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Postcolonial Violence and Indigeneity in the testimonio

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## 1 | Chapter 12

### 2 | Postcolonial Violence and Indigeneity in the *testimonio*. *Andean* 3 | *Lives. Gregorio Condori Mamani and Asunta Quispe Huamán*

4 | Ahmed Correa and Ignacio López-Calvo

5 | The *testimonio* *Gregorio Condori Mamani: autobiografía* (*Andean Lives. Gregorio*

6 | *Condori Mamani and Asunta Quispe Huamán*) reveals various dimensions of

7 | postcolonial violence, which—often trapped within the racial margins of nationalist

8 | projects—have marked indigenous people's lives throughout Latin America. It was

9 | edited by Peruvian *misti* (*Criollo*) anthropologists Ricardo Valderrama and Carmen

10 | Escalante and published for the first time in 1977 as a Spanish and Quechua bilingual

11 | edition. From the beginning and perhaps adopting a defensive stance, the two

12 | Quechua-speaking anthropologists and editors clarify that they were neighbors and

13 | friends of Gregorio and Asunta. In spite of a title that perhaps gives away a certain

14 | ingrained machismo, *Gregorio Condori Mamani: autobiografía*, the book comprises

15 | the life stories of both Gregorio Condori and his wife Asunta Quispe, a monolingual,

16 | Quechua-speaking indigenous couple from the 1930s through 1970s in Peru. Today,

17 | *Andean Lives* is considered one of the most translated Quechua-language texts ever.

18 | Although, as is often the case with *testimonios* by subaltern subjects, critics often

19 | reduce its merits to the authenticity of indigenous voices, in reality this account offers

1 a disturbing representation of inequality and structural violence, built out from the  
2 memories of exploited and impoverished subjects.

3 Violence radically crosses Gregorio's and Asunta's stories not so much as a  
4 spectacular event, but rather as a transhistorical and quotidian reality. In contrast with  
5 an eminently ethnic view about indigeneity, *Andean Lives* allows us to understand the  
6 complexity of social subordination in Peru, at the intersections of racial order, gender  
7 hierarchies, and social class. The formal condition of the *testimonio*, placed a priori in  
8 a sort of third space in relation to fiction and the social sciences, provides significant  
9 elements around the reflection on postcolonial violence in Peru.

10 From the theoretical perspective of intersectionality and decolonial studies,  
11 this [essay-chapter](#) explores the treatment of different levels of violence in the  
12 *testimonio* *Andean Lives*. It is divided into three sections: the opening one offers a  
13 preliminary approach to *testimonio* and the theoretical challenges of violence; the  
14 second section concentrates on the analysis of Asunta's and Gregorio's stories; and,  
15 lastly, a concluding section seeks to underline the specificity of postcolonial violence.

## 16 Narrating Violence

17 The study of the indigenous condition in Latin American literature has a long  
18 tradition, beginning with Bartolomé de las Casas's (1474 or 1484–1566) accounts  
19 (perhaps the first *avant-la-lettre* Spanish-language *indigenista* text and forerunner of

1 | the *testimonio* and, according to Enrique [Dussel \[2005\]](#), also of modern philosophy)  
2 | at the beginning of the colonial period. In the case of Peru, the testimonial tradition  
3 | begins with the writing of two major, canonical, indigenous figures who provided eye-  
4 | witness testimony of the Spanish conquest of their territories and their consequences:  
5 | the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539–1616) and Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala (ca.  
6 | 1535—after 1616), a Yarowilca Indian from today's Ayacucho. Its most expressive  
7 | moment would come in the twentieth century with the so-called indigenista  
8 | movement of the 1920s and 1930s. In the literary field, Jose María Arguedas is  
9 | usually identified as one of its most representative authors, with novels such as  
10 | *Yawar fiesta* (1941), *Los ríos profundos* (*Deep Rivers* 1958), and *Todas las sangres*  
11 | (*Every Blood* 1964). Other works typically identified within the indigenista subgenre  
12 | include Luis E. Heredia's *El miedo bajo las campanas* (*Fear under the Bells* 1964);  
13 | Roberto Leiton's *Los eternos vagabundos* (*The Eternal Wanderers* 1939); Ciro  
14 | Alegria's *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (*Broad and Alien Is the World* 1941) and *Los*  
15 | *perros hambrientos* (*The Hungry Dogs* 1963); Narciso Aretegui's *El padre Horán*  
16 | (*Father Horán* 1969); and Jorge Icaza's *Huasipungo* (1934), *En las calles* (*In the*  
17 | *Streets* 1936), and *Huairapamushcas* (1948). Such broad field of Latin American  
18 | literary texts accounts for the violent life conditions experienced by indigenous people  
19 | in different contexts, offering diverse representations of exploitation and dispossession  
20 | of the land. Some of these include references to *mestizo* elites at the forefront of the

1 emergence of postcolonial capitalism linked to foreign investors as directly  
2 responsible for indigenous people's disenfranchisement. Moreover, many of these  
3 novels include expressions of indigenous rebellion as events of resistance and  
4 mechanisms of change.

5         Literary analysis and storytelling have provided essential sources to foster  
6 sociological and anthropological interrogations ([Said 1979](#); [Benítez Rojo 1989](#);  
7 [Sharpe 1993](#); [Abul-Lughod 1993](#)[2008](#); [Hoyos 2019](#)). In this type of approach, the  
8 literary text constitutes not only a signifier for the representation of a social reality  
9 under infinite possibilities, but also a reference that usually reveals something beyond  
10 the text itself. The *testimonio*, on the other hand, introduces a different relationship  
11 with the text, not because it closes the analytic possibilities that other literary forms  
12 contain, but rather because the interpretative possibilities remain confronted by the  
13 witness's speech. In other words, the possibilities of textually redefining the speech  
14 (of the native), as Viveiros de Castro put it, are limited by the literality of the  
15 testimony.

16         To a large extent, this important book is the result of an epistemic decision on  
17 the part of the two Peruvian anthropologists, Ricardo Valderrama and Carmen  
18 Escalante, which reflects the limitations of their discipline's explanatory mission;  
19 instead of writing the usual anthropological study, they decided to provide, through  
20 [the \*testimonio\* genre](#), a space for Gregorio's and Asunta's discourses. Their voices are

1 indeed traversed by a set of mediations at different levels, encompassing the editorial  
2 process, as well as those linked to its translatability as the condition to reach non-  
3 Quechua readers.

4 But, from an ethnocentric aspiration of authenticity, claims about mediation  
5 can also be made for any professional authoritative voice (whether indigenous or not)  
6 displayed vis-à-vis native and subaltern voices. There is an expectation for purity and  
7 authenticity in indigenous texts that is not usually present when dealing with non-  
8 indigenous texts. On the other hand, for some time there was an expectation,  
9 particularly in American academia, to have indigenous people express themselves  
10 exclusively in testimonial, confessional, real-life terms and away from high-art  
11 fiction. This, in a way, imposes a burden on indigenous subjectivities that is never  
12 expected from non-indigenous literature. In fact, *Andean Lives* intimately develops an  
13 approach that articulates the testimonial and autobiographical speech with a symbolic  
14 discourse that recreates magical realism. Among many other moments, the chapter  
15 "Earth Mother, Cropkeepers, and the Three Brothers", is particularly illustrative in  
16 this regard. Gregorio's explanation of the Cropkeeper's role guarding potato crop  
17 reflects the organization of agricultural production and the magical elements  
18 intertwined in this work, a transcendental event for his community. He elaborates on  
19 the risk of crop destruction by hail and the three brothers who travel in it and  
20 about how it can be prevented by the Cropkeeper through different rituals: "If the

1 hail<sup>17</sup>, he states, <sup>18</sup>still seemed bent on destroying the potatoes, the Cropkeeper would  
2 quickly strip, and, naked as the day he came out of his mother's womb, he'd insult the  
3 hail, slinging dirt clods sprinkled with the holy water and kerosene toward it<sup>19</sup> (44).

4 Gregorio and Asunta were asked to share their life stories, including the  
5 episodes of extreme poverty and violence that they endured throughout their lives. In  
6 this context, the text evokes works such as *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*Biography of a*  
7 *Run-away Slave* 1966), in which the Cuban ethnologist Miguel Barnet registers the  
8 life story of Esteban Montejo. A lesser-known, previous indigenous *testimonio* from  
9 South America is *Lonco Pascual Coña: testimonio de un cacique Mapuche* (Lonco  
10 Pascual Coña: testimonio of a Mapuche Chief 1930). Prologued by Rodolfo Lenz, it  
11 was dictated by Pascual Coña to Capuchin Father Ernest Wilhelm Moesbach. Like  
12 Gregorio's and Asunta's book, it was also published in a bilingual edition, this time in  
13 Spanish and Mapudungun, the Mapuche language. It is within this tradition that  
14 Ricardo Valderrama and Carmen Escalante's book, *Andean Lives. Gregorio Condori*  
15 *Mamani and Asunta Quispe Huaman*, is located.<sup>17</sup>

16 The academic recognition of *testimonio* as a literary genre is undoubtedly  
17 linked to its ability to represent the inner world of subjects who are had traditionally  
18 been excluded from literary production. For John Beverly, the *testimonio* is a specific  
19 form of Latin American literary expression that encompasses, in an embryonic stage,  
20 the potentiality of a transitional epoch, just like the novel and different types of lyrical

1 expression were for the bourgeoisie at the dawn of modern capitalism (Beverly  
2 [2003/1992](#), 12). Such potentiality, however, does not exclude some concerns.  
3 Questions on mediation by ethnographers, editors, and interviewers have been  
4 brought around the production of the testimonialist's voice. Susan Foote, for example,  
5 makes an insightful analysis of Pascual Cóna's *testimonio*, which, she argues, was  
6 not free from intervention by Father Moesbach ([Foote 2012](#)). However, Foote also  
7 acknowledges how these interventions on the many editions of the book have  
8 garnered much-needed attention to Mapuche culture.

9       Beyond its mediations, *testimonios* open a communicational space in the face  
10 of Spivak's famous interrogation about subaltern speech ([2003](#)). In addition, the lives  
11 of Gregorio and Asunta provide elements to analyze the complexity of the formation  
12 of nation-states in Latin America. While *testimonio* as a non-fictional literary form is  
13 decisively marked by the connection of an individual story with a larger group or  
14 class marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle" ([Beverley 2003/1992](#), 23),  
15 it is also a special form of account that conveys people's responses vis-à-vis horror  
16 and systematic poverty. If we consider its history, violence—in its most diverse forms  
17 —represents a recurring element of the genre, so much so that it could be recognized  
18 as one of its constitutive elements. The analysis of *testimonios* such as those of  
19 Asunta and Gregorio, therefore, provides the humanities and social sciences with new  
20 paths to the study of violence.



1 Violence is indeed an elusive concept. General theories of violence, a times  
2 full of universalizing arguments and abstractions, sometimes neglect to acknowledge  
3 specific expressions of violence in their own contexts. The representation of violence  
4 is intimately linked to contextual politics, ideologies, and emotions. For example, for  
5 Frantz Fanon [\(2011\)](#), the analysis of colonial violence is embedded in the political  
6 order, spatial configuration, economic dependency, epistemic control, and the  
7 production of colonial subjectivities and racial hierarchies.

8 For sociologist Randall Collins, violence is something extraordinary, not so  
9 much determined by what he terms "background factors" as by the need of passing  
10 "the barrier of confrontational tension and fear" ([Collins 2009](#), 22). Here violence  
11 takes place between persons or groups as an occurrence that alters normalcy. In  
12 Asunta's and Gregorio's accounts, we find events of explicit violence, but even these  
13 are inscribed in a broader context in which violence does not just "take place", but  
14 rather is part of a social order of racial and gender hierarchies, deeply linked to a  
15 system of dispossession and exploitation. Despite the usefulness of this perspective  
16 for specific contexts, it is insufficient to understand the violence that emanates from  
17 the stories of Gregorio and Asunta. The limits of this approach derive from  
18 conceiving violence as exceptional, episodic events altering an ideal social order that  
19 corresponds with liberal models of contractual community. It is not sudden death or  
20 direct physical aggression, but the continuous and systematic reproduction of a social

1 order that limits the human condition by perpetuating the state of exception over  
2 indigenous bodies. The conditions of existence for such violence can be conceived  
3 without the need for confrontations and in the calmest and most legitimated  
4 institutional spaces of the modern social order. Nevertheless, Collins's approach  
5 emphasizes the importance of the emotional and subjective environment of people in  
6 situations of violence. This is a fundamental element highlighted by Fanon, a trained  
7 psychologist. The discussion around violence in his 1961 *Les damnés de la terre*  
8 (*The Damned of the Earth*), whose role is often distorted by reductionist interpretations,  
9 is intimately linked to his experience as a therapist treating the colonial trauma  
10 suffered by colonized as well as settler patients. This condition seems akin to the  
11 possibilities of *testimonio*. In a special manner, Gregorio's and Asunta's narratives  
12 bring us closer to specific events or situations, from their subjective and emotional  
13 realm as witnesses.

14 As part of the impact of decolonization, self-critique about Anthropology's  
15 colonial links has often fostered inquiries around the discipline's role, goals, and  
16 methodologies. Paul Farmer, for example, has questioned the use of ethnography to  
17 study structural violence. In contrast to the observational and participative element of  
18 ethnographic research, Farmer underlines the need to integrate "history, political  
19 economy, and biology" for comprehensive accounts of violence (Farmer 2004, 308).

1 Beyond the disciplinary routes to convey a critical understanding of violence,  
2 Asunta's and Gregorio's *testimonios* prove its usefulness for such queries.

### 3 *Memory Minga*

4 The two *testimonios* appear independently, as two different texts in the book: first  
5 Gregorio's, followed by Asunta's story. ~~In spite of~~ Despite the formal separation, they  
6 work together, not only when both voices are intertwined around same events, but  
7 also by building a shared story. The book begins with Gregorio announcing a trip, that  
8 of his own life crisscrossed by many others, migrations, returns, and remigrations.  
9 Gregorio was an orphan child who, as he explains, was exploited for work very early  
10 on in his childhood. After his grandmother sends him away from her home as a child,  
11 Gregorio, feeling too ashamed to return to his mother's house (no information about  
12 his father is provided), has to find work under exploitative conditions, like an  
13 indigenous, picaresque Lázaro de Tormes. Gregorio narrates a condition of semi-  
14 slavery, working without payment, being mistreated and cruelly tortured by some of  
15 the people for whom he worked: a butcher forces him to drink fermented urine, they  
16 make him swim in the river during the winter, and he is also whipped. In these  
17 inhumane spaces, abandonment and escape were recurrent events in his childhood. He  
18 often ended up homeless, wandering until the next job opportunity in exchange for

1 | shelter and food arisedarose, always with the hope of not being beaten. Still, even as a  
2 | child, resistance was a matter of survival for Gregorio.

3 |         The reference to the rural space at the beginning of the narration of both  
4 | stories locates the reader in an imprecise and suspended temporality. It is the  
5 | reference to an airplane that suddenly launches an apparently **pre-modern** colonial  
6 | story to the first half of the twentieth century. Along these lines, as if rejecting  
7 | modernity, during the first pages of the book he likewise refuses to believe that  
8 | American astronauts have reached the moon. As part of this space—time movement,  
9 | state institutions and their relationship with indigenous populations also appear in  
10 | Gregorio's accounts. Despite the neglect of public institutions for the life of a poor,  
11 | indigenous, and orphan child, the state expresses itself to Gregorio only in its coercive  
12 | demonstration: first, by enlisting him into a war, then through his conviction by the  
13 | criminal justice system.

14 |         Gregorio's experience in the army reveals the role of this institution in the  
15 | process of disciplining populations, as part of the violence that has accompanied the  
16 | homogenization of national projects in Latin America. This **a-violence** is expressed  
17 | discursively as necessary to eradicate other types of violence, and it does not stop  
18 | reproducing patriarchal order, as well as racial and cultural hierarchies. Both the  
19 | repression of the Quechua language and the bodily inspection of fitness to enter the  
20 | army constitute rites of passage, forms of recognition, of national incorporation, based

1 on a founding violence that it is also displaced toward the external enemy. The threat  
2 of invasion by Chileans, who “crave the women from here” (1996, 51), justifies the  
3 coercion of the military ranks over conscripted soldiers or reservist as something  
4 necessary. According to Gregorio:

5

6 Such was the soldier's life. No matter what you did there, you have to live and die at  
7 your post. If you were a sharpshooter or commissary, you'd have to do everything by  
8 the book, or damn, they'd give you a swift kick. In the army, discipline is everything  
9 “Serve country, obey all orders”. You can't refuse to do anything they tell you to. If  
10 you say no or do it halfheartedly, they punish you with jail time or give you a  
11 beating. Even if they order you to kill your own mother, well, you've just got to do it  
12 because if you don't, you're not obeying your country. There's also an alphabet in  
13 the barracks for those who can't read; the wood-block letters are strung up on a wire:  
14 a, b, c, d, j, k, p. The noncommissioned officers would teach us the alphabet, and  
15 when you finished learning it, they'd put you in first grade-grade.

16

(1996, 50):

17

18 The military's draft and the literacy methods, in which the Church is also  
19 involved, as we see later in the book, can be understood as part of biopolitical  
20 strategies of national incorporations, but through self-repression, disciplinary rituals,

1 and the configuration of the external enemy. These actions reveal continuity between  
2 the colonial social order and the operation of violence in postcolonial Peru. This is not  
3 much due to the imposition of the Spanish language (since Quechua was actually  
4 promoted by Spanish colonizers as a tool of control), but for the violent production of  
5 new subjects. In both Gregorio's and Asunta's stories, we can find the traces of  
6 pedagogies of oppression, echoing the earlier concerns found in the late-fifteenth-  
7 century Caribbean, and that make Franz Fanon's call for the creation of a new subject  
8 crucial for decolonization. In an illustrative way, Gregorio affirms,

9

10 Well, those greedy Spaniards were hungry for power, so they killed our Inka. The  
11 Inkas didn't know anything about paper or writing, and when the taytacha (good  
12 Lord) wanted to give them paper, they refused it. That's because they didn't get their  
13 news by paper but by small, thick threads made of vicuña wool: they used black  
14 wool cords for bad news and for the good news, white cords. These cords were like  
15 books, but the Spaniards didn't want them around; so they gave the Inka a piece of  
16 paper.

17

1           This paper talks, they said. Where is it talking? That's silly; you're trying to trick  
2 me. And he flung the paper to the ground. The Inka didn't know anything about writing. And  
3 how could the paper talk if he didn't know how to read? And so they had our Inka killed (57).

4  
5           It might seem surprising that from the many episodes of violence and clashes  
6 with Spanish colonialism, Gregorio chooses to retell Túpac Amaru's martyrdom as a  
7 shared memory of indigenous people in the twentieth century. Yet this has been a  
8 recurrent discursive figure in previous and contemporary discourses to that of  
9 Gregorio. We can see the recollection of Túpac Amaru's death, for instance, in  
10 Guamán Poma de Ayala's chronicles at the turn of the sixteenth century. In Peru, the  
11 image of Túpac Amaru was used by Juan Velasco Alvarado's (military government  
12 (1968-1975), the left-wing government and, then again, nearly a decade after  
13 Gregorio's testimonio, the Inca's name is reclaimed by the Movimiento  
14 Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA - Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement) and  
15 by the revolutionary communist party and terrorist organization Sendero Luminoso  
16 (Shining Path), which made its first public appearance on 18-May 18, 1980, the 199th  
17 anniversary of the Inca's execution. In any case, Gregorio nostalgically evokes the  
18 Inca Empire and the times of the Cajamarca dialogue between the Spanish  
19 conquistador Pizarro and Dominican friar Vicente Valverde and the Inca ruler Atahualpa  
20 (at the beginning of the *testimonio* he declares that Atahualpa will one day resurrect)

1 | as a period when indigenous people, unlike the time of the writing of the *testimonio*,  
2 | always had available food.

3 |         Thus, Gregorio's evocation speaks of the continuity of a collective, historical  
4 | memory marked by the presence of colonial violence. In this notable passage,  
5 | Gregorio resorts to a foundational act that symbolically epitomizes the epistemic  
6 | violence of confrontation in the context of colonization: there is a cultural and  
7 | epistemic clash in the sense that the Inca throws away a piece of paper that the  
8 | Spaniards consider the word of God and the communicative failure is resolved  
9 | through violence and the "civilizing mission". As opposed to the Eurocentric  
10 | conception of indigenous people as timeless subjects, his reference to the Inca  
11 | illustrates what type of historical events are transmitted within shared cultural roots.  
12 | Gregorio's reference to this encounter expresses the immanence of colonial  
13 | experience not just in the sense of coloniality, understood as the pervasiveness of the  
14 | logic of colonial power, but also as transmission of the memory of violence. The  
15 | awareness of this past violence in the present, together with the impossibility of its  
16 | encompassing representation, implies an alternative position to that which Andean  
17 | *mestizos* call *silencio indígena* (indigenous silence). What Gregorio recalls here  
18 | reflects the limits of speech when attempting to represent this historical event as one  
19 | of the main historical references to a foundational violence that is still linked to  
20 | contemporary forms of oppression. In this sense, Andean silence could be equated



1 | with Édouard Glissant's claim to the right of opacity in the Caribbean ([Glissant](#)  
2 | [2000](#)). The memory of the Inca's murder suggests not only the recollection of a  
3 | historical past that has been carefully transmitted by generations, but, perhaps even  
4 | more important, also a collective mechanism that connects the past with the  
5 | possibility of future social justice.

6 |         Although it is crucial to dispute universalizing and essentialist representations  
7 | that make the indigenous hero an ahistorical figure, Gregorio's evocation highlights  
8 | the place of memory as a strategic space of continuity, inheritance, and denied futures.  
9 | The evocation of this dramatic event as a mnemonic resource constitutes a rhetorical  
10 | exercise that fulfills a transhistorical function. In this sense, Gregorio may have  
11 | thought about the representative role of memory, which, just like fiction, allows the  
12 | establishment of transcendent connections among distant historical contexts.

13 |         Gregorio's experiences with *mestizo* justice and imprisonment are equally  
14 | revealing. Two encounters illustrate forms of legal violence and police brutality. In  
15 | one ~~of these~~, a corrupt judge appeals to a bizarre legal technicality that ends up  
16 | incriminating Gregorio and another *runa* (native) friend. At the same time, *mestizo*  
17 | cattle rustling criminals remain free. "That is justice for you", he argues, "with *mestis*  
18 | [*mestizos*, *criollos*], the law looks the other way" (60). For its part, the prison  
19 | represents a continuation of the corrupt social order, a semi-institutional space that  
20 | can still be found in various areas of the Andean world and of Latin America in

1 general. In fact, Gregorio describes a prison setting that can still be found in  
2 penitentiaries throughout Bolivia, Brazil, or Ecuador, for example, which are  
3 characterized by an informal organization with different forms of internal authorities,  
4 entrances and exits of relatives, or services provided by inmates and their families  
5 (64). Here, Gregorio's description refers to a process that will similarly take place in  
6 penitentiary systems in the neoliberal context of northern countries: he will occupy his  
7 time as an outsourced workforce, with low wages and no responsibility links with  
8 employer. Paradoxically, prison employment provided Gregorio with an occupation  
9 and a stable income, which he could not manage to find while he has free.

10         The formal arrangement of both stories constitutes an important semantic  
11 element in the book. While Gregorio's story illustrates constant poverty, labor  
12 exploitation, and racism against indigenous people, Asunta's expands that universe by  
13 **representing intersectionality and** gender-based violence against indigenous women  
14 (including from indigenous men). Besides enduring indentured servitude, working for  
15 free for *misti* landowners, in several passages Asunta, who, unlike Gregorio, grew up  
16 in an urban area, narrates episodes of rape by men, possibly by *runas* according to the  
17 information provided. This includes an elusive reference to what ~~it~~ seems to be the  
18 first sexual assault she suffered. Although Asunta does not give further details of these  
19 events (they may have been edited out), we do learn about several rape attempts  
20 before she had her first period and about how she was gang raped two years after her

1 first menstruation. Then, they forced a man named Eusebio to marry her. These  
2 traumatic experiences clearly shaped her perception of men who, in her own words,  
3 did evil to her. Gender violence involves Gregorio himself, who, somewhat  
4 unexpectedly, is repositioned through Asunta's testimony as someone who has hit her  
5 as well as her daughter. This element adds a nuanced component against a  
6 romanticized representation of the disenfranchised indigenous man, which, within the  
7 genre of the **testimonio**, seems to express itself in the representation of the narrator  
8 whose life is usually conceived as expression of an *epicidad cotidiana* (everyday  
9 epicality) ([Beverley 1992](#), 16).

10 In his 1934 novel *Guasipungo*, Ecuadorean writer Jorge Icaza develops one of  
11 the most disturbing literary representations of violence against indigenous women.  
12 The multiple rapes suffered by Cunshi, Andrés Chilinguina's wife, illustrate the  
13 racial hierarchies and patriarchal order enforced by Catholic clergy, the landowner,  
14 and the Quito elite. Cunshi's death after consuming rotten meat re-creates an order of  
15 structural violence shaped by the interweaving of patriarchal power, racism,  
16 exploitation, and the fabrication of hunger. As a shattering confirmation of Icaza's  
17 novel, Asunta's life story bitterly illustrates a similar intersection of patriarchal order,  
18 racial hierarchies, and class oppression. The shared passages of her story unfold a  
19 continuous history of gender violence and obscene poverty. The violence suffered by

1 Asunta is not limited to the mechanical result of her double condition of being a  
2 woman and an indigenous [person](#), but also to her being poor.

3 Asunta's perception of men was influenced by her relationship with her first  
4 husband, Eusebio, an abusive alcoholic who would blame her for their child's death.  
5 Although she eventually escapes, risking her own life, Eusebio later kidnaps one of  
6 her daughters, Martina, and hands her over as a maid servant in the home of a  
7 mestiza woman in Santiago (126). Asunta would not see her daughter Martina ever  
8 again, finding out years later that Martina had become ill and had passed away alone  
9 in a hospital. The omnipresence of violence is explicitly articulated along with  
10 poverty, as she will end up burying five of her six children for lack of medical  
11 attention, and seeing her grandmother, father, brother, and sister die (Gregorio often  
12 weeps thinking about his son Tomasito, who died in a hospital as a reaction to an  
13 injection). Part of her family had also died from contagious diseases. For Gregorio,  
14 the violence of poverty also meant the death of several children, two wives, and other  
15 relatives. For both, their relatives' death is mediated by the absence of medical  
16 attention. Andean indigenous people's impoverishment has also been historically  
17 connected with land dispossession, as is stressed out by José Carlos Mariátegui's  
18 criticism of *gamonalismo*,<sup>2</sup> as a paradigm of socioeconomic organization in Andean  
19 societies.

1 Both stories illustrate how the change of occupation usually implied changing  
2 their dwelling—often described as huts, holes on the ground, and even pigpen shacks  
3 —which typically functioned as payment for Gregorio's or Asunta's services. In other  
4 cases, we see situations in which they are forced to leave these spaces. In Coripata,  
5 where their last residence was located, we see Gregorio and Asunta involved in an  
6 apparent regularizing process carried out by the town's leadership, possibly after the  
7 1961 New Villages Law context. This is a recurring element in the region, and  
8 especially for indigenous populations linked to agricultural activities. It refers to  
9 migrations to urban and semi-urban areas in search of job opportunities. As happened  
10 on other occasions, no further detail is provided about this process, but it is connected  
11 to the historical demand for land by popular sectors. Land invasions on farms  
12 abounded in the context of Asunta's and Gregorio's stories. According to Howard  
13 Handelman's estimations, in 1963 alone, between 350 and 400 land seizures occurred  
14 (quoted by [Starn 1991](#), 76). A crucial moment for demands about land took place with  
15 the Law of Agrarian Reform of June 24, 1968, under the government of General Juan  
16 Velasco Alvarado. Yet in Peru, issues around land, invasions, and *titulaciones*  
17 (regularization) are still an ongoing demand for impoverished populations.

18 Despite the limits around the notion of indigenous people in Mariátegui's  
19 *Siete ensayos de la realidad peruana* (*Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian*  
20 *Reality* 1928), his proposition insightfully highlighted the importance of class position

1 and land dispossession to understand the exploitation of Peruvian indigenous people  
2 ([Ferrari 1984](#)). This factor should not be overlooked, as too often happens from liberal  
3 positions that, as bell hooks puts it, highlight views on gender and race, while the  
4 analysis of social class is silenced ([Hook 2000hooks 2000](#)). Our point in this regard,  
5 along with hooks, is not to determine whether it is class, sexuality and gender, or  
6 ethnic-racial identity that best explains the content of oppression and violence in the  
7 broad Andean postcolonial context. As Asunta's and Gregorio's accounts reveal, all  
8 these elements concur in social relations to borrow Ochi Curiel's term in an  
9 imbricated manner ([Curiel 2016](#)). Perhaps as a counter-example to illustrate the  
10 configuration of these elements, we should consider how in some localities of the  
11 broad Andean region, indigenous men and women, linked to various economic or  
12 professional practices (including local and transnational commerce, or accessing to  
13 administrative positions), have gained mobility within certain social hierarchies  
14 ([Celleri and Jussen 2012](#)).

15 In many South American and Central American countries, the word *masacre*  
16 (massacre) is a living term. It is frequently used to represent episodes of collective  
17 terror at the hands of armed groups, usually against black, indigenous, and other  
18 impoverished and displaced populations, especially in rural areas. Yet ~~much~~ many of  
19 these regional episodes of violence seem silenced under larger geopolitical conditions.  
20 Despite several ~~episodes~~ episodes of harshness reflected in Asunta's and Gregorio's

1 | *testimonios*, violence is not mediated by the spectacular depiction of specific events,  
2 | as is often the case in fiction. In a disturbing way, it is in this absence that the strength  
3 | of this work lies, since it locates violence as a naturalized constant, as the permanence  
4 | of a fault, and in the midst of poverty and subordination, the forms of life subsistence  
5 | in the face of an order that stratifies the human condition. It is rather monotonous,  
6 | almost invisible as an ongoing yet silenced condition, that it is on occasion revealed to  
7 | the reader. This normalized violence permeates even the level of language, as *criollos*  
8 | in the testimonio commonly address indigenous people as “*hijito*” (little child), while  
9 | expecting to be addressed as “*patron*” (master) or “*señor*” (sir), thus reflecting  
10 | asymmetric social relations.

11 |         The discomfort generated by the stories of Asunta and Gregorio is not directly  
12 | manifested by the violence expressed, but rather by the way in which it appears, often  
13 | presented without a direct culprit. The impossibility of individualization of  
14 | responsibility, the invisible oppressor, and the inaction of public institutions or other  
15 | actors such as neighbors or employers challenge a liberal conception of violence and  
16 | its resolution. Consider the following example: Gregorio refers to a job he had picking  
17 | up “the hotel guest’s leftovers every morning at six” for the landowner’s dogs. “It was  
18 | good food”, Gregorio adds, “and there was always a little something for us as well”  
19 | (89). It is through these elemental representations of oppression that these *testimonios*  
20 | capture the specificity of structural violence in the region. By contrast, spectacular

1 violence usually has direct victimizers, often linked to paramilitary forces, armed  
2 guerrillas, urban gangs, or state repressive forces. Asunta's and Gregorio's accounts;  
3 are especially uncomfortable because justice cannot be restituted by sanctioning of  
4 specific individuals. The transformation of the condition of existence of structural  
5 violence calls, instead, for radical systemic changes.

6 In the stories told by Gregorio and Asunta, life is fragile: among other  
7 examples, almost an entire family died of contagious fever, a fellow worker at the  
8 factory became ill of pneumonia, and a strapper friend [died after his](#) whose lung  
9 collapsed from the burden. The human body is permanently at risk. So much so, that  
10 Gregorio fantasizes about his own death: "we strappers are always walking around  
11 begging when we die. Who knows, maybe that will happen to me too. I'll get run by a  
12 car; they'll take me to the hospital, do an autopsy on me, and then they toss me in the  
13 graveyard" (101). Gregorio speaks about his own death as if it were some sort of  
14 liberation or that early farewell that Norbert Elias describes in his 1982 *The*  
15 *Loneliness of the Dying*. His fatal fantasy is indeed fulfilled, since, as we learn in a  
16 postscript included in the 1996 English edition by Paul H. Gelles and Gabriela  
17 Martínez Escobar, Gregorio actually died in 1979 after being run over by a car.  
18 Asunta passed away three years later. Contagious diseases, overwork and dangerous  
19 labor conditions, hunger, *misti* violence: any of these factors could have caused a  
20 certain death. The recurrence of death resonates with Achille Mbembe's proposal on



1 necropolitics, which, considering colonial and postcolonial societies, expands Michel  
2 Foucault's theorization of biopower. The many deaths of relatives told by both  
3 protagonists are presented as if they had been left to die.

4       The episodes of violence against women, which include not only Asunta, but  
5 also of her daughter Martina, and Josefa, Gregorio's second wife, depict the female  
6 body as a site of male power and abuse. According to Gregorio, after being  
7 hospitalized for several days and not receiving information from the medical  
8 personnel, they informed him without further details that his wife had died. While  
9 preparing his wife's body, "I saw" he says, "that my wife had been quartered like  
10 sheep meat. Slitting open her head and chest, they'd mangled her, and they'd also  
11 carved open her belly" (82). Here the analysis proposed by Rita Segato on the bodies  
12 of the women murdered in Ciudad Juárez, as disposable and dispensable bodies over  
13 which male power is exercised, is particularly revealing. In this same way, one can  
14 think of the articulation between the territorial dispossession, the sexual assault, and  
15 the medical intervention.

16       Gregorio's brief passage about this event attests to an image that is haunting  
17 him. Despite the grotesque nature of the story, it has kept under the veil of invisibility,  
18 with no repercussions or explanations. As if embodying Agamben's notion of *homo*  
19 *sacer*, violence against indigenous and black people in the Andean and Central  
20 American regions is a pervasive condition fueled by racism and the lust for land and

1 natural resources ([Agamben 1998](#)). Segato's analysis makes possible to connect  
2 patriarchal violence with forms of sociopolitical organization and property regulation.  
3 Similarly, scholarship by various feminists has highlighted the female body as the  
4 target of the imaginary of conquest and triumph for patriarchal power in modernity  
5 ([Segato 2008](#); [Federici 2014](#)). These analyses also allow rejecting a homogenization  
6 of violence and the importance of contextualizing the subject who deploy it. The  
7 recent forced sterilizations of migrant women in ICE centers in the United States, for  
8 example, not only refer to an extraterritorial history of violence against Latin  
9 American indigenous women within the U.S. imperial drive, but also reveal their  
10 eugenic aspirations sustained on white supremacy's ideology.

11 For both Asunta and Gregorio, surviving in violent and impoverished spaces  
12 seems to be mediated by the different forms of support and collaboration from other  
13 people. Although, in many cases, these supports are conditioned by forms of work as  
14 retribution, they undoubtedly replace the absence of state social institutions. The  
15 collaborative possibilities implied by the *ayni* provide a different referent to the  
16 Western notion of kinship to that of nuclear family. This has also been the object of  
17 control and repression from modernizing developmental policies, which are mediated  
18 by the dynamics of racism. The implications of social stratification of these forms of  
19 familiar organization seem to be evident in the decision to marry, which involves the  
20 ~~church~~[Church](#), after a friend recommends Gregorio to do so to prevent his ill wife's

1 death. Although both had previously lived with partners—Asunta with her first  
2 husband, and Gregorio with two previous women—they eventually decide to  
3 receive the “blessing” for their union, something that had not happened with their  
4 previous partners. Despite the decision to marry, they had to wait three or four months  
5 until they learned the prayers of the Catholic ceremony. They also had to save money  
6 because it was expensive to have a *misti* godfather and, later, Gregorio feels ashamed  
7 because there was not enough food for everyone at the wedding. This passage  
8 illustrates how Catholic marriage operated as an institution of ideological re-education  
9 for indigenous Quichua-speaking populations in postcolonial Peru.

10         The *ayni* is a particularly important space to consider solidarity and extended  
11 kinship forms that provide support to navigate calamity and scarcity. It constitutes an  
12 institution of collective work and cooperation, entailing actions in which countrymen,  
13 neighbors, and friends of community work to benefit one of its members for free:  
14 *minka* labor. The *ayni* allowed to put the community’s energies to repair the house of  
15 some of its members, work his farm, or help in the preparations of a wedding, among  
16 other forms of assistance. These practices, Gregorio tells us, were disappearing in  
17 Cusco. The expanded monetarization of social relations as part of capitalism’s  
18 development seems to have impacted the subsistence of this types of communal  
19 practices. Similar types of indigenous cooperation institutions can still be found in

1 various areas of the Andean or South American world; in Ecuador and Colombia, the  
2 word *minga* is still used to designate similar practices of solidarity.

3 Anthropological discourse, and perhaps also the literary discourse about  
4 indigeneity, seem to be motivated by a desire to define or identify it. In this  
5 *testimonio*, there is no concern to do so. Here, the few representations connected with  
6 the collective **I** are made through the underlining of the other, embodied by *mistis*,  
7 *wiracochas*, *gringos*. But these references are far from providing a fixed notion of the  
8 indigenous to the extent of the ethnographic quest. Gregorio even refers to a former  
9 stepdaughter who now avoids him in the street as a **new *mestiza***, signaling the  
10 fluidity of race in Latin America, regularly linked to elements of class and social  
11 capital (Wade ~~2000~~2010). There is no material for ethnographic generalization here.  
12 What can be inferred from Asunta's and Gregorio's cosmovision, far from referring to  
13 a cosmological past, illustrates transculturated beliefs, mixing pantheist elements with  
14 Catholic beliefs.

15 According to Carmen Escalante, this book emerged from Ricardo  
16 Valderrama's research interest in the ideology of strappers. Even though Gregorio's  
17 story provides a deep inside into the strappers' world, both accounts offer an overview  
18 of the working conditions of indigenous population in Latin America. Many of these  
19 conditions persist today for many sectors in the region. Both stories speak also to the  
20 frequent internal migrations of *braceros*, a dynamic that still characterizes informal

1 and seasonal workers' movements, including transborder circulations. In recent years  
2 these intra-regional circulations have been linked to economic sectors like  
3 agroindustry, with the production of soybeans, oil palm, sugar cane, and floriculture,  
4 among others. Along with labor precarity, there has been, in the neoliberal context, an  
5 increase of assassinations of leaders of indigenous and African ancestry throughout  
6 Latin America who were voicing their environmental and community rights, at the  
7 hands of armed actors representing the interests of companies linked to agricultural or  
8 mining exploitation ([Murillo and Hurtado 2016](#); [Homand 2016](#); [Arboleda Quiñones](#)  
9 [2019](#); [Moreno 2019](#)).

10 Throughout the book, we see Asunta enduring unsafe and precarious labor  
11 practices, in many cases related to caregiving roles. We find her first as a worker in  
12 the hacienda, then as a domestic servant, sometimes without wage, washing and  
13 ironing clothes, cleaning, and cooking, as a peddler, attending a cook house, selling  
14 food at a market, and also in a chopper mine as a gleaner. About her life in the mine,  
15 she tells us:

16

17 So, I began working, sorting out the ore. The job was really easy; we just sat there  
18 sorting through it, but we'd also have to be fighting off the coldness, rain, or snow the  
19 whole blessed day. With that alone, you'd suffer. The life I led in that mine was one

1 big lie—you'd work month after month, but your full wages never showed up. If you  
2 worked two months, they'd just pay you for one. So, when people wanted to quit and  
3 leave the mine, they'd just pay you for one. Life in the mine was pure suffering.  
4 Though you'd work, there'd be no money.

5 -(124)-



7 The scenario described by Asunta corresponds to the job insecurity that can  
8 often be found throughout the Global South in postcolonial contexts. As various  
9 studies have shown, in Latin America, informal sectors, far from functioning separate,  
10 operate in a complementary way to renowned economic sectors. According to a recent  
11 report from the International Labour Organization, 86 percent of indigenous people  
12 throughout the world work in an informal economy, as opposed to 66 percent of non-  
13 indigenous people.<sup>3</sup> Asunta also describes employers' practices that can still be found  
14 in the region, such as systematic wage retention ~~and~~ confinement of workers in  
15 enclosed areas of agricultural or extractive industries, among others. But it would be  
16 misleading to locate these dynamics exclusively in the Global South, since in many  
17 cases these same conditions of precarity and exploitation persist for Latin American  
18 migrants working in the U.S.-nited States as well ([De Genova 2005](#); [Menjívar, and](#)  
19 [Abrego 2012](#)).

1           Although it is essential to note the transformations introduced by the structural  
2 adjustment of neoliberal formulas since the ~~eighties~~1980s, these stories tell us about  
3 the continuation of labor exploitation forms from the pre-neoliberal context. Asunta  
4 describes semi-slavery working conditions. She lived in the same place where she  
5 worked for almost three years, in small huts assigned by the overseer. In the mines,  
6 she gave birth ~~in-on~~ two occasions: Ubaldito, the first~~one~~, died shortly after ~~was-~~  
7 ~~born~~birth and the other little one was stillborn (124). These types of events, linked  
8 to other conjunctural situations, account for concurrent forms of violence. Their  
9 complexity often makes it difficult to represent it in a comprehensive manner. In the  
10 case of rape, mutilation of corpses, and labor exploitation presented in the *testimonio*,  
11 there is no identifiable actor (Church, neighbors, local authorities) who may intervene  
12 to prevent these types of abuses.

13           This seemingly banal condition of violence, as well as its invisibility, are  
14 related to the indigenous population's place in the projects of *mestizaje* or racial  
15 democracy in the national discourse in the postcolonial context. Accordingly,  
16 indigenous and black populations in the Andean region have experienced diverse  
17 processes of spatial segregation and displacement. As an expression of this, Asunta  
18 recalls how the police confiscated her belongings from the sale of food on the street:

19



1 One day, just when my little food business was going along well, the City Hall  
2 employees, all dressed up in uniforms like policemen, came around asking for our  
3 municipal licenses. I didn't know what a municipal license was all about, and I kept  
4 on going there to sell, till one day those same municipal police began confiscating  
5 our pots and plates.

6 - (132) -



7  
8 Although these types of confiscatory actions against street vending activities  
9 have been legitimized behind arguments of urban reorganization and public health  
10 criteria, at their core they are openly racist arguments articulated under the pretext of  
11 urban renewal.

12 *Andean Lives* opens a whole range of analytical possibilities in the face of  
13 developmental policies, but also in relation to the political experiences of building the  
14 national popular in the region. After ~~the Second~~ World War 2, modernizing  
15 aspirations and *desarrollismo* (developmentalism), as an economic theory, garnered  
16 great influence in Latin America, especially through CEPAL (Economic Commission  
17 for Latin America and the Caribbean). The discourse of developmentalism generally  
18 implied the undervaluation of indigenous people, understood as an obstacle to the  
19 modernization of South American nations. The testimonies of Asunta and Gregorio  
20 give an account of the place of indigenous populations as exploited and impoverished



1 labor, which has functioned as a resource for accumulation as well as social and class  
2 structuring processes in the region. The agricultural work carried out by both, through  
3 Asunta's food sales, or Gregorio's work as a strapper, account for a labor context  
4 marked by the imbrication of the informal economy with formalized economic  
5 sectors.

6 One of the most interesting moments in the text is a passage in which Gregorio  
7 recounts his link with the Peruvian labor movement and his experience when coming  
8 into contact with communist leaders such as Emiliano Huamantica (93). Gregorio also  
9 gives an honest account of the workers' criticism of the Apristas movement linked to  
10 landowners and wealthy sectors in the country. Both stories evidence their refusal to  
11 inhabit the script of helpless victims. Small actions reveal those hidden forms of  
12 resistance discussed by [Scott \(1990\)](#). Asunta, for example, sometimes pinches the  
13 babies she is taking care of to make sure that their mothers come get them and, that  
14 way, she can take a rest from her caregiving work: "those were the only times the  
15 teacher-lady paid them any attention" (112). In other cases, the resistance is explicit,  
16 public: Gregorio punched a *misti* who, after acquiring the land where they were  
17 living, removed all their belongings. More importantly, at the end of Gregorio's  
18 account, we see him explicitly advocate for a union for strappers: "I'd like all of us  
19 strappers living here in Cusco, young and old alike, to get together and form a union  
20 so we don't have to live this kind of life" (103).

1           Undoubtedly, Gregorio and Asunta's condition as illiterate, monolingual  
2 indigenous people reveals part of the challenge of organizing labor movements, which  
3 are often led by white-*mestizo* leaders from the urban middle classes. Gregorio and  
4 Asunta are far from representing the classical notion of the proletariat of Marx and  
5 Engels. But far from providing an image of the indigenous subject as someone  
6 demobilized and politically unconscious, Asunta's and Gregorio's testimonies provide  
7 evidence of political concerns raised in existential terms. Their concerns about the  
8 price of the sack of wheat, bread, the cost of the *polaca* (a thick oat drink) and the  
9 coat, breakfast or lunch, speak of the daily understanding of poverty as a real scale to  
10 measure the effectiveness of political projects. "This is life, fucked up", Gregorio tells  
11 us, "This life, damn it, it sucks; it fucks the stomach and this back can no longer carry  
12 the load" (61). Asunta's and Gregorio's accounts show an awareness of poverty that is  
13 mediated by postcolonial imaginaries. They combine a resurrection imaginary from  
14 the Inca period with Catholic elements of resignation ethics. Somehow, these  
15 testimonies collected in the ~~seventie~~ 1970s foretell many of the indigenous uprisings  
16 that would take place after the ~~nineties~~ 1990s in Mexico, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia,  
17 and other Latin American countries.

18 **Constitutive Violence: A Coda**

1 | As has been suggested, *Andean Lives*'s stories provide inexorable insights into the  
2 | complexity of domination and social stratification in postcolonial Peru. In Asunta's  
3 | testimony, violence is expressed not only as an event of an overworked mother's  
4 | aggression against her own daughter (when Asunta drops a bucket of milk, her mother  
5 | is forced to work nine more days for free and she angrily rubs cow dung all over her  
6 | daughter's face), but even in the offer of refuge by a woman that ends up becoming  
7 | the exploitation of unpaid domestic work experienced for hundreds of years by  
8 | racialized and impoverished women in Latin America. For Gregorio, nor only the  
9 | violent discipline on the compulsory army recruitment, where all the soldiers were  
10 | *runa*, but the daily exploitation of his body rewarded only with extreme poverty and  
11 | *misti* despise.

12 | Colonialism was marked by exceptional forms of violence related to the  
13 | enslavement and extermination of indigenous and African populations ([Johnson 2009](#);  
14 | [Woolford et al, 2014](#); [Fuentes 2016](#); [Mustakeem 2016](#)). These forms, and their  
15 | technological correlate as systems of organization of enslaved or semi-enslaved  
16 | populations (plantation, slave ship, prison, concentration camp, internment camp,  
17 | migrant camp, stocks) worked as the rehearsal fields for the most visible forms of the  
18 | organization of violence in Europe, such as concentration camps. However, colonial  
19 | violence's particularity is not exhausted in the terror of the pyre, the stocks, the rape,  
20 | the torture, or the amputation of limbs; it is also expressed in the reproduction of

1 hierarchies and human differentiation that makes violence a permanent condition  
2 articulated with postcolonial capitalism. It is not a question of ignoring the existence  
3 of violent events that occur in different settings but, rather, of noticing that too often  
4 for racialized and impoverished populations, impunity has followed massacres and  
5 displacements.

6 | *Andean Lives* **testimonios** can be put into dialogue with Orin Starn's  
7 influential article about anthropological scholarship in Peru prior to the emergence of  
8 Sendero Luminoso. In "**Missing the Revolution**" ([1991](#)), Starn makes a critique of  
9 Andeanism in anthropologists who could not foresee the emergence of Sendero  
10 Luminoso. Starn contrasts the traditional ethnographic approach to *Ayacucho*:  
11 *Hambre y esperanza* ([Ayachucho: Hunger and Hope](#)) by one of Sendero Luminoso's  
12 main leaders, Antonio Díaz, to question essentialist views and aspirations of  
13 authenticity among ethnographers during the 1960s and 1970s. He explains the  
14 connections among popular sectors of urban and rural spaces, and among groups of  
15 diverse racial makeup that would be articulated with the movement led by Sendero  
16 Luminoso's leader Abimael Guzmán (also known by his *nom d#e guerre* Presidente  
17 Gonzalo). Opposing the romanticized and unchanged notion of Andean indigenous  
18 people, Starn goes further by emphasizing the importance of **the** concept of class to  
19 stress the common position on the bottom of Peru's economic pyramid of indigenous  
20 villagers, cholo migrants in the vast *barriadas* of Lima, and poor *mestizo* laborers

1 ([Starn 1991](#), 74). Here the conditions of poverty, child mortality, and famines among  
2 [the](#) indigenous population ~~are~~ often undervalued vis-~~us~~-vis topics such as kinship  
3 relations, world~~view~~s, or rituals ~~are~~ are key to understanding many indigenous  
4 mobilizations and its radicalization. In our view, the stories collected by Valderrama  
5 and Escalante, cried out the very conditions that, as Stern's rightfully argued, were  
6 overlooked by most of the ethnographic work done during the same years in Peru.

7 Interrogations about violence in Peru usually refer to the [twenty-20](#) years of  
8 civil war, and the terror unleashed by both [Shining Path](#)[Sendero Luminoso](#) and the  
9 state's military forces. However, armed conflict in twentieth-century Peru included  
10 other actors, such as the MRTA, most of whom were slaughtered after a standoff with  
11 hostages in the Japanese embassy in 1996 at President Alberto Fujimori's command,  
12 or the previous Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR—~~the~~Revolutionary Left  
13 Movement) created in 1962 and led by Luis de la Puente Uceda, who was killed in  
14 action in 1965. All these were heated passages that linked local justice demands with  
15 regional and global interests.

16 The final report of the Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación (Truth and  
17 Reconciliation Commission 2001—2003) in Peru demonstrated that indigenous people  
18 in rural areas were the main target of violence from both repressive state forces and  
19 [Shining Path](#)[Sendero Luminoso](#) during the two decades of conflict. By the time the  
20 armed conflict was over, 69,280 people had been killed and 75 percent of the victims

1 were speakers of Quechua or other indigenous languages. But as often happens after  
2 reconciliation processes, political narratives about the past and the recognition of  
3 victims and their relatives, often silence other violence, other victims, other stories.  
4 The stories of Asunta and Gregorio tell us a preview story to the 1980–2000 civil war,  
5 one that speaks about the trajectories of violence in Peru.

6 In the epilogue, Ricardo Valderrama Fernández and Carmen Escalante  
7 Gutiérrez, the editors of *Andean Lives*, inform the reader about the fact that today,  
8 there is nothing left of the hut without water or electricity where Gregorio Condori  
9 Mamani and Asunta Quispe Huamán used to live, since a road was built over it. Had  
10 it not been for this *testimonio*, the fascinating, sad lives of these subaltern, indigenous  
11 survivors would have been grounded into oblivion, like those of so many others of  
12 [their](#) peers. Thanks to *Andean Lives*, their life-long suffering leaves a trace in the  
13 collective memory of readers who can now follow Gregorio in his linking of this  
14 contemporary tragedy with that of Tupac Amaru. This book can also inform the ethnic  
15 and national identities of Quechua and Peruvian people in general, who may learn  
16 lessons from a silently violent past that should never be repeated. Moreover,  
17 Gregorio's dream would eventually come to fruition as a German non-governmental  
18 organization helped create a strappers' union. Gregorio's other personal objective,  
19 making sure that readers become aware of his people's suffering, was also achieved.

1 Incidentally, this is evidence that *Andean Lives* belongs to a type of positive  
2 ethnological work that does bring benefits to the people who serve as objects of study.

3         Complementing this dramatic, written *testimonio*, we have the seven-minute,  
4 black and white documentary short film *El cargador* (*The Strapper* 1974) by Cusco  
5 filmmaker Luis Figueroa Yábar (1928–2012)<sup>4</sup> and with photography by Jorge Vignati  
6 and interventions by Ricardo Valderrama and Efraín Fuentes, which also narrates  
7 Gregorio Condori Mamani's life. In this documentary film, which won the main  
8 award in the 1974 Oberhausen film festival, we see the elderly strapper Condori  
9 working in Cusco, often carrying heavy weight for just one to three *soles*. He informs  
10 us about the fact that these indigenous strappers sometimes fall exhausted and die in  
11 the middle of the street. The opening scene shows Condori, dressed in rags and rustic  
12 sandals, walking by a *a*-building with large Inca stones, and with a colonial church  
13 and indigenous conch (seashell horn) music in the background. In the next scene, he is  
14 hired by a Quechua-speaking man to carry a load. We hear the first-person narration  
15 first in the Quechua language by Condori and then in Spanish by another man: he tells  
16 the viewers his name and how he arrived in Cusco in search of work ~~forty~~ 40 years  
17 earlier from his home-town, where his family had no house, land, or animals.

18         In the film one observes other strappers, including younger ones and even  
19 children, working since five in the morning and looking timidly at the camera from  
20 the corner of their eyes. Their only tool: a rope and large piece of cloth to wrap

1 around the huge loads. We see them bent down in an uncomfortable position that  
2 seems sadly reminiscent of those of beasts of burden. Some work so hard, we are told,  
3 that their lungs burst, and they die, vomiting blood. This is the reason they carry their  
4 suffering along with the physical heavy loads, we are told. In another scene, we find  
5 four indigenous elderly men moving luxurious furniture at a wealthy home. Condori  
6 explains that, while sometimes they make some money, others ~~they~~ earn nothing.  
7 They are often hungry because the ~~ten-10-20~~ ~~to twenty~~ *soles* they make per day ~~are-is~~  
8 not nearly enough to survive. When they are sick, they cannot afford to pay the ~~fifty-~~  
9 *50 soles* per day to be cured in the private hospital. Their wives go to the garbage  
10 dump in search of salvageable objects to wash them and try to sell them. Condori  
11 laments the fact that those without documentation cannot go ~~to~~ an old folks' home  
12 once they retire and, as a result, they end up dying helpless in the streets, ~~being~~  
13 thrown like dogs<sup>5</sup> to mass graves with no coffin. The documentary film closes, like  
14 the book, with Gregorio demanding justice for the strappers, so that they stop dying in  
15 the streets. He also hopes to create a strappers' union.

16 Cusco strappers also appear in another bilingual documentary film: the 35-  
17 minute-long *Runan Caycu (I Am a Man 1973)*<sup>6,7</sup>, directed by Nora de Izcue and also  
18 in Spanish and Quechua. Censured in Peru by General Velasco's government,  
19 according to film scholar Isabel Seguí, it ~~was~~ covers the indigenous revolts that took  
20 place before the Peruvian Agrarian Reform led by President Velasco Alvarado. It



1 unveils how indigenous Andean people were being constantly dispossessed of their  
2 lands. In the opening close-up of his face, the **eighty80**-year-old Cusco indigenous  
3 leader Saturnino Huillca, as the testimonial representative of his people, declares **in**  
4 Quechua with Spanish subtitles and other times dubbed into Spanish **the** indigenous  
5 movement's determination to resist the forced displacement by *gamonales* and  
6 **Yankee imperialism**.<sup>7</sup> Supported by photographs and archival television materials,  
7 he recalls, without visible mediation from the filmmaker (the questions are not heard),  
8 how he and his wife Agustina Cohaquira de Huillca were forced, under conditions of  
9 indentured servitude, to work in a ranch for free in exchange for a small plot of land  
10 where they could grow some food. As a result of the exploitation, five of their  
11 children died while living in the ranch. Now, Huillca resents the *gamonal*, Manuel  
12 **Choro** Cornejo, who **was like a God**<sup>8</sup> and had no compassion for them. And like  
13 *Andean Lives, Runan Caycu* denounces the abuse not only committed by *gamonales*,  
14 but also by the state, the army, and the **ehurehChurch**. Thus, *runas* also had to work  
15 for free for the priest and feed him for free whenever he went to their town during  
16 festivities. In addition, the documentary accuses the courts and the police of being on  
17 the side of the *hacendados* (landowners).

18         One day, Huillca learned in Cusco that there was a law against making  
19 indigenous people work for free and he decided to take action against the feudal  
20 conditions in which they were living: he, along with other indigenous people, created

1 a union. The documentary shows angry, indigenous militants planning their next  
2 course of action in their meetings, as well as newspapers clips informing about the  
3 revolts and denouncing indigenous "ranch invasions", "red subversion," and "peasant  
4 violence"<sup>9</sup>. Other scenes expose the military repression and—this time more  
5 spectacularized than in *Andean Lives*—the corpses of indigenous peasants killed by  
6 the Peruvian military. During an interview, an indigenous leader named Villavicencio  
7 states that they can no longer wait for the promised agrarian reform and then corrects  
8 a journalist by clarifying that they are not carrying out land invasions but "land  
9 recovery"<sup>10</sup>; as the land is actually theirs. At first, indigenous leaders do not trust  
10 politicians' false promises but, later in the film, they express their support for  
11 President Juan Velasco Alvarado, who finally brought them the longed land reform.  
12 According to Seguí, the director of the documentary film, Nora de Izcue, had read  
13 Hugo Neira Samanez's 1968 chronicle collection *Los Andes: Tierra y muerte* and  
14 decided to interview Huillca and make a film about his struggle. Seguí explains that  
15 although Huillca and other indigenous leaders were imprisoned several times, several  
16 lands were finally recovered forever by the peasants, signaling the partial success of  
17 their struggle.

18 Overall, *Andean Lives*, Hugo Neira's testimonio *Huillca: Habla un campesino*  
19 *peruano* (*Huillca: A Peruvian Peasant Speaks* 1974), along with these two  
20 documentary films, *El cargador* and *Runan Caycu*, and three more films about Huillca

1 Jorge Sanjinés's *Jatun Aukla* (*The Main Enemy* 1974); Mario Arrieta y Marita  
2 Barea's documentary short film *Si esas puertas no se abren* (*If Those Doors Don't*  
3 *Open* 1975); and Federico García's "fictionalized" *testimonio* *Kuntur Wachana*;  
4 (*Where Condors are Born* 1977) represent key historical documents of an  
5 interrupted history not only of violence and subjugation, but also of indigenous  
6 resistance and struggle for social justice in Cusco. While somehow running the risk at  
7 times of falling into a certain type of slum tourism, exoticization of poverty, or  
8 "tropicalization" of Latin American for Northern readers, this type of non-fiction  
9 literature ("This is the true story", we read on page p. 15) and film exposes a long-  
10 lived, somewhat hidden violence against indigenous populations that has survived  
11 until our days.

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14 | Notes

1 <sup>1</sup> Other significant titles that can be considered within this genre are Domitila Barrios de Chugara's *Si me permiten hablar*  
2 (1978); Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983); and Lurgio Gavilán  
3 Sánchez's *Memorias de un soldado desconocido* (2012). [Another similar and remarkable work that awaited a life time to](#)  
4 [be published is \*Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"\* \(2018\), by Zora Neale Hurston. Based on interviews](#)  
5 [conducted on the late 1920s, it reveals the life journey of Cudjoe Lewis, deemed the last living survivor of the Middle](#)  
6 [Passage. The book would not be published until the twenty-first century.](#)

7 |  
8 <sup>2</sup> *Gamonal* is a term that began to be used in mid-nineteenth century Peru to refer to *criollo*  
9 landowners who illegally expropriated lands from the communal, indigenous *ayllus*. Juan  
10 Velasco Alvarado's 1968 Agrarian Reform brought an end to *gamonalismo*.

11 <sup>3</sup> La COVID-19 y el Mundo del Trabajo: Un enfoque en los pueblos indígenas y tribales. May  
12 2020.

13 <sup>4</sup> Luis Figueroa Yábar was part of the Escuela del Cusco (School of Cusco), along with Eulogio  
14 Nishiyama and César Villanueva. He produced four feature films and ~~thirty~~ 30 documentary  
15 films.

16 <sup>5</sup> "Como a perros los arrojan".

17 <sup>6</sup> *Runan Caycu* won the Silver Dove award at the Leipzig Festival in its sixteenth edition.

18 <sup>7</sup> "Imperialismo yankee".

19 <sup>8</sup> "Era como un dios".

20 <sup>9</sup> "Invasiones de haciendas"; "subversión roja"; "Violencia campesina".

21 <sup>10</sup> "Recuperación de tierras".