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# Water Rights and Everyday Ch'ixi Practices in the Barrio El Faro in Medellín, Colombia

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**Abstract:** Situated at the margins of the urban–rural perimeter of the city of Medellín in Colombia, El Faro is a neighborhood in constant construction where life flourishes despite limited access to a formal water supply. By means of everyday practices, El Faro's residents have claimed their right to water and mobilized to defend their self-managed community water supply. This article attempts to understand how these everyday water practices defy mainstream ideas on universal coverage, standardized mechanisms for access to water, and water rights. Based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining political ecology, critical studies of law, and decolonial theory of everyday practice, this study applies an ethnographic approach in an effort to overcome exclusionary binaries in social theory. First, it recognizes the interdependent and bidirectional relationship between society and nature, allowing for the emergence of new ways of understanding water. Second, it challenges monolithic views of power, revealing the coexistence of multiple normative systems that interact with the state and its laws and, thus, the need for new ways of understanding the law. Third, it gives space for the expression of ch'ixi ways of being of those who live on borderlands. For these reasons, this article represents a contribution to the study of how everyday water practices affect equitable access to water and just water governing structures.

**Keywords:** everyday practices; water rights; community water supply; ch'ixi; ethnography

## 1. Introduction

On 28 July 2010, after listening to the Bolivian ambassador Pablo Solón, members of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly voted unanimously in favor of recognizing the Human Right to Water and Sanitation [1] as essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. Solón's message was overwhelming. He knew how to make words a translucent mirror of a dramatic reality in stating: "24,000 children die in developing countries every day from preventable causes like diarrhea contracted from unclean water. That is one child death every 3.5 seconds. One, two, three. As my people say, now is the time." [2]. This achievement in international law represented an extraordinary advancement in favor of the global water justice movement. Although it was not the first ruling that recognized water as fundamental for human life and well-being, it upheld its status as an international standard (The legal basis to affirm the existence of the human right to water can be located since 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the right of every person to life and to enjoy health and well-being. This regulation was followed by the issuance of: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, by its acronym ICESCR in 1966; the Mar del Plata Action Plan in 1977; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979; the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989; General Comment No. 14 on the The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12) of the ICESCR in 2000; General Comment No. 15 on

the Right to Water of the ICESCR in 2002; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. All these standards explicitly commit to the protection of the human right to water.)

In Colombia, echoes of the existence of a right to water became important with the issuance of the 1991 Constitution, which defined Colombia as a social state under the rule of law. According to this supreme norm, the State has the obligation to guarantee access to drinking water to all people living within its territory, acting directly or indirectly, through the support of organized communities or the private sector (Article 365). For this purpose, the municipality of Medellín, the second largest city in the country, has a special position: It owns Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), characterized as one of the most successful public utility companies in Latin America for its efficiency and profitability [3–5]. Medellín, as its owner, receives between 30% and 40% of its multibillion-dollar income each year, which supports social investment programs [6]. Despite this important sum, in 2016 the company reported that there were 38,000 families without access to drinking water in the city, as they lacked aqueduct service and 56,000 without sewerage service [7].

This fact is not particular to Colombia or to Medellín. Solon, in his speech before the General Assembly in 2010, mentioned that each year 3.5 million people died due to the ingestion of contaminated water. Seven years later, Leo Heller, special rapporteur of the United Nations in the VI Forum on Water Economics, declared: “One of the most important achievements of the decade was the explicit recognition of the right to water and sanitation, although this has not meant that the people without those resources have accessed them so far” [8]. According to the rapporteur, by the year 2017, 800 million people still had no connection to an improved water source [8]. Why has the conquest of the formal recognition of the right to water not translated into the materialization of its promise around the world?

The emphasis on words—both in the discourse that internationally proclaims the existence of the human right to water, and in the local discourse that assigns specific obligations to the State in the implementation of this pledge—has not translated into practices that respond to the aspirations of local struggles for water justice. What do words say then? For author Silvia Rivera-Cusicanqui [9] that question in the context of Latin America requires understanding that colonialism assigns a very peculiar function to words: They do not designate, rather they conceal. Words have become a fictional record because they tend to ignore practices, hence Rivera-Cusicanqui [10] insists on pointing out the need to undertake a way of thinking that cares less for words and more for practices.

Water is currently a central concern in many (if not all) cities. Problems related to availability, pollution and good management are common even to cities in countries considered advanced, as happens, for example, with Flint, Michigan [11] and Newark, New York [12], and other cities in the United States [13]. In light of this context, global water management guidelines formulated under the postulates of sustainable development and water security [14], emphasize integrated water resources management (IWRM) as a solution that depends largely on contextuality and power dynamics [15]. The problem is that this model, when implemented in practice, often gives less priority to social equity goals [16]. In addition to this, the IWRM global institutional discourse rely mainly on modernization standards and western cultural values and expectations. The importance of unpacking and situating the analysis of water policies, norms, rights as well as community and everyday practice in specific places is pressing.

Given this situation, this article presents an ethnographic case study of El Faro, a self-constructed *barrio* (neighborhood) located in the rural–urban boundary of the city of Medellín. This neighborhood is located within the urban perimeter and, therefore, part of its population is excluded from public service provision, including water supply, operated by local utility EPM. However, its inhabitants, many of whom come from different parts of the country having been forcibly displaced due to the fact of internal armed conflict, have worked to guarantee their right to water through everyday organizational and community practices that intermingle strategies of state exigency and autonomy. This neighborhood is part of a larger urban justice movement in the city called Mesa Interbarrial de Desconectados (MID)

(Roundtable of (Public Service) Disconnected Neighborhoods) which is redefining economic-based norms for service provision.

The main objective of this article is to analyze how through everyday practices El Faro inhabitants guarantee their right to water, challenging universal postulates that intend to define all conceivable contents and possibilities of understanding the relationship with water and its forms of provision. Ideas that are generally assumed indisputable, such as those referring to universal coverage, standardized access to drinking water mechanisms, or affordability criteria in the definition of tariffs, are confronted by everyday water rights practices. In this case, these practices in the Latin American context, invite us to rethink both law and water itself. It is important to start thinking about the right to water as a practical matter, as a practice.

In this way, the proposed reflection on water rights practices attempts to overcome exclusionary binaries in social theory. First, it recognizes the interdependent and bidirectional relationship between society and nature allowing the emergence of new ways of understanding water. Second, it challenges the monoculture of power revealing the coexistence of multiple normative systems that interact with state law and demand new ways of understanding the law. Third, it allows the expression of the *ch'ixi* [9] identity of those who live on the borders questioning through their everyday practices the disjunction of the colonial project that only conceives a possibility between modernity and tradition. For these reasons, this article represents a contribution to political ecology, critical theories of law as well as to the understanding of everyday practices in the Latin American context.

This study is part of larger efforts of decolonizing thought [17–19]. It seeks to understand water rights practices from more than modern or western interpretive frameworks in order to expand the explanatory potential of Latin American reality. Through this lens, a problem that has generally been defined by the idea of “absence of the state” begins to be redefined in terms of recognizing and respecting the “presence of the community”. Likewise, other epistemic and ontological shifts follow. In this regard, this article contributes to thinking of water–human relationships from the place of the most vulnerable [20], that is, from specific locations of distress or turmoil that through the everyday, reconfigure hope and care for one another.

## 2. Methods

Starting from a decolonial epistemic position and considering principles of participatory action research (PAR), we opted for the method of “activist research” in which the political immersion of the researcher in the process under study is necessary [21]. This approach requires the construction of a relationship of trust and “co-laboration” [22] based on active participation in different scenarios, and on sharing and co-producing knowledge, information and/or skills related to everyday water rights practices in El Faro. These took the form of “convites” and neighborhood events, assemblies, territorial walking initiatives, community-based census activities, preparation and realization of events, and training workshops, among others. Our agreement on “co-laboring” emphasized the more interactive and active role of the researcher.

Our ethnographic approach included in-depth immersion in the everyday, through participant observation, as well as semi-structured and in-depth interviews with neighborhood and water justice leaders, first settlers, members of the Junta de Acción Comunal (JAC) (Community Action Board), and of the neighborhood Water Committee, as well as those active in daily plumbing work. The information produced from these observations and individual interviews was complemented with four territorial walking activities organized by neighborhood associations, involving the Water Committee, the JAC, and a street-art youth organization called “Elemento Ilegal”. In addition, we organized and participated in three art-based workshops entitled “El Faro: Water–Territory–Body”. Art is essential for awakening the sensibilities, and for opening intuitive and more creative ways of expression [23]. Art can be a channel to tap into our relationship with water [24]. These workshops were designed with the purpose of getting to know how neighbors relate to their water, territory, and body by experimenting with various artistic techniques and sharing their experiences and creations with others (The art-based workshops

were designed collectively by María Botero-Mesa with artist Paula Andrea Alvarez and scholar Denisse Roca-Servat, they consisted of three workshops which experimented with different artistic methods and techniques such as producing clay sculptures, drawing cartographies of body–territory and a technique of stained-glass painting. All of them were guided under the premise of water–territory–body relations. Through art, neighbors were asked to express the meaning of spatial relations and how they are transformed, starting from the flow of water in everyday life. Workshops were conducted with residents of the neighborhood and with members of the Water Committee. Finally, to deepen the understanding of everyday practices related to water rights, as well as its relation with global and national water policies, the research also included a revision of secondary sources. These sources ranged from international organizations and NGOs reports, academic scholarship, national and global legal frameworks, blog entries as well as essays, articles, leaflets, and other textual or visual work produced by the neighborhood and local water justice movements.

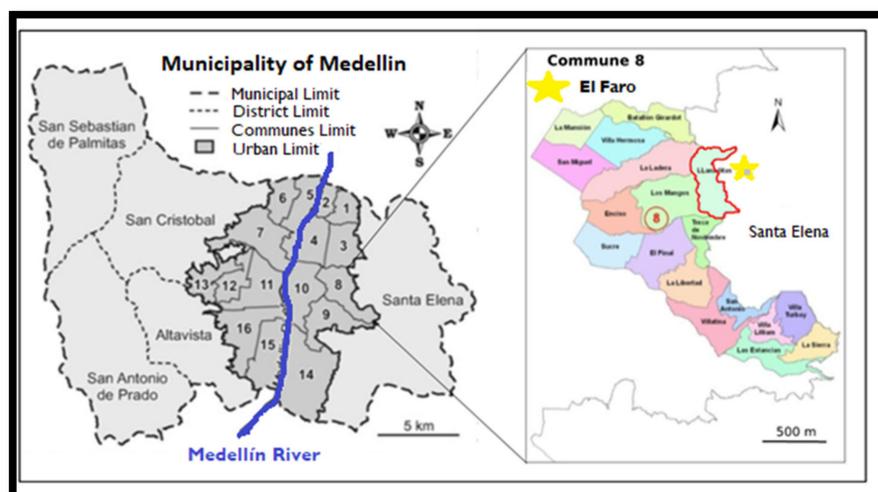
Co-laboring and ethnographic activities took place over a period of two years from 2017 to 2018 [25]. These encounters were systematically registered either through daily field notes or through audio recordings that were later transcribed. These textual documents were then manually coded through a combination of inductive (emerging themes) and deductive categories of analysis based on concepts taken from the political ecology of water, legal pluralism, and *ch'ixi* practices. Coding is described as the “critical link” between data collection and their explanation of meaning [26]. This step consisted of reading textual documents thoroughly while writing analytic memos or jotting in the margins tentative ideas for codes, topics, and noticeable patterns or themes [27]. Following this process, a matrix of content analysis was constructed in Excel to systematize findings. Throughout the open coding process, the analysis was complemented with discussion and reflection during gatherings such as the General Assemblies of the El Faro Community Action Board. This form of triangulation was conducted in order to achieve a deep degree of involvement such that it was possible to develop a reciprocity of senses with the study's protagonists [28]. Other forms of triangulation included comparing and contrasting results with other researchers, using multiple data sources and methodologies [29].

This type of research requires the development of ethical agreements on issues such as, the possibilities of participating in the defense of the right to water, the degree of confidentiality of the information, the forms of exchanges and contributions that can be offered by the researchers, limits to the accessibility of different community spaces, responsiveness to changes in circumstances in order to review initial agreements, and sharing the drafts before finalizing the work. In addition, it was essential to know how to value scientific knowledge and popular wisdom, common sense, and neighborhood culture, as equally reliable channels when approaching and grasping reality. This research makes visible the production of knowledge (written texts, reports, legal instruments, visual narratives) of the social leaders who live in El Faro such as Velásquez [30,31], Serna [32,33], Zapata [34], and of the collective processes such as Elemento Ilegal, Mesa de Vivienda Comuna 8, Mesa Interbarrial de Desconectados [35,36], etc. In that regard, agreements with local residents included recognizing them as producers of knowledge and, therefore, referring to them by their names. For this reason, throughout this article the reader will find that people's names have not been changed or coded.

### 3. Case Study: The territory of El Faro

Located in the Department of Antioquia, Medellín is the second largest city in Colombia. A look at the city from the mountains reveals its harsh geographies as well as its deep economic inequalities. Its configuration is marked by profound contradictions and complex contrasts. On the one hand, it is seen as the most innovative city in the world [37]. On the other hand, it is classified as the most unequal in Colombia and one of the most in Latin America [38]. Given this paradox, it is important to understand that this city has gone through accelerated demographic growth; after a period of industrialization where countryside migration to the city boomed, came periods of intense violence in the context of armed political conflict and drug trafficking, where forced displacement brought large

numbers of rural families to the city. Because of this migration, the barrio El Faro was born on the eastern slopes of the city specifically in commune 8 (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Map of the Municipality of Medellín and the barrio El Faro. Source: Based on Marc Gérard in Furlong [39] and modified by Denisse Roca-Servat.

The renovated image of the city revolves around water. Built on the great basin of the Aburrá Valley surrounded by mountains, the Medellín River crosses the city from north to south (see Figure 1) and is the main point of reference for all important infrastructure systems such as the metro, the financial and corporate sector, as well as the cultural and tourist centers. In addition, a variety of streams flow through the mountains of Medellín and interact with parks, libraries, recreational and sports complexes, roads, and museums. However, this image contrasts with the large quantity of households that lack access to water provision either due to the lack of connection or disconnection. Recent official statistics provided by the service provider EPM [40] estimate that approximately 36,560 households were disconnected from water services for non-payment of bills. In addition, in 2016, the company reported that there were 38,000 families without a connection to potable drinking water in the city and 56,000 without sewerage service [7].

As a multi-utility company owned by the Municipality of Medellín, EPM pays 30 percent of its utility revenues and provides the service of water and sewerage, natural gas, electricity, telecommunication, and solid waste collection to over four million people in the metropolitan area [41]. Despite EPM's efficiency and international success [40], local city residents have demanded a human rights approach and denounced EPM's disconnection practices [35]. These practices consist of disconnecting people with vulnerable conditions from water service provision for lack of payment. Studies have demonstrated that non-payment is due to the fact of multiple and complex reasons, such as unaffordable water tariffs, inflexible and complex billing systems, ignorance of legal mechanisms, as well as informal and illegal connections [41]. In the face of these challenges and seeking economic efficiency, EPM implemented a prepaid water program forcing populations with poor resource access to adapt to market-based consumer approaches [42]. Vulnerable communities have organized through the MID to demand water as a human right and the non-commodification of this public good.

El Faro is one of these communities situated high in one of the mountains near the urban–rural perimeter of the city of Medellín (see Figure 2). El Faro still contains arable land, nearby river streams and country animals. This mountain, for many of its inhabitants, is an opportunity to connect with their original rural territories (artistic workshops, October–November 2017). El Faro was founded in conditions of adversity exacerbated by the lack of economic resources and great fear in the face of violent urban-armed actors and institutional violence and the constant threat of eviction. It was built with the effort, hands, knowledge, sensitivity, and art of its inhabitants. Currently, it is being

transformed through the interests of multiple actors, among them, its historical inhabitants, new settlers, local NGOs, and state entities (conversations with residents Nataly and Leonardo [43] and interviews with social leader Velásquez, C. [44] and activist lawyer and resident Serna, C. [45]).



**Figure 2.** Rural–urban borderland location of El Faro. Source: Denisse Roca-Servat, July 2019.

During a territorial walk organized by the JAC of El Faro, Don Manuel, one of the founders of the neighborhood, recounted how the majority of the families came mainly from the departments of Chocó, Urabá, the southwest region of Antioquia and in some cases from indigenous reservations [46]. “All of them battered by the Colombian armed conflict, converged in this territory of El Faro seeking opportunities to survive and live with dignity,” emphasized Don Manuel [46]. For Oscar, another inhabitant and active leader of the neighborhood, the communal character that marks the construction of the neighborhood on top of the mountain, “goes hand in hand with the cultural diversity of its inhabitants and by the stories of pain, hope, and resistance that forged in them a common and incontestable desire to fight to rebuild their life” [47].

The neighborhood is located in the Santa Elena sub-basin and through its territory run various streams such as La Castro (principal tributary), La Loca, La Aguada, and Chorro Hondo which are part of 29 tributaries that flow into the Santa Elena Creek [30]. Situated high in the mountains, El Faro dwellers refer to living between the sun and the water (artistic workshops, October–November 2017). “When it is not a ray of sun that breaks your skin, then it is the tide of water that bogs down the mountain,” [48] adds Doña Rosalba as she shelters the chairs protecting them from the muddy floor of the place (artistic workshops, October–November 2017). The skin and the mountain form the crust of a collective body, in which the presence or absence of water recreates the imaginaries of well-being in the neighborhood.

Because of its location, at the limits of the urban perimeter, El Faro is excluded from the city’s water supply. A borderland where the multiple urban and rural way of life are found, El Faro embodies the frontier between the paradigm of welfare imposed by the discourse of modern development and paradigms of “living well” evoked by the daily nature of rural work (see Figure 3). As with many rural areas, El Faro guarantees its water supply mainly through a self-managed community water supply system that draws its supply from the La Castro stream. In 2015, EPM installed a water tank in El Faro in order to supply water to communities downhill from El Faro, which had been included through the expansion of the urban perimeter [44,45]. This not only meant changes in the flow of the El Castro stream but also resulted in a social mobilization of the inhabitants of El Faro, alerted to the

possible eviction of residents located on the site where the work was planned [44,45]. In addition, the construction of this tank affected the water pressure and availability of El Faro's communal water supply (personal conversation with El Faro Water Committee President [49]).



**Figure 3.** The Territory of El Faro. Source: Gonzalo Galindo, June 2017.

Through everyday practices, the people of El Faro reproduce social life and claim their right to water. Excluded from public services, they organize to defend their community water supply, while at the same time contesting the commodification of water services and the high cost of tariffs, which were facilitated through neoliberal water legislation reform such as Law 142 of 1994 [39]. Aware of the effects of water tariffs on their downhill neighbors and wary of the implications of being connected to water infrastructure in the future, they joined the MID. The MID is an articulation of neighborhood organizations and people “disconnected” from public services in the city of Medellín that organizes in favor of a dignified life for all urban popular sectors [50,51]. Since its initial year in 2008 and following the work in the early 2000s of the Red de Organizaciones Comunitarias (ROC)/Network of Community Organizations, and way before that with Medellín’s public service civic movement in the 1970s [45,50], the MID has designed action strategies that articulated organizational strategies, popular communication, participatory research, high-impact legal litigation, mobilization and political education [51] (the MID is currently made up of inhabitants and organizations of the popular communities of the neighborhoods La Cruz, La Honda (commune 3), Moravia (commune 4), La Paralela (commune 5), Picacho (commune 6), El Faro, Golondrinas (commune 8), and the Independencias (comuna 13). Among the organizations articulated or allied in their dynamics is the Housing Bureau of the Commune 8, the Popular Women’s Network, the DESC Court, the Alliance of Alternative Media, the Corporación Jurídica Libertad, and the Concertación Round Table of the north-eastern zone and Asolavidi [51]). The MID recognizes two forms of “disconnection” either because of unpaid bills or because the settlement is located outside of the urban territory [32,35]. For Claudia Serna, a MID member, lawyer, and resident of El Faro, the struggle of the most vulnerable to access public services, such as water and sanitation, makes visible the effects of neoliberalism in everyday life [45].

In this sense, framing “disconnection” as a fundamental claim for rights, such as that to a dignified life, health, housing, and well-being, the MID quickly situates the issue as a greater project of social transformation and search for social justice in the city. For those who are part of the MID, access to public services is an obligatory step in the struggle for decent housing, and this in turn can only be thought in a healthy environment according to the values, the relationships and the needs of its

inhabitants [52]. Therefore, the goals and actions undertaken by the MID, all lead to greater respect for Human Dignity in all its expressions, such as in the home, the neighborhood, the city, the region and the country. In addition, it means calling for state action towards guaranteeing water as a human right, and at the same time endorsing the autonomous actions that emerge from within the territories. El Faro has experienced both the oppression of water injustice and practices of emancipation and hope. We now turn to the central objective of this article: To describe the water rights practices undertaken by the inhabitants of El Faro.

#### 4. Results

Acknowledging that 10 years after the declaration of the human right to water [1], we still face a global water crisis with millions of people lacking access to safe drinking water, leads us to two paths: One, to investigate and unveil the practices that, supported by human rights and development discourses, have deepened the causes of their infringement; and, two, to investigate the practices that, apart from these discourses, represent lived experiences of satisfying basic needs and building local justice. In this article, following in the footsteps of thinkers whose steps are closer to the second path, the idea is to reconstruct the meaning of the words “human right to water” departing from the everyday practices of the inhabitants of El Faro. In this regard, for Bolivian scholar Rivera-Cusicanqui [10], language is always an approximate approach to reality in which we use metaphors to build thought, but in the current crisis, words stopped being metaphors in order to become simulacra. In her own words, “in this moment of crisis almost all institutional speech sounds like a lie, a falsehood, a parody, a simulacrum. We do ‘as if’ there was democracy, ‘as if’ there was a respect for human rights” [10] (n.p).

The ethics of communication proposes, in addition to being careful with the use of words, the constant exercise to re-inscribe words in the flow of action and carefully reweave them in the collective plots that allow us to think collectively [10]. Hence, it is necessary to take distance from certain truths that have been taken for granted or that inscribe. For example, it is important to depart from modern worldviews that anchor law in a future time set as something that will be built as a set of promises, and, on the contrary, it is vital to rediscover and make visible the experiences of the present world, that is “not that what we should be or aspire to become, but what in fact we are already” [10] (n.p).

Inspired by Bolivian scholar Zavaleta’s work [53], Rivera-Cusicanqui defends the need for a more historicist and less structural analysis of social relations in “motley” societies (the concept of “abigarramiento” or “sociedad abigarrada” proposed by Zavaleta refers to a disorganization of the linear teleology of the modes-of producing narrative, and the overlapping of historical moments [53]. It is also translated in English as “variegated” society), a category coterminous with peripheral and even “poscolonial” countries [54]. In addition to that, she also considers that motley societies are illegible and, therefore, unrepresentable—or rather they are legible only through and in crisis [55]. In that regard, “it is the persistence of an incommensurability that precludes the total closure of the constituted and, therefore, guarantees the possibility of de- and re-constitution of collective action [54] (p. 68). According to Rivera-Cusicanqui, societies in Latin American are a result of motley and contentious mixtures between what is imposed and what was inherited [55]. It is in this context that everyday *ch’ixi* practices account for a reality where “multiple cultural [or ontological] differences coexist in parallel, which do not merge but antagonize or complement each other” [9] (p.7). Therefore, these practices contain both the uses and resistances that people construct locally in relation to the possibilities offered by the discourse of the global human right to water (what we will call exigency practices), as well as the traditions and innovations that they constitute in their daily life independently of dominant institutional projects (and that we will call autonomy practices).

In accordance with this position, instead of understanding rights only under the institutional framework of state norms, doctrines, institutions, administrative bodies, lawyers, courts, and judges, we will describe the right to water, while situating this work within the legal pluralism paradigm [56], which broadens its meaning and possibilities [57]. Thus, the law will be understood as the normative order lived in a territory, that which is practiced daily regardless of whether it is formally stated as part

of the Rule of Law [58]. Here, there are different sources of law, some formal and others factual that can coexist with each other.

In the next section, we will present the results of our analysis of how the everyday water rights practices in El Faro defy mainstream global ideas of water governing and regulatory principles and structures such as universal coverage, standardized mechanisms for access to water, and water rights. The detailed ethnographic description of water rights and everyday practices at the multiscale levels of the family, the neighborhood organization, and the social movement with the MID [25] are presented here following emerging analytic themes. The themes that come to light relate to: The self-construction of the neighborhood; differentiated water infrastructure, access, and uses; water materiality; multiple waters; everyday norms; water justice and community authority; multiple norms; and exigency versus autonomy (see Table 1). These themes emerged through close examination of the ethnography of the everyday in El Faro using the decolonial theoretical framework proposed by Rivera-Cusicanqui with concepts such as *ch'ixi* [9]. *Ch'ixi* practices are lived, everyday practices rather than discursive or ventriloquial, and produce a different projects of water equity and justice.

**Table 1.** Summary of El Faro water rights and everyday practices.

Water Rights Practices	Description
Neighborhood self-construction	The inhabitants of El Faro have managed to build, adapt, and sustain an array of relations between neighbors and the basin that, until now, allows water to transit from the stream to their houses.
Differentiated water infrastructure, access and uses	The families of El Faro use various ways to access water suitable for human consumption. The expansion of EPM's infrastructure network meant the establishment of mixed (community and corporate) water access systems. Among the families not connected to the municipal utility's network, some choose to access differentiated waters according to the intended uses.
Water materiality	Although <i>water from the intake</i> is sometimes seen as an imperfect alternative, beyond a temporary conformism, for many of its beneficiaries, there is an appreciation of its value because it transcends any economic, scientific or technological rationality: "Our own water is autonomy" claims Claudia.
Multiple waters	To hear about <i>community water, drinking water, our own water, EPM water, contraband water, rainwater, etc.</i> , is to witness the coexistence of different types of water, not only through various ways of naming it.
Everyday norms	Differences within and among homes in El Faro, with respect to ways of supplying water are molded according to needs, conceptions about water and well-being, and the possibilities of accessing it. The varied way of accessing water in turn determines the coexistence of diverse everyday norms.
Water justices and community authority	The differentiation of water types and the uses or values associated with them do not operate under clearly defined standards or in accordance with a pattern of coherence and univocity. Through historical leadership, women and the Assembly are the principal sources of authority.
Multiple norms	In El Faro practices of water rights are in constant negotiation with postulates of state law that seek to generalize certain surveillance and control practices. This constant negotiation is confronted by a self-regulatory right, which means that those who assume the consequences of the rules are the same ones that produce them.
Exigency versus autonomy	While some inhabitants concentrate their energy on taking care of water under their household rules, others opt for strengthening the <i>acueducto comunitario</i> /community water supply system, and others insist on demanding that the State to guarantee the right to water through the supply operated by the municipal utility company.

Elaborated by authors based on ethnographic analysis.

#### 4.1. Self-Constructed Neighborhood

Situated on the border of the city perimeter and referred to by state officials as a "neighborhood of invasion", El Faro was slowly constructed by local settlers. Migrants from rural as well as urban areas, sometimes forcibly displaced from their territories by armed groups and violence, arrived in this territory and began building their houses and little by little satisfying their basic needs, both individually and collectively. This self-construction process took place at the margins of and even sometimes against state norms, policies, and actions [59]. Aware of this problematic situation and based on their countryside experience, Oscar Zapata, an inhabitant of El Faro, affirms that settlers

quickly established “convites” (reciprocal collective work) as the main popular strategy in order to self-construct their neighborhood:

“The aqueduct was built like this, at the beginning it was situated at La Loca stream, but with all the people that started to come here, that source of water was not enough, so we went to La Castro stream. La Castro stream was higher and had more flow, so we built a tank in order to give water to a few thousand people, we thought it was enough . . . but in any case, more and more people continued to settle here, so it was difficult to provide for everyone.” [47]

As mentioned by Robinson Díaz, president of the JAC, in addition to fundraising activities such as bingo festivals, “recolectas”, and bazaars, the community continues to self-manage their needs through various actions all based on local solidarity, organizations, and institutions sensitive to the neighborhood’s processes [49]. Among the most recent strategies to support and improve the infrastructure of the community supply system (community aqueduct) one finds: The sale of solidarity bonds, a one-day cultural event with artistic presentations and recreational activities, community sancochos (potluck activities), territorial walks through the neighborhood to learn about the history of the community’s self-managed water supply system, etc. The money collected through these events is used for diverse needs, such as to purchase materials in order to replace pipes and improve water tanks [45]. Through these forms of activities, the inhabitants of El Faro have managed to build, adapt, and sustain an array of relations between neighbors and the water basin that allows water to transit from the stream to their homes.

#### 4.2. Differentiated Water Infrastructure, Access, and Uses

The community water supply system began with the construction of the intake that captures water from La Castro creek and leads it to a desander tank. There, after passing several filtration grids, water continues through a system of pipes into the distribution tank where it ends in the valves that determine its passage to the four sectors originally supplied: Altos de la Torre, Pacífico, Llanaditas, and El Faro. El Faro is the last neighborhood to be built in the area, but currently the only one that continues to take advantage of the opportunities of having its own community water supply.

Since the community water supply system (referred to in Colombia as “Acueducto Comunitario”) does not count with drinking water technologies, so Claudia Serna, also a resident in this territory, explains that currently the families of the barrio seek various ways to access water suitable for human consumption [45]. When asking Doña Blanca how she gets water to her house, she replies remembering that “before we had to go to the school below in Llanadas to fetch water to cook” [60]. Pointing downhill she adds, “you looked down from here and every day you could see people leaving at different times with their buckets of water, carrying water up and down through all the stairways” [60]. The EPM recently expanded its water supply and sewerage service networks, and the house of Mrs. Blanca was included in this new expansion. Like her, other families that were located within the new margins of the urban perimeter automatically acquired the appropriate legal status to be able to contract with the company as service users and access the official water supply infrastructure.

In general, the expansion of EPM networks meant the establishment of mixed water supply systems. Thus, in order to reduce consumption costs, many of the families that use the services provided by the municipal company restrict potable water to food preparation and continue to use community water for the rest of their activities. However, EPM’s intervention had tangible impacts, not only for families who managed to directly access the formal service, but also for households that were not included in the service expansion since it is common to find neighbors exchanging buckets of drinking water with neighbors connected to the network. Others, in spite of having been left out of service expansion, were able to connect to the new pipes by means of intervening in them with their own hands and accessing the water they carry.

Thus, among the families not connected to the municipal utility network, some choose to access differentiated waters (throughout the text we will use *italics* in order to highlight the different ways

inhabitants from El Faro refer to water) according to the uses they will give them. “For cooking I use *EPM water*, I fetch 4 carafes and pay a thousand pesos,” affirms Doña Rosalba, “but for the rest I use *water from the community intake*” [48]. Other families have access to a single water source, that of the community supply system, and they take advantage of filtration systems at home to consume it. “Well, that’s a beautiful water source. I make the aguapanela, the rice, and cook anything with the *community water* . . . and knowing that one is taking/drinking water from that source, well, naturally, that’s the beauty” [48]; with those words Robinson refers to the water that supplies the community supply system.

#### 4.3. Water Materiality

Depending on the climate, *water from the intake*, can reach homes either transparent, crystalline, without odor, turbid, smelly, yellowish, etc. (artistic workshops, October–November 2017). The color and the materiality of water had a direct relationship with the emotions or thoughts of those who interact with it. According to multiple stories, this fact can reveal expressions of frustration, of yearnings of state intervention, of claims for inclusion in the public service networks offered by EPM, of anguish due to the risks of contracting diseases or of demoralization in reaction to the work provided by the *acueducto comunitario* (community supply system) (artistic workshops, October–November, 2017). But at the same time, the one that could be believed to be the same water is named and recognized by completely opposite expressions: “the *water from the intake* is life because it is alive, they have not killed her with chemicals and the one who learns to take it also learns to have better [health] defenses,” says Oscar [47], while protesting against the “purity” of drinking water sold in advertising propaganda through bottled or piped service water.

While there is no one in the barrio who is not concerned with the need to improve the quality of *community water*, for many before being reduced to “dirty water”, it is one of the most important achievements of the self-construction of their neighborhood: “I imagine that when they finished building the first *acueducto comunitario* 30 years ago that they must have had a huge party!!!” says Serna with an excited laugh [45]. In this way, although the *water from the intake* is sometimes seen as an imperfect alternative, for many of its beneficiaries there is an appreciation of its value because it transcends the economic, scientific or technological rationality: “*Our own water* is autonomy,” claims Claudia Serna [45].

#### 4.4. Multiple Waters

The inhabitants who, in addition to and instead of the *water from the intake*, have other forms of access to water, usually refer to them as: *Water from EPM*, *water from the tank*, *contraband water*, etc. Each of these expressions harbors a different reality. Different realities that are juxtaposed with the reality of *water from the intake*. For example, in the case of *water from EPM*, they do not know where it comes from, what it contains, or how it is managed, and although they pay for this water service, this water has an owner. Access to *water from EPM* opens the possibility of being recognized as a client and at the same time as a citizen, otherwise one is considered illegal or an invader. The public character of EPM and the symbol of pride it represents for the “Paisa” identity (The “paisa” identity is commonly used to identify all inhabitants of the territories of the department of Antioquia. As defined by Santamaría Delgado [61] “Paisas are proud of their cultural heritage and highly aware of their distinctiveness within the country, Paisas define themselves by asserting certain good qualities as well as marking their difference against the backdrop of other Colombian regional identities” (p. 40), generates a worrisome situation for citizens who are unable to pay their utility bills. The naturalized position of success, goodness, and grandiloquence of EPM as a company, coupled with its “culture of payment” campaigns, generates feelings of shame or guilt in those who cannot assume their tariffs [44].

To hear about *community water*, *drinking water*, *our own water*, *EPM water*, *contraband water*, *rainwater*, etc., is to witness the coexistence of different types of water. This in turn, has concrete implications for when defining the contents of the right to water. As Vandana Shiva argues, “the way in which

water is conceptualized and represented is fundamental in determining who accesses it and on what terms" [62] (p. 2). For the multicultural modern perspective, "the primary quality of water is that it is a resource upon which secondary qualities, such as cultural beliefs, are attached" [63] (p. 84). In that logic, a universal understanding of water and the right to water is needed. Instead, in El Faro water is lived as more than a resource with cultural meanings attached. Following this line of thought, "water" appears as an object multiple that cannot be known in univocal ways, but which can be practiced differently [63] (p. 85). In that regard, each form of water practiced differently in El Faro makes us think about the need of differentiated rights and norms.

#### 4.5. Everyday Norms

Differences within households in El Faro with respect to water supply practices are molded according to needs, weather conditions, conceptions of water and well-being, as well as possibilities of accessing it. While some inhabitants concentrate their energy on caring and maintaining the *acueducto comunitario* (community water supply), others insist on demanding that the state guarantee their right to water by connecting them to the municipal water service. The varied ways of accessing water in turn determines the coexistence of diverse everyday norms. In times of rain, it usually occurs that water pressure does not allow the community system's desander tank to perform its function properly; therefore, water arrives in a muddy state, with a yellowish color and with suspended solids [43]. In light of this situation, many households use individual filters and they are changed or cleaned regularly to obtain a cleaner liquid [64].

Also, in some households before finishing the day's work, time is spent collecting water in vessels in order to let it sit overnight, so that the next day the densest materials have settled at the bottom of the containers, and the water at the surface it is in better condition [63]. Rainwater is also collected and, in general, according to its appearance, it is given different uses that can range from adapting it to human consumption, to personal hygiene, to household chores (washing of clothes, floors, and utensils), the irrigation of gardens, orchards or ornamental plants, the feeding and hydration of domestic animals, etc.

In the dry season, it happens that water pressure is always sufficient to reach all of the houses. During those times, more attention is paid to the daily routines of water recycling in order to efficiently use the liquid that is available. Therefore, in the face of acute cases of water scarcity, the same amount of water can serve several daily functions. In addition, more attention is also given to water conservation practices in the home, thus seeking to restrict the use of water to prevent its rapid depletion and, before it is completely finished, looking for ways to recover water. It is common for households to keep separate containers to differentiate types of water, so the water used for cooking is separated from the others to avoid its misuse or its contamination [44].

The households that also or instead of the *acueducto comunitario*/community water supply system connect to the service provided by EPM, organize their daily relationship with water under other rules. Many times, water-recycling practices are developed based on differentiating *EPM water* and *water from the intake* in order to avoid inappropriate or excessive use of the first one since it will translate into an increase of their utility bill. Thus, practices of care or recycling of water carried out by the first group of people, those who access *community water*, differ from those promoted by the institutional system and practiced by the second group, those that access *EPM water*. One of the advantages valued in favor of the community water network, especially after several community efforts to improve its infrastructure, lies in the possibility of water without being concerned about being charged. In this logic, water-recycling practices are taken very seriously according to the basin's conditions, so that no more water is consumed than what the basin can provide [48].

#### 4.6. Water Justices and Community Authority

These different everyday norms and the existence of multiple waters give rise to another type of right to water practice that transcends—although not completely—the scope of the housing scale

when responding to conflict resolution and the definition of what is fair. This discussion arises at the organizational scale and is dealt within community spaces such as the JACs and the local Water Committee. Debates regarding the legitimacy of accessing community water networks or of accessing solidarity networks of drinking water from the EPM system, arise persistently and multiple rules are stipulated, contrasted or negotiated in each street in the neighborhood. The differentiation of water types and the various uses or values associated with them, do not operate under clearly defined standards, or in accordance with a pattern of coherence and univocity.

In this way, water rights practices concerning the definition of the rules that regulate the relationship with water beyond what operates in each home, that is, in spaces of collective discussion and debate, lead us to think about concrete agreements under which the community water supply works. In that sense, there are important aspects that need to be considered, such as the criteria to properly distribute the liquid, the definition or not of a tariff, the methods of obtaining resources to assume the costs of maintaining community water infrastructure, the purposes to which these resources are destined, the appointment and assignment of functions of the plumber, and the recognition of sources of authority within the neighborhood, etc.

With respect to the last point, in addition to the leadership derived from the history of the *barrio's* self-construction, women are a symbol of special authority in relation to water management. Experiencing in their own body the implications of walking up and down the hill carrying water buckets, and in their minds the worry of not being able to fully meet the needs of their family, women are the most interested and committed to caring for water and for the care of life (ethnographic diary, 6 August 2017). Women decide how to manage water in the home and actively participate in collective discussions about how to implement water solutions.

Although in each house there are specific criteria regarding the definition of water use and care as well as in the distribution of responsibilities among its members, the majority in assembly always decides most rules governing the distribution of water in El Faro. In this same way, JAC representatives were elected, the Water Committee was formed, and the plumber was selected. Likewise, after discussing collectively for hours and days, the pertinence of the periodic collection of a certain amount of money per household for the maintenance of the community water system was defined (fieldwork, 19 February 2017). The monthly sum agreed upon per household was that of four thousand pesos (approximately \$1.30 US dollars) destined to pay the plumber's wages, purchase materials to keep networks in good condition, and to set up a small savings fund to finance the yearned for water treatment plant (fieldwork, 27 February 2017). However, it was also agreed that this economic contribution, if necessary, and according to the economic possibilities of each home, could consist of working time/labor time needed for the requirements of the communal system (fieldwork, 25 July 2017).

#### 4.7. Multiple Norms

As can be seen in the ethnographic description, the water rights practices at the household or family level, shows that the normative order consists of a modality of non-state law. Therefore, there is no written document with the authority to guide the proper action of the people. In this case, everyday actions and doings are a factual source of lived social law, under which different forms of agreements, such as customary or transitory, guide the day-to-day relationship with water. These practices are not uniform, their variations serve both the needs and possibilities of each household and take into consideration the multiple cultural origins of the people that make up the *barrio*.

On the other hand, at the organizational level, ethnographic fieldwork also makes visible a lived social law that orders reality on a larger scale than that of the household level, but smaller than the state. This allows the identification with greater clarity of zones of interaction or of inter-legality [65] among multiple levels of norms that are present. An example of this situation lies in the contradictory convergence between state law, mandatory practices for the formalization of community organizations, such as the JAC, and traditional legal practices addressing the obstacles and often absurdities of formalities of state law. State norms such as the verification of quorum is innocuous in identifying

the real commitment of the organization's members and is perceived only as an impediment in the fulfillment of the community objectives.

Another example is the regulatory vacuum that exists in state law regarding community water management, and that state bureaucrats and officials try to supply through the analogical application of state regulations aimed at the business or commercial management of water supply systems. In this case, state requirements are antagonistic to community principles that order the supply of water under criteria other than profit and that seek to benefit the entire community. In contrast, the Supreme Court of Colombia has guaranteed water as a human right insisting that no one, not even companies providing public services, can deny minimum vital access to potable drinking water to a person under special constitutional protection under the argument that he or she is a delinquent payer [66]. This legal development regarding the implementation of the human right to water, driven to a large extent by the demands of social movements such as the MID, has allowed inhabitants of the barrio who suffer from water service disconnection due to the fact of economic incapacity to order EPM to reconnect. Through the mechanism of *acción de tutela*/constitutional writ, inhabitants of El Faro have obtained court orders that protect their rights and demand the reconnection of water services.

In general terms, practices of water rights in El Faro are in constant negotiation with postulates of state law that seek to generalize certain surveillance and control practices. Such forms of control range from the imposition of tariff frameworks, the evaluation of water quality regardless of the use and geographical conditions, the definition of frameworks of responsibility for those who guarantee the right to water without differential approaches for those who perform communal work, etc. These control mechanisms were confronted and negotiated in light of a self-regulatory right, which implies that those who assume the consequences of the rules are the same who produce them. In this way, the definition of its contents is based on the direct experience of those who participate in the *acueducto comunitario*/community water supply and has the flexibility to adapt to everyday demands.

#### 4.8. *Exigency versus Autonomy—With or without the State*

Following these ethnographic results regarding everyday practices, it is important to note that in El Faro, differences in the ways water is accessed—among households and even within them—are molded according to needs, conceptions about water and well-being, as well as socio-natural possibilities. While some inhabitants concentrate their energy in taking care of water under their household rules, others opt for strengthening the *acueducto comunitario*/community water supply system, and others insist on demanding the state to guarantee the right to water through the supply operated by the municipal utility company. These three scales intermingle, the individual and the community levels in complex and sometimes contradictory community fabric that starts in the homes, goes through the neighborhood organization, and is articulated to the urban movement of the MID, and from there it returns to the neighborhood and to households with new components.

The articulation of El Faro into the urban justice movement MID has meant the use of varied practices in relation to the right to water according to experience and insights learned over time. Initially, mobilization meant the empowerment of neighborhood organizations and community leaders in a repertoire of rights claims that demanded action on the part of the state. With these practices, inhabitants of El Faro became aware of the fact that they were bearers of rights in a territory where the state, instead of representing the threat of eviction, began to be recognized as an actor responsible for social welfare and, consequently, should be demanded to act in accordance. However, due to the experience of community labor, and recognizing the limits of legal mobilization, this new grasp of rights complements and at the same time antagonizes the historical awareness of territorial autonomy.

What has been described so far, without being exhaustive of all water rights practices in El Faro, reveals the main foundations of the community's regulatory system. This, being a predominantly self-regulatory right, which is, produced directly by its bearers, operates in constant reformulation, transformation and adaptation to the needs of the neighborhood. Therefore, the elements that contribute to the discussion on the right to water meet the ethical requirement of communicating from words

supported by actions. This is what we mean when we point out that instead of constituting a positive right, that is, a right pronounced, promulgated or formalized, that of El Faro is a lived social right, anchored in everyday practices of ordering social life from concrete criteria of justice.

## 5. Discussion

Throughout this article, discussion has focused on analyzing and overcoming the paradox registered in the years following the declaration of the human right to water and the simultaneous continuation and even deepening of the circumstances of its slow compliance. The first question that emerges from the previous description, and that constitutes the general framework of the rest of the essay, consists in problematizing the international claim focused on creating standardized solutions and evaluation criteria applicable to all states. The human right to water has been promulgated in such a singular way. It seeks to account for all the values that are considered essential to guarantee dignity in the human–water relationship. However, the words that describe its contents hardly describe the regulated reality. In addition, practices established for its fulfillment are hardly adjusted to the enormous socio-natural diversity that inhabits our planet.

In the following table, we present some of the main findings from contrasting global discourses of water policies, norms, forms of access, infrastructure, materiality, etc., such as that of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation [1] or governance mechanisms like the IWRM and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with everyday water rights practices in El Faro (see Table 2). An important result from this analysis is making visible the everyday practices that are embedded in the antagonizing and complementary existence of different cultural ways of being in the world [9]. Ch'ixi practices, as Rivera-Cusicanqui [9] would refer to them, are a product of the juxtaposition of western modernity and that of indigenous, peasant or mestizo epistemologies and ontologies. In this regard, urban socio-natural formations and practices in El Faro are asymmetrically articulated with, rather than separate from, relations of colonialism, capitalism, and modernity.

**Table 2.** Global versus everyday water rights practices.

Elements	Global Discourse	Everyday Practices in El Faro
Responsibility	The State	Self-Guarantee and Demand
System and infrastructure	Public–private service provision system: Multi-utility and multinational utility corporation.	Acueducto comunitario/community water supply and informal connections to public service.
Coverage	Universal coverage	Coexistence of mixed systems
Access	Standardized forms of water access.	Access based on needs, water conceptions, and possibilities.
Water's nature	Modern quality standards: Potabilization.	Multiple waters
Availability	Availability and continuity	Practices according to socio-natural conditions (climate, neighborhood relations, etc.).
Economy	Tariff framework based on market economic affordability.	Exchange value agreements based on community reciprocity.
Justice	Legal monism, heteronormative, and rigid.	Legal pluralism, self-regulation, inter-legality, flexible.
Participation	Representative democracy	Direct democracy and representative democracy.

Elaborated by authors based on the case of El Faro.

The standards defined by the dominant conception of the human right to water (corresponding mainly to that subscribed by the General Assembly of the United Nations [1]) tend to emphasize the role of the state for the effective protection of this right. This is consistent with the nature of the international bodies that in principle regulate interstate relations and agreements. However, this fixed naturalization contributes to the invisibilization and devaluing of the leading role of non-state actors. With the statement “the State is the main guarantor of the effectiveness of the human right to water and sanitation” [8], two realities are hidden in the case of El Faro. On the one hand, there is the idea that the

state is sometimes a perpetrator of violations of the human right to water. On the other hand, there is the notion that, in the absence of the state, organized communities have always been present. Everyday practices of the right to water in El Faro combine these two truths; on the one hand, they demand the state guarantee access to potable drinking water to economically and socially vulnerable populations, and on the other hand, they are also engaging in practices of autonomy, while defending their historical legacy of autonomous supply under a criterion of justice based on their relationship with the territory of El Faro.

In this order of ideas, from the position of community autonomy the content of the right to water extends far beyond those assigned by formal law, which advocates conditions of universal coverage, availability, accessibility, quality of water in terms of health and safety for human consumption, affordability, participation, equality, and non-discrimination [1]. In this regard, and as Rivera-Cusicanqui [10] points out, everyday water rights practices in the barrio El Faro, combine, antagonize, complement, contradict, and take advantage of the practices derived from the dominant discourse of the right to water. Through everyday practices (see Table 2), people of El Faro build different relations with the state, the city, water, and the law—relations that are distinct from those centered on modern law, market-led economics, and profits.

Thus, in the context of El Faro, universal coverage from the position of the state and that of the utility company, EPM, has been understood in terms of a market-oriented approach where all those served must pay the full costs. This is in direct connection to findings documented in Lopez's [67] work on contested urban waterscapes in Medellín. Thus, the strategies for expanding water networks are focused on guaranteeing that service users uphold payment conditions, otherwise the consequence is the disconnection of water services. It is important to note that EPM has created innovative payment strategies, ranging from prepaid services to programs tailored to specific vulnerable populations and informal economic groups such as carwash locations. Given this, the community of El Faro has opted for lived water rights practices that are established according to the possibilities and needs of each home. Hence, mixed access systems coexist. These range from water access guaranteed through payment, to access self-guaranteed by the community, or by neighborhood solidarity or, even, access by disobedience (self-connecting to the company's networks). Relatedly, the criteria of economic affordability from the institutional perspective are reduced to the implementation of strategies that guarantee payment. Instead, community principles are based on the criteria of community reciprocity through which, although it is possible to set a family contribution quota, monetary quotas can be replaced by another type of solidarity contribution that can be in kind, through work/labor or through administrative and operational tasks.

In terms of access to *drinking water*, the expectation splits in two directions. One is the desire for continuous improvement of the community water supply, trusting that one day soon it will distribute drinking water. Second, is the desire of the expansion of EPM's infrastructure networks and the municipal subsidy programs so that they might be connected to the formal network. The community does not defend either options exclusively. It matters less if there is tension between them or if they respond to distant models of city, citizenship, community, water management, or worldview. Being in the middle of two waters, that of the *intake* and that of *EPM*, makes the limitations and virtues of both visible. The residents of El Faro do not tend to believe in one perfect solution.

In addition to the above, the different forms of accessing water in El Faro are, in turn, interwoven with the differences in the water's materiality, with differentiated water uses, and with the distinct ways of regulating the relationship to water. Because of this complexity, the water referred to in the dominant legal discourse—consisting of a single water: *drinking water*—is replaced by a multiplicity of waters in which quality cannot be characterized in singular terms. *Drinking water* comes into tension with *community water*, *rainwater*, and *recycled water*, and this tension cannot be resolved in favor of any of them because the characteristics of each serve some purposes but not others. This multiplicity of waters is linked in significant measure but not solely to its materiality. In El Faro, there are also differentiated waters according to whether or not they can be associated with a particular

owner. Thus, its residents speak as much about *EPM water*, as about *their own water* or *community water*. The differences between these waters determines the entitlement of one's right to water. Following the practices and the institutional discourse associated with the *water of EPM*, those who access it through an official connection, are considered both "clients" and as "citizens" in the exercise of their right to water. While those accessing *EPM water* without such a connection (like in the case of *contraband water*), are conceived as illegal actors vulnerable to state sanction. In addition, if accessing *community water*, a person is considered an invader or illegal migrant according to the urban planning paradigm or a vulnerable subject who has suspended the exercise of his/her rights.

This contributes to the understanding of the practices of the right to water, from a perspective capable of identifying the socio-nature of water [68,69], that is, its understanding based on the recognition of the bidirectional relationship between society and nature. With this, everyday practices of the inhabitants of El Faro also problematize how the right to water is approached (see Table 2). From the dominant perspective, availability is guaranteed by access to a sufficient amount of water for every person without considering the conditions of the water basin. Contrary to this, in the *barrio* of El Faro, families benefiting from the community water supply system have developed different water saving strategies according to weather conditions. However, this comes into contradiction and conflict when families who—in addition to accessing *community water*, access *EPM's water*—engage in conservation practices to manage their utility bills without considering the capacity of the stream to satisfy collective needs.

Likewise, these differences in savings criteria, connected in turn, with the ontological or more than cultural differences of the socio-natural materiality of water [24,63] and with the forms of accessing it, also translates into contrast emotions. For example, the security and confidence that strives to build the discourse of drinking water quality is crossed by the lack of knowledge it generates about the water that is consumed. In other words, if it is said to be potable it is assumed to be good water, whereas if it does not have such a label, it is presumed to be bad water. Consequently, a territory such as El Faro, characterized by the presence of multiple waters, is torn between the frustration of some of its inhabitants who yearn for state intervention, and the pride of others who celebrate water as a symbol of their autonomy.

In conclusion, water rights and everyday practices in El Faro, by revealing the plurality of ways of life, and rejecting the imposition of a single story, are in themselves experiences that in the present and from the city, confirm the existence of other epistemic, ontological, and normative ways of defining and enacting water. Secondly, the communal or collective character of water practices, as opposed to the individualistic character derived from mainstream global or institutional water policies contain the disruptive power necessary to face and overcome logics of capital accumulation and commodification that are escalating planetary inequity and injustices. Finally, the contradictions within these *ch'ixi* practices, rather than responding to strategies of cooptation, alienation or the domination of capitalism, colonialism or modernism in everyday life, are expressions of the consubstantial indocility of motley societies.

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