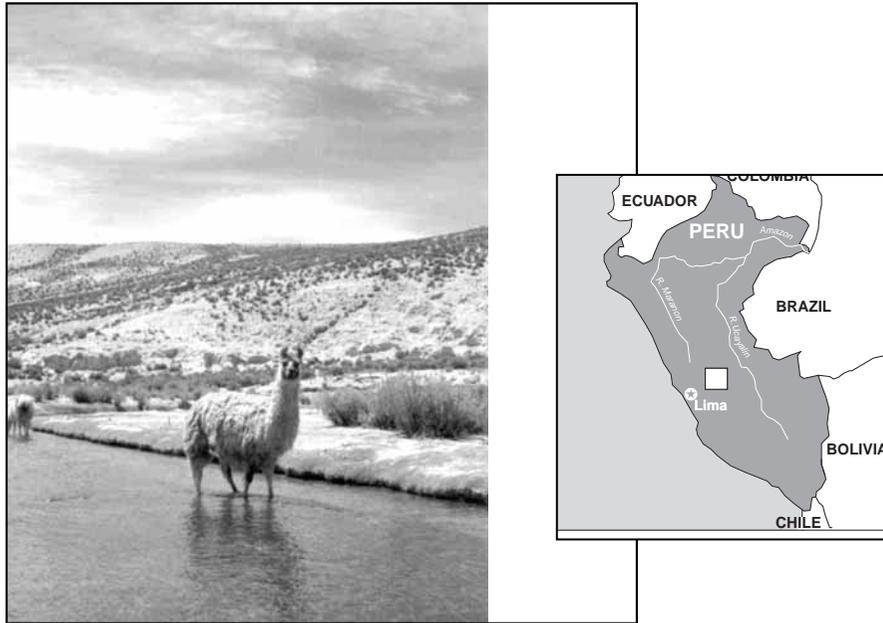
Economically, it has mainly been livestock [that we've depended on]...animals from the South American camelid family, better known as llamas, alpacas and *huanacos*, which are similar [to alpacas] but smaller. There have also been wild *vicuñas*, and then recently we've raised cattle. But the environment and climate isn't suitable for pure-bred cattle, just the ordinary cattle. What I mean is that at an altitude of 4,000 to 4,350 metres above sea level it's icy cold. Then there's the pollution [from the mines]... The rivers, streams and springs—they're all polluted. And the pastureland...very little escapes the contamination...

Farming?... My grandfather on my mother's side used to tell me that in the old days they'd plant potatoes called *shiri*. They were white potatoes resistant to the high altitude... The *mauna* potato was also resistant... They also used to grow *maca*. *Maca* is a small root like a radish but cream in colour. It's a tuber... It makes you strong, rather like honey [does], and maybe more so because it can also help improve your memory and increase your brain cells. This is what the doctors say who've researched the plant... There's much less [cultivation of altitude-resistant potatoes] now...because the people have no assistance. It's tough. There are bad harvests and you're left with nothing...

The *campesino* family...has a hard life, a hard unrewarding life, no remuneration. They have to work from 5.00 in the morning till 10.00 or 11.00 at night, taking care of the sheep, etc. But the children make the biggest sacrifice... [They] come from other places to study in Rancas, by mule, horses, others on foot... leaving at 5.30 or 6.00 in the morning and arriving at 8.00. They then immerse themselves in their studies, after travelling such a distance, and [then do] the same thing again at 2.00 in the afternoon... When they



*Potatoes: a staple Andean crop*



get home, it's not only homework they have to do, but also look after the sheep, cows, alpacas... Then at night they have to help their parents keep watch in the little huts where they look after the sheep, because if they don't, the *abigeos* (livestock thieves) come—[and] wolves and dogs, which eat the animals.

#### ***“They took away the land”***

[Ours] was mining land, the subsoil was rich in copper, iron, silver, mainly silver... There are even things in the indigenous languages that tell of minerals, foundries, indigenous mining works. Then in the [nineteenth] century our lands were stolen by large landowners...huge tracts of land... They presented their claim to the mining headquarters and to the government... By taking advantage of the fact that the *comuneros* of old knew nothing of the law, or by making up mining legislation [as they went along] they took away land from the communities for mining. The *gringos* of Cerro de Pasco [company] made up similar laws at the beginning of the [twentieth] century... [They] held the lands until 1960. From then on, the Rancas community tried to claim back the land and many of our people were massacred. [After] eight years of struggle including legal battles, in the end we won back the land...

[It will] take 100 years to eradicate [the effects of] the pollution. **Centromin Peru** have paid \$1,150,000 in compensation, and a company—what we call the communal company—has been set up with the money.

#### ***Changes in traditional customs***

One of the customs [in my grandparents' and parents' time] was that the men of the community, well the boys, had to learn how to handle a horse... Nowadays they have bicycles, they have mopeds, they even use cars—this has been a big change. [And] it used to be children, boys or girls, who used to milk the cows, sell the milk or make the cheese. Nowadays there are few children doing that. We now have a machine designed to do that...

As far as the family set-up is concerned... [before], the suitor had to prove his worth, *vara*, as we say; in those days he had to have a number of references, guarantees... Guarantors had to be people of good economic standing, with livestock or a car or houses in Rancas. And the suitor himself had to have something in the way of livestock, etc, or at least his parents did. But my father died when I was five years old, 1955, and we were very poor... [Nowadays] things are much more relaxed. You just meet someone and after a while you get together and ask for consent from the parents...

I [got married] after I'd been working a while. I'd been working for a year [when]...I started cohabiting. We call it *servinacuy*, living together...a period during which you offer yourselves to each other. But in that trial period you have to be careful because if you have a child it becomes a commitment that you cannot abandon.

As far as [choosing a marriage partner today] is concerned, there is a fairly liberal attitude. You could say that miners' children are free to marry whoever they wish—it could be with professionals, *campesinos*, businessmen, drivers, engineers, teachers, whoever they like. This applies to the son or daughter, you no longer need referees or godparents or people of standing.

#### ***Being a comunero***

You have to be registered in the community book where all the *comuneros* are listed... We have to pay our annual subscription and then we take up one of the jobs within the community and this has to include livestock.

Being a *comunero* means, for instance, you have the right to acquire land, a piece of communal land where you can raise your sheep or cattle or llamas in total freedom and no one can say anything to you. This is your right. And your duty above all else is to look after the heritage of the community and take part in the



*“Economically, we’ve depended on livestock...mainly llamas, alpacas and huanacos”*

communal activity, whether the *faena* or the voluntary *minka*...where everyone lends everybody else a hand. For example, I’ll help out my neighbour...to finish job X, and they’ll then help me to do whatever work I need to do, be it digging a ditch, or even taking care of my sheep, sheering... It doesn’t cost anything, you might just pay by giving them food and drink.

#### ***The status of women***

If a woman is married, she and her husband cannot [both] be *comuneros* because otherwise they’d be taking up more space, more land, more animals and more benefits. That’s why, while they live as man and wife, it’s the man who’s the *comunero*, unless they’re separated. That’s the way the custom goes. It’s rather chauvinist...

[As for education] they used to say, what’s the point of daughters studying when girls weren’t going to contribute to the household?...when they got married, they’d go on to serve their husband and his family—that’s the way it used to be... Basically, it was *machismo*, and not just specific to that day and age, it’s

inbred... Our parents would only let women have a primary education, perhaps not even that. But nowadays sons and daughters reach the same level...

*It’s the man who’s the comunero*

Many men treat their women as if they were ignorant, illiterate even. And when you become a father you wouldn’t want your daughter to be treated like that by her husband. So, I think that today everyone who wants to study—primary, secondary and even higher education—should have the chance.

#### ***“They squeeze the juice out of you”***

[Becoming a miner] meant an almost total loss of freedom to travel around my own community, to go to other towns... Not only are you giving yourself from 7.00 to 4.00 of the working day, but they squeeze the juice out of you, you sweat like crazy and come out exhausted... You go to town once a week, normally on a Sunday, you go to visit your relatives and the rest of the time you are completely exhausted. It means...you’re practically enslaved...

When I worked at Cerro de Pasco it was already on the point of being sold... [After it was nationalised] there were considerable changes... The *gringos* exploited us a lot and paid us nothing. They used to say that in Peru, besides minerals, there was plenty of cheap labour... From ’74 onwards there were, for the first time, Christmas bonuses, bonuses for national holidays...a housing allowance. Then there were hospital benefits for the children, workers’ parents, not parents-in-law... [But now] the company is cutting back on benefits. And the worker says nothing. He is weaker, he isn’t organised, and there’s less solidarity... You could say that the trade union has lost about 55-60 per cent of its social value and as a result it can hardly do anything any more. Anyway, they’re living behind the times, they’re outdated, they don’t even know how to use computers, or electric typewriters even. They’re living in the dark ages and haven’t kept up with today’s miner or his wife...

When I started working I realised there were tremendous problems at Centromin, at Cerro de Pasco—too much work, exploitation, numerous things. So I began to talk about these things in different ways at work... I became chapter representative and then I became general representative and went as far as becoming federation leader. I only did it for a year. I guess I was a man who worried a lot and who sought equality... I earned a reputation enough to get me sacked... [First] they moved me to a section called “carpentry”, which took care of the maintenance of buildings and land. I was moved so that, in the Corporation’s own words, I would not “screw up the company”... After two years the whole

*The mines are  
here today,  
gone tomorrow*

section had practically come to a standstill...[so] they laid everybody off... Under the recent social security law, I don't qualify for a retirement pension. If on the day I was sacked I'd been 45—yes—but I was only 43, so I have no right to a pension.

**“Our communities aren't going to disappear”**

Compared with what it was like before, the *campesino* community and the villages [close to] Rancas...are extremely developed. It's almost a tourist spot. There's more transport, for example, between Cerro de Pasco and Rancas, there are more than 60 different mini buses... There's a lot of economic activity...and now with our new alpacas and the enclosures, it's possible there'll be even more development... The future is looking good. We have our own resource—the livestock—and therefore we do not need the mines, which anyway are here today, gone tomorrow. Here, we are growing more and more potatoes and *maca*. Before there was only one person growing *maca*, then 10, and now there are more than 50 communities growing [*maca*] on their small plots...

The *campesino* communities and the rural populations of the region have been here for centuries, they aren't going to disappear; they'll live for ever in this region. Mining, on the other hand...so many mining communities are artificial towns, which appear in boom times when there is an abundance of minerals, and as these minerals start to decline, they are left in ruins...

[The mining company] must leave [some benefits] for the people, now that they have contaminated our rivers, waters, towns. They must see that...the communities are given a different form of development—a large project that helps them increase their livestock, that purifies their water, that allows them to irrigate their lands once more... Centromin is doing something—it's recycling some of the water...using the same water for industrial use and not taking any more water... [But] then they should look at building a water-treatment plant...[and they] should sign an agreement with the municipalities... If there is good water, all the plants will come alive again, all the grazing lands will be replenished.

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*Magno (M, 55 years), community leader/construction worker*

PERU 22

[Most community members] can no longer dedicate themselves to [farming]... the majority work for the company now, Centromin. Others are informal vendors; others do construction work... some have left the country... We need more sources of work... Automobile bodywork factories, mechanical workshops and other repair shops and services can be set up. We need technical schools. We have to think of new things, because, sadly, we are no longer a livestock or agricultural community. Due to the [toxic] fumes we have lost production and our lives have changed.

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## Dominica

PERU 11

*Dominica, 70, lives in Quiulacocha. Although she has known much hardship and loss, she is proud of her working life and of local cultural traditions. As an elderly person, she speaks Quechua, and at one point teases the interviewer: “I'm not going to translate, so that you learn Quechua too. Find out for yourself. I might have insulted you.”*

I [was] brought up in the Andachacha *hacienda*... I didn't know my father. He abandoned me when I was only nine months old... I worked, honourably, in poverty—spinning, weaving...washing clothes—with my mother... There were sheep, cows, hens. My job was getting milk for the *hacienda*, and in the same *hacienda*...buying butter and cheese in Lircari... [We] sold [things] in La Corina, at the checkpoint, every week...

Faithfully my mother would come to take me to school. There I learnt, but I didn't finish because we were so poor. I remember that [one day] I was studying and [the next] they took me away...

My mother used to sell the stockings she made, the jumpers. She'd exchange them for sheep, for wool for us to weave...just like me, now. Right now I'm going to knit some stockings to sell, my little jumpers, bedcovers too.

I was only 14 years old [when I got married]... I've had 14 children but only eight are alive, just eight...that's all. The eldest—I've even forgotten the name of my eldest—was a girl... Most of [my children] are in the mines... It's a good job. It's a local job. My children have had to work since they were very young because their father was very ill and I couldn't look after all my children... [Although they work elsewhere] they come back when my husband's ill. They came every week when my husband had his operation. When I communicate with them...when I tell them I'm ill, they're here, they don't leave me [on my own]. Yes, young man, my children are very good.

## Carnival

Here in February they have the *Baile Viejo* during Carnival...it's an ancient custom. [This dance] is seen as a treasure by the people from this community. They dress up with tiny bells on their feet and sheepskin in their hair. The girls—the young ladies—dress in pure white...it's really lovely...[The men wear] black breeches and long black jackets...made from the hide of the llama...

During Carnival, the people who have sheep dress them up, it's really beautiful. The llamas and cows, too—people tie ribbons on them, this is a village custom...[Carnival] lasts five or six days... If

*Ignacio (M, 71 years), farmer/retired electrician*

PERU 31

When we feel bad we go to Cerro de Pasco to the doctor to hear what he has to say, though we know doctors can't do everything... The truth is... we only take the medicine for four or five days at the most and then we stop. That's because there's no shortage of people who say, "Sort yourself out." We have a lot of natural remedies here.

you go dancing at the **fiesta** you have to keep going, starting from the meal...all the orchestra and the dancers have to keep going...

[As for food] the special custom of this village is **patasca**... We also make **pachamanca**... You cut the meat piece by piece, then you season it with *huacatay* (a herb), garlic, pepper, salt. You leave it overnight, then on the following day to heat it up, you put it on top of a really hot stone, the meat on top of the potato, and the *pachamanca* comes out really rich.

#### **Traditional beliefs**

The *judeo*... It's a kind of healing with a guinea pig... You chew your **coca**. Then you pass the guinea pig over your head, then over your feet, if you want. Wherever there's something wrong, the guinea pig will drop dead... you can do it with a mouse as well. That's how you're cured. [We use Western medicine] as well, but we also use our own cures... *Coca* helps us carry on... *Coca* is our companion... I [also] learnt from my mother [to read *coca* leaves] and so now I read them. [The leaves] say that [Centromin] wants to kick us out, that's what's they say.

### **Janios**

PERU 26

*Janios, a teacher in his 40s, from Rancas, also promotes local cultural activities. He describes some of the rich traditions of the "Andean world", including the annual ritual of offering food to the mountain. He also emphasises the need for greater economic efficiency.*

Many of my family have been in both mining and farming. Many worked on short contracts in Cerro, down the mine, and others set up home in the town, but they've always remained part of the **campesino** world...the Andean world where our customs are still strong and our attachment to the land is the essence of our lives...

One of the most important [feasts] is the animals' feast, the rural feast, which we call *Erranza*... [It] coincides with Carnival... We adorn the cattle with ribbons, sing local songs, chew **coca**, drink, mark the cattle...and treat their diseases. Carnival finishes...on Ash Wednesday, and we make a **pachamanca** for everyone present...

[Laying the table] is a mixture of customs from the Inca period and Catholicism... We prepare the table [with]...a little quart of liquor, biscuits, sweets and a portion of *coca*, as an offering to the mountain to increase the cattle and to ensure all goes well...over the year. It's one of our local traditions... People do the same thing all over the Andean highlands, with very little variation...

Every farm holds [the *Erranza*] on the same days... I have [often] passed by the farms [when they are] celebrating, drinking, playing with flour and paint, and I have had to stop for a while and share with them and that's in every **estancia**... An *estancia* is a place a family has on community land. It's not necessarily where the family actually lives. It's a dwelling or hut with pasture-lands around it and it's near a river or a spring which is also used collectively... The land is not fenced, so the livestock move around, but there's no danger of confusion because each little animal can be identified by the colours on its ribbon, by the paint.

Then there are purely Catholic feasts... Every village, every community has a saint in its name, that's part of the Catholic heritage. Rancas celebrates its patron saint, San Antonio, on the 13th, 14th and 15th June. It's a very big feast but it's at the village level. We do the Chonguinada dance and there is an agriculture and animal husbandry fair, an exhibition of local dishes, horse racing.

#### **In-migration and "the great mixing"**

Many people came in the early decades attracted by the promises of the **enganchadores**, which in the end were nothing but lies because they were "hooked" into mining in the worst conditions, with starvation wages... The result of several decades of this is the great mixing so characteristic of Cerro de Pasco...[and] different cultures and music that come from other Andean regions and are now part of Cerro de Pasco's culture.

[On the other hand, some customs such as] the *Fiesta de los Compadres*...the aim [of which] is to bring people together, to marry

*Victor (M, 42 years), librarian/researcher*

PERU 25

The first and second of November are days when we feel, perhaps subconsciously, we'll be with our absent loved ones again. That's why big family groups invade the cemeteries... [We say] Catholic prayers in Quechua—we decorate the graves and plant things. The families also eat local dishes, like *charquican*, little beans, tripe and *patasca*. All this is eaten in the company of the deceased... [When] we're in the cemetery we begin to talk about the loved one, the absent one. We talk more about their good points than their bad ones—for us, their virtues have to be reincarnated in a new addition to the family.

*We make an offering to the mountain*

*People were “hooked” into mining* young people...have been dying out in Cerro de Pasco... It seems that we have been losing our customs and traditions much more in the city than in the countryside. In the countryside people are more rigorous with their customs... [For example, in Chacayan], when they celebrate their feasts they come back from Lima, from the jungle and other parts of the country—I mean the people...who have had to leave the area maybe for work or in search of a better future. But they don't forget their land, their traditions, their customs. They don't add in anything modern, nothing like that. For example, the women, adults or girls, all wear the village costumes and put aside their clothes from the capital for a few days...

You have to distinguish between the development of the Cerro de Pasco province—which was linked to mining—with that of the Yanahuanca, which is where our customs and traditions are best kept, even food—because most of the people of the highlands don't use much from other areas, things that have been prepared or put into jars. They don't use money much, they don't have much experience in transactions and that's why they are often taken advantage of. If you eat there they'll give you potato, beans, wheat, barley all made in different ways—local dishes. They also eat *mashua*, *caya*, **chuño**. The local dishes include *locro* (a soup or stew) *toche* made from pork crackling, chickpeas, *chuño*, wheat, beans with little bits of **charqui**.

**“Large-scale plants will be white elephants”**

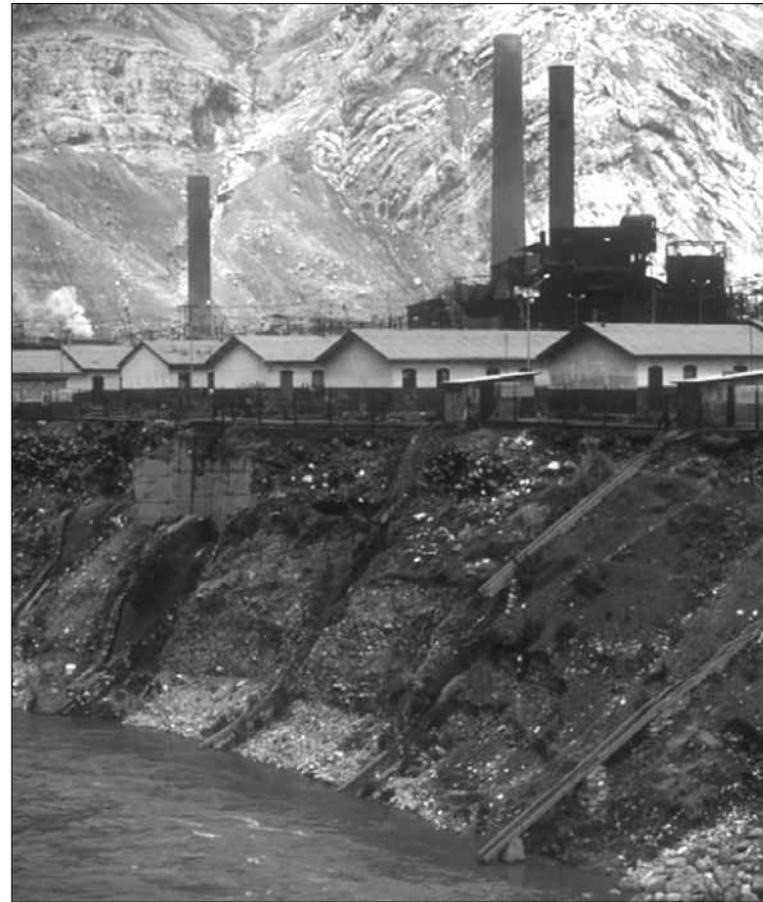
Rancas [agrarian] cooperative, which was set up many years ago, was one of the first in the whole region and it stands out to this day despite technical limitations and little government support. But if we look at the community cooperative in terms of the national and the international markets we cannot deny that we have stagnated. So we have to support any measure that will improve productivity and help us become more efficient.

There is also ECOSEM, the community company for multiple services. ECOSEM was set up with Centromin's \$2,500,000 rent paid to the community. [It] aims to create employment in Rancas and [has] a development role. At present we have heavy-duty

*Carmen (F, 18 years), student*

PERU 27

My parents think we don't do the traditional dances they way they used to but the truth is we dance both... They only used to do traditional local dancing because there was no other music... It's different now, we do everything, modern music like *salsa*, *chicha*, *baladas*, but young people dance *huaynos* and *huaylas* too... My father says it wasn't easy to have a television in their day, whereas now everyone has a television and certainly a radio.



*“It will take 100 years to eradicate the effects of the pollution”*

machinery, mostly transport, which services Centromin. [There are] plans to build a bakery large enough to serve the whole area, and also a tannery. The government offered credit for the industrial processing of wool—washing and spinning. We bought...machines for a certain part of the process, from the washing to the yarn stage. But they haven't been installed... What was lacking was the other part of the investment for the installation, functioning and organisation of the production process. Many years have gone by since this story began...

Even if we had succeeded all the wool from this region would not have been sufficient [to keep up with production]—so what

*They don't forget their land, their customs* would we do then with the extra machine capacity? In both woven fabrics and skins Rancas has production levels for small-scale industry, so why should we dream of large-scale plants which will be nothing but white elephants? All that money invested would have been better spent on equipment scaled to our capabilities, and it would probably be working now.

### **Culture and identity**

We have tried hard to strengthen the media sector. We have bought a transmitter for Rancas. Rancas gets two television channels and we add youth programmes made by our own young people from the community and the municipality. We also have an FM radio station and we are working on a project for a 5-10 kw AM one. Nevertheless, we have a problem with the licence because the government issues licences mainly to private companies rather than to community ones. Despite this difficulty we already have funds for the equipment and running of the station, which means we'll be able to get Radio Rancas on the air again. Radio Rancas was a pioneer in radio in Cerro de Pasco... In a few years' time the sound of Radio Rancas will be heard throughout the central Andes...

I'd like to emphasise that we have to value what's left of our culture much more... I am from a *campesino* community, my family and I are witnesses to the changes and we really want to preserve some of our customs that are part of our tradition and our heritage. They shouldn't be allowed to ruin what's left of Incan architecture and civil engineering, which can still be seen in the buildings and roads. We need to value our traditions much more...because this is what identifies us as a people.

### **Luis**

PERU 3

*Luis, 64, is justice of the peace in Quiulacocha—"nominated by my people", he explains, to deal with "problems with neighbours...disputes, fights and things like that". He tells of the devastation to the water and wildlife caused by the mining industry and of how this has also had a social cost, with the ending of the Sunday washday **faena**.*

Mining in Quiulacocha hasn't brought us any improvements. From the time the *gringos* arrived up until now, we've got nothing [willingly] from the company. It's only because of our own efforts that the community is getting back on its feet. The water system was done as part of an agreement when they were [nationalising], señor, it wasn't thanks to the *gringos*. When the [Cerro de Pasco]

**Corporation** was here, one of the *comuneros*, God bless his soul, worked incredibly hard to get us electricity... [Before], we had to ignite a tiny little machine to get light in the community—there was nothing else...

There are things that are no longer customary around here, for example...the *faenas* of the women washing their clothes on Sundays, a delightful custom we had before... The whole family [would go] and all their friends... They'd spend the whole day there doing their washing, everyone would help each other out, everyone would be partying. They'd bring a lamb along and they'd cook [it] on a spit and they'd cook their traditional dish, *pachamanca*, and they'd celebrate with their maize wine, their *chicha*, the children would be playing...when it wasn't raining. Everyone was happy then, some people used to fish, catch trout and then roast them. It was really beautiful, señor, the whole day was beautiful... [It doesn't happen] nowadays, no, because...the river is pure filth.

### **"There were birds...frogs...fish"**

They used to fish as well before, in the lake and rivers... There were birds, lots of birds typical to the area, but now they've disappeared as well... The only thing that remains is the seagull and there aren't very many of them around either. You used to find trout, frogs, and the people ate fish. All this has changed, señor. You don't find trout around here any more. You have to go and buy it... Frogs as well, you can't get anything now. And it's because the waters are dirty...

When Centromin dumped all its waste in the lake, Quiulacocha was the first to be contaminated environmentally. But nobody came here, no journalist. I'm grateful to you for coming here to spread the news of how the pollution got here... [It] killed all the frogs and the birds... Our little animals always used to drink from here, but quite a lot have died since the first reactive chemicals were dumped. [Those remaining] don't produce wool or they get thin when they drink the contaminated water... The pasture-land is also polluted because the fields get flooded by the sulphated water and all the grass gets burnt... The air [is polluted] too...

The children have a lot of cavities, you know, bad teeth. I guess because they're young, they don't have problems with their hearts,

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*Hector (M, 33 years), teacher*

PERU 4

Quiulacocha comes from two words: *quiula* which means seagull and *cocha* which means lake. As you may appreciate, the name of the community makes reference to two things which virtually don't exist anymore. There are no seagulls in the area now and the lake is dead—because of contamination from the mines.

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*Nowadays the river is pure filth*

or their lungs... The older people...already have bad teeth and some of them have lost all their hair, you know...

We've met with the Minister, all of us together, but he didn't take any notice of us. And it's going to get worse because they're going to dig a canal, passing through Quiulacocha... We've been to the prefecture...everywhere, but we still haven't found a solution... We haven't got enough money to see us through a court case.

## Adela

PERU 13

*Like her parents and grandparents before her, Adela, 59, is a member of the community of San Geronimo in La Oroya. It is a source of great sadness to her that such continuity no longer exists, as her own children and grandchildren have left the highlands in search of a better life.*

Before, [my grandparents' farm] was just [over] there, where you see nothing now, just rock and fumes. That's where the community farms and all their land used to be. All the farmhouses were just made of thatch, but they were beautiful, that's what they told us. In old La Oroya they use to plant trees, they used to plant potato, **olluco**, **coca**...and there were trees, lots of trees, and different varieties too. There was myrtle, for example...[and] *quisuars*... Now there are none. There were four or five little stumps here but they have been removed...

The land now occupied by La Oroya's smelter [was taken from us]. Our grandparents told us that a certain Palacios sold it with documents that he'd bought from the courts; all those men are corrupt [and] still are... They didn't just take our grandparents' land...they also brought the damn fumes which began to hurt us...

There was [another] section [of land that the company wanted] where many of my friends used to live, so the **gringos** told them to sign and there wouldn't be any problems... But people, as humble as they may be, are not idiots—the people of La Oroya didn't sell... My grandparents and my father [took part in those struggles]... Others signed, and they say that there was fighting among them, there were confrontations. Some people were in favour of the company. Yes, there was no lack of them.

They didn't let us work in peace... Everything was for mining. Did we ask them to come? They just came with their chimneys and their fumes. If they bothered us then we went up, up into the hills. Others left for Huancayo or for Jauja, what else could they do? They went because they couldn't work on their land, just their houses were left, but only on a scrap of land... That's why we went

*We went to court and we won*

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*Andrés (M, 80 years), farmer/retired mechanic*

PERU 23

The smoke turfed us out. It fell like snow [and] ruined the land, the rock, the pasture and the livestock. It was a complete disaster, no harvest and the animals dying off in droves... it was like they were poisoned by the arsenic dust from the foundry. That's why we went off to different places, like nomads we were, we took our little animals to see where we could rent grazing land.

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to court and we won. After 25 years we won the court case... We had to gain respect, because they saw that we were poor, they thought they could do whatever they liked in our land...dump all their rubbish, that slag, on our communities.

### **"We learnt to survive"**

My husband...worked [in the mines] for five years... His lungs [suffered] more than anything. He coughed a lot but my grandfather cured him. I remember [that] my son, who was small at the time, collected four toads and killed them. [My grandfather] boiled them and he made my husband drink quite a lot of [the liquid] for a few days, and so he made him quite well. [He] gave him herbs as well—*mulanca*—from high up [in the mountains]...

My grandparents [also] cured him when he had scabs on his face; they were all over his neck... My grandparents would tell him: don't go there, you'll just damage your health in the foundry support yourself with the farm, with the animals... So that's how we supported ourselves. [We learnt] to survive. In our little house we killed the lambs, we planted potatoes further up, we planted barley... We also spun wool from our sheep to...keep us warm...

We had a river here, a stream... **Centromin** hasn't got there and it hasn't contaminated it like so many other lakes and rivers...[the Mantaro river], for example. We used to drink from that river, we would even wash our clothes in the Mantaro river, but we don't any more... The clothes come out dirty, dirtier than when you take them to be washed.

### **"Children have forgotten their parents"**

[My children]...said it wasn't possible to live in La Oroya any more, and so they went, one after the other, until we were left on our own. [They don't visit] very often because they are far away. I've

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*Delma (F, 54 years), president of Vaso de Leche*

PERU 5

[The young people] leave to find work, they don't go for any other reason. They don't go because they hate their land, because they don't like their land...the majority go to escape the poverty, don't they? If there were better pastures and clean water they'd stay...

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*At first we weren't conscious of the damage* been to Lima sometimes and I've seen them. The one that lives in Huancayo I see more often, but they don't come to visit us and now I'm too old to go and visit them in their houses... Of course [I have many grandchildren], but I think they don't even remember their grandmother... They don't even see me—how are they going to remember me? We should see each other more often, but no, my children have forgotten their parents. They don't even remember our birthdays, they don't come.

## Hilario

PERU 14

*Hilario was born in Quiulacocha. Now 65, he has retired. Like others who went into the mines he started to feel "more like a miner than a comunero" and failed to realise for some time just how much damage was being inflicted on the land. More recently his community has fought back against the mining companies.*

I was only 16 years old [when I went to work in the mines] and it was the first time I'd left to stay away, to live elsewhere, without my family... It was a [big] change. In Quiulacocha they lived differently. Life in a community is always different, it's more peaceful, calmer than in the mining camps. The timetables are different in the community. The hours are more rigid in the mine—if it rains, thunders, or even if there is an earthquake, you still have to do the hours, and if you don't...you're punished...

The *gringos* taught you how to do the job, how to hold the taps, how to handle everything... [Some] would show you how to do the job, others wouldn't. That's what it was like, but in general it was good. What I can tell you though is that...the *gringos* paid us very little. When it was nationalised and **Centromin** began to operate, miners' daily wages improved a bit, but in fact it didn't last very long... Little by little we realised that things were just the same and they even got worse in many ways. Like in the camps, for example, they ignored housing improvements; they were old, they dated back to before the nationalisation. A few have done something, but that's all... They even fired people later on and didn't pay good wages. There were strikes carried out by the workers... Of course [I participated]—I'm not a scab.

### *"Finally you realise you're a comunero"*

At first there was no real awareness of the damage being done to the land...we weren't conscious of the true magnitude of the problem... What's more, a miner, to be honest, is only interested in his salary—how much he earns and that's all—that's the bottom



*"The community protested against the company"*

line... Miners in general...are trapped by their surroundings, so they're not even interested in whether their lungs are being infected, or if they are going to catch something serious, or if they're going to die in the mines. They don't think...

The community, its leaders, protested against the company, especially when they realised that the contamination was increasing and the company wasn't doing anything about it... When the community protests...we have to support it. That is our duty as *comuneros*. Unfortunately, before, when I worked at Centromin and at the Cerro de Pasco Corporation, I felt more like a miner than a *comunero*, but then you think it over and...finally realise that you're a *comunero*—this is your land and you're going to die here... So you do something about it, because they are contaminating the land and, as you can see, sometimes the damage they do is irreparable, as they say. Take a look at the fields, the lake and other places.

Since retiring... I've become involved in the *faenas* here, looking after animals and helping my son who works for the cooperative. I've done this to keep myself busy and useful, as they say. Of course I'm old now, but if you don't work you get even older, don't you?

*Hector (M, 33 years), teacher*

PERU 4

[To be a *comunero*] means to belong to a community. To have land. To work the land. To help with communal work, to do the work of everybody. To contribute to the maintenance of the *community* livestock and crops. To respect the authorities. This is what being a good *comunero* is all about.

**Wilmer**

PERU 17

*Wilmer, 20, is a student in Lima. Although proud of the cultural traditions of his home town of La Oroya, he says young people like himself see little future there because of worsening labour conditions in the mines and increasing unemployment.*

I remember my grandmother told me that at one time they had nothing to eat...there was no harvest because of the drought. They would take the cactus...cut the stem, remove the needles and drink the liquid because there was no water... They would also eat some plants...those that grow even if there is a drought. I think they are called *chita*... During that time...there was a lot of suffering...

[Now], living conditions are [difficult] because of the environment. For example, the camp we live in is 300 metres away from the refinery, the smelting plant, the chimneys, the smoke and the pollution... There are moments when your throat and nose sting... People who come here from other places feel the difference and they ask us, "How can you live with that gas?" But you get used to it. Of course there are people who do get sick—they get bronchial problems. And some workers are called **emplomados** because it is said that their blood has lead in it...

I went back to La Oroya recently and I bumped into a friend of my age, maybe a bit younger, probably 18 or 19. When I saw him his face was covered in spots. He had started working for **Centromin** four days before...in the arsenic plant... I remembered my father saying that everyone who worked in the arsenic plant would get covered in spots and get ill.

**Traditional dances**

It's an everyday thing to see people dancing **huaynito**. In every family get-together—in almost 90 per cent of the houses of people from the *sierra* (mountain)—we dance. In every party there are *huaynitos*, **huaylashes**, *santiagos*, all the dances... *Santiago* is danced during Carnival and the music is characterised by [the sound of] a little drum called a *tinya*. The musicians play it and you take a step to the beat of the drum, tan, tan, tan... You have to dance in a *pandillada*, a group... One person, or couple, goes in front... Now

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*Ana (F, 39 years), leader of women's mining association*

PERU 24

Most of them didn't have breathing apparatus, or helmets, or goggles... Most workers had enormous scabs on their faces... Many of them developed [skin cancer]. The people that started work in the foundry in the early years were the ones who paid this price.

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the *huaylash* has more footwork—more tapping. As they say, "You crack the floor." You stomp on the floor, jumping and dancing with more rapid movements than in the **huayno** [which] is more peaceful... The *huaylash* is faster and stronger, as if you were stepping on cockroaches.

At least in La Oroya [these traditions] still exist... There are people who say they want to lose this tradition, but once they have a bit of a buzz, once they have had a few beers and are sort of drunk—phew, they start dancing like the best dancers. There are [also] night clubs... [People] dance *salsa*, rock; there's **chicha**, **cumbia**...but people always like their own *fiestas*.

**"You can't imagine how we lived"**

My father has been a union leader two or three times: at the union in 1984 and the federation in 1989-90. Those were really hard times because all the labour union leaders received death threats—they would get letters... My mother and his relatives would tell him to quit, to think about his family. But he would say he did think about his family, that if improvements were achieved everyone would benefit, the family too...

You can't imagine how we lived in the [mining] camps. On the one hand, **Sendero Luminoso** harassed the miners to force them to join their campaign...if they didn't they would either threaten them or kill them. On the other, the military would barge into the camps. For them, everyone was a member of Sendero Luminoso. Even worse, the union leaders were the greatest suspects. The military and the *soplones* (secret police) threatened them too...

It was especially tough in La Oroya. You could not live in peace. They could take you away anywhere, or a bomb could explode. Too many have died like that... During the strikes, sometimes we would all have to join together and make *ollas comunes*. You know...*ollas comunes* consist of asking everyone—merchants, fruit and vegetable retailers, all the residents—for voluntary contributions and you cook for everyone in the biggest pots you can imagine. Everyone has to contribute because everyone eats from the same pot. Those who don't contribute don't eat...no, that's a lie, everyone eats.

On the one hand it's really good when people unite and there's solidarity... But this hasn't happened much in a long time now. Things have changed. The workers themselves don't risk it any more, they don't strike like they did when my father was a union leader because, since 1992, there have been no permanent fixed contracts. The laws are very tough and unfavourable to the workers [now]... Wages have gone down, but...[people] don't know

*In every family  
get-together  
we dance*

anything apart from being miners. They have been miners all their lives and now they are getting old, they are afraid of losing their jobs... That's why they don't get involved... [My father is still working] but many of his colleagues have been fired. They say more will be fired this year...

Young people like me don't see much of a future in La Oroya. They can't even be sure they'll be miners any more. About 90 per cent of my graduating class has already left La Oroya... That's today's reality.

## Teófilo

PERU 10

*Teófilo is an elderly man who remembers wistfully times when larders were full and the local livestock industry flourished. He is resigned to his children leaving their home town if they are to get a higher education, and laments Yauli's decline from being a busy trading centre. A miner for 25 years, he is now planting trees to counteract the pollution the industry has generated.*

When I was a child there was a large quantity of livestock—and so many animals—and now you see so few... The fumes...cause an illness that kills through paralysis... To prevent this we need a cure, but these days medicine costs so much, too much, and you can't survive. No *comunero*, for example, has any more than 100 sheep these days, when before they used to have 500, 600 or 900... The livestock situation is very sad and the poverty is great...

I remember in [former] times...my grandfather had a room like a larder where he just kept provisions—rice, sugar, fruit, potatoes. And in another room there was meat and you could walk in—like into a wardrobe—and take it out. But these days, who has meat in store? Nobody...

According to what my grandparents told me, here in Yauli, when it began, there was a mining delegation, there was the sub-prefecture, the general command of the Civil Police was also there, and the law court... [The town was] very important. There was a lot of money coming in and they had everything. There were people who came from other countries...from Spain...Yugoslavia...Japan. They came to live here for the livestock, they came for the mining and they had good properties [here] until the day when the smelter started in La Oroya. From then on, everyone had to go away...

I would like my children to study here and not to have to go away, but there's no higher education here...if we had a centre for further education, then they could be educated...and people [could] go on thinking about improving their knowledge of mining

*These days  
who has meat  
in store?*

and agriculture... So what's needed is to educate the people and prepare the land in whatever space we have here... We need the local or central government, ministries, or other institutions to support us. I know that in this way Yauli could improve... If it's going to happen, we fathers will have to work for it.

## New initiatives

The [mining] company has reduced its workers by more than 50 per cent. We think, if mining dies what will we do? We do have a thermal spring in Yauli...the waters have to be analysed, to see what they have in them. According to the Chemical Faculty in the capital, these waters are mineral... So we're thinking about setting up an industry. We've got other projects too. We're also doing something about farming trout—all things you need to create companies for... The other [idea] is to breed livestock, llamas, etc...

At the moment, I'm planting trees to counteract the pollution. Because the more trees there are here, the better it will be... We're looking for trees that will grow well in this region. The local council is researching this. They're the only ones doing it with us.

We haven't had any [support from elsewhere], but we have been given some seeds for trees from the village of Concepción down the road—they've worked with us... Our community is well organised... We make our work plans together and hold meetings. Just recently the board had to present its work plan, which was approved in the General Assembly of all *comuneros*... We are trying to develop activities like before, with the whole community...like improving our pasture, getting them to supply us with the kind of machinery we see in other places...

Right now we have a communal cooperative... All they have at the moment is 1,200 sheep and 35 head of cattle. They're maintaining these but we can't really hope for more because the grass is so bad... To cure all these animals now we would have to spend at least 5,000-6,000 *soles*... Can you imagine spending all that? We'd have to sell all our animals. Then what would be the point in doing it? It's ridiculous how much medicine costs...

These days you can't have sheep, it's better to have camelids

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*Delma (F, 54 years), president of Vaso de Leche*

PERU 5

Now, there's more destitution, a lot of poverty. Take an example, there didn't use to be an organisation called Vaso de Leche. Everybody had resources and it wasn't necessary then. Now, yes, there's a need. Vaso de Leche is an organisation we've created ourselves. They have them elsewhere, that's how we found out [about it]. We try to organise ourselves to make sure that none of the children in the community goes without milk... It's the women who are in charge.

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*We are trying  
to improve our  
pasture*

*Our crafts were famous before* because the pastures are now pure rubbish. Camelids can feed from scrubland and need less care. They're more hardy and also the medicine is cheaper... We generally use the name camelid for llamas... Alpacas as well are camelids, but alpacas are weaker than llamas. On one occasion we did buy them, thinking of the wool; we bought 10 but they didn't even last a year... As if it was a leper, the alpaca was naked, it didn't have any wool... [They] died very quickly and everything that had been invested was lost...

To plant things we need machines—tractors, for example, to turn the land; we need to buy seeds, things you can grow here... Since we're just *comuneros*, nobody wants to lend us money, nobody wants to take risks with us... If there was money we could restore the economy of the Yauli community to what it was before. I told you that, before, there was wool in abundance, the crafts were famous as well, not like now. There used to be plenty of demand, people came to buy, for example from Huancayo, from Jauja. We used to exchange things; they brought vegetables here, clothes...from here they took meat, wool and woven articles. The road-building was at its peak and there was all kinds of business... Nowadays we see two or three little shops. Before, there were all these streets, all of them were full of shops.

## Felix

PERU 18

*Felix, from Cerro de Pasco, describes how he gradually broke out of the isolated world of the labouring miner, joined the union and fought for improved conditions, local and national. The company eventually sacked him because of his activism. Only 38, Felix's health has been permanently weakened by his time in the mines.*

My father died [of]...a lung disease, which is very common among miners... He had to be hospitalised on two occasions, then nothing [more] could be done. It seems the disease was too advanced. So my father left me when I was young...aged four...

I applied to university to continue my studies, to have a profession, I wanted to be a mining engineer. At that time, most of my family—uncles, cousins, brothers—were mine-workers, or technicians, mining professionals, metallurgical workers...

[After qualifying] I arrived [in Yauricocha] and...gave my papers to the company. I passed the medical exam...[but] they didn't want to take me... Since I had a relative who was a personnel supervisor, he told me that my application had been assessed by the camp superintendent [who had] told him that

people with more education were the biggest complainers, they were the strikers... My case was even worse because I came from Cerro and the ones from Cerro were the most rebellious... [Finally] they told me that if I wanted to work for the company I had to begin a trial period... They gave us, the ones on trial, the hardest jobs just to see if we could handle the work.

### *Life in a mining camp*

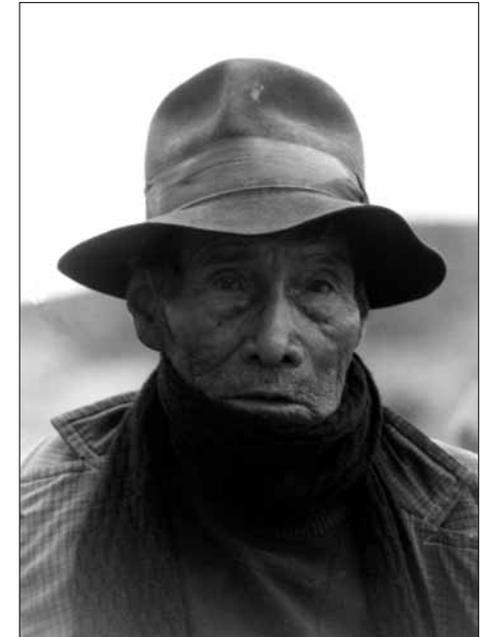
One of the social problems...in the Yauricocha camp was the problem of housing. If you were single you had to share a room in a house with four workmates. The rooms were tiny—four by four, each of us had a bunk bed... At the time some of my workmates even had families—a wife and children—they had to live with another family, also in tiny rooms. Can you imagine...two families living in one four-by-four room?...

I got married in the camp and...the first thing was to find housing... The company said they established a system of points. If you were married, logically, you had a better option than a single worker, but for each child you got eight points in order to have priority for housing and the largest, most comfortable houses... [So the miners] would have loads of children just to have the best houses, but in the end it was all the same because, even though the houses were the largest, they would end up being [too] small because of the number of people, of children, who lived there...

In a camp one lives locked up and removed from the world... I think the businessmen have us locked up on purpose, so that we won't find out we can do other things. The miner believes...that if work ends, the world ends, that he can't do anything else, that he will die of hunger—he and his family—but that is not true.

### *"I began to participate"*

[Like others] my whole idea was to save and retire—[but]...I had an accident... Where I was working caved in and I got out of there half-dead. I survived out of sheer luck. I was in hospital for almost



*"We're just comuneros, nobody wants to lend us money, nobody wants to take risks with us"*

*A miner lives removed from the world* a year... Nobody thought I would be able to walk again, but slowly I began to recover... I began to work in different areas of the company and since the job was more peaceful, I just stayed... That's when another phase of my life began...

Before, in the shaft, in the mine, it was more difficult. The work—the shifts—reduced the possibility of having contact with everything but...once I got out [and] was no longer isolated...I began to see the difficult reality of all the miners. I began to read, to educate myself and to participate in the union. First I was a base delegate and later they elected me to the committee of Yauricocha union. That was a very enriching experience for me, possibly the one that's had the greatest impact on my life... I began to get to know not only about the issues of the miners in my camp but also about those in other camps, because I ended up in the National Federation as social secretary. Likewise I met professionals and technicians from Lima who advised us and helped us to have greater success in our struggles...

The company was hostile to me and in one of our struggles, in a general strike in our company, the directors of **Centromin Peru** took advantage of the circumstances and fired me... I complained; my base and my workmates supported me, but the company used various tricks and never took me back... I pursued a lawsuit for many years but I never achieved anything...

Lots of other national labour union leaders were sacked as well... By sacking the leaders they thought they could behead the movement, but it wasn't like that, because the struggle continued. Later the violence we all know—deaths, disappearance of union leaders—came... That's what happened in those years.

### ***No stability, less solidarity***

There have been many changes. One...is that people now conform easily... They don't care now, there's a lack of solidarity... The only thing people are interested in is being able to work, that's all... The prospects are bleak. There's no longer any stability, people know they can be sacked at any moment, you can be expelled and nobody will demand anything, not even [the person] himself...

There's a saying...around here that "there's nothing sadder than an old miner". First of all, I can tell you, it is difficult to find an old

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*Amador Pérez Mandujano (M, 51 years), carpenter*

PERU 16

They have taken the gold, the silver... [But] they have destroyed the *campesinos*... Mining is important, it is something that nature gave the central region... But [it] should not enrich only a few, it should benefit everyone, especially the people from the regions, their communities.

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miner because they die young. Life expectancy is 40, 45—because their lungs don't resist. That's what happened to my father. When we speak about contamination we have to keep in mind that the miners are contaminated before anyone else and they die. What you can find is widows like my mother and most of them spend their old age abandoned if their children don't take care of them.

*People can be sacked at any moment*

### **Luzmila**

PERU 2

*Quiulacocha, where 38-year-old Luzmila is a municipal worker, has been particularly badly affected by the contamination from the mining industry. A strong and united struggle against the company has, however, according to Luzmila, achieved very little so far.*

[My husband] was a miner...but he died in a work accident a few years ago. My father also worked in **Centromin**. He's retired now... I've lived in mining camps since I was a child. From La Oroya I moved with my parents to Moracocha and later took up at Cerro with my family and now, as you see, we're here in Quiulacocha... Life for the miners...is hard... Father used to tell me [most people would have]...preferred to stay on the land, grazing animals, sowing crops—[it was] more relaxed. But in the end they had to leave because the company...had bought up all the prime land and there was no work anywhere else, no pasture-land or water...

[The company told people] the salaries were better and they were sure to get paid every week, not like the *comuneros* in the fields. They closed in on them and forced them to work as miners since there was no longer any alternative... [But] now, a lot of people are being laid off by the company. Nobody knows if they are going to reach retirement...

There are accidents all the time in the mine. My husband was the victim of negligence on the part of the man in charge of the company's operations... My children have had to grow up without their father and they'll go into adulthood the same...with just me. [The compensation I received?] A pittance. 300 *soles*. That's all, and a tiny pension. That's what the company pays for those who die working for them. Others leave the mines because they get sick, unable to live a normal life. It's the lungs they suffer from.

### ***"We have all united"***

Against [Centromin] and the pollution it produces...we have all united... [The water] is full of sulphur...there's no clean air left, everything is contaminated... People have got ill, stomach problems, for example. The children's teeth are rotten and people's hair is

*We are trying to move ahead* falling out... look how many men are bald, without hair, and even some women are losing their hair... Animals have died. The roofs in the houses are being corroded, ruined because of the polluted air—they keep collapsing because of the sulphur in the rain...

All the organisations in the community have joined together... We stopped people from the mining camps in Huaymanta from going to work. Now we're doing their work by building a channel to take the waste away—to make people aware of what can be done... We don't let the big lorries pass—we stop them getting on with their work. We want them to recognise all that is going on here and how they're all in it together—from the President to the community to the other leaders—they've made a pact... There were problems with the military. They attacked the *comuneros*... But they saw we were united, the three together—the council, the cooperative and the community—and so they stopped, but [the problem] still hasn't been resolved... A couple of things have been achieved, but not much... The park...the milking shed and the stadium over there. Our electricity also comes from Centromin—that's one agreement we've managed to sign with them...

Quiulacocha [suffers most] because it's right in the middle of it all... [And] they're still building...they made an agreement between the authorities without letting us, the *comuneros*, know anything. Centromin has also talked about resettling our community elsewhere... They told us they were going to move us to Villa de Pasco as well, but the houses are tiny there, they're like matchboxes...

We are trying to move ahead...in spite of the adversities. We're increasing our livestock, we've introduced new breeds, we're doing business with other communities, we sell meat to the cities. We want to set up a little industry with the wool from the animals. We've already set up a bakery. It's doing quite well now... [There's a tailoring workshop]—it's part of the occupational centre, but not many people are involved... [and a] milking shed, but it isn't up and running yet. We do want to get it going for the community. [And] of course we would like some of the artisans to come here to teach us [weaving]. We do have the looms here in Quiulacocha but because there's no one who's really into it they are going to waste.

*Hector (M, 33 years), teacher*

PERU 4

These lands are the inheritance we've received from our ancestors, we don't want to lose them for anything. We want to recover from the pollution and preserve what is left of our customs. We're a working community, with a history, and this is what we want to leave our children.

## Eliseo and Isabel

PERU 21

*Eliseo and Isabel, a married couple in their 40s, were interviewed together. They grew up in farming communities but have lived in La Oroya for many years. Eliseo has been a Centromin employee and union worker; Isabel runs a small business. They have both been active in the fight for better conditions in the mining industry.*

**Eliseo:** I learned many important things from [my father], especially his devotion to the community... I would follow [him] about to learn about work together in the community *faena*, in the harvest of potatoes, barley... Everybody would bring their donkeys or any beast of burden, like a llama, for example, to pick up their grain... Once the barley was harvested, the next day [we had] to thresh the tremendous heaps of barley... Another thing that was very beautiful was the potato harvest because a group of women prepared boiled potatoes in the farm and would take chillies and cheese to share with everyone... There was a lot of unity and those who skipped the *faenas* or did not attend without justification were sanctioned... Now that I bring back these memories, I see that it was a beautiful life... Everyone thought about the community's progress, because it was progress for all. And it is that lesson I have always had in mind...



Mirnería y Comunidades

*"In the community faena...everybody brought their donkeys...the men threshed the barley...the women boiled potatoes to share with everyone... It was a beautiful life"*

**Isabel:** [A custom I remember is] the Huanconada... [this], according to the elders, was like a council of illustrious village neighbours who held the responsibilities of village authorities, and watched the behaviour in our community, and had the opportunity to apply sanctions during the Huancanada festival from January 1st to the 3rd, every year. They would make each one see if they had misbehaved, and they would apply sanctions, if not solutions. For example, if there was a couple that lived together informally, they would make them get married, that is what they would do. The custom is that they...intervene only once a year and the public authorities make sure their decisions are carried out.

**Eliseo:** I found out about a vacancy at Centromin Peru [in 1976]... At that time Centromin was booming... We had no idea or awareness of the grave mistakes the company was making and which with time, the workers ended up paying for. When I started working, I was assigned to clean and maintain the analysis laboratory... I did not like the injustices I saw...the indifference of the bosses towards the workers. I was also shocked by the [polluted] atmosphere from the smelter's smoke and gasses. From then on I learned of the great value of pure, uncontaminated air like the air in my village, San Roque, in the countryside...

As a result of my [activism], I was elected sectional delegate by my colleagues within a year of starting my work. First we negotiated to improve environmental conditions at work and in the city of La Oroya. We always demanded an end to the contamination of the Mantaro river, an end to pouring acids into it. We suggested that these be placed in special reservoirs where they could be treated and the acids neutralised... The company, as well as the government, turned a deaf ear to these complaints...

Both my wife [and I] oppose any form of inequality. We knew many workers who suffered from *saturnismo*...the disease caused by lead in the blood, when all of a sudden a person loses the ability to move. We have also seen a great number of accidents due to the company's negligence. To see that a *compañero* is suddenly an invalid or crippled shocked me a lot... They would talk to you about everything in the company hospital except the contamination that was affecting us.

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*Ignacio (M, 71 years), farmer/retired electrician*

PERU 31

When mining began... they started to dump waste in the San Juan river... the trout disappeared. We could no longer drink the water and the animals got sick when they drank it. At first we thought it was a curse from God because we couldn't understand what had happened.

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**"We worked as equals"**

**Isabel:** At first I did not want to participate [in union activity]...seeing [how Eliseo's work]...affected the house, [how] we neglected our family...but later I joined. Since the Committee of Housewives of the Metallurgical Trade Union was already created, I joined in 1984 as a supporter of the union where Eliseo was a leader. There we worked, as equals, in mutual agreement.

[My mother] had also participated in the committee...we women have always been very courageous, strong... I remember those years that were so difficult for the miners. On one occasion...when we learned that a National Federation leader had been detained, that they'd made him disappear overnight, with other leaders...we supported them all with food, but mainly with our encouraging voices so that they would not feel alone...

At that time, we did not live in peace. Threats would arrive every moment, either from the company, or from **Sendero Luminoso**... But instead of being cowardly or running away we worked even harder with the Support Committee to the Federation, with the Metallurgical Union... We established mining schools for the miners' wives in all the camps...despite all the difficulties, we confronted the company [and stood] behind...[the] leaders. We were a very united group of wives...

[The workers] would come with their complaints to request help and they would come from such faraway camps. Maybe they needed more than we did, so we had to offer them a hand, be close to them at least to comfort them morally...

Now our participation is not like it was before, but the struggle continues and, on that, nobody is going to change our minds. First we are humans and we feel. If we feel our own pain then we will know how to feel other people's pain too. As a mother and a woman that is how I feel. That is how people from...our communities are...it creates solidarity among us... We continue thinking the same and we help each other out. That's what the company and the people from Lima and others do not understand.

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*Ana (F, 39 years), leader of women's mining association*

PERU 24

We began to coordinate with the idea of forming a steering committee for all the miners' wives in Centromin...because all the leaders had begun to receive threats, there were disappearances and murders. That was both from **Sendero Luminoso** and the paramilitaries... We began to organise around self-defence and human rights... [Also] the company owned its own stores, medical centres and butcher's shops. So we worked on what to do about this... We organised out of necessity and conviction, and knew why we participated.

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*We women  
have always  
been strong,  
courageous*

**Vicente**

PERU 30

*Vicente is an elderly campesino with an interest in local history and culture. He talks about the contrast between life on an isolated farm and in the city, and the enduring local custom of worshipping the mountain.*

I am from Rancas but my parents brought me up in the *campesino* way of life, tending the sheep, the alpacas and all the other animals you find here. Just as the stones live alone in countryside accompanied only by the sun and the wind, so I have lived, and I have been happy. But living with nature in this way you don't know much about progress, you don't transform your experience, you only know the daily routine—land, animals, day and night, and what else? You only work and cultivate the land—like a stone which at some moment forces the stream to change its course, like the grass which has to grow for the animals to live.

I was 22 by the time I left to study in this rural area's Education Centre... [My classmates] had a different way of behaving which made me feel inferior to them. Like all *campesinos* I was an introvert, shy and distrustful of the world, whilst they joked around and spoke slang...

Life on the farms marginalises all of us. People often have a battery-operated transistor radio so they hear a little local news and music, but we didn't have television, newspapers or magazines. So it was only when I went to Rancas and the city, Cerro de Pasco, that I met another world, other ways of behaving, and a lot of this was

bad in my opinion—different times for doing things, and the noise! My first night in Cerro de Pasco...I got up several times thinking dawn had come. It wasn't dawn but the artificial light in the streets... In the country, life begins with the first rays of light at around 5.30 am and that's the order of things we're used to... I felt the enormous difference in the way of life and [missed]...having complete freedom to live with nature. In the city I used to leave the house for a walk, I used to walk along street after street, it was always the same... When I would go out for a walk in the country, I could walk for kilometres through ever-changing landscapes. It was fascinating, there was always something new to see...

In more recent years things have changed.



For women as well as men "the *campesino* way of life" has changed.

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*Ignacio (M, 71 years), farmer/ex-miner*

PERU 20

[We plant] potatoes, carrots, lettuce... [People grow] just for themselves. Only some of us plant; others don't because some years it works and others it doesn't. It's been like that for a while now... The fumes come this way and everything burns as it grows, for example the potatoes, the top of the plant ends up frozen like ice.

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Some Rancans work local mineral resources such as silicon, they produce lime which they then sell to the mining companies. We have a better communication network now, especially for trading between towns. However, you can see the impact of the waste water, the washing of the minerals, from the silt, on the other side of the mountain chain. Those lands are yellow and don't grow any more, parts of the hills are barren. Even the animals, the sheep, the alpacas and the cows won't graze there. We have always waited for the rains and have used our springs but now even the rains bring pollution and the lakes and rivers are full of waste from the concentrators belonging to **Centromin** or the other mining companies. This is all bad for our land. Even the wind carries the mining silt when it's dry, when it's a powder. Pollution is an ever-present problem.

**Faith in the mountain**

We take this offering to the mountain, the patron of the animals, because the mountain looks after the animals and all cattle-owners have absolute faith in him... We lay the table for the *Auquillo*—the *compadre*, but in Quechua it's *Auquillo*. So a group of people led by the head of the family offer the table to the mountain and they put out a glass. Meanwhile they...select the smallest, the most succulent, *coca* leaves for the glass. The owner of the farm or the head of the family adds wine, or alcohol made from sugar-cane and raisins... That's the way we share with our patron—the grandfather, the great shepherd—this is the *Auquillo*. We give this to him in faith and with love so that in the next year the little leaves in the glass will become good crops that will grow throughout the year... If you have offered up a good table, and you have given it in faith, your animals will double in number next year, that's what we believe and we all have faith in this here.

I learned [these things] from my grandparents and they in turn learned them from their grandparents... Each year [farmers] bring the legacy back to life. Though there have been some changes over time, the essence of this is the same: the relationship between *campesinos* and the land.

*The mountain looks after the animals*

**Gregoria**

PERU 6

*Gregoria, 44, lives in Yauli where, she says, living off the land has become increasingly difficult as a result of the impact of mining—but women suffer most because of society's double standards for men and women.*

In the old days, life for people in the community was less difficult... There was more livestock, more land. Now people don't want to stay in the community... They go away and no longer think about their homeland. Nobody supports us, our life isn't important to anyone, although we produce meat for them, beans, potatoes, *maca* and other things that they eat in the city...

I used to graze animals [for others]—I only stopped a week ago. On Friday at dawn five llamas were stolen from me... We've been fine here until now, but now I've been robbed and I've lost my job. Who would have come this high up? The path was snowy and beautiful that morning, winding up and down. Someone had removed the stones from the wall. They'd taken out the beautiful stones and stolen all the animals...

[My husband?] He's a bricklayer. What happened is that all our animals perished. Before, of course, we both used to work in the fields, in Pomacocha, high up... The animals were fine... Then I came here [and they got] *torniquera*... [and] septicaemia... With *torniquera*, the animal spins round and round as if it's drunk and then it falls over. It's very difficult to cure... [It's caused by] the fumes and all that. They say the bad grass is poisoning them... little leaves that grow in the damp and when the animals eat them they get maggots, and this also causes them to die... I brought 30 sheep and 14 llamas from Pomacocha. All of them [have died]...

When people go to La Oroya, down there by the foundry, when it's full of fumes it makes them sick, they [too] get headaches, just like the animals. They begin going round and round, crying and doubling up in pain.

***"That's enough school...you're a woman"***

[I studied] just until the second year of primary, that's all... My grandmother paid for me to go to school. My mother did what she

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*Andres (M, 80 years), farmer/retired mechanic*

PERU 23

One thing's for sure, there's not much future round here. You can only be a miner round here because you can't live from being a community member, working the land, the farm. The people who work the farm do it as an extra, they have to work in the mine or as a trader or in transport too. You can't live from farming any more the way our grandparents did.

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*"They've have contaminated our rivers, waters, towns..."*

could to help my grandmother as well, but then my brother came along and they took me out of school, preferring to pay for [him] as he was the boy. They told me: "That's enough for you. You're a woman—you have to get on with your life now. Now you've learnt something, at least you can sign your name and you've learnt how to read"...

The older people thought men ought to study more than the women because they would be the ones who worked and became heads of families and the community. [But] it should have been [seen as] important for me to go on with my studies. There are lots of women who are heads of families in this community, widows and single mothers. Likewise, if you decide to go to the city it's important to know how to read and write and to have qualifications, isn't it? It's important for everybody to study.

Now it's obligatory for everyone to go to school. Parents think

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*Julián (M, 58 years), farmer/president of cooperative*

PERU 29

For us, it's important to be in harmony with the animals and the land. Every [February], we put ribbons on the animals' ears so that they're happy and Grandfather Mountain, the land, also gets a table [laid with] *coca* and cane alcohol. We can't forget these customs because they're part of our lives, our beliefs, our faith. And if something happens like animals go missing, Grandfather Mountain must be complaining about something.

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*Lots of women are heads of families* it's important...[whereas] my mother, for example, didn't care whether her children studied or not...  
My oldest is 21... She was doing very well [at school]...then she started to get headaches... From the same thing my animals died of—that's what she had begun to suffer from, and she complained all the time, in school as well... The medical post identified an unacceptably high rate of tuberculosis and silicosis among the population of Quiulacocha.... The lake was full of mine waste and **Centromin's** solution was to transfer the waste into Ocroyoc...which is situated on the edge of our village...so now when the wind is blowing in the evenings—dammit—it smells foul, awful. The stuff that comes out of the water-treatment plant...is another problem.... Our children have a lot of cavities as a result of the contaminated water we drink.

[My daughter] suffered from the attacks for two years and was doubled up in pain... So we took her out of school until I could find a way of making her better, until she was healthy again, but it took years. From here, she started to work, she got a job and that's when everything went wrong—she got pregnant. So she's a single mother. The husband didn't acknowledge the baby at all...

**“Men can do what they want”**  
[My second daughter] is 17 now. She stopped at the third grade... My partner had taken to the vice of alcohol. He drank every day, more and more, and we couldn't afford what they asked for at the school, the fees, what they needed for activities...that's why my son also got left behind. He was in the third grade along with his friends, but now he's back in the first grade... Last year he didn't study at all. Why? It's his father's fault!

**“Men can do what they want”**

Men can do what they want and it doesn't matter. For example,

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*Carmen (F, 18 years), student*

PERU 27

They say that if a woman goes into the mine there'll be a tragedy of some kind, that's what they believe... it's forbidden. They say it'll cause a disaster, deaths, cave-ins and all that. So don't even think about that, it's not possible. My dad says it comes from the *pachamama* (mother earth) tradition. She doesn't allow women to enter her.

*Victor (M, 42 years), librarian/researcher*

PERU 25

The story of the *Muqui*... is part of the mining tradition, especially in Bolivia and Peru. What is the *Muqui*? The *Muqui* is about 80 centimetres to a metre in height. If you catch a *Muqui* at work he'll do all your work for you and you can sleep or relax... They say the *Muqui* and other mining characters are jealous and won't let any women into the mine. That's why no women to date have entered the mines in the Cerro or in Bolivia, not one woman engineer, researcher or journalist.

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if they get drunk, it's not seen as bad. A drunken woman's a lost woman. A single mother's disgraced all her life. The men have children all over the place. They hit their women when they're drunk. [But] a drunken woman's incurably bad.

## Abel

PERU 7

*Among the minority of young people who have not moved away, Abel, 22, identifies strongly with his community's struggles against the mining companies and supports Quiulacocha's efforts to develop new income-generating activities. He is also a keen footballer whose ambition is one day to play for his country.*

My parents...keep a little livestock like everyone around here, and they also trade things... They've worked hard throughout their lives like all Quiulacochans...and they've been able to give us something, in spite of the poverty. We're recognised as children and we're very grateful to them...

The majority [of young people] leave... The 40 per cent who work for **Centromin Peru**, in the mines, they go because that's their fate... Sometimes they come back in droves, for the assemblies, for example. Sometimes on Sundays they call a **faena** and people who've left come home...

There are artists and dances typical to this village... I won't deny [that] young people go to Cerro or other cities and they dance there to other things. But here in the community they dance the typical dances—that's how it is. For example, now, at Carnival time, it's really beautiful...and everything is shared... It's not like this any more in other places, not in Rancas or in other communities... the children of Quiulacocha come back for the **fiestas** and celebrate with their brothers in the community. They never forget the saints' days, they don't forget the dances and they enjoy them together...

I think [migration] has always happened, though of course not as much as now. I've got uncles far away, in other cities. My relatives, just like other families, have been to seek their fortune in other cities. I've thought about [moving], but not yet. My parents need me here now that my brother's married and I help my parents and my younger brothers and sisters. Right now, I'm with the pick of the pitch. I'm a footballer, I play every day, putting in the effort, training. Sometimes they have teams from the mining camps and when you get well known, they call you up and you play and earn a little money. If you're good enough then they put you on the company payroll and want to give you a contract.

*Migration has always happened*

[Professional teams?] Yes, there's the Union Minas de Cerro de Pasco which is in the first division championship and which is backed by Centromin. But they just prefer footballers who come from Lima. They just give them the contracts and don't take any notice of the people from around here, despite the fact that we know how to play at high altitude, at 4,400 metres above sea level, but they don't give us the chance. Despite all this I go on training so that one day I'll play for my country. I'd like that.

***"We've always united"***

These days we have many problems created by Centromin Peru—we have to join up with [other] communities. Mostly, we join up with Yurahuanca because of the [mining] waste. Two or three lakes have been contaminated by Centromin Peru and this waste is going to come down the pipes here to Quiulacocha and it's also going to affect Yurahuanca quite a lot too. Because sometimes they don't take any notice of one village [acting alone]...

I believe that we share the same history. That's what we learnt in school as children, that there's no big difference. All the communities want to live peacefully and we strive for this. But there's a history of defending our lands and confrontation with the company—and that won't change. Every time somebody comes wanting to take something from us, we've united, just like against Centromin... We have to stop [the pollution], because if we don't there'll be no life left in our communities and they'll disappear.

Some [young people are aware]...but others—not so much. That's why we don't get anywhere and we react too late... That's why when you asked me about this interview I accepted—so I could relate what's happening. This could move things forward. My remembering that there were crystal-clear lakes...when now there are none, illustrates the pollution issue. We must become more aware of this all the time and I believe we are doing this in order to confront the contaminators, particularly if we love our community.

***"It's as if we don't exist"***

We've appealed to the sub-regions but they've tried to bring us down and we've made complaints as well—we've protested to President Fujimori, but no, we haven't been able to do anything about it, they haven't helped us with anything. Sometimes it requires a lot of money to come up against Centromin and often the community doesn't have these kinds of economic resources and so we've been paralysed. We've sent representatives to the government, when members of parliament have come here we've spoken to them as well, but they don't do anything to help the

*There's a history of defending our lands*

communities. It's as if we don't exist, and the Centromin company, since it belongs to the government, can do what it wants. We even won a court case against Centromin and they were forced to repay us [by building] a stadium, they built us a dairy [too] and a park. Officially we've won twice against Centromin...

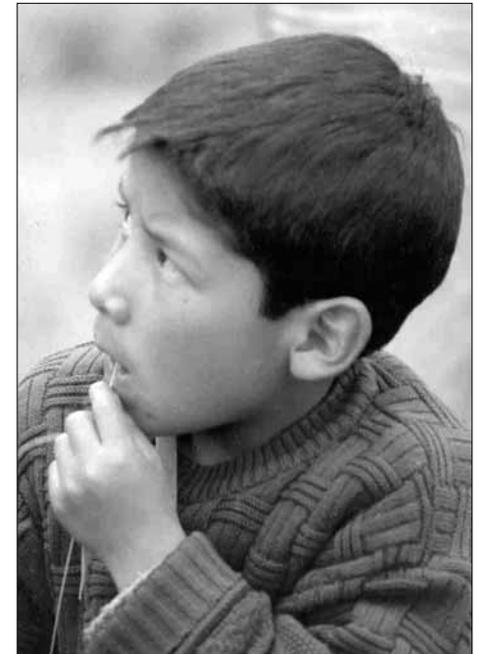
When Centromin was installing the pipelines to pollute the lake we got the whole community together to try and stop their work, but they brought in the armed forces. Sometimes the community doesn't do anything so as not to come up against the army... We've defended ourselves, but when the army arrives then we don't have much success.

***The future of the community***

Just now we're planting these grasses here in the sub-regions and when they grow we'll plant more grasses here in the cooperative so we'll have more resources for the community and the livestock belonging to community members. It's a cycle. [The *maca* we planted] turned out well...and we hope it'll continue going well for us, so it complements the rearing of livestock in the community... Nowadays some people make a living raising guinea pigs [for food]... Rearing guinea pigs, agriculture, that's all. Ah, also, they extract sand down in Sacra—it's all sand in that area...

There's a small textile business, that's...the only business there is here. There are two teachers from San Pedro de Cajas who've come to teach textiles and weaving... [The bakery?] It's part of the cooperative, it's needed a lot by us and also the community of Yurahuanca, lots of communities which are close by... It's especially important for people [who live in] the country because sometimes the bakers from the bakery in Cerro de Pasco don't come... Now it's working so well we're thinking of building another oven, for the community this time, not for the cooperative...

Oh, and I forgot the dressmaking workshop. There is one that runs from Monday to Friday. There are about 18 to 20 people who



*"All the communities share the same history. That's what we learnt in school as children"*

*The poor campesinos make the rich ones richer* attend, and a teacher from the...school in Quiulacocha helps out. These are new activities in the community...

I know that working as brothers together, as **comuneros**, we'll make progress... I'd just like to ask that Cerro de Pasco and Centromin Peru visit Quiulacocha, that they come to talk with us. I'd also ask the President of Peru who has never visited these lands of God to see for himself that we exist, and to see how the children of Quiulacocha work despite everything.

## León

PERU 8

*León, 51, is a leader in the campesino community of Pamparca with a strong commitment to regenerating the local economy and to fighting injustice.*

As a child I saw my father cry. My father was so poor then and he'd ask why, why are there so many differences, so much poverty? Why did others have everything and him nothing? This made an impression on me... It's not all equal [here] and this is the problem, the ownership of land. [The rich *campesino*] is the one with the best lands, the best cattle, the one who wants to order everybody about here in the community... The poor *campesinos* have to be subjects of the rich *campesinos*... The communal **faenas** hardly ever benefit the poor *campesinos*, they just make the rich ones richer...

[My father cried]...because he was a poor *campesino*. They treated him very badly. Every now and again they'd throw him in jail and he'd be judged by others who had land. Then there was a trial, there was a boss who'd gather up the poor people as if they were slaves and make them work. So my father was going to leave the community, but I told him it was better...for me to go... So, at the age of 13 or 14, I left with this on my mind...to find a way to change the way of life for the poor. I went to Lima...to study. I got married there and then returned in 1980...

You know, nearly 70 per cent of young people from the communities—despite all the wealth...they're extracting from the Cobriza [mine], which we don't get any of—go to Lima, to struggle in the slums, to suffer hunger and all the rest of it. This is the migration from the country to the city that is doing so much harm to our communities... I knew this. That's why I came back.

## Deception

My *campesino* community Pamparca has really been deceived... **Centromin** produced a false document, with the story that they were going to give us a communal company which they'd manage

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*Ignacio (M, 71 years), farmer/retired electrician*

PERU 31

The hillsides of the mountain range were pure pasture-land so we were able to keep cattle and also plant crops. It was great fun because everywhere was good for games...for sports. That's what my early days were like, with nothing to worry about. But if you look around now...there's no [pasture] land to be seen; [before], it was *pampa* (a grassy plain), and now there's a mountain there, but it's a mountain of pure rubbish from the mine, the silt left over once the minerals have been washed.

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for the community in order to have real development... Later it turned out they'd got us to sign for the sale of the Pampa de Gallos land. So they ended up giving us a few **soles** for the land, that's all. But with the community law—the new constitutional law [which says that] the land cannot be used for commercial purposes...just a while back we were given this document and I had a good look at it. Frankly, there's no possible way that Centromin could have legally acquired that land.

[It's] 26 years now that they've been here, refining copper. [Before,]...we used to produce sugar-cane, there were vegetables, fruits, bananas, oranges, papaya, yucca, sweet potatoes. With the copper dust that's ruining our land...none of this area produces anything now... We're coming up to the [planting] season now, but we can't produce maize any more, and as if this wasn't enough, we've recently had the problem of El Niño...there's no rain now, there's nothing. The communities are becoming quite frankly, just full of old people, that's all. The young people go to the cities. When they get a little bit of money they forget about their community, frankly, they become more like foreigners or people from the coast.

## "No one sings our songs any more"

Before, in my community, until I went to Lima, I didn't know how to speak Spanish. It was really hard for me to learn Spanish, but now the young people who come here forget **Quechua** and go here and there speaking Spanish to everybody. Quechua is being forgotten, but [as for] me... I'll never forget my Quechua. It's so rich and beautiful... I've been thinking about how we can hold on to the Quechua language, to maintain our culture, customs, but the way our organisation's going...

**Huanca** culture is being infiltrated [from outside]... Since the foreigners came along, we've lost our customs, our culture and...even our own **huaynitos**. No one sings our songs any more... Foreign culture is taking over, they dance rock here, they dance **chicha**, so we're losing our sense of community completely.

*Communities are full of old people now*

*Money is a god  
nobody needs*

Before, we used to use our wool—sheep’s wool, alpacas’ wool, llamas’ wool—for jumpers, and now we don’t any more... I used to know the natural dyes, from plants, which were hard to fade. Now everything’s plastic and the dyes all synthetic, [and] synthetic wool... Very occasionally they still use lambs’ wool but quite frankly it’s looked down on these days...

[When I came back], the solidarity of before no longer existed... Nobody needed the *faena*—that was a change. [I’d say the reason was] mainly the Centromin Cobriza company where people earned money. I think it’s like a god that nobody needs. Now the idea of “you help me today and I’ll help you tomorrow” has completely gone... You have to look for money, it’s money everybody wants. Poor [*campesinos*] can’t pay. The Centromin workers earn more, so they’re more respected... At the same time the young people turn their back on their community.

*“The whole community comes together”*

The nicest thing about my community which still exists is the *baraya*, which is when they name six people as authorities; every year it happens... mayor, land manager, governor, etc... and we still want to give it value... They celebrate Easter Sunday with the original authorities... preparing food for all the visitors. They make *chicha* and everything...

The whole community comes together... [First] you have to go through all the ceremony. The president of the community has to give permission... you have to ask him: “Señor President, you know today is our Easter celebration and we’re going to serve ourselves.” ... You have to toast your drink to the president... The person serving will make sure there’s enough for everyone, but you have to bring a bottle...

Sometimes [young men and women] get engaged during these celebrations. And the highest authorities of the community come together to explain the customs of the community... the younger people have to assemble in the main square and sit down together, in circles or in straight lines, and they serve *mote*, potato stew, soup and all that, and they explain how this is our custom, so that when people grow up they will do it the same way... This is how our community goes on living...

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*Victor (M, 42 years), librarian/researcher*

PERU 25

It’s synonymous with progress, technical advance, the mining industry, but that’s for those who get good use of these primary products, it’s not for the people of Pasco. We haven’t seen one cent of it, there has been no investment in our favour, absolutely none.

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*Carmen (F, 18 years), student*

PERU 27

Very few young people work in the company these days and those who do are casual workers, they only work for a few months on contract... All of a sudden they don’t have a job... In my parents’ time if you started work there, it was to stay, you were unlikely to be fired unless you’d done something really bad. It’s different now... which is why I think young people leave—there’s not much left for them here in La Oroya.

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And at dawn—I was forgetting this—at dawn on Easter Sunday the children bring pumpkins, papaya, fruits and chocolate for the single women who have to prepare the pots, seasoning and everything that they’re going to serve to the single men. And the teenagers have to go to the small farms to fill up the main square with horses, goats, cows, donkeys and hens. They even take cows there, to what’s called the regional fair. So in the morning none of the *campesinos*’ animals are in their sheds, they’re in the square, and you have to pay 10 *centavos* for your animals to get them back. This is a custom... Before, they used to pay in little silver pieces, but not now. Now you could actually get your animals back by giving a glass of something.

*Looking to the future*

It seems [my children] might return [to the community]; my second son finishes mining engineering this year, he wants to... win back some of the mines left by the Spanish and make them work for the community, to find an alternative way...

I’ve just put forward [a proposal for] an irrigation project using sprinklers at Focondes Huancavelica... We want to go to a place that’s 7 km away and... build a new village... The idea now is how to get some engineers on board who can give us training in how to make natural fertilisers out of earth. Once that’s organised, I know things will get better with the irrigation project.

For the first time, a series of *campesino* communities living on the edge of the Andes [have done something] on a national level... Our idea is... to bring back our *cochinilla* (cactus plant)... so we can manufacture coloured pencils around here, or things like that. Or if that goes wrong, we could produce even better things... and we’ve got a project with the agro-industrial centre, and we could process our product with them. But if we want to improve our product we need the irrigation—and more land...

After [that], what I want is to bring all the villages that have been divided around here back together again. Division doesn’t make for progress or real development, it doesn’t do anything.

**Juan**

PERU 15

*Aged 23, Juan is from Tinyahuarco, near Cerro de Pasco, and has recently graduated as a teacher. Aware of the long history of extraction of local resources, he sees an urgent need for the **campesino** community to develop new skills and its own small-scale industry as well as to value the culture and knowledge they already possess.*

When large-scale mine exploitation began in the area, the labour force was not sufficient and the only possible supply of labour was the *campesino*. That's why nearly all the miners have a *campesino* background. That's what it was like. The companies would recruit from the communities... My grandfather worked in the first tunnels that were dug... He died with his lungs eaten away by silicosis.

**“Orphans of development”**

[The mining company] began to look for minerals in the middle of the city and this affected the people who lived there. Of course the company bought the houses but for a low price in comparison with what came out of the ground—all the wealth of the minerals!... Mining, as much as ranching, has only served to create export centres, simply for extraction. Cerro de Pasco and all its peripheral zones have been orphans of all this, of any true development.

Great quantities of wool were taken from there, for example, but that wool went straight to the city of Lima...[and] to other parts of the world where only then the wool was turned into threads, fabric, etc, but it was never done here. Currently the old grandmothers who live around here continue to use their *puchigas* (looms) to weave with...[but otherwise] wool has never been processed here... Not only...sheep's wool but also alpacas' wool. The price they sell it for here is the “price of an egg” (very low)... The middlemen are the ones who benefit. The same thing happens with the minerals. Here in Cerro de Pasco, they don't even make nails. So what happens? There are no jobs because they don't develop industries here... It's the same with dairy products, for example. Cheese and butter, let's say, have never been mass-produced to be exported, although everyone knows that dairy products from this area are of high quality.

**How the *campesino* needs to change**

[The] thing about the agrarian reform [in the 1960s] is that the attempt was good but it was lacking in follow-up... I think that the *campesinos* haven't been able to take advantage of things, they have been led by selfishness, by individualism, and because of this some

*Middlemen are the ones who benefit*

of them have succeeded and others have failed. Some received a great quantity of livestock but they didn't know how to manage it. Now they don't even have a single one left and to survive they have had to become herders. Their job is to care for and graze the livestock that belongs to others...

[We need] a new *campesino* mentality... A *campesino* on his own is not going to be able to do anything; he has to be organised. The communities must be strengthened to be able to move forward, to be able to secure loans...to set up industries...let's say metal workshops or some foundries where we could begin making the smallest things...tools or nails, for example. Not complicated production using sophisticated technology, but something to start off with. In this way we would have a mine there, a spinning mill, a leather tannery, a place where you could produce cheese, butter, and in this way diversify, unlike now. I believe that this would generate employment...

[Underdevelopment] has got a lot to do with the cultural aspect, the educational... This area is very much neglected by the state. For example, in the Pucara area...[the teachers] only teach for three or four months a year and the rest of the time—most of the time—they ask for leave... These days a *campesino* will say...“I'm a *campesino* but my son isn't.” That's to say that the *campesino* doesn't want his son to be a *campesino* like himself. And he's right because there's no support for *campesinos*, the countryside is abandoned... There are communities for example, that support their young students to go and study in the university so they can later return to transfer their knowledge to the community and then what happens is that they go and they don't return...there aren't any incentives for the *campesinos*.

**Loss of language and knowledge**

I think my parents have been a tremendous education for me, not just in terms of *campesino* life, but in relation to...our Andean culture. Since I was little, for example, my mother always spoke to me in **Quechua** and, although I can't actually speak Quechua, I can understand it...

Quechua is spoken nowhere...it's not that it's prohibited, but it might as well be. Do they teach you how to speak Quechua at school like they teach you how to speak Spanish? What is the official language? It's Spanish, isn't it? If you go to a public office, does anyone speak Quechua? This is why people stop speaking their language and it's lost, there's no way to practise it...

[As] *campesinos*, [my parents]...raised livestock and I was able to

*We need a new *campesino* mentality*

*Young people leave and lose their roots* see the amount of knowledge they had as the result of practical experience, which allowed them to solve the problems that arise in ranching. For example, I remember the time when a young lamb had bad eyes and my mother got some lime and salt and put it in its eyes. I said to myself she would really make that little lamb suffer and my mother said to me, “You’ll see how it will get better”, and a week later the lamb was cured. It got its sight back.

Another example...is a very bitter plant which my mother used to prepare by boiling in an oil... It’s used to get rid of worms. So, as I say, they use a lot of things, they use their ingenuity... [My mother] used to collect some car grease, put copper sulphate into it and by mixing it and putting it on the sheep’s feet; it also cured the problem of the lice on the sheep’s feet; it also cured the mange on the mouth... There are a lot of knowledgeable *campesinos*, but...most of their children are in Lima—so in this way they lose all their knowledge... [Young people] leave and they lose their roots, their culture, this is what worries me.

**“They’re killing the campesino centre”**

[The El Brocal mining company] facilitates education work and improvements in housing, but that’s all. Its contribution is small and it’s diminishing. Previously, for example, the company used to provide the *comuneros*’ children with access to the company buses so they could study in Cerro de Pasco, but now this assistance has been cut off... [And] now the labour force they use is barely 1 per cent, no more.

Personally, I’m not against the fact that they want to privatise **Centromin**, but the way in which they’re privatising everything is, I believe, bad for the country and for the region... I believe mining can be a great engine [of progress], even as a way of re-energising livestock production and agriculture. They should think about this, not like they do now when they think only about mining [interests]. What they are doing at the moment is killing the *campesino* centre; they contaminate the rivers, for example, and the

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*Victor (M, 42 years), librarian/researcher*

PERU 25

The misfortunes of life and death are ever-present... That’s why the *huaynos*, *mulisas*, *chimaychas* and the *pasacalles* of Cerro de Pasco are not for dancing or for getting drunk to... These songs are so sad they make you cry. It’s because they have pillaged this place, not only minerals but also our thoughts, these people have to complain in one way or another. The songs are a testament, they’re like banners, or loudspeakers through which we make known our laments and pains, but also our hopes and good fortune.

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*“We’ll develop when we recognise our Andean culture”*

pastures. I think they must stop this. There should also be mining taxes, which don’t exist and have never existed... They take everything and they don’t leave anything for the villages, for this reason I think privatisation is going to be simply a change of ownership.

**“I’ve tried to look for answers”**

You know I’ve been to university, I’ve studied to be a teacher. The truth is I want to stay, although I’m young... I’ve always asked: “Why is [Peru] an underdeveloped country? What happened to our country?”... [People] would tell me, “Peru is inferior, the Peruvians are inferior and we are never going to advance.” And I began thinking about whether this was true or not... I’ve tried to look for answers, alternatives... In the university they taught us that the country and villages of the area are going to develop, that when they have industries there will be work for all. But I don’t believe this is enough. I believe we’ll develop when we recognise our Andean culture; it’s not just to do with economic development but also with personal development, cultural development.

Every attempt has been made to gloss all the terms in the testimonies but finding the meaning for all the words has not proved possible.

<b>Baile Viejo</b>	(literally, old dance), a special Carnival dance
<b>baladas</b>	ballads
<b>campesino/a</b>	someone who lives off the land, peasant
<b>centavos</b>	cents (old currency)
<b>Centromin</b>	state-owned mining company
<b>Peru</b>	
<b>Cerro de Pasco Corporation</b>	US-owned mining company (later nationalised as Centromin)
<b>charqui</b>	dried llama meat
<b>charquican</b>	dish made from <i>charqui</i>
<b>chicha</b>	1. a liquor made from maize; 2. a popular music/dance form (mixture of Latin and traditional)
<b>chuño</b>	potato conserved by freeze-drying
<b>coca</b>	South American shrub, the leaves of which are used as a stimulant or narcotic
<b>compadre</b>	godfather; also used as a term of respect
<b>compañero/a</b>	companion/comrade
<b>comunero/a</b>	registered community member with rights and responsibilities
<b>cumbia</b>	a type of dance (and music) that originates from Colombia
<b>emplomados</b>	(literally, people of lead), people suffering from lead poisoning
<b>enganchadores</b>	(literally, those that hook people in), contractors
<b>estancia</b>	farmstead, community-owned dwelling or hut surrounded by pastures
<b>faena(s)</b>	communal work
<b>fiesta</b>	festival, celebration
<b>gringos</b>	Westerners, foreigners; in this context North Americans who ran/owned the mines in Cerro de Pasco Corporation.
<b>hacienda</b>	estate farm
<b>Huanca culture</b>	a Peruvian Indian culture
<b>huayla/huaylash</b>	traditional song/dance, fast
<b>huayno/</b>	traditional song/dance, slow
<b>huaynito</b>	
<b>maca</b>	small tuber with medicinal properties

<b><i>machismo</i></b>	chauvinistic attitudes and behaviour
<b><i>minka</i></b>	voluntary communal labour
<b><i>mote</i></b>	type of maize
<b><i>Muqui</i></b>	mythical dwarf connected with the mines
<b><i>olluco</i></b>	type of crop tuber, similar to a radish
<b><i>pachamanca</i></b>	traditional meat and vegetable dish cooked in an underground oven
<b><i>patasca</i></b>	traditional soup
<b>Quechua</b>	indigenous language and culture originating from the Incas, who first established the Quechua state. Large-scale expansion of the Inca empire occurred in the fifteenth century; from 1525 and 1532 civil war devastated the empire, which was then conquered by the Spanish.
<b>Sendero</b>	(literally, Shining Path), the main (Maoist) guerrilla movement in Peru. Formed in the late 1960s, it was particularly active in the 1980s and early 1990s, and drew much of its support from rural areas.
<b>Luminoso</b>	
<b><i>sole(s)</i></b>	Peruvian currency
<b>Vaso de Leche</b>	(literally, glass of milk), welfare organisation originally aiming to ensure all children receive milk daily
<b>vicuña</b>	animal (llama family) prized for its wool; nowadays shearing of its wool is prohibited

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