

1 The 1970 Avalanche: Suspensions and Figurations

The clock in the church struck the hour,
again and again, again and again, as if
time had somehow contracted.

Juan Rulfo

Deysi remembers that day very well. Maybe too well. Even the preceding days. She recalls that a deep sadness invaded her that week, triggered by intense dreams and thoughts about what would happen if her mother suddenly died. She was 22 years old at the time and very attached to her family. The feelings of loss assaulted her during those days to the point of inconsolable tears. It was a sort of premonition for the things about to come, she posits.

Deysi had been living in Lima since the beginning of that year, 1970, to study at the university and become a teacher. She was only visiting her family in Yungay for a couple of weeks to ultimately celebrate Mother's Day that Sunday, the 31st of May. Although this was several decades ago, the details of Deysi's narration offer an extremely vivid account of everything she and her family did during that day. Around noon, she remembers, they had a big lunch to celebrate her mother. She recalls almost automatically what they ate: *Olluco*, a type of tuber, with meat. Deysi argued with her mother because she only wanted *olluco*, whereas her mother insisted that she also eat some potatoes. Potatoes were not her thing, Deysi admits with laughter, but she obeyed her mother to avoid any trouble. After lunch, her mother went to the *chacra*, the family farm, with her brother to take care of the crops, while Deysi stayed in the town to take care of the family's shop, where they used to sell liquor and basic groceries. Before leaving, Deysi's mother informed her about the open bills of some customers that needed to be settled. With Deysi's mother and uncle gone, and while she was behind the shop's counter, the earthquake began.

Like the testimonies of many other survivors, Deysi's account of the earthquake and landslide that struck Yungay that day in 1970 is as detailed as the description of the moments before. She narrates insightfully how she escaped from the shop before it collapsed as a result of seismic movement; how she saw that an avalanche triggered by the earthquake started descending from the Huascarán Mountain towards the city; and how she instinctively took her sister and younger cousin by the hand and

ran to the city's cemetery over the Huansacay Hill, the point where 90 people – the highest concentration of survivors – gathered to escape death. She remembers extensively, like many others, how the avalanche buried the city and the lives of almost its entire population. She recalls how the voices from the landslide scar screamed for help until they began to still as the hours passed. She can still feel the chill, brought before dusk by a thick cloud of dust resulting from the mud, rocks and ice dragged from the Huascarán; how she spent the night on the top of the cemetery, together with her siblings and cousin, covered with a blanket provided by other survivors. She remembers all this with sadness to the point of crying, while her husband comforts her. But despite how shocking and upsetting Deysi's story is, she gets to share it with affection and a warm smile – even emitting a contagious laugh while sharing some funny anecdotes of her life.

Deysi is a good storyteller. Although she acknowledges that she does not like to talk about the event and sees our conversation on the matter almost as an exception, she seems comfortable sharing her survival experience and other aspects of her past with me. While listening to her at her house in the new Yungay, where she and her husband have lived since moving there almost 50 years ago, it almost feels that her story, rather than improvised, has been repeated to the point of developing a unique rhythm – a feeling that I encountered several times while speaking with many survivors of the 1970 avalanche. Like hers, countless testimonies of that day have been collected in books, interviews, chronicles and even artistic interventions, many of them produced by the same survivors. It is an outstanding articulation of memory practices and materialities that, as we will see, also shows strong differences in how the events of that day in 1970, together with its aftermath, are remembered nowadays.

This chapter explores the times and rhythms configuring the memory of a disaster. It analyses the multiple expressions and interpretations that disasters, as assemblages with concrete but diffuse temporalities, depict, enact and manifest (Law 2004, 94). As a non-coherent multiplicity, catastrophes produce temporal arrangements that can lead to apprehensions and conflicts. The memory of events like that in 1970 lead to deep temporal ruptures that remain in stories and objects – an ecology of practices and materialities that shows the diverse ways in which the trauma of the disaster, together with the challenges of recovery, configure the way the past is maintained and updated across time. Yet, these diverse temporal configurations can also lead to conflictive strategies for producing the past, generating heterogeneous interpretations and explanations of how events unfolded following the destruction left by the earthquake and avalanche.

Based on direct testimonies of survivors of the 1970 earthquake and avalanche, together with historical material from governmental reports and academic studies, this chapter digs into the differences that narrations can have when recalling the destruction and reconstruction of a city like Yungay. By taking into account different sources dealing with the city's past, I explore the multiplicities of voices that, when placed in relation to one another, can 'shed light on the silences – and possible motives for the silences – of others' (Macdonald 2013, 57). Rather than a triangulation of sources for testing the veracity of past narrations, the contrasting accounts of the disaster serve to understand the differences we can find when constructing the past through diverse experiences and rhythms. It is an exploration of the multiple forms of inhabiting in and across time, granting all those versions a concrete existence sustaining the notions of survivor and victim, native and foreign – an *us* and *them* that operates in time and space.

Throughout this chapter, we will see how the vivid accounts of the moments before and during the earthquake and avalanche offered by survivors like Deysi are followed by a diffuse time of waiting – what Lisa Baraitser (2017) terms a suspended time – that survivors seem to enter when narrating the aftermath of the earthquake and avalanche. The chapter then analyses the diverse strategies for providing accounts of the challenges and difficulties experienced during the reconstruction, and the conflicts that those differences gave rise to. Concretely, we will explore how local testimonies call upon the heroic work of survivors in rebuilding the new city, in contrast to sources from governmental agencies and researchers at the time, which depicted survivors as traumatised victims requiring support. The historical figures of hero and victim will operate as concrete devices by which to make sense of the disaster in temporal terms. Based on Donna Haraway's (2018) notion of figuration, the chapter analyses these figures as semiotic and material abstractions that emerge from the multiplicity of stories and accounts around the 1970 earthquake and avalanche, emphasising the temporal configurations that those abstractions lead to.

Yungay Hermosura

My story with Deysi begins some days before our interview, while talking with her husband Filomeno at his office close to the *Plaza de Armas*¹ in the heart of the new

1 Literally 'Weapons Square,' the *Plaza de Armas* is a common feature of the colonial city inaugurated by Spaniards. It consists of a central square commonly surrounded by administrative buildings, churches and other constructions of political and cultural significance. See Valerie Fraser (1990) for a historical analysis of this space and Setha Low (2000) for an ethnographic account of the lives and rhythms around central plazas in Latin America.

Yungay. Filomeno is part of the directorate of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, Yungay's charitable society that owns and administers the city's cemetery – where his wife survived the avalanche that buried the old city. With my visit, I expect to learn from him and other directors more about the history of the institution and the cemetery – one of the city's most famous attractions, and a source of pride for *Yungainos* across the decades.

Once a wealthy organisation, the offices of La Beneficencia (as it is known) show the precarity of an institution that, despite being a major landowner, has long learned to function under a tight budget – at least since its re-founding in 1970. The directors tell me that they suspect the organisation was created around 1820, but no longer have any documentary proof of this. The debris and mud brought by the avalanche left no traces of its past, no record or document from the old days. Simple facts about Beneficencia's history, like the year of its foundation, are just a mystery now buried several metres underground. Some historical sources mention the figure of a similar institution providing education for indigenous children close to Yungay, dating back to 1780 (Melgarejo Méndez 2013). Whether that is the same charitable society as today is something that no-one really knows. The directors do know that the institution was a philanthropic organisation, apparently a very wealthy one, and that profits from its land holdings – derived from the unremunerated labour of residents, as in any other *hacienda* at the time – were used to finance its charitable work. Its properties included large pieces of land, buildings and the old Yungay cemetery located within the city on Villón Avenue; a graveyard of which, as with most of old Yungay, there are now no traces.

Likely inspired by hygienist currents of European urbanism, local authorities decided to relocate the cemetery outside Yungay by the end of the nineteenth century. Huansacay, then an abandoned hill on the outskirts of the city, was chosen as the location for the new, modernist graveyard. The Swiss architect Arnold Ruska was in charge of designing the three levels of white, rounded funerary niches in 1891, the construction of which, headed by the *Yungaino* Esteban Montañés, would be immortalised in Yungay's history books. Decades later, in 1962, the *Huaracino* artist Godofredo Zegarra designed and installed the Cristo Monumental, a ten-metre-high plaster sculpture depicting Christ with open arms looking to the Huascarán Mountain. *Yungainos* decided to erect the Cristo as a sign of gratitude for protecting the city against an avalanche from Huascarán's Glacier 511 that buried the neighbouring town of Ranrahirca in 1962. Some say that the extended arms of Christ were meant to bless the mountain. Others, however, affirm that the hands facing outward suggest that the Christ is trying to hold back the Huascarán and any threat coming from there – an interpretation that would be used to explain why the avalanche lapped exactly at the cemetery's base some years later, in 1970 (Bode 2001).

Despite the apparently abandoned condition of Huansacay, this hill was the location of an archaeological site dating back to the Chavín period (1200–400 BCE),

something that *Yungainos* unaware of at the time or simply decided to ignore. Stories affirm that the place was one of the entrances to an extensive network of underground tunnels connecting the territory, spanning hundreds of kilometres from north to south. The most accepted description of this place, however, says that the hill, placed near the former settlement of Yunkaypampa (or 'the place over the valley of temperate climate'), was used as a strategic fortress by different groups, including small but powerful state-like administrations of the Recuay and Wari cultures. The site was later annexed to the Inca Empire after Cusi Yupanqui, son of the Inca Wiracocha, defeated the *Sinchi* (warrior lord) Kuismanco in 1370 (Silva Santisteban 1972). It is also believed that both Yunkaypampa and Huansacay were later utterly devastated around 1385 by an avalanche originating from the Huascarán that, as in 1970, was likely triggered by an earthquake. However, all these versions of the past are merely speculative, given the lack of historical information. There are almost no records left by the Spanish when they arrived in those lands that might shed light on previous settlements. Moreover, the scarce archaeological research in the area is insufficient to fully determine what previously lay behind the hill. The foundation of Yungay over the place in the sixteenth century, the construction of the cemetery over Huansacay at the end of the nineteenth century and the further destruction left by the 1970 earthquake and avalanche; all these processes have added multiple layers of sediment and debris over those ancient soils, making any archaeological effort to elucidate the story of the place an increasingly challenging task.

Although heavily damaged by the 1970 earthquake, the cemetery was one of the few places in Yungay that was not completely covered by the subsequent avalanche. Located on the city's opposite side to the Cordillera Blanca, the landslide scar reached only the base of the cemetery and impacted just the first levels (see Figure 3). In front of it, the avalanche left a giant expanse of mud and rocks, together with four palms from the former *Plaza de Armas*. As a substance that refused to leave, the mud remained for some time – first as a fresh sludge staining survivors' clothes and then as dried sediment covering everything with dust and grit. With time, the mud turned into soil, where the gardens of the Campo Santo, the massive memorial that commemorates the destruction of the old Yungay and its victims, are located nowadays. In some areas, it is still possible to find sediment deposited by the avalanche, such as a bus that was dragged hundreds of metres and destroyed in the process. The mud, however, is most present in survivors' stories, functioning as a binding material that merges their testimonies into a common, unified experience of loss and trauma.



Figure 3: ‘Here was Yungay’. An aerial image of the landslide scar over the city (Peru’s National Aerial Photography Service 1970. Courtesy of the Air Group No. 31 of the Peruvian Air Force)

The fame of Yungay’s cemetery did not come out of nowhere. Just like Rushka’s work, the old city of Yungay was a well-known urban centre of the Callejón de Huaylas: an ancient colonial city that today is still remembered as one of the most beautiful towns in the region. Yungay *Hermosura* (Yungay Beauty), as the city was named by the Italian geographer Antonio Raimondi for its stunning architecture and landscape, was renowned among the aristocratic circles of Ancash and Lima, even gaining the attention of international tourists that would visit this small Andean town of white, red-roof mud houses and narrow cobbled streets. The proximity to natural monuments such as the Huascarán, which was seen from almost every point in the city, and glacial lakes such as Llanganuco, made it a strategic location for a flourishing tourism sector in the region – *Peru’s first touristic city*, as some elder inhabitants tell me sometimes.

The fame and recognition that Yungay enjoyed during its glorious years are almost entirely gone. The new city, built two kilometres north of the former, attempted to replicate the beauty and charm of its forerunner but without success. Its inhabitants and institutions, such as the same *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, seem to live from the memories of a glorious old past. Once a wealthy organisation, La Beneficencia lost a large part of its real estate properties, first due to Juan Velasco Alvarado's agrarian reforms of 1969 and then as a consequence of the 1970 earthquake. The cemetery, rebuilt some years after the earthquake, is now the most emblematic property that it owns, and selling cemetery niches and mausoleums is, according to the directors, the main activity for its maintenance. The organisation does not receive any state support nor part of the profits from the tourism that Campo Santo attracts yearly. The entrance fee to the memorial (5 Soles, approximately USD 1.5) generates barely 130,000 Soles (USD 33,000) per year, and allocated entirely to the maintenance of Campo Santo's gardens and its tourist zones. Despite the almost nostalgic beauty it depicts, the passing of time over the cemetery does not come as a surprise. The lack of funding for maintaining the cemetery is evident in its cracked walls and some of its abandoned platforms still awaiting refurbishment.

While we inspect a brochure of La Beneficencia containing some old pictures of the cemetery, Filomeno shares with me some details of his life. A man in his early seventies, he comes from a small town close to Yungay that he left to study and become a schoolteacher. He met his wife some years after the earthquake while working at the primary school of a nearby village. They later decided to move to the new Yungay and apply for one of the houses the government was providing to the victims of the 1970 disaster. Whereas Filomeno considers himself a *Yungaíno*, he admits that he is not a *real* one. He says that his relationship with those lands is only partial, as he did not live there before the avalanche, nor is he a survivor of that event. Filomeno proudly says that, unlike him, his wife Deysi is a *Yungaína neto y neta* (authentic and by-birth), a survivor who escaped from the landslide by seeking refuge at the cemetery. Deysi is therefore part of another group, whose members – as we will see – are considered the real citizens of those lands.

A suspended time

The house that Deysi and Filomeno own, located in the upper part of new Yungay, is on the same land plot that the state gave them after the catastrophe. What used to be a small, single ambient wood cabin – *full of holes everywhere*, as Deysi describes it amidst laughter – is now a massive three-storey house of *material noble* (hard material), a concept that people in Ancash use frequently to refer to claybricks and concrete. Unlike adobe, those materials are more valued due to their robustness – strong enough to even withstand an earthquake. Many figures and pictures of saints, *pa-*

tronos and virgins decorate the house. One is a representation of the Cristo Monumental – the same that witnessed how Daisy fled the city to the top of the cemetery while extending his arms to the avalanche.

During my visit to Deysi's house, we start reconstructing the events of that day: the story of the avalanche and how she escaped from it. The 1970 Ancash earthquake measured 7.5 on the Richter scale, lasted for 45 seconds and had its epicentre in the Pacific Ocean about 40 kilometres offshore from the city of Chimbote on Peru's northern coast. The resulting seismic movement reached Yungay at 3:23 pm on that Sunday, destroying most of the white, red-roof mud houses located along the narrow-cobbled streets – the same that attracted tourists from Lima and overseas. The earthquake was followed by chaos, confusion and an immediate deafening sound – 'as if 20 or 30 planes were passing by', says Diana, another survivor. With her memory still fresh of the 1962 avalanche that buried the neighbouring town of Ranrahirca, Deysi's immediate reaction was to evacuate when she heard someone warning of a landslide heading from the Cordillera Blanca. 'The Huascarán is coming down!' (*¡Se viene el Huascarán!*) is the expression that comes from every survivor's mouth when referring to that moment.

Technically, what buried Yungay was a debris and mud flow. It was triggered by a huge body of rock and ice that broke away from the sheer north peak of Huascarán at approximately 6,400 metres above sea level due to the seismic movement. In his report on the event, the French glaciologist Louis Lliboutry (1975) estimates that, during its freefall, approximately one million cubic metres of ice impacted Glacier 511 at 5,400 metres elevation, increasing its volume to 24 million cubic metres. The friction of the impact melted a considerable part of the ice, instantly releasing two million cubic metres of water. The mass of ice and water transported approximately 53 million cubic metres of soil, vegetation, and rocks. Travelling at an estimated 400 kilometres per hour (Ericksen et al. 1970), the resulting debris flow reached the city of Yungay and part of Ranrahirca, located 14 kilometres away, in two to four minutes. Many *Yungayños* liken the debris flow to the approach of a massive dark cloud, a black plume of smoke throwing sparks and flames due to the clashing stones falling from the mountain – an apocalyptic image and feeling of panic that most claim they will never forget.

Deysi, who was at the family shop, reacted by leaving the building before it collapsed from the earthquake, and fled with her younger sister and cousin to the cemetery over the Huansacay Hill, the safest point she could come up with near her house. Unfortunately, this was not an automatic reaction among most of the population. The old Yungay used to be located over the foothills of the Aira Hill, which separated the city from the basin of the river Llanganuco – the natural course of landslides coming from the Huascarán. Consequently, Yungay inhabitants commonly conceived it as being protected against floods, landslides and avalanches (Valladares Quijano 2011; León León 2016). The 1962 event, which Yungay escaped unscathed

thanks to this natural topographic barrier, reaffirmed this feeling of security. However, the 1970 debris avalanche was three to five times larger than its predecessor and four to five times faster. The unprecedented mass of debris, mud and ice engulfed the 100-metre-high Aira Hill, taking *Yungainos* completely unaware and unprepared to react.

While escaping, Deysi overcame several obstacles that made her route to the cemetery very difficult. She faced a panicked mass of disoriented people running without any clear direction – many of them praying on their knees and surrendering to the end of the world (as many survivors portray it) – while sidestepping collapsing mudbrick walls and avoiding falling power lines that would prove immediately fatal. As she reached the upper part of the cemetery, she felt the landslide hitting the lower part of Huansacay. When she turned around, less than five minutes after the beginning of the earthquake, her hometown was gone. ‘Everything was mud; everything was dust’, she remembers.

We began this chapter by stating that Deysi remembers the day of the earthquake very well. Maybe too well. Even the preceding days. The testimonies of people like her about that day are full of details giving an account of their experiences when facing the destruction of their hometown: what they ate in the hours before the earthquake, how they escaped from the landslide to safer areas or how they spent the first hours of the cold night. They recall those moments from more than 50 years ago as though they occurred yesterday – as if they were frozen in time; static; full of facts and emotions that make their testimonies extremely vivid and not easily forgotten.

No matter how detailed they are, memories of the past are never a complete account of all the possible ecological relations that practices and materialities elicit. The practice of memory, according to Johannes Fabian (2007), is a constant process of remembering and forgetting, a selection of moments that allows creating a logical narration of the past without getting lost in an overwhelming existence that is impossible to fully comprise. This selection can be related to what Bruno Latour (1990) conceptualises as a trajectory, a collection of the movements of associations and substitutions an actor makes across a network over time. As a record of those movements, trajectories are never complete lists of relationships but instead the crystallisation of some of those associations that, for one reason or another, gain more visibility along the way. It is a partial set of movements that ultimately gives greater prominence to some entities and reduces the complexity of portraying the past. ‘By cutting across the translations, the notion of trajectory invents surrealist “*cadavres exquis*”’ (Latour 1990, 114) – fictive constructions that allocate the power of a network to concrete actors. Whether incomplete or not, such trajectories are what confer a

history, an accumulation across time ‘that gives the impression that we have gained some reality’ (Latour 1990, 109).

Trajectory is both literally and figuratively a precise term to describe Deysi’s story. It conveniently relates to her displacement, the ‘trajectory of movement’ that allowed her path to safety while overcoming all manner of obstacles and challenges to *become knowledgeable* (Ingold 2010). But trajectory also implies the selections that survivors make in narrating their stories, the compilation and use of as many details as possible to give the impression of giving ‘the full picture’ of the events that day. This trajectory, both literally and figuratively, creates a particular form of time, one that seems to be compressed in the minutes before and during the earthquake and landslide. It is a time overflowed with actions, emotions and objects from the beginning to the end of their travels. Their trajectories are presented as the account of a moment that, since it took place more than 50 years ago, we do not expect to be particularly exhaustive and vivid, but yet they are. The personal testimonies of survivors give the feeling of being there with them, experiencing grief at the loss and suffering they experienced. It is a time fully condensed, because the events happening during that moment require extensive explanations, with a massive amount of detail to make them believable, sensible and logical, independent of how perplexing the narration of a whole city erased by a landslide might sound. Even when recounting a moment in which it seems the world comes to a sudden end, there is a succession of actions and events that need to be fully accounted for. No matter how dramatic the disruption, survivors must somehow make sense of that ending.

Yet, the richness of the survival testimonies, and the trajectory of the path followed before and during the event, contrast sharply with what came afterwards. The day after the event, people who survived in the cemetery started to move to the lower areas to locate their relatives. Deysi remembers being horrified in the days following the avalanche: there was absolutely no certainty about where to go or what to do. Neither was it clear whether the authorities in Lima knew what had happened with Yungay and if they were sending aid in the short term. The place, moreover, depicted a terrible scene. Besides the four palms from the former *Plaza de Armas* that resisted the landslide, the entire town was covered with mud. Both animal and human remains were everywhere, sometimes unidentifiable as men or women, children or adults.

With the exception of some written accounts, personal oral stories about the aftermath of the earthquake commonly turn somehow vague and diffuse – at least compared with the vivid details offered by survivors to reconstruct the minutes before and after the city’s destruction. Comments such as *we waited for days and weeks for help to come; we were desperate and without any food... and I couldn’t find my family as the days passed...* are common themes in describing what came afterwards. The detailed descriptions of how people escaped to safe areas seem to be replaced by much more

general narrations of the aftermath. This is by no means surprising, since the subsequent days turned into a long, terrifying wait before the arrival of governmental help. People like Deysi, still in evident shock, tried to survive with the means at hand. Like others, she recalls their efforts to collectively find food wherever they could as they hoped for help. Waiting turned into despair, and despair into temporal disorientation. The elapsed time, built upon the eternal minutes of the catastrophe, seemed to expand into infinite days of uncertainty and desolation without any logical sequence of events. Withstanding was the only goal.

Descriptions of the landslide aftermath resonate strongly with what Lisa Baraitser (2017, 1) defines as a suspended time: ‘Time conceived no longer of as a viscous fluid takes on a different form, no longer a line with direction or purpose but a pool, the welling up of present time that will not pass and has no rim’. For Baraitser, suspended time escapes from the dichotomy of rupture and constant motion paradigmatically exposed by Alain Badiou’s notion of event and Gilles Deleuze’s becoming. For the former, social change can be only conceived through the appearance of something new, or truth brought through the rupture of an event, whereas the latter emphasises movement as the ultimate condition of life, with time being defined by the displacement of an object. In contrast, Baraitser (2017, 13) focuses on the lived experience when ‘nothing at all is changing, when “something like a globe holds you”’. This understanding of time differs from the classical relationship of time and history defined by George Kubler (2008, 65), in which ‘without change there is no history; without regularity there is no time. Time and history are related as rule and variation: time is the regular setting for the vagaries of history’. Under suspended time, stories are built precisely on extraordinary regularity rather than the change granted by unique events – a history of time stuck in its purest sense.

In the days after the landslide, waiting was related to the anxiety of a delay that ‘holds the future hostage to the present momentum originating in the past’ (Lampert 2014, 14). The disruption the earthquake produced subsequently gave way to a state of unknowing, with survivors awaiting their fate, making the future unreachable from a never-ending present. In this suspended state, time operates differently to those moments when survivors escaped to safe zones: an irregular, expanded time consisting of disruptive events taking place simultaneously. It is the second inversion of the classical time–history relation: Time no longer as regularity but as abrupt change, a moment in which life seems to turn upside down without any certainty of returning to its normal path. When faced with this abrupt destruction and subsequent waiting, the aftermath turns into an absurdly long moment of despair and horror, in which the consequences of the catastrophe are more vivid than ever. There is nothing else to do but wait – and survive – with the means at hand. It is time lived, but without its flow (Riley 2019); a moment trapped in the mud of the landslide scar.

Historical figurations

The suspended time inaugurated during the aftermath of the disaster would come to contest the unconditional authority that survivors had as narrators of the earthquake and landslide. The suffering and loss experienced that day prevailed as a form of justifying the veracity and plausibility of the narrated facts for the moments before and during the event. However, once survivors enter the open and diffuse space inaugurated by the suspension of time following the destruction of the city, personal testimonies around this period would lose their unquestioned cohesion as the ultimate sources for exploring the past of Yungay.

That the accounts of the aftermath provided by survivors are less detailed than the moment before does not mean that there are no descriptions of what happened afterwards. The trajectory produced by survivors seems to lose its profusion, to be replaced by a suspension of the flow of time; other sources seem to fill the gaps left by the personal testimonies, thereby narrating the events of the weeks and months following the landslide. Alternative strategies for accurately and reliably recalling the past would start to be developed – approaches to the past that would shape the abstract and ethereal condition left by the temporal suspension characteristic of the aftermath.

This shift in the sources providing narratives of the past would also come with the introduction of new figures: Characters beyond the individual personalities narrating first-hand what they experienced during the aftermath. Figures that, in some cases, would be related to the account of heroic actions fulfilled by the same community members of the *campamentos*, while in other cases closer to the figure of traumatised victims that would inhabit all sorts of reports and studies concerning the disaster. Throughout these figures, recollections of the reconstruction process would be formed and shaped, while the boundaries of who can be considered part of that recovery and who should be considered a threat would be defined.

Resisting the relocation, recovering from below

If the hours and first days after the landslide were marked by the destruction and despair of losing one's hometown, the following days, weeks and months would be defined by intense feelings of frustration, helplessness and discontent. According to *Yungainos*, the emergency response from the government at that time would be anything but acceptable, resulting in feelings of disappointment and impotence among the local population when they started receiving what was considered entirely inadequate humanitarian aid.

Diana, a survivor of the landslide now residing in Lima, remembers those days bitterly. 'After 15 or 20 days', she affirms, 'the planes arrived with aid but in terrible conditions. There were no new clothes; everything was second-hand. There were

loads of shoes and ties. Who wanted to grab ties! I went to find some shoes because I did not have any, but I could not find a pair; they were all unmatched. There was not a single complete pair of shoes'. Diana attributes the poor quality of the humanitarian aid to ill intentions of governmental agencies such as the National Assistance Board (JAN) charged with distributing essential items such as food and clothing, or even the Committee for the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of the Affected Zone (CRYRZA), an institution created some days after the earthquake to cope with the short- and long-term challenges of the reconstruction. According to the survivors, those agencies habitually retained high-quality products – commonly associated with donations from countries such as Cuba, the Soviet Union and United States – while only distributing leftovers received from domestic donors. Some accuse relief agencies of a discriminatory attitude against *Yungainos* for the sole reason of belonging to the *sierra*. Javier León León (2016, 59) alleges that 'clothing and blankets sent from Europe for the wintertime were not distributed among the victims' because authorities in Lima contemptuously argued that 'the *indios* did not know how to use such garments. They were used instead by the Peruvian humanitarian agents'.

Perhaps one of the pivotal conflicts between survivors and central authorities referred to the relocation of the new Yungay. Staying as close as possible to the buried city and its surroundings, including the 'treacherous Huascarán', had an emotional meaning for the survivors; it was seen as a way to stay close to their origins and homeland. However, it also had a political dimension. Besides the *campamento* of Pashulpampa (also known as Yungay Norte), the nearest to the old city and where most of the surviving *Yungainos* were located, three other camps were willing to claim the name of Yungay. One, situated on a land extension near the city of Tingua, was the government's choice due to what they considered a safe location against further landslides from the Huascarán. The inhabitants of Pashulpampa fiercely rejected this decision, since the site was located around 15 kilometres from the old city. Furthermore, they claimed that its 40 hectares were not large enough to contain a provincial capital, contrasting the almost 100 hectares available in Yungay Norte. The connectivity of the old Yungay to other localities was also a compelling factor. As a nexus between cities like Caraz and Carhuaz in the Callejón de Huaylas and Yanama on the other side of the Cordillera Blanca, the old Yungay was considered a strategic location for business and commerce. The old Yungay hosted one of the most important markets in the Callejón de Huaylas, where urban residents and local *campesinos* from the highlands sold their products. Relocating the city to Tingua would have meant losing this geographical advantage over other important cities.

According to survivors, the most common strategy used by the government to push forward the relocation was to withhold essentials such as food and shelter. León León (2016) and Vergara Méndez (2013) accuse JAN and CRYRZA of explicitly denying aid to Yungay Norte as a means of forcing survivors to move closer to the

storage centre located in Tinguá. People who were settled in Pashulpampa, they affirm, used to walk several kilometres during the first months to obtain food, water and clothing. The allocation of tents and the construction of provisional houses, moreover, took longer in Yungay Norte than in any other camp in the zone. What at the beginning of the aid distribution was expressed as feelings of disappointment and impotence soon became anger and grievance.

Months after the catastrophe, and with what was considered scarce support from state agencies, survivors started to organise their own rehabilitation strategies. Besides the educational centres, one of the first infrastructures used in Pashulpampa to dispute the title of Yungay was the market – thereby emphasising the relevance of this place for the old city. The lack of *material noble* was countered with *materiales a mano* (materials at hand): ropes delineated the market's perimeter where modest stands of sticks, branches and agave leaves started appearing. The delimitation of this place, without the authorisation of central agencies, aimed to give a sense of stability and security to local suppliers. The improvised market was relocated to a nearby area and replaced by a more robust infrastructure three months later, which was received with discomfort by survivors, until the definitive market of *material noble* was built four years later. This was followed by the reactivation of basic services and administrative agencies, including the Municipality, the civil guard, a bank agency, Yungay's *Sociedad de Beneficencia* and some groceries shops – 'all re-established within three months of the disaster', according to Oliver-Smith and Goldman (1988, 112).

Perhaps one of *Yungainos'* proudest works in those first years was the replenishment of water supplies for agriculture and human consumption. Nehemías Vergara Méndez (2013), new Yungay's first Major and later Director of Public Works, narrates the struggles and various challenges involved in providing water for human consumption and irrigation. As with almost every aspect of life after the landslide, water supply began with *materiales a mano*. The scarce muddy water available was initially collected in small wells and filtered with the cladodes of the *tuna* (prickly pear cactus). As time passed, water distributed by the government some kilometres away was neither sufficient to supply Yungay Norte adequately nor to sustain the croplands that survived the landslide. With the help of surrounding villages, and the Church's financial support secured by the direct intervention of the renowned and beloved *Monseñor* (Bishop) Luis Bambarén, Yungay Norte decided to rebuild the old irrigation canals, a task that took them four months. It is narrated as an extraordinary feat and an example of unity between *Yungainos* and *campesinos*, a heroic campaign that allowed the local population to meet their basic needs with their own hands.

Despite their apparent unity as a ruling group, urban survivors also presented contrasting positions. Vergara Méndez (2013) manifests his discontent with several *Yungainos* involved in the recovery and reconstruction. Specifically, he reprimands organisations of *Yungainos* based in Lima, such as the Association of Rehabilitation

and Reconstruction of the Yungay Province (ARRPRY). According to the author, it took nine months to establish the organisation while survivors were fighting for their lives against the indifference of CRYRZA and the central authorities. One of the leading figures of ARRPRY was the doctor Asunción Caballero Méndez who, 'splattered with *rojimios* [red-like ideological thoughts] and stimulated by the dictatorship of Velasco Alvarado of communist hue, wanted to take advantage of the situation to revive his political image, controlling in his own way the surviving *Yungainos* of the Yungay Province' (Vergara Méndez 2013, 109). Notably, the author not only explicitly differentiates between the *Yungainos* and the rest of the province's inhabitants but also between the *Yungainos* who were in the city during its destruction and those living in Lima at the time. According to this view, to be a *sobreviviente* (survivor), and not being born in Yungay, is what distinguishes a '*neto y neta Yungaino*' from the rest of the world.

Despite all the controversies and struggles that the recovery process arouses among *Yungainos* in the Callejón de Huaylas and those in Lima, there is also a common recognition of the central figures that took part in the reconstruction. *Yungainos* still remember people like Nehemías Vergara Méndez and Asunción Caballero Méndez, both deceased, as pivotal figures in the city's refoundation. Their legacy has been maintained thanks to public homages during official commemorations. During the 100th anniversary of the Province of Yungay in 2008, Vergara Méndez was honoured as *hijo ilustre de la ciudad* (distinguished son of the city) due to his role as the first major after the earthquake. Caballero Méndez, moreover, has been honoured several times in events of the Club Yungay in Lima. Together with other public figures such as Monseñor Luis Bambarén, their names are mentioned in books as remarkable *Yungainos* (see León León 2016; Pajuelo Prieto 2002; Valladares Quijano 2011). Figures like them live through testimonies and stories about the city's recovery, embodying the heroic commitment of *Yungainos* amid the reconstruction of Yungay, together with the conflicts existing between different groups at the time. This embodiment, which is repeatedly applied as a source of memory production, can be related to a first historical figuration articulating how a past world is recalled.

Heroic figures of the reconstruction are repeatedly evoked as exemplifying the determination of the survivors. They function as vivid figures of community, cooperation and solidarity – values that are constantly mentioned when thinking about *Yungainos*' response in the aftermath of the disaster. The heroic narration around the re-establishment of Yungay helps to create a common survival experience built on a shared feeling of surviving and resistance, even among the new generations that did not live through the atrocities of the disaster but that, nevertheless, inherited the suffering of the older generations. Heroic figures such as Vergara Méndez and Asunción Caballero, in this sense, condense a vast network of actors that jointly worked to achieve the goals proposed for rebuilding the city, and the sacrifices they

made to recover a lost home. They give a tangible face and a sense of leadership to the recovery process, even though the reconstruction, far from being an individual act, resulted from a collective effort of mobilisation and negotiation.

Beyond ill intentions: pathologising the victims

Whereas local sources describing the tragedy, such as the books by Vergara Méndez and Javier León León, recall the heroic work of the local population to stimulate processes of reconstruction and recovery, governmental interpretations of the situation at the time show a somewhat different approach when managing the emergency. The heroisation of survivors amid the reconstruction efforts would be replaced by a rather assistance-related vision of the catastrophe, one in which the response and recovery agencies would be in charge of providing proper tools and humanitarian aid, calling upon the figure of a victim that needs to be saved through rapid state support provided in a specific time.

In its National Plan for the years 1971–1975, prepared by the National Planning Institute (INP 1972), the government portrays Ancash's *sierra* as an underdeveloped zone experiencing strict emigration processes, highly related to the accelerated industrialisation of the region's coastal areas. In tune with the recently inaugurated Latin American theories of dependency in the late 1960s (Frank 1967; Cardoso and Faletto 1969; Contreras Elvira 2002), the INP remarks that the underdevelopment that then characterised the affected zone was a consequence 'of the historical process followed in the country, defined in general terms by the subordination of the Peruvian economy to the needs and interests of the capitalist system, and in particular by its interregional dependence to the needs and interests of Metropolitan Lima' (INP 1972, 87–88). Ancash's main Andean cities were depicted as shrinking zones, experiencing dramatic depopulation even before the earthquake, which purportedly worsened with massive emigration to coastal areas after the event. The disaster, in this sense, only came to 'accentuate the spatial imbalances' (INP 1972, 90) that defined the relationship between *sierra* and *costa*, portraying the catastrophe as an accelerationist event of internal migration and economic dependency. In the words of CRYRZA, 'the earthquake of the 31st of May 1970 confirmed the unequal and unjust socioeconomic and political order existing in the Affected Zone, a situation that as revolutionary Peruvians we have the obligation to change through the tasks of Reconstruction and Rehabilitation' (CRYRZA 1972; in Bode 2001, 178).

Authorities also explained the earthquake's drastic consequences through the poor coordination capacities of the local population, linked to decades of social capital dismantling. According to the report, 'the earthquake proved the inefficiency of the scarce levels of social organisation in the majority of the population', leading to 'a set of dispersed demands' (INP 1972, 91) that were portrayed as very difficult to satisfy. Such a scenario, the government remarks at the time, only benefited a local elite

that traditionally influenced the region's productive activities – a group of the population that, 'given their organisational capacity and the cohesion of their interests, became the most important lobbying and influencing sector' during the reconstruction (INP 1972, 91). Under this context, the government's mission in the aftermath was not only to reconstruct the regional settlements under new modern standards; above all, it was the rearticulation of the social fabric and improvement of the highland's productive capacity as a form of overcoming its dependency on the coast. To achieve this, democratisation of the urban public space was required – a process that aimed to restrict the hegemony of the white and *mestiza* elite while redistributing wealth and access to urban services among the indigenous and *campesino* population.

Weeks after the earthquake, the area surrounding old Yungay became an operational centre not only for governmental organisations coordinating immediate help and further reconstruction, but also for international groups from all over the world willing to support the region's recovery. The magnitude of the destruction would foster massive international aid from countries including Chile, Cuba, both East and West Germany, Mexico, the Soviet Union and United States. Inscribed within what Anne-Emanuelle Birn and Carles Muntaner (2020) define as the Cold War's disaster diplomacy and South–South medical solidarity, the two main geopolitical blocs of the time sought to demonstrate their supremacy and support by sending anything considered profitable for recovery purposes: monetary donations, clothing, machinery, satellite phones, prefabricated houses and hospitals, tents, healthcare volunteers and professionals, medicine and even blood – with Fidel Castro's supposedly running among Ancash's veins nowadays². This 'earthquake of world solidarity' as it was termed at the time (Bode 2001, 164) was one of the first expressions in the history of international aid amid a catastrophe of such magnitude (Álvarez 2019) and was covered by journalists worldwide.

The consequences of the event, together with the strong presence of a diverse set of professionals, would leave a profound influence on different disciplines. A notable example is the work conducted in the region by psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. Supported by a vast network of volunteers and humanitarian agencies from all over the world, psychiatrists from Lima and countries like the United States produced vast numbers of reports diagnosing post-traumatic stress disorder, the most common pathology identified. Signs of this diagnosis commonly

2 It is commonly said among *Huaracino* leftists that Fidel Castro was the first donor of blood sent from Cuba to Peru. I learned this while joining the Huaraz-based National Encounter of Peru–Cuba's Cultural Centres (*Casas de la Cultura Perú–Cuba*) taking place in November 2019, where assistants constantly shouted with joy ¡*La sangre donada jamás será olvidada!* (The blood donated will never be forgotten!) and ¡*Gracias, Fidel, tu sangre en mis venas!* ('Thank you, Fidel, your blood in my veins!').

included anxiety and distress reactions, psychotic and neurotic reactions, depression and dissociation – a feeling also described as ‘automatism’ (i.e. the inability to perceive cold / hunger, or to react to immediate disturbances). In other cases, it also included violent reactions and loss of memory. Some passages from a report of the time exemplify this:

On June 20 [1970], a meeting with the inhabitants of Lucumapampa was convened to transfer the isolated people from one camp to another where the JAN could provide help. This meeting consisted of an agglomeration of people behaving without any sense of unity or defined goals, acting like six- and seven-year-old children. Open aggressivity and clear manifestations of affective ambivalence were felt floating in the air. Aggressivity was towards themselves or the rest. Individuals threatened to kill themselves if, for example, a particular request was not fulfilled.

... Other interesting reactions were observed within the group from Ranrahirca on June 25 [1970]. This population was better organised: they had installed some tents, given names to the streets and allocated silos.

When the assembly began, the Peruvian flag was raised. The reaction of the group was instantaneous: some individuals cried, others laughed, others manifested frenetic joy while jumping and hugging each other, others laughed and cried at the same time, others sang the national anthem loudly’ (Infantes et al. 1970, 176).

Critical here is how these reports ultimately led to a pathologisation of post-disaster behaviour, in tune with the diagnoses that were spread by disaster research groups linked to the United States Army at the time³ and common in contemporaneous literature of disasters studies⁴ (Stehrenberger 2016; 2017).

3 The connection between military research groups and disaster risk management for preparedness and response has been extensively researched, including the work of Tracy Davis (2007), Joseph Masco (2014) and Davide Orisini (2022).

4 Moreover, this event had implications for post-disaster psychological studies and other interventions. According to Cécile Stehrenberger (2016), the 1970 event led scholars such as Dr. Raquel Edelmann Cohen, a prominent Peruvian researcher in the field of mental health, to apply their findings and diagnoses in other disaster-related settings, such as the 1972 earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua. Similarly to Ancash, the aftermath of Managua’s earthquake would turn Nicaragua’s capital into a Cold War ‘battleground’ (Johnson Lee 2015). Supported by the US and international urban planners, the authoritarian regime of General Anastasio Somoza Debayle would produce an incomplete and contradictory modernisation plan, creating the feeling – of an ‘unfinished’ and ‘unrecovered’ city – that still prevails among the population. See David Johnson Lee (2021) for a detailed analysis of the US intervention in Managua’s reconstruction process and the influence of the failed recovery process in the 1979 Sandinista Revolution.

The unfolding of the 1970 earthquake and its aftermath would also be particularly significant in developing an emergent and weakly addressed field of anthropology of disasters at the time⁵. Events like the 1970 Ancash earthquake and the landslide that buried cities like Yungay were one of the first moments⁶ when anthropologists could observe first-hand the consequences of such a disruptive event and the challenges experienced by surviving groups to recover 'normality'. The work of Paul Doughty (1971), Stephen Dudasik (1980), Jorge Osterling (1979), and most prominently Anthony Oliver-Smith (1977) and Barbara Bode (1977) around the aftermath of the 1970 earthquake in the Callejón de Huaylas provided a solid impulse to the predominantly incipient anthropology of disasters, to focus on the institutional challenges that societies in the so-called path of modernisation and development face after the occurrence of extreme events. The disaster agent, according to William Torry (1979, 519), would become 'one of several interacting forces which disrupt social stability and promote change', providing the discipline with new research horizons beyond primitivist approaches to traditional societies.

The strong presence of anthropologists in the region was in any case accidental. Since the 1950s, the Callejón de Huaylas hosted the Vicos Project at the hacienda of the same name, a world-leading research institute of applied anthropology associated with Cornell University. Similarly to many other applied anthropology projects in the Andes at the time, Cornell's scholars aimed to enhance – through what Allan Holmberg, one of its founders and directors, defined as 'participant intervention' – conditions that would promote social and economic development within the local Quechua-speaking population living at the hacienda (Greaves et al. 2010). Strongly influenced the expansion of a developmentalist anthropology – commonly related to an 'inherently capitalist character' (Klarén 1973, 550) – in the region, the project's main goal was to 'bring the indigenous population into the 20th century and integrate them into the market economy and Peruvian society' (Cornell University 2005). The presence of the Vicos Project until the late 1960s, together with the dramatic social disruption that the 1970 earthquake and landslide entailed, provided a perfect scenario for the conjunction of research perspectives that had somehow been

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- 5 Before events like the 1970 earthquake, anthropological studies of disasters had been relatively rudimentary and based on scarce empirical studies. According to William Torry (1979), the first anthropological studies on hazards were mainly focused on exploring the capacity of tribal groups to adapt and maintain, 'under aboriginal conditions', long-term stability amid harsh environmental circumstances – related primarily to scenarios of drought and famine. Studies in this regard included the pivotal work of scholars like Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940), Fernando Ortiz (1947), Paul Spencer (1965) and Victor Turner (1967), among others.
- 6 Other studies conducted in the aftermath of events at the time include the work of Cyril Belshaw (1951), Felix Keesing (1952), Raymond Firth (1959), William Lessa (1964), Joan Miller (1974) and Kai Erikson (1978).

separated until then⁷: an applied school of anthropological research focusing on establishing conditions to support economic progress, and a rather modest field of disaster studies focussed chiefly on understanding the impacts of hazardous events for the integrity of communities. Among them was Anthony Oliver-Smith, a young PhD candidate who, while preparing his doctoral thesis on traditional markets in the Callejón de Huaylas, would be forced to reorient his research on Yungay's recovery process as a consequence of the devastating earthquake and avalanche. Condensed in his seminal book *The Martyred City: Destruction and Rebirth of an Andean City*, Oliver-Smith's work would offer key insights for a research field that, to date, had focused on exploring how to mitigate the consequences of extreme events and improve society's response capacity amid crises.

Just like Kai Erikson (1978) while studying the 1972 Buffalo Creek flood in West Virginia, Oliver-Smith would strongly emphasise the post-traumatic consequences experienced by *Yungainos* due to what scholars at the time would identify as a 'loss of community' and the incapacity to rebuild the lost social fabric. Oliver-Smith's work was fundamental in establishing and reinforcing many of the implicit assumptions we face nowadays when dealing with social studies in disaster and recovery: the existence of a traumatised population that, in their communitarian efforts to recover their old forms of life, must deal with a centralised apparatus that, incapable of broadly understanding the 'real needs' of survivors, forced upon them a processes of relocation that in many cases ended up destroying the cohesion of social groups – ultimately resulting in 'greater change than the disaster agent itself' (Oliver-Smith 1977, 5). Similarly to Barbara Bode (2001), who was also conducting ethnographic research in the region at the time, Oliver-Smith would suggest that urban elites – the same group that the government identified as influencing the region's decisions and politics – viewed the relocation as an attempt, through land redistribution, to suppress the strong class and race divisions that had traditionally marked the relationship between *criollo* and indigenous populations (Bode 2001). The reconstruction of the new Yungay, in this sense, is portrayed by Oliver-Smith (1986) as a constant tension between the will of local inhabitants from the former Yungay versus the recovery plans of central agencies.

Whereas the tension between governmental agencies and the local population is a diagnosis shared by survivors of the tragedy and scholars working in the affected

7 An exception to that rule relates to the work of Anthony Wallace (1956), who analysed the consequences of a tornado over Worcester, Massachusetts, and the community and individual reactions to the situation. According to Anthony Oliver-Smith (2021), Wallace's main contribution at the time was to develop a spatial-temporal matrix that allowed him to differentiate temporal periods and spatial domains according to the distance from the impact zone and across well-defined moments: pre-disaster, warning, threat, impact, inventory, rescue, remedy and recovery.

zone at the time, it is important to highlight differences in how this conflict is portrayed. In Oliver-Smith's narration, the heroic figures embodied in local authorities and leadership are replaced by a much more vulnerable character, one facing the dramatic consequences of a devastating event. In his description, personalisms are overshadowed by what he considers a genuinely collective work of survivors and authorities without clear leadership or visible faces. There is scarcely space for strong figures leading the reconstruction; quite the opposite – his ethnographic description of local actors aims to portray the difficult living conditions and severe post-traumatic consequences that survivors faced in the year after the earthquake and avalanche. Here, Vergara Méndez and Caballero are not historical figures that reflect the heroic values of a devastated community trying to rebuild its life. Instead, emphasis is placed on other local figures such as Rosa Martínez, the owner of one of the few restaurants and a survivor who lost her entire family in the landslide, or the *Chupamaros*⁸, a group of local survivors known for their heavy alcohol consumption. Oliver-Smith's work reveals, common to both Rosa Martínez and the Chupamaros, feelings of unbearable pain and loss in the aftermath of the avalanche. The former, portrayed as a beloved figure among Yungaínos due to her charismatic personality and solidarity among survivors, is also depicted as experiencing deep anguish resulting from strong feelings of loneliness and loss. 'I have no more *compadres*, no more *ahijados*, all dead, all buried in the avalanche. I am lonely. Who will care for me? Who will keep me company when I am old? I am alone in the world now', she exclaimed (Oliver-Smith 1986, 176). In the Chupamaro's case, moreover, heavy drinking and alcoholism are understood as a natural reaction to the difficult living conditions of the time.

This emphasis on trauma as an articulating emotion for ethnographic testimony seems not so dissimilar from institutional positions dealing with the survivors at the time, and is certainly not an isolated institutional response to the aftermath of the 1970 earthquake. As the vast literature on the matter shows, it has been a common attitude related to problematic naturalisation and homogenisation of reactions amid extreme scenarios through the use of a specific set of instruments (see Young 1997; Terheggen et al. 2001; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Good and Hinton 2015). Rather than rejecting the existence of trauma as such, these approaches view trauma as a social phenomenon, constructed and mobilised by different actors in ways that lead to the traumatising of experience (Fassin and Rechtman 2009) – the creation of a present, conditioned to the painful scars of the past, that precludes and suspends the

8 The name Chupamaro combines Tupamaros, a revolutionary guerrilla group active in Uruguay and Argentina at the time, with *chupar*, a slang term for getting drunk. As the author explains, the name emerged from 'the coincidence of the two words *chupar* and *Tupamaro* in the context of this heavy drinking and tightly knit group of friends who now saw themselves as independent of society's opinion' (Oliver-Smith 1986, 172–73).

expected passage of time. The particularity of pathologising approaches to trauma, moreover, is the form that articulates the existence of subjects under a historically situated category like post-traumatic stress disorder (Young 1997; Good and Hinton 2015). Understood more as a resource, trauma can be considered, in this sense, an operation that aims to characterise, or rather classify, bodies that have experienced situations of extreme violence, suffering or tragedy. Trauma, from this perspective, functions not as a condition that suppresses natural reactions to highly intense situations, but as a tangible mechanism by which to name and classify experiences and feelings that are outside the norm.

Post-traumatic disorder was not the only problem depicted by authorities and researchers at the time. Oliver-Smith (1986) narrates the escalating tensions that arose surrounding aid distribution, especially housing allocation. According to the author, when social workers sought to justify the equal distribution of housing irrespective of socioeconomic condition or ethnicity, the urban population tended to react critically, even shouting '*¡No somos iguales!*' (We are not equal!) while demanding better treatment and conditions than *campesinos*. 'Hostility between the social workers and the urban survivors became so sharp that eventually the social workers refused to come to Yungay to assist with the distribution of doors and windows for the houses as well as with other organisational aspects of the project' (Oliver-Smith 1986, 145). Such passages contrast sharply with the versions of the survivors, who saw their behaviour as a real example of local organisation and virtue based on the principles of humanity and compromise with their homeland. The *Yungainos* from *Campamento Norte*, who, 'with the help of *campesinos*, ... drawing strength from their courage and grief, overcame their misfortune, desolation and death and raised a new village' (León León 2016, 42), were instead depicted as a traumatised population susceptible to severe outbursts of violence that, in many cases, presented evident discriminatory attitudes against other members of the *campamentos*. Thus, the government's position was that it was dealing with a vulnerable population barely able to make rational decisions about the reconstruction of the city.

It is maybe not surprising, therefore, that Oliver-Smith and other authors do not put great emphasis on clear, recognisable faces when dealing with the process of reconstruction and recovery. For those focusing on the relationship between the institutional handling of the situation and the local reaction to aid distribution and reconstruction efforts, local leaderships were less relevant than the community and the agencies working in the zone. This perspective, moreover, portrays the frictions between the national agencies and survivors as the result of an overwhelmed apparatus that aimed to deal not only with the immediate response to the disaster but also with the structural asymmetries and power relations within the Peruvian society. From this perspective, figures like Vergara Méndez or Caballero Méndez are no longer drivers of change, but the result of 'the relationship between the old and the new event structures and the passage which people must negotiate between the

two' (Oliver-Smith 1986, 16). What is considered by local actors as orchestrated negligence by central authorities seeking to retain resources donated by international agencies, is instead depicted by Oliver-Smith and other authors as simply inefficiency or incapacity to deal with a catastrophe of such magnitude, fed by 'paternalistic forms of disaster aid which do not involve the recipients in decision making, management and implementation' (Oliver-Smith 1986, 159).

In all these narrations of the aftermath, it is the figure of the victim – embodying the trauma of loss and survival – rather than the reconstruction itself that assumes a stronger protagonism. Rosa Martínez, 'a tragic figure among tragic figures', Oliver-Smith affirms, 'became for a time a living symbol of survival. ... In the first year, she also became an important ritual and symbolic presence, much like the palm trees on the avalanche and the cemetery' (Oliver-Smith 1986, 219). It is the stories and experiences of the traumatised survivors that are at the centre of these accounts of the disaster – and how, despite the horrors experienced, they managed to remain alive while their entire world fragmented. Heroism, in this sense, was far from being the centre of attention but instead a distant discourse that only the local population seemed to articulate.

Configuring the disaster

This chapter gave a first glimpse of temporal arrangements that are produced while keeping the memory of past disasters alive. We explored how the temporal rhythms of survivors' accounts vary across the different stages of their testimonies; how the fully detailed narrations of people like Deysi, concerning the moments before and amid the earthquake and avalanche, are replaced by a time in which survivors were immersed into an ontological suspension – a time of waiting for things to happen. By paying attention to the diverse sources narrating the loss and recovery of the city of Yungay – a strategy that allows inquiring into the plurality of temporalities emerging from different actors and voices (Macdonald 2013) – we also explored how the gaps left by personal accounts of the aftermath are filled with other types of narratives. Narrations contained in books and historical material complement the authority of individual testimonies of the catastrophe with broader, generalisable figures that, as we saw, emerged as conflictive and almost antagonist approaches regarding the role and necessities of local inhabitants amid the aftermath.

From the previous observations, some initial conclusions could be outlined. We could argue that, on the one hand, members of the affected community base their remembrance of the recovery phases on figures such as *Nehemías Vergara Méndez* and *Asunción Caballero Méndez*, framed as fighting the injustices committed by an obtuse government with wicked intentions. Recognising visible, heroic figures is common in past narratives, a selective construction of the past that some schol-

ars have defined as 'cumulative heroisation' (Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall 2002; in Macdonald 2013, 60–61). On the other hand, we might say that central governmental agencies like CRYRZA, JAN, and even scholars like Oliver-Smith, built their response action, diagnoses and analysis on the notion of trauma – in the case of Oliver-Smith, portrayed in figures such as Rosa Martínez or the Chupamaros. Depicting victims of disasters and extreme experiences as vulnerable, traumatised subjects has been a usual response from authorities and scholars, as previous studies on this issue have shown (Young 1997; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Good and Hinton 2015). We could say that these two contrasting but complementary figures clashed at some point, creating tensions around what is meant to be a survivor – i.e., a true expression of resistance and endurance versus fragile beings that must be saved and supported.

Furthermore, we could also argue, as some sources affirm, that behind the survivors' responses to the catastrophe lies a true expression of class and racial conflicts deeply rooted in Peruvian society. In this reading, central agencies like CRYRZA saw, in the transformations made after the earthquake, a mechanism to balance the hitherto unequal conditions in which the urban and rural populations lived, whereas urban survivors considered reconstruction a threat to their historical privileges and domination over rural communities. These differences would have led to strong disputes about who were the real survivors (*sobrevivientes*) versus those portrayed only as victims (*damnificados*), thereby radicalising the differences between the urban and rural populations. Conflicts between community members, which are seemingly common in aftermath and recovery processes (Hoffman 2019; Fuentealba 2021), can lead to different forms of memory constructions among survivors. To build a shared history, in this sense, is to build a common otherness, a stranger – 'a large task of suppression and denial of incongruous or undesirable elements' (Hodgkin and Radstone 2005, 170). As Sara Ahmed (2000) affirms, identifying a stranger is a recognition that implies a fetishisation; the displacement of social relations 'through the transformation of objects into figures' (Ahmed 2000, 5) that turns the other into a common, generalisable unit. In line with the scholars conducting research at the time, we could say that while efforts to depict Yungay as a city of *criollos* completely erased the fundamental role of *campesinos* within the urban area (Williams 2001), it also left the latter outside the group of those who were considered the real *sobreviviente* of the avalanche – and, thus, ineligible for state support (Oliver-Smith 1986).

These initial conclusions are indeed coherent. But the reality is, as always, much more complex. Despite his strong emphasis on the trauma, Oliver-Smith also describes his contacts in Yungay back then as strong and dedicated people whose 'attempts to forge a new, meaningful existence in the face of almost total destruction of their town may tell us a great deal about how people cope with and adapt successfully to massive social change' (Oliver-Smith 1986, 13). Although mostly paternalistic, governmental agencies appealed to empower local communities through

'consciousness-raising' (Bode 2001), notwithstanding the adverse responses these politics had on the population. Furthermore, *Yungainos* at some point admit that organisations like the JAN were not 'established or created to cope with situations of emergency like the one of 31 May 1970', and 'maybe that was the reason' – rather than ill intentions – 'why it was not possible to deploy an effective work' (León León 2016, 100). Even the rivalry between Vergara Méndez and Caballero Méndez seems to dissipate at some moments – for example, when the former recognises the arrangements made by the latter to receive one of the hospitals donated by the Cuban government (Vergara Méndez 2013, 110). All these excerpts can be seen as contradictory to the testimonies presented throughout this chapter. But the truth is that stories are always partial accounts. As such, coherence and single explanations are simply difficult, if not impossible, to achieve – even from the versions of the facts provided by a single informant.

Contradictions in testimonies do not necessarily make the existence of conflictive historical figures a false abstraction; it makes them, precisely, a figurational practice – the articulation of actual and figural entities fundamental for the constitution of our live-material worlds (Haraway 2018). Figures deployed by survivors, authorities and researchers offer arrangements that, according to Donna Haraway (2018, 11), operate as 'performative images that can be inhabited. Verbal or visual, figurations can be condensed maps of contestable worlds'. As a practice, figuration provides an abstraction that can help us to navigate the complex entanglements of the past – a trajectory that, as previously mentioned, creates a record of displacements that gives certain associations greater visibility than others. It is an operation that, by holding 'the material and the semiotic together in ways that become naturalised' (Suchman 2012, 49), leads to fictive constructions that persist over time. It is important to reiterate that fiction does not necessarily mean false. They are virtual creations that imply a mode of production and actualisation, 'as the circulation of figures implies their recontextualization, multiplicity and at least potential transformation', continues Suchman. Figures, in this sense, have a real presence in the world as they offer new forms of making sense of reality – independently of how they are produced or mobilised.

Whether Vergara Méndez narrating how *Yungainos* overcame the devastation of the avalanche *vis-à-vis* a corrupted government, former authorities depicting survivors as a traumatised population that was necessary to assist, or scholars such as Oliver-Smith calling upon the suffering experienced by survivors and the conflicts with a government incapable of understanding their *real* needs, all of them based their accounts of the past on figures with a historical background. They give a sense of the unfolded events because they shape those moments and narrations, leading to different versions of the past that, in many cases, are conflicting. The once undisputed authority of Yungay's urban elites, for example, is troubled by the arrival of a vast number of foreign actors with different goals and logics, whose diverse oper-

ational principles clashed with the intentions of those local *Yungainos* to remain in the location of the original city and rely on their historical privileges. These differences construct not only divergent and contesting urban projects among the actors involved; they ultimately create different times that clash with each other: an idyllic past of glory contrasted with a present of loss and hopeless future for some, versus for others a past of exclusion and inequalities that the post-disaster policies aimed to overcome in pursuit of a more equitable present and future.

As historical figures, both hero and victim promote temporal strategies for configuring the past. This applies to local narrations mobilising those figures in an effort to configure the disaster, endowing it with historical substance and coherence. But it also applies to reports and academic studies that, in an effort of figuring out, of ‘fitting figure to ground’ (Fortun 2009, 169), sought to understand what happened in the affected area and how it is possible to explain the behaviours, responses and attitudes that survivors showed. By invoking these figurations, all the sources dealing with the aftermath of the disaster aim to create a narration sufficiently persuasive to convince that their account of the facts is accurate and coherent. Yet, the creation of abstract figurations is not only a result of the eye-witnessing process; it is mostly a strategy that enables the construction of a generalisable and thus pervasive narration affirming that the author, the witness, knows what is going on there. By allowing totalising descriptions, generalisations and interpretations, the figurational exercise is a rhetorical strategy that creates part and whole simultaneously. The figuration, in other words, is what articulates the ground.

The conflicts and divisions produced by these historical figures are the first *tinku* of this work: the encounter of antagonistic figures marking the way in which the past is built and maintained. As abstractions, figurations are forms of gathering together (Haraway 2018); in the case of Yungay’s testimonies, propositions resulting from the multiplicity of the stories emerging from the disaster and its aftermath. Sustaining the past requires technical reports, academic studies and the countless testimonies presented in the books about the tragedy that have been published year after year by the survivors. It also requires concrete materialities that must be recreated and reproduced, like the destroyed cemetery, or elements that must be erased and turned into something else, like the dried mud left by the avalanche since transformed into the fertile soils of Campo Santo memorial. These forms of maintenance sometimes create antagonistic figures based on different operational principles. It can portray survivors as heroic figures fighting for their hometown, but also as vulnerable actors guided by trauma and the loss of privileges.

This first encounter invites us to think on memory and history as situated categories articulated around the conflictive encounter of temporal figures defining how the past is arranged in the present. Temporal delimitations of the 1970 catastrophe define who can be considered a real survivor and who is not. It is, in other words, an exercise that determines who should be included in what Jacques Rancière (2004) depicts as the distribution of the sensible: the definition of what elements are considered to take part in the common orders of the world versus those that are not, and which place they assume in those arrangements. But this creation of restricted pasts is not the only way in which inclusion and exclusion may take place. In what follows, we will explore how the practices and materialities aiming to demarcate the spatial limits of the avalanche can also be a decisive ecology for developing a regional memory of the catastrophe that, as we will see, can also lead to exclusionary temporal practices.