Prologue
Andean Cosmopolitanisms

Huaraz, the cosmopolitan. So it is called. A city at the foothills of the Cordillera Blanca in the Peruvian Andes, shaped by architectural contrasts. Claybrick and concrete buildings of up to five storeys overshadow the few mudbrick houses that survived the passing of the years. It is a mixture of materials that coexist with the strident sounds emerging from a vibrant urbanity. Retail shops in the city centre compete with the shrill chorus of honking taxis and *combis*[1] by playing loud reggaeton and *huaynos*[2], while street vendors close to the main market sell their products on the narrow sidewalks of this excessively car-friendly city. Chocho[3], bread, smartphone cases, perfumes, tamales – the public space screams for attention. Despite being a modest regional capital of no more than 120,000 people – a small town, compared to coastal cities like Chimbote or the national capital Lima – it is a vivid place of contrasts, mixtures and encounters. The centre of the Callejón de Huaylas – the 'first star in the horizon' in Quechua.

Huaraz, Yungay and other cities of the Callejón de Huaylas – the region on which this book focuses – are places of overflowing newness. They are new cities, with new buildings and new inhabitants: new versions of old towns, clashing with their ancient histories. Contemporary Huaraz is very different from that described by Barbara Bode (2001, 30–31) 50 years ago: a city of a *nada* (nothingness), emerging from the rubble of a deadly earthquake that struck the whole region in 1970. Certainly, it is a different city than that idyllic Andean town remembered by survivors of the earthquake. The subsequent efforts of the Peruvian government to develop a modern urban project from its ruins led, perhaps, to a transformation characterised by unmanaged, excessive novelty. The longed-for beauty of the former colonial settlements, recalled as unique towns of white adobe houses and cobblestone roads, is

1 A common type of public transport in many Peruvian cities, comprising vans operated by private companies.

2 A style of music traditional in several Andean countries.

3 *Lupinus mutabilis*, a type of edible lupin bean.

now buried under cities of brick and concrete, honking cars and loud shops. Modernity won – partially, at least.

When talking with people from Huaraz, those survivors of the 1970 earthquake and those neighbours whose families arrived to rebuild the new city, one is continually confronted with ambiguous temporal definitions. Huaraz is neither modern nor traditional. Its past was obscured by a recovery process promising a modernity that never arrived. This city, struck by several extreme events in its history, has built its identity on devastation, loss and frustration. What developed was never as traditional as the previous city nor as modern as the promised one. Destruction and reconstruction are the source of this Andean cosmopolitanism that shapes the frustrated sense of belonging felt by its inhabitants.

Cosmopolitanism in Huaraz – and the Callejón de Huaylas in general – refers to something quite different than that modernist pulsation in which local history is 'deterritorialised, universalised and future-oriented' (Macdonald 2008, 133). The dream of a universalist moral capable of overcoming nation-states' discourses (Levy and Sznaider 2002) seems to vanish here and is replaced, in the view of the survivors of the earthquake, by a place without tradition or a past that binds its inhabitants together. It is the city of disaster: an urban project, emerging from the destruction of 1970, that could never regain the beauty of its colonial architecture and past.

Radical transformations are not something new in the Callejón de Huaylas. Cities like Huaraz were founded on a colonial project that inaugurated a *pachacuti* (Quechua for cataclysm, or total upheaval), an ongoing catastrophe that imposed a world arrangement still present today. The colonisation of the Andean world created a spurious division between a native population, the pejoratively called *indios* (Indians), and the new settlers (Spaniards, later *criollos*) sustained by land usurpations, imposed conversion and all sorts of racial and territorial categories. Huaraz, the colonial, was transformed into the 'civilised' world, the world of God and the Crown, that would later be placed in sharp contrast to those higher lands of the Andes outside its rule – the 'savage' *sierra*. This opposition between the high and the low, rural and urban, would later find a temporal correlation: the backward and the forward, past and future, stagnation and progress. Yet, all these categories became contested by change and disruption, such as that brought by the 1970 earthquake.

Disaster, tradition and progress are a triad that occurs all too often in the stories of cities like Huaraz. Together, they refer to diverse forms of time: times of destruction, awaiting, recovery, hope and despair – sometimes in this order, sometimes all mixed up. The disasters that have befallen cities in the Callejón de Huaylas – the dramatic 1970 earthquake, but also disruptive floods as a consequence of melting glaciers in the Cordillera Blanca – have brought desolation and suffering related to the lost worlds, but also the expectation of wiping the slate clean. A *tabula rasa* for a new, orderly beginning. Efforts to foster future resilience, related in many cases to the dramatic consequences of climate change in the region, have brought new hopes

of modernisation that, at the same time, generated unexpected resistance from people who view with suspicion the new, old promises of development and controlling nature. Disasters led to feelings of stagnation and backwardness, together with the sense of an unwanted transformation resulting from a frustrated modernity: the times and rhythms of an idealised past and a frustrated future that coexist in that long and thin valley known as the Callejón de Huaylas.

Understanding the diverse temporal articulations emerging from these Andean cities shaped by disasters requires exploring the stories of loss and despair of people who have experienced the world coming to an end. However, it also requires inquiring into all the attempts at reconstruction and prevention that came after. It demands looking into the governmental projects seeking to rule and control the wild peaks of the Cordillera Blanca in order to prevent the past from repeating itself in the future. Yet, it also entails exploring the reactions that those projects provoke among the population. Understanding Huaraz and the cities of El Callejón necessarily implies examining the encounters that have shaped their history – between native and foreign, tradition and progress, stagnation and development, disruption and endurance – but also the history of those categories and figures. It requires looking into the dramatic consequences of encounters between extreme past events and projects of Andean urbanism, and the futures that those encounters elicit. Moreover, it demands analysing who is welcome in those future projects and who is relegated to live in the eternal past of an old world order. Understanding El Callejón's urban realities requires, as we will see, an examination of the compelling entanglements between disasters and time.

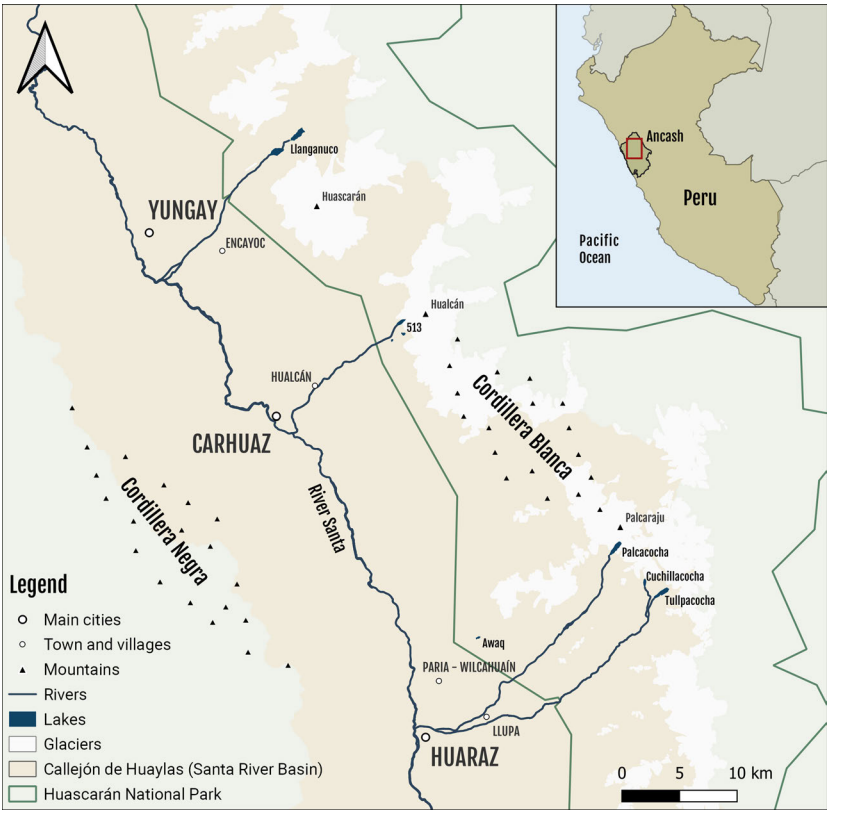

Figure 2: Map of the study area in the Callejón de Huaylas, Peru (Usón 2023)