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A CONFLUENCE OF COUNTERHISTORIES: REFLECTIONS ON EXCAVATING LOST STORIES THROUGH A NATION-BUILDING NOVEL

During the earliest days of the transatlantic encounter, the nation now called Peru was being formed by the contributions of people from three continents: Europe, South America, and Africa. The imaginary of the Peruvian nation, however, has tended to focus on a dual Inca-Hispanic heritage and bury the stories that lie outside this narrative. In this paper, I reflect on my motivation and practice in writing my novel about the process of nation-building in Peru. This novel, titled *Mancharisqa or The Dust Never Settles*, is my attempt to excavate and privilege untold counterhistories and subjugated knowledges and, as I reflect in this essay, could be understood as a performance of my own cultural identity as a Peruvian-British writer.

**Keywords: Peruvian History, Counterhistory, Historical Fiction, Creative Writing,
Nation-Building**

In the English Midlands of the 1990s and early 2000s, it was not easy understanding what it meant to be Peruvian-British. For most of my childhood, I had no model of how Peruvian, Hispanic or Latinx heritage could coexist with my Britishness. In British popular culture, the only references I had were Manuel, the idiotic Spanish waiter whose calamitous misunderstandings I watched in after-school re-runs of the '70s BBC sitcom *Fawlty Towers*, and the newsreaders of *The Fast Show's* Channel 9 spoof, in which the Spaniard would nonsensically repeat *féfé-féféfé*, presumably to imitate how the Spanish language sounded to

the monolingual Anglophone British viewer. Watching such parodies of my language stung: it felt as if my mother, my culture, and I were being laughed at.

My classmates were mostly the children of two English parents until, in year 3, a girl with Jamaican heritage joined my class and we became close friends. We bonded over the shared experience of longing and not belonging. Together, we missed our distant grandparents, aunts, cousins and, together, we celebrated when we were able to take transatlantic vacations to reconnect with the cultures, places, and people that meant so much to us. I was fortunate: my mother, sister, and I were able to visit Peru every twelve to eighteen months. My relationships with my Peruvian family were close. I had a strong sense of my Peruanidad.

But my Peruanidad and my Britishness were wholly disconnected. I had no sense of how the two could mingle. I felt like two separate persons in one skin. It was only as a teenager, when my father's career took my family to New York and I made friends with young people who identified as Latinos, that I began to develop an understanding of Latin American diasporic identity and I began to use my writing as a means of exploring what my hybrid identity could mean for me.

About six years ago I began writing the first snippets of a novel about Peru.¹ It was born, I think, from my unresolved grief over the deaths of my Peruvian grandparents and from my fear that, with their passing, I would lose my connection to my roots. At that time, my mother and my aunt were preparing to sell my grandparents' house – the house in which I had stayed on all my visits to Lima. It was a house whose walls and floors held in their fabric all my memories of Peru and, with those memories, my very Peruvian-ness, or so it seemed to

¹ This novel, *Mancharisqa or The Dust Never Settles*, will be published by Oneworld Publications in the UK and Commonwealth in late 2021/early 2022.

me then. As Gaston Bachelard puts it, ‘Something closed must retain our memories’² and I believed that upon the demolition of my grandparents’ house (it was to be razed to build apartments in its place) my identity would be demolished along with it.

My novel became the receptacle into which I placed the memories that had once been contained in that house. The narrative began to mirror life: it, too, was about an ancestral home being sold and demolished. It, too, was about a young Peruvian-British woman who was grieving. As the house in Lima was torn down, I rebuilt it in the pages of my book.

But then the project began to sprawl: in my quest to add authenticity to the setting and characters in my story, I began to read about the history of Lima. My reading (as reading tends to do) spawned more reading, and before long I found myself researching all manner of histories and communities of Peru about which I had previously known very little. What had begun as a novel about the demolition of a house became a novel about the building of a nation.

In the Limenian district of Barranco, once a beach resort for Peruvian aristocracy, now the city’s bohemian quarter where extravagant colonial mansions stand, crumbling and emblazoned with graffiti, there is a palatial, gleaming white mansion that now houses the Pedro de Osma Museum. In this museum, there is a famous painting of the late sixteenth-century marriage of the Inca princess, *ñusta* Beatriz Clara, to the Spanish military captain Martín García de Loyola.³ Behind the young couple, in the top left corner of the painting, stand Inca nobility and, in the top right, Spanish nobles and clergymen. The placid facial

² Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 6.

³ A copy of the painting is available online via Fordham University’s Vistas Gallery at <https://vistasgallery.ace.fordham.edu/items/show/1910>.

expressions of the celebrants and their families belie the violence that hides behind the painting: the groom led the military attack on Túpac Amaru I, uncle to the bride and the last Inca monarch.⁴ Beatriz Clara's story is not unique in Peruvian history. In the very earliest days of the colony, the conquistadors forcibly took *ñustas* as their wives: most famous is Quispe Sisa, daughter of the Sapa Inca Huayna Capac who was married to Francisco Pizarro at around sixteen years of age.

I was in the early stages of writing my novel when I saw the painting of Beatriz Clara's marriage in person for the first time. Standing before that painting, I mused on the violent histories that families hide within their genealogies. I had been drawing inspiration for my novel from my own family tree. During my childhood, my Limenian family had told me stories of various European ancestors. With great pride, Tías and Tíos had listed the protagonists of our family narrative – a great-grandfather from Alsace-Lorraine who came to Lima to sell Swiss chocolate; a great-grandmother born in Paris who became a successful chemist; elegant ancestors descended from Spanish nobility. But it seemed strange to me that my family pointed to no autochthonous heritage and, in tracing our genealogy, the gaze was always cast eastwards, across the Atlantic, towards Europe. In contrast I, being raised in Europe, wanted to cast my sight west and forage for identity in the Americas.

Repeatedly, my family told me I had no American heritage. We were European through-and-through. And yet I could not shake the suspicion that there must be more complicated stories lurking in our past. I was aware that sometime in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries, there were two Spanish nobles from whom we had descended –

⁴ A drawing in Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's *First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas* depicts the groom leading Túpac Amaru I to Cusco to be executed. A facsimile copy of the drawing is available online via the Danish Royal Library at <http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/451/en/image/>.

Francisco de Talavera y Araujo, mayor of the Andean city of Jauja, and his wife, Francisca Xaviera de Torquemada y Echeverría, IVth Marquise of Soto Hermoso. What injustices had these two overseen? What enslaved persons had they bought and sold? And in their ancestry, had there been marriages of convenience in which Inca women had been bartered away to Spanish conquistadors seeking power in the New World?

These nagging questions began to coalesce into spectral shadows, casting their presence over my research, and then they took shape as persons, characters who insisted on making their voices heard. Two characters in particular who stood beside me as I worked, flanking me like sentries at my shoulders, were an upstart conquistador, Hernando Echeverría, and his first wife, Chimpu Yupanqui, a rebellious *ñusta* whom Echeverría had taken in marriage to secure his status in the colony. Their push-and-pull upon me and upon my novel (the first towards the Hispanic and the second towards the indigenous) are the same push-and-pull that I encountered in the early chronicles of the Peruvian nation which I consulted in my reading.

Take for instance the work of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, an Indigenous man born around the time of the arrival of the Spanish who in 1615 completed his *First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas*.⁵ In this chronicle, which he addressed to the Pope and King Felipe of Spain, Guaman Poma provides an account of the history, geography and beliefs of the recently fallen Inca Empire, the Tawantinsuyo as it had been known. Blending the origin myths of the Inca and Christian worlds, Guaman Poma crafts an epic narrative in which the Andean deity Viracocha descends from a son of Noah who was taken by God to the Americas, a land filled not only with

⁵ An online, facsimile copy of the chronicle, as well as a Spanish transcription, is available via the Danish Royal Library at <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm>.

pumas, serpents and condors but also *hapi nunos*,⁶ old hags that snatch humans with their claw-tipped breasts and drag them away to eat them.⁷

Some fifty years or so before Guaman Poma's *First New Chronicle*, the first Spanish chroniclers had also written their accounts of the conquest of the Americas. Together, these early chronicles would not only become the foundational texts of the Peruvian literary tradition (and, indeed, the Hispanic American canon more widely) but would also provide the foundation for the history of the Latin American continent. In his *Myth and Archive: A theory of Latin American narrative*, Roberto González Echevarría posits that the Latin American continent was born through writing and that 'America existed first as a legal document',⁸ namely The Capitulations of Santa Fe, the contract in which Christopher Columbus and the Spanish monarch set out what would happen with the lands to be 'discovered'. The earliest history of Latin America was recorded, González Echevarría writes, through the letters, maps, charters, contracts and chronicles of the early colonisers.⁹

I must pause here to reflect on the problematics of the term 'Latin America' and the notion that the Latin American continent was 'born' through the writing and arrival of Europeans. The region which we now call by that name was, of course, inhabited by diverse

⁶ Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. n.d. 'El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno.' *Det Kongelige Bibliotek*. Accessed 23 May 2019. <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/50/en/text/>.

⁷ 'Hapi nuno' was translated into Spanish as 'duendes' by Guaman Poma and into English as 'goblins' by Roland Hamilton in *The First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas up to 1615*, trans. Roland Hamilton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 38. The creature is known today as the *hapinunu* or *hapiñuñu*. See Irene Marsha Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 180.

⁸ Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: A theory of Latin American narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 50.

⁹ González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive*, 10-11.

populations long before European arrival – populations whose descendants continue to live in and understand the world according to epistemes bequeathed to them by the Indigenous inhabitants of those lands and not Latin Europe. The history of the continent can and should be traced back to before the transatlantic encounter. Nonetheless, González Echevarría's argument, and his focus on the continent's European heritage, reveals a tension between the two prevalent conceptions of the origins of 'Latin America' – the Indigenous and the European. In his seminal work *La formación de la tradición literaria en el Perú* [*The formation of the literary tradition in Peru*], Antonio Cornejo Polar traces two overarching tendencies in the literature of Peru. The first 'hegemonic' tendency is that which harks back to Spain, the conquest, and the Virreinato, for its influences. The second 'subordinated' tendency is that which strives for 'la recuperación de la herencia prehispánica' [the recuperation of pre-hispanic heritage].¹⁰ Although Cornejo Polar's summary focuses on texts written since the formation of the Peruvian Republic in 1821, this dual tendency of Peruvian literature that Cornejo Polar identifies can be traced right back to the first chronicles of Guaman Poma, which evinced the subordinated tendency, and his Spanish contemporaries, written under the hegemonic tendency.

As for the term 'Latin America' itself, it was first used in the nineteenth century both by French imperialists seeking to justify their designs on American expansion and by Central and South Americans as a means of resisting U.S. expansionism.¹¹ While I am glad of the term and the 'imagined community'¹² it affords me, 'Latin America' is a term that

¹⁰ Antonio Cornejo Polar, *La formación de la tradición literaria en el Perú* (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1989), 117. My translation.

¹¹ For a useful summary, see Michel Gobat, 'The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race,' *The American Historical Review* 118, no.5 (December 2013): 1345-1375.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006).

marginalises many of the continent's Indigenous communities whose languages and cultures are not 'Latin' in origin. When I was in Lima in August 2018 carrying out archival research for my novel, I attended the International Congress of the Peruvian Literary Network. During a panel on current trends in Latin American literature, a member of the public interjected to lament the prevalence of the term 'Latin American'. He explained that he, born and raised within one of Peru's *pueblos originarios* whose presence on the continent pre-dated the presence of Europeans, did not perceive himself as Latin American or even Peruvian. The ancestral lands of his Indigenous community did not correspond with the boundaries of the modern nation-states and his mother tongue was not a European one. For this man, and many like him, the idea of belonging to a 'Latin American' community does not resonate with his identity or experiences. Nevertheless, for me – as someone who has found belonging and comfort in the imagined community of the Latin American diaspora – there is meaning to the notion of a Latin American continent with a shared history of Spanish-Portuguese-French presence as long as we also recognise, valorise, promote, and protect the region's Indigenous communities and heritages.

Despite some problems I perceive in González Echevarría's thesis, as a writer I am fascinated by his argument that, because the novel form and the so-called Latin American continent were born simultaneously in the sixteenth century, the two – novel form and history – mingled.¹³ Narrative became central to making the New World intelligible both to the Old World and to itself and, in turn, origin stories and history became central to Latin American narrative.¹⁴ As the Latin American novel developed, it drew on two key sources for both discursive and aesthetic influence – myth and archive. González Echevarría charts how, as archival content and focus evolved (from legal to scientific to anthropological), the Latin

¹³ González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

American novel emulated the discourses and styles of the developing archive. What maintained constant was the aspiration of Latin American literature ‘to have a function similar to that of myth’¹⁵ – that is, to explore and explain the continent’s origins.

The conception of the novel form as intimately tied to the idea of the modern nation-state has been well argued.¹⁶ Edward Said noted the contemporaneous ‘rise of nationalism and the European nation-state, the advent of large-scale industrialization... the consolidation of power in the bourgeoisie [and] the period in which the novel form and the new historical narrative become pre-eminent’.¹⁷ For Said, the nineteenth century novel became an important means for demarcating ‘social space’ and particularly the ‘actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial’.¹⁸ Benedict Anderson has argued that in the late Middle Ages, just when the dynastic, monarchical, and religious formulations of communities were dwindling in Europe, there arose a need for ‘a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together’;¹⁹ at this time, the modern nation-state and the novel emerged contemporaneously.²⁰ The novel, Anderson suggests, in its construction of an ‘imagined world’ that is ‘clearly bounded’ in space and time, provides a model for the way the imagined community of the nation is conceptualised.²¹ In particular, Anderson writes, the imagining of the nation is built on a conception of the ‘simultaneity’ of its citizens as all those whose ‘meanwhiles’ are

¹⁵ Ibid., 174.

¹⁶ Timothy Brennan, ‘The national longing for form’ in *Nation and Narration* ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 49-50

¹⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 58

¹⁸ Ibid., 78

¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36

²⁰ Ibid., 24-26

²¹ Ibid., 20, 26, 30.

understood to matter to the national narrative.²² All those whose ‘meanwhiles’ lie outside of the relevant simultaneity fall away, off the edges of the page, as it were.

When writing the first snippets of my novel, particularly when depicting the house, which became a metonymic representation of the Peruvian nation, I became conscious of – haunted by – the persons and stories whose ‘meanwhiles’ might be left outside its walls. I came to feel that, any attempt to understand the present was futile without ‘perceiving... the missing and the lost ones and the blind fields they inhabit’.²³ The novel, as with any kind of counterhistorical investigation, became a kind of ghost-work that involved ‘following ghosts’ and ‘putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look’.²⁴ Suddenly, the house became a habitat for spectres. If I began to describe the front door, I found myself wanting to recount where the wood had come from, who had chopped it, who had carved it, the life stories of the woodcutter, the carpenter and the origins of their families. I understand now that this impulse towards the epic, the desire to return to the past and mine myth and archive, is quintessentially Latin American and bound up in pre-Hispanic understandings of time as non-linear and cyclical. The past palpitates in the present and revisits us in the future or, in the words of a popular Aymara saying,

Qhip nayr uñtasis sarnaqapxañani.

We need to walk in the present
with the past before our eyes and

²² Ibid., 24-26.

²³ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 195.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

the future behind our back.²⁵

The question is to which past one turns. Writing historical fiction risks reaffirming the stories which, written by the proverbial victors, have served as ‘the discourse of power’.²⁶ As Michel Foucault argues, history can tend to act in the manner of the genealogies of the Middle Ages which ‘spoke of the antiquity of kingdoms, brought great ancestors back to life, and rediscovered the heroes who founded empires and dynasties’²⁷ all with the goal of reaffirming and legitimising existing power structures.

The genealogy of power in colonial Peruvian history was one that recognised a dual heritage – Inca and Hispanic, American and European – but that sought to subsume the Inca within the Hispanic. Nobles of the Inca royal lineage were established as puppet leaders. *Kurakas*, who had served as administrators of the Inca Empire, were enlisted to help administer the new Spanish colony, overseeing the *mita*, an indentured labour tribute which the Indigenous Peruvian peasant had previously paid to the Inca and now paid to the Spanish conquistador.

The new *criollo-mestizo* elite sought to portray themselves as the inheritors of the glory and rule of the Inca and, to do so, conflated European-ness and Inca-ness. In his *Comentarios Reales de los Incas*, published in 1609, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of a Spanish conquistador and an Inca princess, claimed similarities between the Inca and

²⁵ Sinclair Thomson et al., *The Bolivia Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 11.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

Roman Empires and called the Inca capital city of Cusco a type of Rome.²⁸ Later, during the 1800s, when the Latin American republics were being established and the project of modern nation-building was taking place, Latin American intellectuals were compelled to respond to the purportedly ‘scientific’ theories of racial difference emerging from Europe²⁹ and the claims that racial mixing of the kind that had occurred in Peru ‘had produced a degenerate, unstable people incapable of progressive development’.³⁰ Some Latin Americans responded by affirming pride in racial mixing, like José Vasconcelos whose bizarre and speculative *La raza cósmica* was published in 1925 (a time when eugenics projects were gaining strength in both the Americas and Europe).³¹ Vasconcelos declared pride in the emergence in Latin America of a new ‘cosmic race’ which would be ‘made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples and, for that reason, [be] more capable of true brotherhood and of a truly universal vision’.³²

To a modern reader, Vasconcelos’ ideas are troublingly racist, but placed within their context they might be seen as somehow misguidedly utopian for, while he was celebrating racial mixing, others wished to whiten Latin America, both through policies that

²⁸ An online transcription of the manuscript is available online via El Museo Histórico Regional de Cusco Casa del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega at <http://museogarcilaso.pe/mediaelement/pdf/3-ComentariosReales.pdf>.

²⁹ In infamous ‘works’ such as Arthur de Gobineau’s *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* and those of his contemporaries.

³⁰ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 45.

³¹ See Nancy Stepan’s *The Hour of Eugenics*.

³² José Vasconcelos, ‘The Cosmic Race’, trans. Jaén T. Didier, in *Modern Art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms*, ed. Elaine O’Brien et al. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 408.

would encourage European immigration³³ and by whitening history: for example, many Peruvian intellectuals strove to ‘whiten the Inca by incorporating them into the Aryan race’.³⁴ Commentators and historians of the mid to late 1800s, such as Clemente Palma and William Prescott, claimed that the members of the Inca royal lineage were racially different from (that is, racially whiter than) the Indigenous populations over whom they ruled.³⁵ There emerged, Shane Greene argues, a narrative of ‘Inca Whiteness’ in the discourse of Peruvianidad which has led to the invisibilisation of many of Peru’s diverse communities including Amazonian peoples, the majority of Andeans who could not claim royal Inca descent and, perhaps most notably of all, Afro-Peruvians.³⁶

There has been an African presence in Peru since the very first days of the transatlantic encounter. It is said that the first man to set foot on Peruvian soil during the

³³ Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 45.

³⁴ Shane Greene, ‘Todos Somos Iguales, Todos Somos Incas: Dilemmas of Afro-Peruvian Citizenship and Inca Whiteness in Peru’, in *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin America*, ed. Kwame Dixon and John Burdick (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), 287.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 287-289.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 283. The same can be said of Asian-Peruvians, though Greene does not mention them. Asian-Peruvians, many descended from Chinese and Japanese indentured labourers who were taken to Peru in the 1800s, make up some 3-5% of the Peruvian population today but their contributions to Peruvian culture and nation-building are given little place in the national discourse of Peruvianidad. Much can, and should, be said of the contributions of transpacific migrations to Peruvian history, but these fall outside the remit of this paper. For discussions of Japanese-Peruvian and Chinese-Peruvian literature, I recommend the work of Ignacio López-Calvo, in particular *The Affinity of the Eye: Writing the Nikkei in Peru* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013) and *Dragons in the Land of the Condor: Writing Tusán in Peru* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014).

Spanish expedition of 1529 was an enslaved Black man.³⁷ At the end of the sixteenth century, half of the Limenian population was Black³⁸ and by 1650 Black Peruvians outnumbered white Peruvians.³⁹ But by the early twentieth century the Afro-Peruvian population seemed to have disappeared: the 1940 census suggested that Afro-Peruvians made up just 0.47% of the population.⁴⁰ As Heidi Feldman notes, this represented a population of just 29,000 Black Peruvians, less than a third of the number of Black Peruvians recorded in 1650.⁴¹ How could this be explained?

In part the issue is one of self-identification. Some of the Afro-descendent population now having mixed heritage might identify as racially and ethnically *mestizo* rather than Black or Afro-descendent.⁴² Another factor impacting self-identification might be a lack of clarity in what it meant to identify as Black or Afro-descendent: Heidi Feldman, whose work has highlighted the contribution of Afro-Peruvians to Peruvian culture, suggests that the apparent disappearance of the Afro-descendant in Peru by 1940 may have been due to the invisibilisation of Afro-Peruvian culture resulting in an indistinctness in what it meant to be

³⁷ Henry F. Dobyns and Paul L. Doughty, *Peru: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 62, cited in Heidi Carolyn Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 2.

³⁸ Frederick Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 75.

³⁹ Feldman, *Black Rhythms*, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴² Christine Hünefeldt seems to suggest this interpretation when she writes, ‘The complexion of Peruvian society has grown lighter over the past two centuries’. See Christine Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price of Freedom: Family and Labor Among Lima’s Slaves, 1800-1854* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 6.

Afro-Peruvian.⁴³ During the early Peruvian Republic, while republican intellectuals engaged with what to do about the so-called ‘Indian problem’ and attempted to draw the Indigenous population into the nation-building project, Afro-Peruvians were imagined out of Peruanidad⁴⁴. To this day, the common perception of Peru as the land of the Incas conquered by the Spanish has caused the African contribution to Peruvian history and culture to be too often forgotten. As Greene asserts,

The status of Afro-Peruvians is particularly difficult to visualize from the point of view of Peru’s national narrative because they are represented as both not Inca and not Indian: neither as contributors to Peru’s national ‘civilization’ nor indigenous to Peruvian soil.⁴⁵

Despite the relative invisibility of Afro-Peruvians in the national narrative, Africans and Afro-descendants played an important role in the building of the Peruvian nation and Peru’s *criollo* culture since the very earliest days of the transatlantic encounter. Black men were part of every expedition undertaken by Francisco Pizarro’s company.⁴⁶ Enslaved Africans were brought to Peru as early as 1529 to build roads and bridges and fought

⁴³ Heidi Carolyn Feldman, ‘Strategies of the Black Pacific: Music and Diasporic Identity in Peru’, in *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin American*, ed. Kwame Dixon and John Burdick (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012), 43-44.

⁴⁴ See Tanya Maria Golash-Boza, *Yo Soy Negro: Blackness in Peru* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 62-64.

⁴⁵ Greene, ‘Todos Somos’, 283.

⁴⁶ Bowser, *The African Slave*, 3.

alongside the conquistadors in quelling the revolt of Manco Inca in 1535-1536.⁴⁷ In the 1780s, free Afro-Peruvians formed the majority of the troops that defeated Túpac Amaru and went on to fight in the battles for independence, on the side of the Crown, in the early 1800s.⁴⁸ In arts and culture, African origins can be traced in Peruvian *criollo* music and dance: in *Black Rhythms of Peru*, Feldman explores the Afro-Peruvian origins of key Peruvian instruments, most notably the *cajón*; dances such as the *zamacueca*, *festejo* and *marinera*; and music styles with West African influences including ‘polyrhythms, layered percussion, call-and-response vocals [and] metric complexity’.⁴⁹ In the nineteenth century, Pancho Fierro (born to an enslaved woman but manumitted at birth) achieved notoriety as a *costumbrista* painter and José Manuel Valdés as a poet.

Nevertheless, the African tends to be left out of a Peruvian national imaginary which perpetuates the narrative of a dual Inca-Hispanic heritage. Feldman notes that in the countries of the South American Pacific coast, Afro-descendants tend to be more socially invisible when compared with, for example, Afro-descendants in central America or Brazil. Feldman juxtaposes Paul Gilroy’s ‘model of the black Atlantic, a cultural world made up of citizens of Africa, Europe, and the Americas who share a transnational community linked by waterways, commerce, expressive culture forms’⁵⁰ with what she calls the Black Pacific, ‘a second diaspora on the margins of the black Atlantic’.⁵¹ Enslaved persons brought from Africa to the Black Pacific had not only endured the Atlantic passage but further land and water-based

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4-7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 333-334.

⁴⁹ Feldman, *Black Rhythms*, 4.

⁵⁰ Feldman, ‘Strategies of the Black Pacific’, 44. See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 2002).

⁵¹ Feldman, ‘Strategies of the Black Pacific’, 44.

journeys from Cartagena, through Panama and south along the Pacific coast. These further journeys might span years or generations and compounded the Afro-descendent population's separation from their countries and cultures of origin.

As such, in the Black Pacific, conceptions of African-ness seem to have played a lesser role in the identity formation of the Peruvian nation. Feldman notes, whereas 'black Atlantic double consciousness results from dual identification with premodern Africa and the modern West, the black Pacific negotiates ambiguous relationships with local *criollo* and Indigenous culture and with the black Atlantic itself'.⁵² The same is true of collective memories of slavery. Tanya Maria Golash-Boza's research with the Black population of the northern Peruvian village of Ingenio de Buenos Aires found that neither a collective memory of slavery nor concepts of African-ness were central to ideas of what it meant to be a Black Peruvian.⁵³ Indeed, several of her participants did not even know about the history of the African slave trade and, when asked about slavery, they referred instead to the exploitative practices of *hacienda* owners towards their workers, conditions that persisted well into the twentieth century and were not exclusive to Black Peruvians.⁵⁴

It seems that the disarticulation of connections to originary African lands and cultures caused by the Middle Passage was further compounded in the Black Pacific. However, during the 1950s to the 1970s, a revival of Afro-Peruvian arts, particularly music and dance, took place in Peru, famously led by the Santa Cruz family. Because of the licence afforded to the artist, the arts are a powerful means of excavating lost memories and filling gaps in the archive. As Feldman explains, conceptions of Peruvian Blackness or African-ness were excavated not from Africa but from Brazil and the Caribbean and also from essentialist ideas

⁵² Ibid., 45.

⁵³ Golash-Boza, *Yo Soy Negro*, 28-58.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 54.

about embodied memory within the Black body.⁵⁵ While some of the creative practices and theories propounded by the Santa Cruzes might be seen as problematic (in their essentialising attitudes towards Blackness and the Black body) or historically inaccurate, the revival nonetheless helped ‘mobilize a new sense of racial identity in a generation of Afro-Peruvians’.⁵⁶ Today, the Afro-descendent presence is more widely recognised in Peru: in the 2017 Peruvian census, the first to record self-identification of race or ethnicity since 1940, 3.6% of respondents identified as Afro-descendent,⁵⁷ with the highest proportions in the north western coastal departments of Lambayeque, Piura, and Tumbes, where 8.4%, 8.9% and 11.5% respectively identified as Afro-descendent.⁵⁸

As a writer, I am interested in the power of the literary arts, and particularly the novel, to recover ancestral memories that have been lost. History is rarely told with the stories and subjectivities of the Every(wo)man and its centre. Even more rarely is it told from the perspective of the subjugated individual. The story of Afro-descendent or Indigenous Peruvians, if it is told, is often told as a ‘metahistory’⁵⁹ that treats the Indigenous, African and Afro-descendent populations as an ‘amorphous mass’.⁶⁰ Almost never is the individual African or Indigenous Peruvian the protagonist on the stage of history. In her essay ‘Literary Imagination and Living History’, Sabina Murray muses on her experiences of researching and

⁵⁵ Feldman, ‘Strategies of the Black Pacific’, 47-54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁷ Peru. Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. 2018. *Perú: Perfil Sociodemográfico Informe Nacional*. Lima. [https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_ digitales/Est/Lib1539/libro.pdf](https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1539/libro.pdf), 214.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵⁹ Feldman, *Black Rhythms*, XX.

⁶⁰ To borrow a phrase used by Brooke Larson in *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 250.

writing historical fiction. She notes that history, like fiction, is structured, taught, and remembered around characters⁶¹ – the Christopher Columbuses, Henry VIIIs, and Abraham Lincolns. In the Peruvian historical narrative these protagonists would include figures such as Atahualpa, Francisco Pizarro, El Libertador San Martín – royal Incas, conquistadors and republican revolutionaries. But what about the stories of the everyday individuals whose lives were lived and ended in the margins of (or entirely unrecorded by) the pages of the archive?

The Latin American paper archive is particularly likely to perpetuate, in Foucault's words, 'the great uninterrupted jurisprudence of long-established power'⁶² of the *criollo* elite: as Ángel Rama argues in *The Lettered City*, power in colonial Latin America became concentrated in the Hispanic, Iberian-facing urban sites where institutions that privileged the written word crafted the trajectory of the nation and elevated a literate, Creole elite who, certainly in Peru, largely still dominate to this day. The *letrados*, as Rama dubs them, held the power, and literateness was, he suggests, revered on a par with the sacred. The colonising mission of 'civilising' the Indigenous rural populations was achieved through the imposition of European conceptions of education, law-making and governance that were centred on literacy and Castilian Spanish.⁶³ Though Peruvians of Indigenous descent (like Guaman Poma and el Inca Garcilaso de la Vega) made significant contributions to the written archive, they tended to be wealthy, socially powerful, and either allied with, married to, or partly descended from Spanish colonisers. The average Indigenous Peruvian, the Afro-descendant, the Asian-Peruvian, fell outside the edges of the page, waiting for revisionist historians to

⁶¹ Sabina Murray, 'Literary Imagination and Living History,' *Massachusetts Review* 54, no.1 (2013): 42.

⁶² Foucault, *Society*, 70-71.

⁶³ Ángel Rama, *The Lettered City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 13.

excavate their ‘counterhistory’ (in the words of Foucault) by listening to the ‘darkness and silence’⁶⁴ to which they were relegated by Hispanocentric, graphocentric history.

I have tried to people my novel with characters who would ordinarily not feature in a history of the Peruvian nation. There is the *ñusta*, Chimpu Yupanqui (a merging of the Inca princesses like Beatriz Clara and Quispe Sisa who were bartered in marriage to conquistadors) who becomes a matriarch to the novel’s dynastic family line alongside another matriarch, Fatimah, a Muslim merchant who is enslaved when the city of Malaga is surrendered to the Christians in 1487. Descended from Fatimah is her son Hamet, a ‘passionate poet, learned astronomer, and indefatigable escapee’⁶⁵ from slavery who eventually travels to the New World alongside a conquistador with whom he has made a bargain for his freedom. There is an Indigenous man, Sayani Cahua, who serves in the colonial *mita*, and the *kuraka* who oversees Sayani’s indentured servitude. There are also characters to represent those brought across the Pacific: Leung Huang, brought from China to labour on the guano islands, and Haruto Higa, who arrives on the Sakura Maru, among the first Japanese men in Peru.

The enslaved African and Afro-descendent characters in my novel arose from the pregnant silences in the sixteenth to nineteenth century manuscripts I studied in the Biblioteca Nacional in August 2018. By chance, as I searched the catalogue for manuscripts relating to the African slave trade, an entry arose which mentioned a *Francisco de Talavera*. My breath hitched – I recognised this name as one I had seen in my own family tree. When I clicked on the hyperlink, the catalogue offered me a summary of the manuscript:

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Society*, 70.

⁶⁵ This quotation is taken from my novel’s unpublished manuscript.

*Manumission. Francisco de Talavera, resident of the City of Kings, grants liberty to a black slave woman named Brígida, aged thirty-five, and to her son named Juan, aged four.*⁶⁶

As I sat in my study, papers spread out on my desk, my fingers poised on the mouse, reading and rereading this summary, the silence of my empty house seemed to populate with voices. Their whispers declared me guilty and certainly I felt heavy with contrition. Here was proof of the cruelties that lurked in my ancestry. And yet, here, too, there were whispers of hope – perhaps this Francisco de Talavera had been a merciful man. He had, after all, granted Brígida freedom. Still more voices accused me of naivety because, look here, another manuscript was listed in which this Francisco de Talavera was recorded as sending an enslaved man, Anton, to a Francisco Muñoz in Chile.⁶⁷ I should not deceive myself: this Talavera had clearly bought, sold and dealt in enslaved persons many times. And what was the most likely motivation for Talavera’s release of mother and child? Perhaps this child was his own son?

When I came to study the manuscripts in person, I saw that the dates meant that my two Franciscos could not be the same: the Francisco de Talavera who had manumitted Brígida had done so in 1551 whereas my Francisco de Talavera y Araujo, mayor of Jauja, had lived more than one hundred years later. I had no evidence to link the two men. And yet the contrition I felt of inherited guilt remained and I could not help but think often about this

⁶⁶ This is the description entered in the Peruvian Biblioteca Nacional’s online catalogue for the Fondo Antiguo: Lima, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Colección Indiana, MS Código de Barras 2000022797, Signatura XI-FN1775.

⁶⁷ Lima, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Colección Indiana, MS Código de Barras 2000022772, Signatura XI-FN1750.

Brígida and her son Juan and what had become of them. I read in another manuscript of a Black woman named Maria, seized in 1815, along with her nine-year-old daughter and four-year-old son as they walked in Cusco.⁶⁸ Unable to prove their free status, all three were valued and sold. Had Brígida and Juan been allowed to live freely in peace, I wondered, almost three hundred years earlier? Or were they, too, captured by a mercenary and resold? And what had become of Maria and her little ones?

There was no way to answer my questions about Brígida and Juan, Maria and her children. There were only other manuscripts about other enslaved persons, like Maria Rosa Sagal who in 1810 petitioned for the manumission of her son Julian on account of his master's excessive corporal punishments.⁶⁹ Or like Rafaela Marín, who in 1825 petitioned for her own freedom because of her master's subjection of her body to acts 'contrary to the natural order' to satisfy his 'inappropriate misdemeanours' despite the 'burden and repugnance of her conscience'.⁷⁰ These women – protective mothers, abuse survivors – stayed with me even when I had returned to the archival assistant the crumbling, yellowed pages in which I had met them. They became, in my novel, *Bulanda*, a woman from the Central African Kingdom of Luba, and her generations of descendants, including Dominga who, through her astute understanding of the judicial system, shrewdly arranges the manumission of one of her daughters; Miercoles Primera, whose master murders her husband and fathers her daughter; and Miercoles Segunda, the twin sister who escapes slavery to start her own business in the capital.

⁶⁸ Lima, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Colección General, MS Código de Barras 2000015434, Signatura D8785.

⁶⁹ Lima, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Archivo Astete Concha, MS Código de Barras 2000028309, Signatura Z713.

⁷⁰ Lima, Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, Colección General, MS Código de Barras 2000019046, Signatura D12586.

In my research I have been aided by historians who have set out to recover untold stories. In her *Bound Lives*, Rachel Sarah O'Toole has applied what she calls 'microhistorical and ethnohistorical techniques'⁷¹ in studying how African and Andean populations in Peru's northern coastal region interacted with one another (both cooperatively and in conflict), oftentimes using their position in and knowledge of the caste system to resist or better their circumstances. O'Toole's method has focused around '[s]mall pieces of evidence from multiple sources [that] need to be pulled together to explain why a particular individual acted in a particular way'.⁷² In particular O'Toole uses snippets of stories (including 'rumor, gossip, hearsay, and eyewitness accounts'⁷³) found in court documents and notarial records from cases brought by or about African and Andean Peruvians. Because of her focus on microhistories, O'Toole is able to record the stories of African and Andean persons who feel (and I speak now as a writer) real and three-dimensional. They are not an amorphous backdrop to the better-known figures in Peru's genealogy; they are protagonists with names, countries and communities of origin, relationships and motivated actions. They are not faceless, archetypal victims but rather full persons imbued with consciousness and subjectivity, albeit that their subjectivity must be based on O'Toole's own inferences drawn from the documentation.

Christine Hünefeldt's *Paying the price of freedom* takes the praxis of uncovering counterhistories a step further: Hünefeldt seeks to challenge the axiom of Peruvian history

⁷¹ Rachel Sarah O'Toole, *Bound Lives: Africans, Indians, and the Making of Race in Colonial Peru* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 13.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

that *Ramón Castilla... nos dió la libertad*⁷⁴ [Ramón Castilla... gave us freedom] by demonstrating the diverse ways enslaved Afro-Peruvians had been acquiring and purchasing their own freedom prior to the emancipation in 1854.⁷⁵ To illustrate her archival discoveries, Hünefeldt dedicates her first chapter to the ‘fictive reconstruction of the life of a slave family’ whom she calls the Lasmanuelos.⁷⁶ Hünefeldt’s creation of the Lasmanuelos begs the question – where is the line between historical enquiry and historical fiction?

The line is a blurred one if we recognise that history is constructed – a narrative influenced by the subjectivity of the historian and the epistemes of the place and time in which the historian lives.⁷⁷ That is not to say there are no historical facts, but as readers of the past we must be aware that we are drawing inferences into the blanks between those facts.⁷⁸ Similarly, we can understand that there may have been causal links between past events, but reading causation backwards is, once again, an act of inference. As Sabina Murray puts it, ‘we agree on a few key items – things, dates, the names of people... and between these intermittent anchors, we create linkages’.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ These words are from a popular refrain included in the lyrics of ‘Que Viva mi Mamá’, a festejo by Nicomedes Santa Cruz. A modern cover of the song can be heard on: Hermanos Santa Cruz, ‘Que Viva mi Mamá’, track 7 on *Afro Peru*, MGP, 2011, CD.

⁷⁵ Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price*, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁷ See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., ‘The Challenge of Poetics to (Normal) Historical Practice,’ *Poetics Today* 9, no.2 (1988): 435-452.

⁷⁸ I am influenced here by Wolfgang Iser’s literary theory that a text’s meaning emerges from the reader reading into the blanks of the text. See Wolfgang Iser, ‘Interaction between Text and Reader,’ in *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton & Company, 2001), 1673-1682.

⁷⁹ Murray, ‘Literary Imagination’, 45.

Mercifully (and I hope the reader will forgive me if I am perceived as deftly side-stepping the debate), as a novelist I do not feel compelled to define where the line lies between conventional ‘history’ and historical fiction because I present my work to readers as the latter. As such, while my work is inspired by and based on archival enquiry, I invite my reader to understand that I have also prioritised aesthetic quality in narrative and style; I have crafted the work to affect the heart as well as the brain; and I have embraced my subjectivity as writer, rather than tried to cast myself off as conventional historical enquiry might demand in the name of academic objectivity.

Central to my Self as a writer (my writing self) and to my praxis is my intention to complicate the narrative of the Peruvian nation by unearthing the untold stories of those excluded from the Peruvian imaginary. I recognise that this ideology of inclusivity emerges from my own experiences of being always outside the imaginary of both of my nations. When in Peru, I was seen as English. When in England, I was Peruvian, and where exactly is the Peruvian located in Englishness? Growing up in the interstice, I came to understand that my acceptance within either culture was a matter of performance. That the reason I felt like two separate persons in one skin was because culture – which for each of my parents felt like an inherent essence – was performative and I, between two cultures, had to learn to become the chameleon.

If, to borrow from Homi K. Bhabha, ‘the production of the nation [is in] narration’⁸⁰ and culture is performed from ‘scraps, patches and rags of daily life’,⁸¹ for me my novel has been a performance of my own cultural identity: I am affirming and cementing for *myself* my Peruvian-ness and, in my novel about the building of the Peruvian nation, I am building a

⁸⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation’ in *Nation and Narration* ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 209.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

place to store my own memories – personal and ancestral, ‘real’ and imagined. I recognise, too, as Jerome de Groot notes, that the historical novel can be ‘a tool for national self-definition... part of the typology of nationhood and [it] helps to define what Benedict Anderson terms the “imagined communities” of countries’.⁸² I dare to hope that my novel can play a small part in inserting into Peru’s narration of the nation those stories which have previously been excluded.

In choosing to write a historical novel that resurrects counterhistories, I am a child of my time. Virginia Brackett suggests that beginning in the 1970s there was a new trend in the historical novel: ‘a new focus on previously marginalized ethnicities, as well as on women and children in history’ led to a raft of historical fiction that undertook ‘the task of re-visioning history through the eyes of those who were invisible in traditional history’.⁸³ Marni Gauthier in *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction* notes that the final two decades of the twentieth century (the decades of my birth and early childhood) were defined by ‘a paradox of two cultural phenomena... official denial and historical amnesia on one hand and public, cooperative attempts at truth telling and redress on the other’.⁸⁴ In response to brutal conflicts, governments around the world launched truth commissions to establish what would be the recorded narratives that would form the basis of the collective memory for future generations.⁸⁵ This is also true of Peru, where a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in 2001 to report on the Internal Armed Conflict of 1980-2000 during which an

⁸² Jerome De Groot, *The Historical Novel: the New Critical Idiom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 94. Here, De Groot is referencing Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*.

⁸³ Virginia Brackett, *Critical Insights: Historical Fiction* (Amenia: Grey House Publishing, 2018), xvii.

⁸⁴ Marni Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction: Counterhistory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-2.

⁸⁵ Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress*, 4.

estimated 70,000 people were killed or disappeared⁸⁶ and a further 600,000 people were displaced.⁸⁷ Gauthier suggests that out of this cultural and political landscape of amnesia and redress there arose a new genre of historical novel which she calls ‘the contemporary truth-telling historical novel’⁸⁸ which strives to challenge established national narratives by mining counterhistories.

Gauthier defines the contemporary truth-telling historical novel not only by its attention to the ‘neglected or alternate historical archive’⁸⁹ in its content but also by its deployment of what Doris Sommer calls ‘a rhetoric of particularism’.⁹⁰ Particularist writers employ a range of literary strategies that widen and emphasise the gap between reader and text, especially regarding culturally bounded knowledge. Sommer notes that the seasoned reader who approaches texts with an expectation of (and sense of entitlement to) intimacy may need to relearn how to approach particularist texts which can be intentionally ‘uncooperative’ and ‘reticent’.⁹¹ As Gauthier puts it, particularist writers ‘inscribe an epistemological resistance within the telling ... invit[ing] readers to perceive rather than to

⁸⁶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission gave an estimated lower limit of 61,007 and upper limit of 77,552. See Peru. La Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, ‘¿Cuántos Peruanos murieron? Estimación del total de víctimas causadas por el conflicto armado interno entre 1980 y el 2000’ in *Informe Final de La Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación*, 2003, Anexo 2, 13.

⁸⁷ La Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, *Hatún Willakuy: Versión Abreviada del Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* (Lima: La Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2004), 388.

⁸⁸ Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress*, 21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*.

⁹⁰ Doris Sommer, *Proceed with Caution, when Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1-34.

⁹¹ Sommer, *Proceed with Caution*, 1-16.

merely consume the story'.⁹² As Sommer explains, particularist texts 'sting' readers with '[t]he slap of refused intimacy [and] slow readers down, detain them at the boundary' and refuse 'to surrender cultural difference for the sake of universal meaning'.⁹³ Particularist texts inscribe difference and distance between text and reader to interrogate whose 'socially differentiated understanding' is centric and whose peripheral.⁹⁴

In detaining the reader to question and contemplate difference, Gauthier posits that contemporary truth-telling historical novels 'manifest... contemporary theoretical debates about the complex relationship between narrativity and historical referent and about narrating the nation'.⁹⁵ If traditional historians have always been striving to find the 'truth' they have been labouring under the belief that they could seek that truth objectively. However, as Robert Berkhofer explains, although 'the historian's written history acts as if it were a transparent medium...between the past and the reader's mind',⁹⁶ 'normal' historical practice is conducted using the praxis and methods of narrative. History is, in essence, an attempt to try to organise an absent Great Past (unknowable to the individual historian but hypothetically contained 'in the mind of God or the Omniscient Historian'⁹⁷) into a Great Story. This Great Story, or its partial stories, are narrated in such a way as to present their content as 'the natural order of things' when it is in fact merely 'the illusion of realism'.⁹⁸ In practice, the Great Story emerges from the intertextuality of the works of diverse historical practitioners

⁹² Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress*, 22.

⁹³ Sommer, *Proceed with Caution*, ix.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁵ Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress*, 27-28.

⁹⁶ Berkhofer, 'The Challenge of Poetics', 436.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 443.

working with the sources that the presumed Great Past has left behind.⁹⁹ This being the case, Berkhofer suggests it is time to call into question the conventions of historical writing, in particular ‘the omniscient viewpoint... the third person voice, and maybe the ethnocentrism evident so long in history productions’.¹⁰⁰

Traditional historical practice requires the historian to perform a fallacy of objectivity and traditional academic style strives to make the author transparent. In contrast, the fiction writer embraces their own subjectivity in their endeavour. The novel can make the reader aware of both the author’s and the reader’s relative distance from or proximity to the stories being uncovered. In my practice, my own distance from the stories and communities I write about is a source of regular reflection and even anxiety. How can I find the stories that have been previously excluded? And, if I uncover these stories, how can I be faithful to them and to the persons who lived them? How can I try to represent their cultures and ‘local knowledges’ (in Foucault’s words¹⁰¹) when I am so distant in space, time, and episteme?

One of my approaches has been to acknowledge and inscribe the gaps and uncertainty – both of the archive and my own understanding – into the novel. When Bulanda is in Cartagena, far from her Luba homeland, she carves a lukasa in her mind as a means of resisting the dislocation of the Middle Passage. In the Luba Kingdom of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (as well as in Luba societies today), community stories and memories were recorded, shared and re-interpreted via the lukasa, a memory board on which beads, shells, and carvings represent events.¹⁰² These memory boards record the stories of Luba

⁹⁹ Ibid., 445.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 448.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *Society*, 10.

¹⁰² Mary H. Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, ‘Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History,’ *African Arts* 29, no.1 (1996): 26.

history and are ‘read’ by the Bambudye (also called Mbudye) or Men of Memory. During my archival research, I did not find historical records to confirm that early Afro-Peruvians knew how to craft or interpret the lukasa. However I did find evidence that people were brought from the Luba region. In recognition of the loss of ancestral memories that occurred for Afro-descendants on the Black Pacific and the tendency to treat ‘Africans’ brought to Peru as a homogenous mass rather than as coming from distinct homelands and cultures, I felt that there was space in Peruvian national memory for a greater awareness of the specific elements of the cultures that early Afro-Peruvians might have brought to Peru. Thus, in my novel I write,

Now, on this new continent among these strangers with alien words, without tools or wood or beads with which to craft a physical lukasa, she constructed a lukasa in her mind. With her thoughts, she shaped it: she carved it with the legends of Kongolo and Mbidi the Hunter and also with the faces of the people she had known. She glued to it the smell of the earth and the texture of the tortoise shell and the fear of the journey she had just undertaken. Onto it, she poured the sound of her true name, not Ana Angola but Bulanda Ilunga, and with her fingers she beat upon it the rhythm of the ritual drums. At last, painfully, with her own fingernails, she inscribed upon it the outline of her husband and, with her tears, she polished it.

I hope that, through this metaphor of the lukasa and the references to Luba arts and narrative, I have resurrected some experiences of some of the first Afro-Peruvians. However I am also aware of the great distance of my position from men and women like Bulanda and so

I write into the lukasa metaphor the gaps that exist in my understanding, in the archive, and in the cultural memory of the Black Pacific:

...the artefact of her memory became tangible: she could turn it over in her hands, feel its grooves and nicks at her fingertips, hold it up to her face and peer through its holes, for already it had holes – gaps in her knowledge where something was forgotten. Already, she could not recall the sound of her mother’s laughter...

With each successive generation, the lukasa was whittled down, a narrower and paler imitation of the one that Bulanda had constructed. The holes became wider – wide enough, at first, for a needle, then a twig, then for a finger to poke through. But Bulanda’s daughters and grand-daughters were resourceful, and they plugged these holes with the materials at their disposal – with stories from other kingdoms and other peoples, invented in other tongues, shared from companion to companion. To their lukasas they added Viracocha and the Vírgen María, sahumeros and ekekos, chupacabras and hapiñuñu. Into the gaps they crammed the zamacueca and the alcatraz, the marinera and the lundu, the cajón, the flauta, the festejo, and the guitar... And every now and then, when there was a stubborn hole that nothing else could fill, they would dream they heard a voice laughing, echoing to them from across the sea.

Bulanda's lukasa is an isolated example of my attempt to incorporate, through the metaphors and metonymies of the novel, the diverse cultures that have (or might have) contributed to contemporary Peru. For the creative writer, as for the museum curator, objects are potent: objects seem to have the power to imbibe their owners and are shaped by the ontologies and customs of times past.¹⁰³ The objects in my novel do metonymic work, standing for lost cultures and cultural practices.

But it is not only the objects and characters in the novel that are crafted to excavate counterhistories. I have striven to underpin the narrative itself with the cosmologies and knowledges that were marginalised by the Christian, Hispanic understanding of the universe. Key to my organisation of the narrative has been the Andean, pre-Hispanic concept of *pacha*, a Quechua word in which, as Atuq Eusebio Manga Qespi explains, 'están imbricados el espacio y el tiempo, a la vez' [both space and time are imbricated at once].¹⁰⁴ *Pacha* unites together what in Western, Newtonian ontology are two entirely separate entities – three-dimensional static space (with its dimensions of length, breadth, and depth) and dynamic time.¹⁰⁵ The result, per Manga Qespi, is that 'el pasado, presente y devenir en los Andes se ubican en el mismo espacio y el mismo tiempo' [the past, present and future in the Andes are located in the same space and at the same time].¹⁰⁶ It is a conception which the discoveries of modern physics suggest is not far from the order of the universe.¹⁰⁷ In the key spaces of my

¹⁰³ Murray, 'Literary Imagination', 47.

¹⁰⁴ Atuq Eusebio Manga Qespi, 'Pacha: un concepto andino de espacio y tiempo,' *Revista Española de Antropología Americana*, 24 (1994): 156. My translation.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 157. My translation.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. My translation.

¹⁰⁷ For a fascinating and accessible summary, I would recommend Carlo Rovelli's *The Order of Time*, trans. Erica Segre and Simon Carnell (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

novel, all time (including time which, according to a Western, Newtonian paradigm, has passed or not yet arrived) is present. And by ‘present’ here I mean the opposite of absent. All time is *there*, inextricably and inexorably part of the fabric of the place.

By way of example, the Atlantic Ocean – a central space in my novel – can be revisited by any time infinitely: when one of my central characters dies she sees,

...superimposed upon the flattened Earth – Time, spread like an ocean, flowing this way and that, tossing up moments, driving them forwards on the crest of a wave, then swallowing them again, pulling them back into the deep. Here, rising from the waters, she sees the first tentative caravels, soaring on the *volta do mar*, exploring the southern seas, ascertaining that the oceans were not – as had been feared – boiling hot or teeming with monsters. She discerns, among these caravels, the ship of Lopo Gonçaves crossing the equator, of Cristoforo Colombo aiming for Asia, of Francisco Pizarro drawing nearer and nearer, yes, all these ships drawing nearer and nearer while, on land, at the centre of the Tawantinsuyu, the Sapa Inca does not see what is approaching, does not see that a pachacuti is coming...

During this ascension scene, the dying woman comes to understand that ‘every point on the Earth had been and was being and again would be visited and revisited by the moments that had passed by already, infinite times before’. My portrayal of the Atlantic Ocean here is inspired by the *mappa mundi* of Guaman Poma and his descriptions of South American geography. In his first new chronicle, Guaman Poma describes the Inca world as extending

from the South Sea to the North Sea,¹⁰⁸ understood to mean the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.¹⁰⁹ In his mappa mundi, Guaman Poma draws the Tawantinusyo framed by two bodies of water that extend above and below the land like two arcs.¹¹⁰

For Guaman Poma, it is unlikely that his mappa mundi was meant to depict only static, geographic space. Instead the two framing oceans would have represented what other Indigenous chroniclers called the *jananqucha* [ocean of above] and the *urinqucha* [ocean of below]¹¹¹ which were also temporal entities in that *janan pacha* is the space-time comprising both spatial above-ness and temporal recent-ness, located in the visible realm of *tiqsi pacha*, while *urin pacha* is the space-time of below-ness and ancient-ness, located in the non-visible realm of *kaylla pacha*. Manga Qespi notes that Guaman Poma's mappa mundi does not depict the Kingdom of Castile, though Guaman Poma clearly understood that Castile existed geographically, as seen in another drawing in which 'las Yndias del Piru' [the Indies of Peru] are depicted at the top of the page 'en lo alto' [literally, 'in the high'], underneath a shining sun, while Castilla is at the bottom of the page 'en lo avajo' [literally, 'in the below'], drawn under a horizontal line bisecting the page.¹¹² Manga Qespi's understanding of this second drawing is that Guaman Poma was depicting Castile as located in the *urin* and *kaylla pacha* or non-visible realm of before-and-below-ness, while the Inca Empire was located in the

¹⁰⁸ This page can be viewed on the Danish Royal Library's facsimile copy of the chronicle at <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/343/en/text/?open=idm46287306165344>.

¹⁰⁹ Roland Hamilton in the notes to *The First New Chronicle*, 323.

¹¹⁰ The mappa mundi is reproduced in Manga Qespi's 'Pacha' on page 186 or the original page can be viewed on the Danish Royal Library's facsimile copy of the chronicle at <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/1001/en/text/?open=idm46287305913392>.

¹¹¹ Manga Qespi, 'Pacha', 168.

¹¹² This second drawing is reproduced in Manga Qespi's 'Pacha' on page 187 or the original page can be viewed at <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/42/en/image/?open=idm45693537053136>.

visible, upper, and more recent realm. Thus Guaman Poma would have understood Europe to have been, quite literally, the Old World. Moreover, Manga Qespi suggests, he would have found in the label ‘indios’, used by the Spaniards for the native population, a confirmation for his spatio-temporal conception of the relative placement of the Inca Empire and Castile: for him, the ‘indios’ would have meant the people found ‘en dia’ or ‘in the light of the day’ of the visible, recent, upper realm.¹¹³

How, then, would Guaman Poma have conceptualised the Atlantic Ocean as a temporal as well as spatial entity? Manga Qespi argues that the oceans were contact zones between the literal Old and New Worlds.¹¹⁴ Thus, crossing the oceans was a form of temporal as well as spatial travel. Returning to Guaman Poma’s *mappa mundi*, Manga Qespi interprets the upper semi-circular ocean as the beginnings of the *urinqucha* [ocean of below],¹¹⁵ beyond which the non-visible realm, including the non-visible Castile, would be found.

Why then is the lower ocean now in the upper position of the *mappa mundi*? The answer is that there has been an inversion or overturning of the relative spatio-temporal positions. The Andean concept of *pacha* conceives of space-time as moving in a series of loops such that, though time passes into the realm of ancient-ness and below-ness, it will eventually resurge into the upper realm as the future.¹¹⁶ This resurgence is, in Andean cosmology, a *pachacuti*. In Quechua the suffix *cuti* or *kuti* comes from a verb which means to turn and to return. *Pachacuti* is therefore a cataclysmic overturning of space-time with connotations of return or reversal and the Spanish conquest and dissolution of the Inca Empire were interpreted as such. As Manga Qespi explains,

¹¹³ Manga Qespi, ‘Pacha’, 172.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

...el viejo mundo, que en principio se encontraba en situación pasiva y latente en la zona no-visible o *urin*, emerge como activo y «conquistador» y así, transcurrido el tiempo, se torna en *janan* (acción representada en el rey cristiano), nueva situación que subvertiría a los andinos a la antigua zona de *urin*, que antes estaba ocupado por el viejo mundo.

[...the old world, which at first was found in the passive and latent position in the non-visible or *urin* realm, emerges as active and ‘conquistador’ and, in this way, with the passage of time, turns into *janan*... a new position which subverts the Andeans into the old zone of *urin*, which was previously occupied by the old world].¹¹⁷

The concept of *pachacuti* is a deconstructive one, collapsing the binaries between visible/invisible, past/future, present/absent. In promising that what is absent will return again, that the past will arise as a revenant, a *pachacuti* is a haunted phenomenon, undermining the ‘reassuring order of presents’¹¹⁸ on which Western conceptions of time and conventional historical enquiry are founded. It promises ghosts and asks us the same question asked by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, namely ‘whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future’.¹¹⁹ *Pachacuti* promises the chilling prospect also articulated in the Book of Ecclesiastes:

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 184. My translation.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), p.48.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.48.

*What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.*¹²⁰

Pachacuti has become the underpinning concept that shapes my methodology in the researching and writing of counterhistorical narrative. I see the practice of retrieving counterhistories as an academic *pachacuti*, excavating, raising, and bringing into the light those stories of the past which have been relegated to the ‘darkness and silence’¹²¹ of the non-visible and subordinated realm. In addressing ghosts, I am conscious that ‘I cannot settle my debt’ to them, but I can speak with them and, more importantly, hear them speak.¹²² Unlike the ghost of Hamlet, I have not found that they come to demand vengeance. Instead their request has been, first, to mourn: to grieve those whom the dominant narrative of the nation has treated as ‘ungrievable’, to use Judith Butler’s term, because of their exclusion from the community of relevant ‘meanwhiles’ and because they are, by now, ‘always already dead’.¹²³ The call to mourn has been to grieve not only ‘the lost subjects of history’¹²⁴ but also what Derrida has called ‘modalized presents’¹²⁵ – those pasts, presents and futures that *might have*,

¹²⁰ Ecclesiastes 1:9, Holy Bible: New International Version.

¹²¹ Foucault, *Society*, 70.

¹²² Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, ‘Spectrographies’ in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and haunting in contemporary cultural theory* ed. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.41 and Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.xviii.

¹²³ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006) and *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge Classics, 2011), p.xiv.

¹²⁴ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p.195.

¹²⁵ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.xix.

could have, should have been. What paths might have otherwise been taken? What lives otherwise lived? What ancestors born? Through my novel I ask the reader to engage with alternate or contingent memories, including time-‘lines’ in which they might have been the ‘lost ones’ of history or, indeed, not have *been* at all. Thus the reader is herself erased, displaced, rendered spectral.

In mourning, I understood the ghosts’ second injunction: to consider *what might yet be*. To mourn in advance the injustices that might be coming and, insofar as possible, set them right. I invite the reader to ask herself, *To whom do I owe responsibility?* Is it possible that we owe a duty of ‘justice concerning those who are not there... who are no longer or who are *not yet present and living*’?¹²⁶ In this way (I hope) my novel is not just about counterhistory but also *counterfuturity*, a version of the to-come which, if we continue our current trajectory, will never materialise but which, if we accept the ghostly invitation to learn the lessons of the past and imagine alternative, modalised futures, is a version of the yet-to-come which *could yet be*.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.xviii. My emphasis.

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