

Beliefs about the World and Nature

Introduction

Beliefs about health and illness, and the human body itself, are just one part of an overall understanding of the way the universe is – a cosmology or worldview – particularly with peoples of very ‘traditional’ or indigenous cultures. Therefore, it was deemed important to find out how people viewed the world around them, whether they saw it as an aggregate of individual things (a ‘modern’ way of seeing the world), or as one ‘whole’, and also of ideas that looked at peoples’ experience of what we would term the positives and negatives in life, of ‘duality’.

In pre-Colombian times, continuing into the Early Colonial period, there was a preponderance of beliefs that venerated geographical features or phenomena as being repositories of the numinous, which had spirits, and which served in a guardianship capacity over communities. These beings were called ‘*wak’as*’ and they were deemed capable of taking human or animal form, being loci in the landscape, or even portable objects of human manufacture. Similarly, the numinous power of the landscape itself, the sense that the earth and its mountains had spiritual energies which could help (or even harm) you, are also part of a sub-set of traditional or ‘folk’ beliefs of many traditional pre-industrial societies world-wide. Therefore, Section 2 of the questionnaire sought to establish the survival and prevalence of these beliefs, alongside any more European Catholic Christian, Renaissance notions of the way the world is.

2.1 What religion do you follow?

The first question everyone was asked was what religion they espoused, to which the overwhelming majority responded was Catholic Christian. Nearly 90% of all respondents said they were Catholics, 83% in Greater Salasaka and 95% in Greater Zuleta. Six people (7.3% of total), all from Greater Salasaka, described themselves as being ‘independent’ meaning they had essentially abandoned any Christian practice and followed their own beliefs, which were generally related to the ancestral ontology of sacred landscape and spiritual beings within it. One person from Ugsha affirmed that they were an evangelical Christian. However, those claiming to be Catholic were likely to be a very heterogeneous group, along a spectrum of those who were ardent believers and followers of the faith, attending church regularly, to those who had been baptized as infants, but to whom the teachings of the church meant relatively little. Interestingly, there is a clear indication that many people operate a kind of dual system, whereby they both believe in the Christian God (Taita – Father – God, or more impressively, Jawamunda Jatun Taita – God of Heaven) and

also in regional powers, usually symbolized by mountains such as Taita Chimborazo, Mama (mother)Teligote (or Mama Awela – Volcán Tunguhuara), Taita Kinlli, Nitan Cruz etc. Commonly *yachaks* or *curandero/as* venerate loci such as these and obtain spiritual power from them, although in ‘ordinary life’ may also see themselves as being faithful church goers.

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
What Religion do you follow?	None	1	2.4%	0	0.0%	1	1.2%
	Catholic	35	83.3%	38	95.0%	73	89.0%
	Evangelist	0	0.0%	1	2.5%	1	1.2%
	Independent	6	14.3%	0	0.0%	6	7.3%
	Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
	NA	0	0.0%	1	2.5%	1	1.2%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 1: Religion by Greater Community

2.2 The physical landscape and nature

The question here asked: “How do you see the physical landscape and nature, that is, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the landscape, the plants, the animals, etc.? Do you see them as part of ‘whole’, or do you see them as separate things?”

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
How do you see the landscape of nature?	Whole	36	85.7%	30	75.0%	66	80.5%
	Separate	5	11.9%	8	20.0%	13	15.9%
	NA	1	2.4%	2	5.0%	3	3.7%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 2: Whole World by Greater Community

In modern industrialised cultures, the phenomenal universe is generally seen as being composed of separate things, whereas in many traditional cosmologies, and also according to yogic philosophies of the east, it is seen as being a whole. Eighty per cent of all survey respondents (86% Greater Salasaka; 75% Greater Zuleta) said that for them, nature and everything in it was a unified whole, no matter that you could see and experience its manifold aspects as being somehow separate. Everything was inter-dependent:

“I see them all as part of a single world; I see them dependent on each other and united” (2).

“Among the beings of nature there is dependence on one another. We are all part of a whole”(4.)

“Nature is one and each being that makes it up has their own life and spirit.” (15)

“For me, all the elements of nature form part of one whole, they are one.”

There was, however, the occasional respondent who saw things differently:

“The diversity of the landscape is beauty for our sight. I consider that each element of nature makes a unique / separate world.” (9).

The theme of nature being something of inherent beauty occurred again and again:

“Nature is beauty for our eyes and all the elements of it are united and are one”.

“The natural landscape is a beauty for us, something beautiful for our life. Seeing all the splendour we can imagine the creation of the world by our God. What I can say is that there is a need for each other, that is why rain and sun need both human beings and nature” (12).

“Nature transmits happiness and gives life to be a human being. Everything exists in inter-relation and inter-dependency” (13).

But there was also a perception of how the world had changed for the worse in recent years, through the use of chemicals and other contaminants:

“The landscape of nature is beauty and part of a whole. But the contamination of waste and sewage has damaged the ecosystem” (3).

“Man (the human being) is the one who harms nature when we do not care for or do not protect it” (4).

2.3 Do any of the elements like wind, water or the sun have the power to harm or heal?

There is evidence from the early Colonial period and earlier ethnographic sources [refs] that the elements of nature such as the sun, wind, rain, thunder and lightning had specific spiritual powers to influence people for good or bad, apart from their purely physical properties. However, this question was universally misunderstood and taken literally by most respondents and although 61% of all respondents answered in the affirmative that the elements of nature could both harm and benefit you, it was in a literal physical sense depending upon how much you were exposed to them:

“Yes, the elements of nature can cause us harm or also heal us. For example, a lot of sun (heat) or cold causes diseases. Instead the air gives us life” (7)

“I think that nature, yes, has power, as much good as bad. Water is life (a power), without water we cannot live. Even the mountains have power since they give me the strength I need (14).

“Yes, nature, such as plants, can heal us and at the same time the excessive use of them can cause diseases. Or natural disasters such as excessive rain and drought can cause material damage and loss of human life.”

“Yes, the elements of nature can affect both positively and negatively. For example, when you walk on a very sunny day you [can] get the flu, fever and headache. On the other hand, plants can prevent us from some diseases, for example, oranges, so that we do not catch flu” (7).

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do elements e.g. wind have the power to harm/heal?	?	5	11.9%	3	7.5%	8	9.8%
	Yes	27	64.3%	23	57.5%	50	61.0%
	No	6	14.3%	13	32.5%	19	23.2%
	God	3	7.1%	0	0.0%	3	3.7%
	NA	1	2.4%	1	2.5%	2	2.4%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 3: Powers of Elements by Greater Community

Some people felt that nature was only ever beneficial:

“Yes I believe this, for example when we go to bathe in the springs around here with medicinal plants it makes us feel well and refreshed” (12).

“The elements of nature cannot cause us harm. For example, rain helps us in the field to grow plants, the sun serves to dry clothes and water gives us life and serves us to clean up”(6).

“In reality nature, or the earth never harms us, on the contrary, we harm them, not knowing how to care for them” (14).

A lady who was both a practicing *yachak* as well as a *partera* (midwife) was one of the very few who did understand the question more in the way it had been intended:

“All the elements of nature have a spirit, therefore, to be able to heal people and other human beings and pos[sibly?], also to damage depending on the situation. So, I am grateful to Taita Chimborazo¹ for giving us water to take care of our lands. It is necessary to know that when Mama Teligote (Mama Awela²) gets angry, she sends us ash and even fire” (15).

Still others feared the power of nature to inflict damage:

“The elements of nature cannot heal diseases. But they can cause damage, for example, a lot of rain can cause floods and a lot of sun droughts” (10).

“Yes, nature can cause irreparable damage. For example, it’s possible to have a tsunami from the sea here in the Galápagos, something which makes us live in fear” (5).

The overall goal of the survey was to establish how much still survives of indigenous health beliefs and practices, so the near universal prevalence of a literal understanding of this question is evidence of the erosion and loss of part of a core indigenous Andean belief system, as the physical universe has become increasingly detached from its spiritual basis and metaphysical significance. This spiritual understanding still survives in such beliefs as there being earth and mountain spirits, and sacred locations in the landscape, however (see below), so it seems plausible to suggest that we are witnessing a gradual loss of an autochthonous ontology across the five hundred years of conquest and occupation by the alien European epistemological paradigms.

2.4 Belief in the World of Spirits

Belief in the world of spirits is a fundamental aspects of a pre-Colombian/indigenous ontology and one that survives as a sub-stratum of folk beliefs in many places throughout the world, underlying the superimposition of pan-regional religions such as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam.

In answer to the question: “Do you believe in earth spirits, mountain spirits, in good or bad spirits”, there were essentially two responses: affirmative or negative, although for those who did believe in them, the understanding of these spirits varied. Nearly 75% of all respondents believed in spirits, which was approximately equal between the two greater communities. Very few people seemed to believe in malign spiritual forces in any literal way, although it was similarly commonplace for people to understand certain traditional Andean maladies as nevertheless being the consequence of such forces in operation (*malaire* etc). There is a distinctive pre-Columbian belief in mountain spirits – called *Apus* -

¹ Taita means ‘father’ in Kichwa. Chimborazo is also known as ‘Nevado’ or ‘Volcán’ Chimorazo, the tallest and snow-capped volcano in Ecuador.

² The Volcano Tunguruaha

which sit at the top of the hierarchy of terrestrial spirits and which are envisaged as powerful supernatural beings whose help can be elicited if they are appropriately venerated.

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you believe in earth spirits, spirits of the mountains, good/evil spirits, etc.?	?	3	7.1%	1	2.5%	4	4.9%
	Yes	31	73.8%	30	75.0%	61	74.4%
	No	8	19.0%	8	20.0%	16	19.5%
	NA	0	0.0%	1	2.5%	1	1.2%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 4: Belief in Spirits by Greater Community

“Yes, the mountains have spirits and other people have told me this too. Our ancestors, even when they didn’t know about the existence of God, lived worshipping the mountains. There could be good and bad spirits, yes, this depends upon a person’s faith. Because if someone has evil wishes about someone, it could be the same spirit that causes bad effects, but if one doesn’t have evil wishes about anyone, they only have good spirits.” (12).

“Yes, the mountains have spirits. They are good, for example, when girl children can’t spin or want to spin better, to learn how to embroider we go with an offering to the sacred site called Mama Kinll (Kinlli Urku; the sacred mountain). In the same way, when a boy has malaire, you go to the sacred site Mama Kinlli to do a cleansing. Furthermore, there we have Taita Kinlli, Taita Cruz Loma y Taita Punta Rumi [Wak’as].” (15).

“Yes, our land and our mountains have spirit and soul. All spirits are good” (6).

“Yes, all on earth has being; living beings, spirits have power, mountains and rivers have spirits. ‘Urco’ [in Kichwa signifies] spirits that heal” (16).

A very common belief in these parts is in the indigenous sickness ‘*malaire*’, a kind of pervasive evil influence that causes the sufferer to sicken, lose weight and generally decline in health; a more acute manifestation is often associated with diarrhoeal illness and especially in infants and children. It is a phenomenon particularly associated with isolated locations in the landscape and abandoned houses.

“Yes, I have heard that bad spirits (devils) exist in abandoned or old houses. I haven’t seen them, but other indigenous people say that they have even met the devil in person. Listening to these conversations we say that there are evil spirits.” (13).

“I could say that the beings of nature do not have spirits, but I would not sleep on a mountain, because sleeping there one becomes crazy. Likewise, I would not sleep under large trees, near animals such as pigs and inside abandoned houses, because in these places there are evil spirits” (11).

But generally, those who believed in spirits saw them as positive and beneficial to humanity.

“Yes I believe that the earth and the mountains have spirits. People are the ones who have bad and good spirits so, nature only reacts to the actions of man. I think that nature has good spirits and we do not take advantage of it” (14).

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Which spirits?	All	10	23.8%	4	10.0%	14	17.1%
	Both (good/bad)	8	19.0%	10	25.0%	18	22.0%
	Earth	0	0.0%	3	7.5%	3	3.7%
	God	0	0.0%	3	7.5%	3	3.7%
	Mountain	4	9.5%	5	12.5%	9	11.0%
	NA	20	47.6%	15	37.5%	35	42.7%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 5: Types of Spirits by Greater Community

2.5 Sacred locations in the landscape

A belief in sacred locations in the landscape is another fundamentally pan-global human belief and there are many ‘non-industrialised’ or traditional cultures worldwide that still acknowledge this, particularly if less influenced by the later spread of organised religions. The commonest geographical features that are generally associated with spiritual or sacred energies and powers are mountains (as we have seen above), caves, waterfalls, springs, strange geographical features like odd rock formations and so on. In Andean belief systems these are also commonly associated with the persistence of *wak’a* veneration (see below). Sacred locations are seen as being liminal places where the boundaries between the ordinary world of the mundane and the ‘Otherworld’ of spirits and deities are much thinner.

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you believe in 'sacred locations' in the landscape, and the importance of venerating them with offerings?	?	1	2.4%	4	10.0%	5	6.1%
	Yes	32	76.2%	20	50.0%	52	63.4%
	No	6	14.3%	13	32.5%	19	23.2%
	NA	3	7.1%	3	7.5%	6	7.3%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 6: Greater Salasaka and Greater Zuleta Belief in Sacred Locations

A total of 63% of all respondents believed in sacred locations, although this disguised a significant variation between the two greater communities. Only 50% of respondents from Ugsha and Zuleta recognised loci in the landscape as being sacred and therefore worthy of veneration in any way, but this rose to 76% of those from Greater Salasaka, lending support to the better survival of ancestral beliefs and practices in this more culturally traditional and cohesive indigenous community, less exposed to the influences of modernity. Believers were nevertheless found throughout the communities.

People were asked: "Do you believe in 'sacred places' in the landscape and the importance of venerating them with offerings?"

It was not uncommon for people simply to say no, they didn't believe in them, a response more usually encountered in Zulia and Ugsha, although certainly in the more traditionally minded township of Salasaka (including the Galápagos ex-patriot part of it), non-believers were also encountered. The reason most commonly given for this was simply that they believed in the Christian God, which had supplanted their faith in pre-Colombian religious expressions, rather than a more 'modern' way of seeing things.

"I don't believe this, I only believe in God. My parents didn't teach me to believe this either" (13).

Sacred locations are believed to have the power to bestow gifts like health and wisdom, or even merely 'positive energy', although sometimes you might approach them and ask for more specific interventions. One older man said that he had wanted to go to school to learn to read in his youth (a time when it was commonplace for indigenous people to be unable to have regular classes given their need to work to help their families), so he had made a pilgrimage to Kinlli Urcu (a local mountain) and prayed and left offerings there. He said that he had achieved his wish and had managed to attend one year at school aged fifteen, where he had learned to read.

Respondents who affirmed their belief said things like:

“Yes I believe in sacred locations, so it’s important to venerate them to get positive energy” (2).

“It is important to venerate them and take care of them, because when we have faith in them they protect us and give us wisdom, energy and even cure us of diseases” (3).

“I believe in sacred places, so it is important to venerate them so that they protect us and give us wisdom. But it depends a lot on each person's faith” (6).

“People who really have faith go to the mountains (or other sacred places) to pray upon their knees and to offer money and candles to effect good or bad, upon the other person, or on themselves. For them it is very important to worship sacred places.” (12).

“It’s very important to look after them; they are our gods.” (14)

“When I do a ceremony I invoke Mama Kinlli, Taita Chimbo, Taita Cotopaxi, Taita Inti (sun), Mama Awela (Tungurahua / Teligote), Mama Yaku (water) and Pachamama (goddess of the Earth). When we have faith they can relieve us of some evil.” (15, a yachak).

“Yes. Sacred sites exist for the community; like springs are sacred. Martín Pocyó is a sacred site locally. [You] go there to be healed of problems like *cuichig*³. A yachak will prepare a healing bundle to offer to the sacred site” (16)⁴.

But problems can also be experienced with the negative impacts of alternative and chauvinistic belief systems:

“Yes, spring and cascades, such as at the Bridge of Angochagua. The Evangelists had a spring destroyed in La Rinconada” (17).⁵

2.6 Belief in Wak’as

Whilst at its most basic simply meaning ‘a sacred thing’, it is nevertheless difficult to describe the concept of a *wak’a* to people from a European ontological background. Innately this relates to the lived reality of the culture and how it has evolved its understanding of the nature of ‘reality. Wak’as can be both of human manufacture or natural, portable, as well as natural loci in the landscape, or natural phenomena, but with the power to transform into human-looking beings or animals, and back again. They are better known from ethnohistorical accounts in the Peruvian Andes, although it is clear that the name is still understood in many places in the Ecuadorian sierra now too. They were pivotal in every aspect of Andean life. We know from many ethnohistorical sources, that in pre-Colombian times, *wak’as* were in charge of the health and well-being of communities, of the cycles of agricultural fertility, had an oracular/ divinatory function and could foretell

³ The negative influence of rainbows

⁴ Zuleta respondent.

⁵ Zuleta respondent, also a yachak.

the future. *Wak'as* were served by community religious specialists and through serving this entity and interpreting its oracular pronouncements, the health of the community and individuals could be maintained. In turn, the *wak'a* would demand feeding with ritual items such as coca, chicha (maize beer), guinea pigs, llama fat, or other offerings.

A belief in *wak'as* is intimately linked with a belief in sacred landscape locations, and often the two concepts are intimately related and even functionally inter-changeable (at least now); also with such entities as the *apus* ie mountain spirits. Of interest therefore was how it was experienced or understood by respondents, given there were people who claimed to believe in one, but not the other. The clue to this might lie in the concept of the *wak'a's* 'personhood', in that rather than seen as an impersonal geographical feature, albeit with mystical powers, the *wak'a* is understood as a spiritual non-human being, a kind of minor local deity, but with unusual properties of transmutation from one form into another, not generally associated with the concept of deities as a generality.

		Greater Salasaka		Greater Zuleta		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you believe that a supernatural being is in charge of the health of their community and able to cure people of any illness?		2	4.8%	0	0.0%	2	2.4%
	?	5	11.9%	3	7.5%	8	9.8%
	Yes	14	33.3%	10	25.0%	24	29.3%
	No	15	35.7%	21	52.5%	36	43.9%
	NA	6	14.3%	6	15.0%	12	14.6%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 7: Belief in *Wak'as* by Greater Community

The question asked respondents: "Do you believe that a supernatural being is in charge of the health of your community that is capable of curing people of any disease (as it was once believed the *wak'as* did)? The question was not well understood by many respondents. As with belief in spirits and sacred locations, there were several out-right denials of the "I don't believe it" kind; however, many people simply said that "Taita Dios" (Father God) or 'Diosito' (familiar endearment version of Dios – God) was the one in charge of the health of themselves and their community, and praying to him regularly and sometimes making offerings (which might be via the intermediary of a priest at church) was what delivered the required protection. Therefore only 33% in Greater Salasaka and 29% in Greater Zuleta agreed that they believed in *wak'as*, with a total of 43% saying that they didn't believe in them at all.

“The only one who can cure all evils is the *Jawamunda Jatun Taita*⁶ (15).

“I believe in nature, but I don’t believe that anything supernatural is looking after it [or us]. Only God looks after us” (2).

“Our God is the one who looks after us” (8) and “There aren’t any; there’s only God who looks after us” (11), responses which confirm that the process of uprooting of indigenous Andean belief systems through the imposition of orthodox Catholic Christian doctrines following the Spanish conquest in the 16th century was by and large successful.

In Zuleta there was also a perception that it was the Catholic saints or the Virgin Mary who had supplanted the *wak’as* of old:

“Yes, the tradition of San Juan [Saint John the Baptist] and the Virgin of Zuleta are in charge of the well-being of the community”.

The Virgin of Zuleta spends much of the year enshrined in the chapel of the Hacienda, but at key religious or community events (often one and the same) she is taken upon a litter off into the community to a guarded location for a period of time. In this, it is hard to escape the conclusion that she is serving the same kind of purpose as a *wak’a*.

Many people did, however, express a continued belief in *wak’as*:

“Yes, I believe that something supernatural is looking after us. This, yes, depends much on the faith of the person” (4).

“Many people believe that yes, there is a place or a spirit to venerate and be blessed by and receive her protection. It is because of this that there was a big discussion here in Salasaka when a tractor destroyed the sacred site of Kinlli Urku because for many believers this site was for prayer and to leave offerings to the spirits. Furthermore, I have heard it said by many people that when you pray and worship with much faith with all your heart, the animals grow healthy and strong and the harvest is good”⁷ (12)

“I do believe it [something] is taking care of us. Moreover, people who believe in the spirits of the mountains are healthier in body. It is so, when you want to share and talk about it, you do not want to know, that is why you live in ignorance and vulnerable to diseases. They [ie sufferers] say that when they get sick it is God's punishment. It is not divine punishment, diseases are a consequence of our actions” (14).

“The spirits of nature look after us, they help us and even give us life, so, we should live gratefully and take care of them”⁸ (15).

⁶ Salasaka Kichwa meaning ‘God of Heaven’.

⁷ This respondent essentially describes ‘sacred locations’ here, referring to Kinlli Urku; however, this response was directly in answer to the question about *wak’as*.

⁸ Similarly, this respondent answers in a way that could also be for question 2.4

In Salasaka, an important sacred landscape feature – an immense rock overlooking a valley known as ‘Taita Punta Rumi’ – is generally accepted by local people as being an important *wak’a* and is the guardian and guiding (female) spirit of one of the Salasaka yachaks, as well as being the location where he carries out many of his diagnostic and healing rituals (Currie et al. 2018). The site is therefore a classic *wak’a*, in that it is both a sacred spiritual entity and well as a sacred location.

It seems, then, that the actual function of belief in a higher spiritual entity in charge of the health of the community and individual within that, is functionally one and the same, whether experienced as ‘God’, Virgin, saint or ‘*Wak’a*’. The only difference is the actual name given to it, and the fact that the Christian personages are seen as being universally relevant, rather than there being one individual *wak’a* per community.

2.7 Experience of ‘duality’

A dualistic world view that divides life and experiences into innately ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is seen to be largely a modern way of looking at the world, and other philosophies, such as the Yogic and Buddhist traditions of the East favour a more holistic interpretation of the nature and experience of reality. In fact, in the pre-Columbian Americas, there undoubtedly *was* an apprehension that reality had two aspects seen as good/bad, positive/negative and so on. This is reflected artistically in the juxtaposition of gold and silver for example, and in the presentation of faces looking in two directions at once (as with the Inca period Oracle at Pachacamac, Peru); also in the ubiquitous juxtaposition of the colours of red ochre and white (not black and white as is commonly employed today).

Seventy three per cent of all respondents believed in duality, with 88% from Greater Salasaka and 57.5% Greater Zuleta. This difference is accounted for by more nuanced

responses from Greater Zuleta respondents who explained that they believed in ‘good only’ (as opposed to good/bad).

		Greater Salasaka	Greater Zuleta	Total			
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you see life and life experiences as being good or bad, positive and negative?	Yes	37	88.1%	23	57.5%	60	73.2%
	No	1	2.4%	0	0.0%	1	1.2%
	Good Only	2	4.8%	14	35.0%	16	19.5%
	Negative Only	0	0.0%	1	2.5%	1	1.2%
	NA	2	4.8%	2	5.0%	4	4.9%
	Total	42	100.0%	40	100.0%	82	100.0%

Table 8: Belief in Duality by Greater Community

How people experienced their world and their lives was accordingly tested in the question: “Do you see the experiences of life as good or bad, positive and negative?” People almost universally experienced the world and their lives in a dualistic way:

“Each person has positive and negative experiences, that's life, the two go together, in a dual way.”

“In life I have had good as well as bad experiences. Everyone lives in duality.”

“For myself and my family we have had negative and positive life experiences, in duality.”

“People have bad and good experiences. Sometimes we are sad and sometimes we are happy.”

But there were some for whom this understanding was less clear-cut and who didn't necessarily view life as being particularly negative, whilst recounting experiences that had nevertheless caused them sorrow or hardship:

“Until now I have lived well, as I haven't done any harm to anyone [so] I could say I am fine. Sometimes I have been ill” (12).

“Yes I have lived a good life. I live working the land and happy being able to be active” (13).

“Up until now I have lived well, and my children are also well. Only that sometimes [redacted] and this makes me sad ... In spite of it, I feel that I am well. ” (15).

Discussion and Conclusion

Reviewing the whole range of stated beliefs about the world and nature (worldview/cosmovision), there can often be a contradictory mix in the beliefs that people espouse. Some claim to believe in the whole range of ontological phenomena from spirits, to sacred landscape locations, and supernatural beings that protect them, whereas others

may flatly deny any belief in spirits, but nevertheless talk about the mountains protecting them and their need to venerate them with offerings. The prevalence of a belief in 'Taita Dios' (God the Father), the Christian God, was the clearest reason for people abandoning their traditional ancestral beliefs in the world of spirits or sacred beings/loci in the landscape. Many people had grown up in the context of a Catholic religion and were devout followers of it. In this respect, as a source of supernatural protection for the health and well-being of the community and the individual as a part of this, the name 'God' seem to have simply supplanted the idea of *Wak'a*. Certainly the expression and understanding of these two expressions of the numen might be different to some degree, but they are essentially serving identical purposes.

With the advance of time and the slow erosion of belief systems, firstly through the imposition of Christian religious doctrine to now, and the more immediate and possibly more damaging impact of modern global culture, there is a real sense that 'nuance' has been lost, which is perhaps well demonstrated by people's overall lack of ability to distinguish the subtle differences in their understanding and experience of sacred phenomena like *waka's* and sacred locations; or with their acceptance of one type of spiritual phenomena, but not another (e.g. a belief in mountain spirits, but not *waka's* or sacred locations, and vice versa). It seems plausible to suggest that even two or three hundred years ago, perhaps even later, people had a better grasp of these ideas, but that this is finally evaporating. Original trial records of many Andean religious specialists who came before the Spanish ecclesiastical courts on charges of idolatry and sorcery (mainly in Peru), amply demonstrate the continuity of these beliefs, with all their original nuances, well into the 17th century, and in many cases beyond this, until the point when evangelisation was i) considered mostly complete and ii) the indigenous peoples were deemed too simple minded to be worth prosecuting over their continued adherence to their older 'superstitions' (e.g., Griffiths 1996; McCormack 1991).
<http://www.andeanmedicine.net/blog/curandera's-tale-story-juana-icha-1491594927>).

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