Conclusions
Disasters, History, Time

These years working in Peru have been shaped by moments of crisis and global political turbulence. In this tumultuous period – marked by the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global recession, the resurgence of far-right movements and authoritarian regimes worldwide, and the acceleration of climate change – we have seen the very foundational principles of our societies challenged. Naturally, this generalised political turmoil has also had substantial impacts on Peruvian society.

At the end of my first period of fieldwork in March 2020, COVID-19 arrived in South America. The warnings of an imminent border closure forced me to abruptly end my stay in Peru some weeks earlier and return to Chile, where I spent several months before being able to return to my home in Germany. The pandemic changed our lives globally, perhaps more than any other event in the past decades – *the global disaster of our times*, as I heard many people calling this period. Millions worldwide died as a consequence of the virus – exacerbated by poor health protocols, delayed governmental reaction and a highly uneven distribution of vaccines between countries. Our unpreparedness to properly respond to the pandemic worsened poverty and social inequalities; people lost their jobs, while others were forced to work in precarious conditions and exposed to the fatal consequences of the virus. As other moments of crises have shown us, COVID-19 revealed the ugliest face of inequality and the brutal effects of health injustice.

When I was finally able to return to the Callejón de Huaylas in January 2022, after two years of strict travel restrictions and closed borders, I found a bleak scene. As in many other regions of the so-called Global South, the pandemic had severe consequences for Ancash. I came to find that many people I had met during my first visit had passed away due to the virus, some of them close enough that I considered them friends. Many others, moreover, lost their direct sources of income due to stringent curfew measures implemented for several months and the economic crisis affecting the country. The lack of social contact and the instability triggered by the pandemic had all sorts of psychological consequences for the inhabitants, increasing the already dramatic precarity that many faced even before the virus' arrival.

This new scenario, however, also contrasted with the apparent continuity that life in that Andean region seemed to show. Things had changed, it is true, but cities and villages were the same, at least materially and rhythmically speaking. Behind face masks and improvised sanitary measures to reduce exposure, besides the public vaccine campaigns and new informal market for increasingly demanded health products, *the hold life has* (Allen 2002) kept its path as always. Markets were doing business as usual, streets in cities like Huaraz were as crowded as they used to be two years before and the stunning beauty of the Cordillera Blanca was still there. My own feelings therefore reminded me of when people in the region explain how things evolved after facing past extreme events: that despite the dramatic destruction and transformation that disasters brought, *everything* and yet *nothing* seemed to change, after all.

Besides the clear consequences of the pandemic, the months leading up to my second visit were marked by deep political processes, which, as in other moments of history, saw Peru divided into two apparently irreconcilable groups. In June 2021, Pedro Castillo became the new president of Peru after winning a very close run-off election. A former *rondero*[1] and rural schoolteacher from a small town of Cajamarca Department, Castillo gained international attention after winning a completely unexpected first majority in the first round, beating Keiko Fujimori, Alberto Fujimori's daughter and the favoured candidate of ring-wing conservatives. A prominent figure of the Union of Peruvian Educators (SUTEP), Castillo's short political career began with his role during a national teachers' strike in 2017. Under the slogan 'No more poor people in a rich country' (*No más pobres en un país de ricos*), Castillo became a figure of hope for a part of the population that never felt represented by the political *status quo*. But he was also strongly criticised by that part of the country he aimed to fight against: a coastal, urban world revindicating Peru's *criollo* condition.

During the campaign, Castillo was constantly treated as an ignorant schoolteacher, representing a rurality incapable of ruling the country. Although he lacked political experience and dismissed many of the protocols expected of a national authority, the main problem seemed to be his origins – a lost town in the district of Chota – and what he sought to revindicate: the rural disposed world. Under that scenario, *Fujimorismo* found strong support in coastal regions of the country – a project that, despite being rejected by an important part of the population for its authoritarian past and the several corruption scandals related to Fujimori's father, many seemed to prefer to the idea of being ruled by a rural Marxist teacher. *Costa* and *sierra*, once again, were divided.

1 Member of a *Ronda Campesina*, autonomous *campesino* patrols created in the 1980s as a strategy to protect rural communities against the attacks by Shining Path revolutionaries during the internal war.

One and half years after being elected, Castillo's government would end abruptly with almost none of his campaign promises of social justice and wealth distribution achieved. The Congress twice attempted to impeach Castillo, and accused him of several crimes of corruption within a matter of a year. Finally, he would be accused of attempting a self-coup and imprisoned after shutting down the Congress and calling for new elections in December 2022, the same legal strategy that Alberto Fujimori used in 1992 to remain in power for more than ten years. Vice President Dina Boluarte assumed power with strong support from the right-wing sector, promising to ensure the country's stability and governance by any means.

The political scenario the country was experiencing as I was finishing my work elicited all sorts of reactions. As a response to Castillo's detention, massive mobilisations demanding new elections took place throughout the country, with an intense concentration in the rural departments of the Peruvian *sierra*. The response of Boluarte's government, however, was merciless. By the end of February 2023, 60 people had died as a direct or indirect consequence of police brutality. Protestors were commonly named *terrucos* (short for terrorist) by public opinion, a figure that has featured in the national consciousness since the internal war against Shining Path. The allegations against protests also reminded many of an article written several years earlier by former president Alan García (2007), Peru's president during 2006–2010 and maintainer of Fujimori's neoliberal legacy. In the article, García relates people in rural areas to the figure of *el perro del hortelano* (the dog in the manger), an ancient story of a dog protecting a stall full of grain that it does not eat but does not allow others to eat either. 'There are many unused resources that are not tradable, that do not receive investment and do not generate work. And all of this is due to the taboo of outdated ideologies, idleness, indolence or the law of the dog in the manger that says: "If I don't do it, nobody does it"', exclaimed García in his column. García's invocation of *el perro del hortelano* is, according to Paulo Drinot (2017, 228), a strategy to reproduce a particular form of sovereignty and governmentality that 'expresses a project of country against its own population'. Like the dog in the manger, the *terruco* is a figure built on fear, an internal enemy that the *status quo* uses to suppress any form of dissent against the governmental project of development. Both figures, *el perro del hortelano* and the *terruco*, question the alleged search for integration and development to which people all over the country aspire.

As in other moments in Peru's history, the political conflict the country has and is still experiencing has created an ambiguous alterity used for all purposes. The rural *other*, embodied in the figure of the *terruco*, would strongly resemble that of the *indigenous*, an uneasy figure in Peruvian politics. Some public speakers from the conservative world, like Fernando Rospigliosi close to Fujimorismo, would deny the existence of an organised indigenous project in the country, arguing that those are phantasies 'created by some intellectuals and NGOs' willing to install a leftist agenda similar to the political project inaugurated by Evo Morales in Bolivia in the past

decades. 'What we have are people who want to integrate, not create this kind of different movement. … They try to integrate and become *criollos*. That's the Peruvian reality', Rospigliosi affirms[2]. For this position, the idea of indigeneity must be necessarily reduced to a multicultural category, a concept aiming to subjugate cosmopolitical differences to an epistemic exercise of domination while offering reduced spaces of controlled political participation (Blaser 2014; Babidge 2020). Any other expression of indigenism would be simply a hidden effort to implant chaos and terror in the country.

But for other voices, closer to the protests' demands, the *otherness* embodied in the demonstrations represented a figure of hope, an organised rural mass capable of changing the country's political structures. 'This is historical, also because it has happened before. But never in Lima – to demand the right to a voice in politics as usual publicly, massively, relentlessly, from all over the country', writes Marisol de la Cadena (an author quoted several times during this book), on 22 January 2023 on her Twitter (now X) account. Her words are accompanied by a picture of a woman in traditional rural clothes, waving a Peruvian flag in front of a police line. The committees that arrived in the capital from other provinces, to protest against the dictatorial regime installed by Dina Boluarte and demand political changes, were seen by many via the prism of heroic fighters, embodying the abandonment and abuses committed for centuries against rural areas.

The old conflicts we have seen throughout this book have all but disappeared in recent years. The permanent tension contained in the rural as a strangeness, an uneasy figure shaped by a constellation of experiences, histories, concepts and features (Timperley 2020), still defines the relationship between the national project and its allegedly uncivilised counterpart. Rurality still means an ambiguous category closely associated with the indigenous, the *campesino*, and, as such, with a form of existence that escapes the civilisatory project of the *criolla* nation. But it also refers to a mythical figure, an alterity emerging from the abandonment and isolation that has the capacity to change the course of the country, the 'politics as usual', in unimaginable ways.

***

Throughout this book, we have explored the entangled ways in which disasters and time are connected; how disasters articulate – and are articulated in, by and across

2 Debate between Fernando Rospigliosi, member of Keiko Fujimori's campaign, and Betsy Chávez, representative of Castillo's candidacy, on 26 May 2021. By the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies of Harvard University and the Institute of Latin American Studies of Columbia University. Extract of the debate available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-cf900-nwo.

– time; how those temporal arrangements that disasters produce (re)configure urban environments; and what types of disputes and conflicts those reconfigurations can elicit. By exploring places and devices where controversies around the memory of the past and the anticipation of future disasters arise, this book has analysed concrete moments in which apparently unsolvable oppositions seem to emerge – forms of *tinku* where the highland and the lowland, urban and rural, indigenous and *criollo* clash in conflictive terms. Yet, rather than focusing on such divisions as essentialising categories defining two inextricable worlds that come together, this book has considered those moments of encounter as entry points to explore further the articulation of those categories – how they emerge from vast ecologies of practices and materialities, and where they come from. It has been, in other words, an effort to explore how the massiveness that disasters entail can be conceived in actual terms – even in their past and future versions – but also how they are positioned historically through figures that transcend the material conditions from which disasters emerge.

To explore the chaotic, or disastrous, connections between the actual and the virtual, two main analytical concepts have been central to this work: the assemblage and the figure. Working with both concepts has been a way of dealing with the common risks that the application of those categories can have: in the case of assemblages, an all-too-actual arrangement that cannot deal with virtual existences properly, and all-too abstract figurations that run the risk of disregarding the material existence that the figures emerging from them can have. Throughout this book, we have seen how disasters are semiotic and material arrangements, through which all sorts of figurations are put into practice. As massive assemblages placed in time but also articulating particular forms of time, disasters coexist with figures that grant them historicity, a presence in time that defines the consequences – actual or potential – they have for the territories they reconfigure. Figurations, in other words, allow disasters to coexist with history because they place them and their massive consequences in a historical realm. Disasters create time, and figures place that time in historical terms. This work has critically analysed the interaction between disaster and figures, between the massiveness of those hyperobjects (Morton 2013) and the more concrete – although ambiguous – existence of figures.

The different sections of this book have explored how the temporal ecologies shaping disasters propagate all sorts of encounters between conflictive figures. By taking the notion of *tinkuy* as an epistemic mood, this work has analysed the types of configurations we find when we face disasters not only as disruptive events or processes perpetuating social order but also as moments of encounter. The gatherings explored in this work are never between indissoluble figures resulting from radically opposed worlds. Throughout the chapters of this book, we have seen how the apparently mutually exclusive urban and rural worlds, the lowlands and the highlands, are entangled in ways that overcome the initial division that the *tinku*, as an

encounter in the difference, entails. These ambiguities, it is important to remark, do not mean that those figurations do lack any correlative existence in *real* life. Figurations like the *indio*, *campesino*, *comunero* and their foreign counterparts such as the *gringo* or mining companies have operated as semiotic-material arrangements with a decisive presence in the history of regions like Ancash. As fixed categories, they operate as partial constructions that cannot contain or express the full complexity of the environments in which they are placed. In many cases, using these figures to talk about an alterity overshadowed by official history leads to generalisations often crossed by efforts of racialisation and class discrimination. The indigenous, as a colonial category, is commonly a form of denoting an uneasy other that can easily be appropriated to denote ignorance and barbarism, but also braveness and admiration – as the recent protests in the country have also shown.

In what follows, I will dedicate some final words to reflecting on these concepts and exploring some fundamental issues that have shaped the discussions developed throughout this work. First, I will briefly reflect on the relationship between disasters and history and how figurations help us make sense of catastrophic moments in historical terms. I will then reflect on the relationship between disasters and time, exploring how disasters produce temporal orientations that have political consequences when interacting with other equally massive attractors such as tradition and progress.

Disasters and history

The analysis of figurations in this work has allowed us to explore disasters historically – 'moving across several times at once, putting into play the present and the past, or rather pasts in the plural, however far apart they may be in space and time' (Hartog 2015, 16). But what does history under this context mean? How is history defined based on the case of the Callejón de Huaylas and the places and objects of encounter we have explored?

In the last chapter of *Wild Thought*, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (2021) aims to overcome a totalising understanding of history – like that (according to him) presented by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre – by placing it as just another expression of the deep influence that structures have in every realm of societies. In his book *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre (2004) proposes a notion of history as a form of verifying the foundations of human existence, a sort of realm in which the 'totalisation without a totaliser' of dialectic takes place, while Lévi-Strauss offers an understanding of history shaped by the structures defining the human condition. The former considers history as the intrinsic movement of humankind across time, shaped by dialectic as a form of confronting the world, the latter just the expression of the regularities defined by the diagrammatic operation of social structures. Sartre's hu-

mankind is determined by its freedom to define dialectically the consequences of its actions, and that of Lévi-Strauss by the structures defining the logical relationships among its members that make sense of those actions. It is, ultimately, a distinction of history shaped by agency or structure, but also as diachrony or synchrony – the result of actions across time or categories determining which events are relevant to describing the passing of that time in the first place.

Lévi-Strauss' understanding of history vibrates somehow with the figurational operations we have seen across these chapters. By exploring the concrete places and things from which figurations emerge, as practices defining the boundaries of society, we have seen that the historical existence they portray cannot be separated from the moments that configure them. Despite all the complexities it presents, the destruction of the early warning system is a moment in which the old figures comprising the highlands and lowlands are actualised. Figures are applied to make sense of events, to create forms of prioritising which elements of the event are important to remark: for people in Carhuaz, the destruction of the equipment was a form of superstitious understanding of reality; for some members of Shonquil Pampa Herd Association, the attack was a natural reaction against foreign machines intervening in the environment. The explanation, as a historical arrangement, is mediated by those figures. History, under these terms, is a means by which to make sense of discontinuous events. 'The alleged continuity of history is ensured only by tracing fraudulent lines', Lévi-Strauss (2021, 297) would suggest, with figurations as one strategy to ensure the existence of those fictional lines.

Yet, we have also seen that those same figurations are also a fundamental element in articulating the ground in which they are immersed. As we saw in Chapter One, the figures of the hero and the victim operate as 'condensed maps of contested worlds' (Haraway 2018, 11), archetypes that help us navigate the massive destruction that disasters can entail. The suspended time produced by the 1970 earthquake and avalanche over the former Yungay is overcome through the historical figures of the hero and the victim, providing a concrete yet diffuse arrangement offering order amid chaos. Figurations are a form of *figuring out*, of fitting the figure to the ground (Fortun 2009) that articulates the setting in which those figures move freely. In the case of the hero and the victim, they are not only part of the reconstruction that came after the earthquake and avalanche; they produce the recovery as a moment in history. History, viewed from this perspective, emerges from those categories connecting that moment with what came after – e.g., the cosmopolitan city, a place without identity as a result of a failed reconstruction. The testimonies around this period account for an unproblematically idealised past of a model city – of 'straight, cobbled streets, a *plaza* with lush palms and perfumed rose bushes, manor houses of white walls and red-tiled roofs and joyful, laborious people' (León León 2016, 91). *That Yungay is over, it's history*, I have heard old *Yungaínos* say. If the old Yungay is associated with an uncontested homeland, the memories of the aftermath of the disaster re-

fer to a time of uprooting, dislocation and contradictions; a time of an unregulated recovery explained by different figurations – distinctions that articulate the notions of native and foreign; an *us* and *them* that works in time and space.

The relationship between figure and ground and their mutual configuration offers a syncretic union between agency and structure, event and process, that helps to move beyond Levi-Strauss' rigid structuralist understanding of history. Figurations are those practices that, in a strict sense, provide situations like disasters with a historical existence. Disasters can operate as figures, things that unite but also that divide the society they help reconfigure. It is, however, an elusive existence; not concrete enough to be fully embodied but not abstract enough to be only an idea. The historical realm that figures offer differs from the historical production that material objects, say books or photographs, present. Figures, in a strict sense, are not material things. Their virtual condition moves across a material reality, but their existence cannot be reduced to the concrete moment in which that existence is updated. As with any other figure embodying the idea of rurality, categories like *comunero* are permanently embodied in an ambiguous other that implies a racialising exercise relating it to certain forms of life, of skin tones, clothing, artefacts – a materiality close to the ground, as Ben Orlove (1998) suggests. Figures require those practices and materialities to emerge, but their existence cannot be reduced to them. As historical figures, they provide a sense of deepness beyond the immediate arrangements in which they are immersed. Figures are historical because they help to make sense of events. History, moreover, is figurational, as it helps place those figures in a certain order.

History under these terms might leave a bitter taste as a realm offering a false sense of immanence. If history is only a method to order things through a chronological code (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 294), granting figures a concrete place in that order, how can they give such a deep sense of reality? Despite being *only* a method, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, history is a fundamental account that provides an order of things. Figurations, under these terms, are not only a way of classifying a problematic other that seems to escape the limits of our desired worlds – a violent rurality and a foreign modernity installing threatening machines. Figures provide an order that allows us to create a sense of being-in-the-world, which, at the same time, can be politically empowering. Whereas a result of a problematic colonial classification, the indigenous as a category has also been a fundamental device to empower those communities that have embodied the trials of colonialism – land dispossession, imposed world arrangements and genocide. Although categories like *comunero* have been associated with a backwards lifestyle rejecting progress, a 'dog in the manger' against private investment, they have also been revindicated as fundamental actors for the defence of the land. The rural other is an uneasy construct that finds in figures a means of stabilising that negative identity. History, under these terms, 'is thus never history, but history-for' (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 293), a form of creating a sense of place in

time, whether by excluding certain forms of world cohabitation or by revendicating those excluded existences.

Recognising figures as fundamental devices that create a historical reality allows us to acknowledge their contemporary existence. Here I call upon the notion of contemporary not as a historical epoch – with the inauguration of modernity as its foundational time (Koselleck 2002) – but to the recognition of figures as devices that, while cohabiting the *time of the simultaneity*, 'give shape to the here and now' (Rabinow et al. 2008, 57). The issue here, then, no longer necessarily concerns chronological succession – what comes next – but *coming together*: how things and positions that seem fragmented gather in the first place. As an act of contemporising, figurations can help us to overcome the idea that figures are *part of history* and replace it with the assumption that figures are *producing* history; they are devices providing historical orientation and order – especially during catastrophic moments when order appears absent. A direct consequence of this view is that history loses its unified condition, the 'arrow of time', and is instead characterised by a 'a *scattering* in all directions that recaptures and repairs what the old sense of history sought to oversimplify' (Latour and Schultz 2022, 41). There are as many histories as the elements and stories producing them.

It is worth noting that even I, as a researcher working around the figures of disaster and their aftermath, cannot escape the necessity of using figures to argue for the historical consistency of my work. As Norbert Elias (1978, 20) rightfully affirms, 'no matter how painfully aware we are of [concepts'] inadequacy, more adequate means of thought and communication are in many instances simply not available at present'. What in this work I have identified as highlands, lowlands, rural, urban and even the very notion of disaster are also figures that I have constantly applied; concepts that, as concrete abstractions (Cadena 2018; in Peterson 2021, 14), propose a material and semiotic articulation for the exploration of our worlds in-the-making (McGowran and Donovan 2021). By 'emphasizing concepts in things', Marina Peterson (2021, 14) suggests, it is possible to understand 'theory as being in the world – of the ethnographic as intrinsically theoretical – and the possibility of drawing that out through writing'. My analysis of the figures that emerge from places and devices and their uneasy encounters has not been an effort to neglect them but to understand how they arise, the different settings they are immersed in and their consequences for (re)configuring in historical terms the realities in which they participate.

Disasters and time

A second reflection that is worth raising concerns the complex entanglements between disasters and time. Throughout the chapters of this book, we have seen that disasters can be both moments of unbearable magnitude that the very notion of dis-

aster aims to make sense of by giving a name – or a place, as the case of Campo Santo shows us – to those disruptive moments escaping human understanding. But we have also seen how disasters can operate as enunciations, interpretations with a strong political orientation – in our case, for time control. This double condition of disasters has been exemplified through concrete places and objects through which we have explored the ecologies of practices and materialities assembling past and future disasters while showing how disasters, as massive arrangements, are invoked to produce certain forms of time.

Considering disasters as both concrete arrangements of the world and conceptual devices has allowed us to explore not only how they are concretely enacted but also how they are used to promote specific political projects – in tune with what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) differentiate between machinic and enunciative assemblages. The conceptualisation of disasters as assemblages has allowed us to overcome the implicit understanding of disasters as events or processes taking place 'outside' the social order. The question that emerges, though, is how these arrangements behave in relation to other equally-massive arrangements that can have the same influence on the articulation of time.

Throughout this work, we have seen that, in the temporal production that disasters entail, they constantly operate with two other equally massive concepts: Progress and tradition. Yet, rather than being a category explicitly destroying the cultural heritage or jeopardising the region's development, the relationship between the three concepts is much more complex. Disasters are sometimes called upon as a cause and effect of stagnation and loss of identity, but also as an opportunity for enhancing progress and protecting tradition. Sometimes tradition and progress are used together to ward off future disasters, while discourses around past disasters, together with a respectful treatment of traditional lives, are used to promote better futures. Disaster, tradition and progress have operated in a complex triad shaping the politics of the Callejón de Huaylas for many decades, showing that the temporal arrangements they produce are, in any case, a straightforward relation of antagonist categories.

The massiveness that disasters, progress and tradition entail requires us to deal with them in terms that embrace their magnitude. Here, the notion of attractor proposed by Manuel DeLanda (2002) can be helpful to conceptualise such massiveness. Attractors, according to the author, are singularities that, due to their strong influence, 'are said to represent the inherent or intrinsic long-term tendencies of a system' (DeLanda 2002, 15). Following Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, 408) notion of singularity, attractors are types of events but without a concrete form. They operate as topological arrangements defining a multiplicity of trajectories in a system, giving the idea of a tendency that is followed in the long term.

As attractors, tradition and progress operate similarly to what Bruno Latour (2018) identifies as modernity's two main poles of attraction: the local and the

global. According to the author, these two opposing positions have shaped discussions around globalisation for the past 50 years: the idea of the globe, related to multiplying viewpoints; and that of the local, associated with a single, provincial vision. Like tradition and progress, these two poles do not necessarily represent intrinsically positive or negative features of modernity. The local can be revindicated as a desired scale that permits a return to the certainties that old world orders provide. The global, in contrast, can be conceived as a forward movement chasing the ideal of a hyperconnected world – the cosmopolitan model of a nation-free globe guided by universalist principles. 'To be modern, by definition, is to project onto the others at every turn the conflict between the Local and the Global, between the archaic past and future – a future with which the non-moderns, it goes without saying, have nothing to do', Latour (2018, 29–30) affirms. It is a temporal and spatial scale that, despite the revindications it generates, sets clear boundaries: we can protect and preserve the past, but those figures comprising that past must remain there.

Tradition and progress are recurrent features that, due to the strong influence they produce, have the capacity to shape the trajectories of regions like the Callejón de Huaylas over time. Tradition, as we have seen, is invoked every time that political actions aim to protect a past threatened by the consequences of unregulated transformations – related in many cases to a frustrated modernity (such as the 'cosmopolitan city' that Huaraz has become) that does not respect the value of heritage for the creation of a common identity. Similarly, progress is called upon when programmes and plans seek to introduce new means of dealing with the challenges of, for example, climate change in mountain regions. The installation of expensive equipment to alert the population of outburst floods from glacial lakes would be an example of those progressist efforts; conversely, its destruction is a sign of a traditional form of living guided by superstitions and ignorance. Disasters, as a third attractor, are placed in relation to them when aiming to contest the promotion of tradition and progress – whether as an arrangement that impossibilities one of them while benefiting the other or as a feature that exacerbates their negative effects: tradition as stagnation, progress as identity loss. Together, these three attractors and their diverse linkages have marked the political agenda for coping with extreme events threatening the cities of the Callejón.

Just as figurations enable overcoming the dichotomy between agency and structure, defining disasters as temporising assemblages allows us to position ourselves beyond the two other main attractors in this work and to think of alternative ways of inhabiting time. A call to inhabit times of disaster can be one of those ways, a form of highlighting the fact that disasters cast a long shadow. Rather than a temporary stage, a disaster is an attractor that constantly articulates reality. The invitation to inhabit a time of disaster requires recognising that the material arrangements they produce remain in heterogeneous ways – whether defining a past that has been lost

or questioning the articulation of certain futures. Time, based on a relational perspective, moves away from the abstract dimension to which it has been commonly related and becomes a property that emerges from the realignment and displacement of practices and materialities. By assuming the relevance that concrete elements have for creating time, we recognise their capacity for shaping our temporal existences. We are accepting that such disruptive events – including outburst floods from glacial lakes or massive avalanches triggered by seismic movement – play a fundamental role in articulating what we conceive of as a disaster in temporal terms – the suspended times they can inaugurate, together with the feelings of loss due to a destroyed reality that becomes part of the past. In doing so, we are also accepting that concrete devices for coping with those massive forces deeply influence our temporal configurations of reality: early warning systems enacting times of preparedness; mitigation infrastructure like dams and drainage tunnels seeking to control the flows of lake water. But rather than generating forms of temporal dependencies towards those devices and elements, recognising their impact in temporal terms allows us to consciously ask what forms of time our environments mandate us to generate; what temporal rhythms catastrophes require to produce. How we want to cope with those challenges, and what costs our actions may have for the times we wish to inhabit.

Inhabiting the time of disasters is not necessarily a call to catastrophism. As Andrea Ballestero (2019) suggests, underlying the end of times as a consequence of climate change can be an unsatisfying exercise as it mobilises hyperbolic anxiety triggered by an apparent lack of future. 'The apocalyptic instils a sense of ends of times that depends on the existence of a previous definition of what is or should have been in the future. It depends on an implicit certainty about the existence of some vision from the past that has ended, that will not come' (Ballestero 2019, 197), the author remarks. To avoid that paralysing effect that the end of the world might arouse, it is necessary to place it in contemporary terms rather than subordinated to past or future orientations. This movement requires us to leave temporal orientations mandating us to move 'forward' or 'backward', to 'advance' or 'retrogress', to 'progress' or 'stagnate', and focus instead on the constructions of past and futures in contemporary terms. Accepting the contemporaneity of disastrous times means calling upon the legacy of those lost worlds without turning them into the only role model that current cities can have. It means speculating about possible futures without making that orientation a view of the world from afar, an outside gaze capable of controlling the forthcoming. To make disastrous times a moment of dwelling requires accepting the terrifying consequences that disasters can have for our current worlds. But it also means embracing the virtuous alliances and forms of diplomacy – as the figure of the guardian crosses shows us – that we can find in places dealing with scenarios of existential risks and uncertainty. Cohabiting those times implies leaving behind attractors categorising forms of existence as backward lives and recognising them

as valid forms of inhabiting the contemporary, with valid forms of future production beyond technocratic accounts of managing and controlling nature.

In any case, recognising the contemporary condition of catastrophic times means that the temporalities of disasters cannot allow us to construct concrete forms of past and future. As we have seen throughout this work, the moments of waiting amid flood risks, as shown in the case of the houses located on the banks of the Quillcay River in Huaraz, bring with them forms of stability that allow us to articulate futures based on precariousness that does not necessarily deny the existence of a threat. Likewise, remembering the severe consequences of the 1970 earthquake and avalanche in the province of Yungay allows us to put into perspective the drama of such an event for the thousands of victims. Inhabiting the time of disasters does not mean positioning oneself in a present time that does not change – similar to the suspended time that the total destruction of the city of Yungay inaugurated for its survivors. Inhabiting the time of disaster means, first and foremost, accepting that the limits of disaster do not begin and end with the triggering event, nor with the subsequent recovery – despite how effective or unsatisfactory it may be – nor does it end with the creation of preparedness mechanisms. It is when we situate ourselves in *the times of the end*, rather than waiting to see what comes after *the end of time* (Latour 2017), that the inability to escape the passage of time becomes evident.

The documentarist and the documentarian

The preceding reflections on our positions in *the times of the end* necessarily lead me to say a few final words about my own positionality in this whole work. In several moments throughout this book, I positioned myself according to the categories used by others to describe me in the Callejón e Huaylas: a Chilean *gringo*, a person that, despite being – topographically speaking – not so distant from the reality I was studying thanks to being of a neighbouring nationality, I was nevertheless topologically distant enough to be considered a stranger – a *gringo* that little had to do with the reality in which I was immersed. This double characterisation, which at first glance can be perceived as a tense construction, actually had much to do with the historical relationship between Chileans and Ancashinos, as explored in Chapter Six. The *Chileno* in Ancash has been historically considered an invasive figure, associated with the atrocities committed by the Chilean army during the War of the Confederation in 1936–1939 and the War of the Pacific in 1879–1884 between both countries. This strangeness was also related to my foreign-like physical appearance related to a *gringo*; a person looking, walking and dressing notoriously differently from people in Ancash.

Such a historical contextualisation certainly influenced my positionality in this work. This uneasy figure of a familiar stranger (Hall 2018) in the Callejón de Huaylas led me to adopt a more distant role in articulating my ethnographic scenes. My figure, as an ethnographer wandering around the different cities and corners of the Cordillera Blanca, is more like that of a passive observer – which in any case implies a 'fly in the wall' attitude. Whereas I recognise my presence in recounting the experiences during my fieldwork, it is always from a distant position – like an observer being shown and told something but without intervening too much. It is a strangeness I embraced in order to narrate my encounters as a foreign figure, one shaped by uneasy historical relations, during my time in Peru.

Adopting such a positionality was also strongly influenced by the difficult global events during which this research took place. Such difficulties are perfectly exemplified by one of my contacts during this work: Juan Benito Congo from Encayoc, the survivor of the 1970 earthquake and avalanche, who showed me, as seen in Chapter Two, the intangible condition of those devastated lands – the *hinterland* of Yungay. When I began preparing for my second visit to the Callejón in 2021, I received the sad news that Juan Benito had passed away from complications triggered by COVID-19. His son told me by phone that Juan Benito had died in April of that year, some weeks after he was exposed to the virus while being tested at a health centre. Despite being a high-risk patient due to his diabetes, he was only belatedly admitted – with very advanced pneumonia – to one of the few intensive care units available in Yungay's overcrowded provincial hospital. Juan Benito was one of the thousands of victims underserved by a precarious public health system common not only in Peru but worldwide.

When I visited Juan Benito's widow, Rosa, after hearing about his death, I brought her some photographs that I took of them at their old family house in Encayoc during my first fieldwork. These portrayed a happy couple, posing with the imposing magnitude of the Huascarán at their backs. Looking at those pictures, Rosa could not hold back her tears, while asking heartbrokenly *¿Dónde estás?* (Where are you?). Those images were one of the last records she had of her deceased husband. She was clearly still struggling to adapt to the shock and void of losing a loved one. Despite bringing her painful feelings of loss and grief, she was very grateful for those photographs, an affective trace that helped her to remember her life partner.

The news of Juan Benito's death affected me in many ways. Through our encounters during my first fieldwork, our relationship developed into a friendship. The passing of Juan Benito was one of the first COVID-related deaths of someone close that I heard of in the Callejón de Huaylas. It was a sort of reality check about what a global pandemic truly means, a situation in which the loss of lives was – and still is – shared by people in every corner of the planet. It is a bizarre form of global solidarity emerging from the anonymity of our hyperconnected world.

Besides the evident sadness we experience when somebody close to us dies, one of the most shocking feelings after hearing about his death was of having recorded a piece of history that might otherwise have been lost forever. In several moments during our talks, Juan Benito constantly repeated that he wanted me to record his story and take pictures of his hometown, and that what happened in places like Encayoc should be known. He was very open to sharing with me his survival testimony, despite how painful it probably was, because he wanted that story to be told – a tale of subsistence and grief, full of details about how traumatic the end of the world can be as a seven-year-old boy. Although his family and friends were quite aware of his survival experience, the audio recording of our talks and my notebooks were, as far as I know, the only non-oral record of what he lived through that May day in 1970. That fact had quite a strong effect on me. I felt a duty to his request to share his story, one that I hope I have fulfilled on good terms.

The necessity Juan Benito felt for telling his story was not unique. During my fieldwork, survivors and authorities I spoke with consistently commented on the relevance of my work; that efforts like mine were fundamental to ensuring that the survival stories of people in that region were not lost. I constantly heard that something could be done with that information, that maybe others could learn about the testimonies of people that have experienced what it feels like to live in the ruins of a world (Tsing 2015) that came to an end. My persona – a Chilean *gringo*, this uneasy figure in the Callejón de Huaylas – somehow called the attention of the people in the region. Perhaps it was related more to the fact that somebody was interested in knowing about the suffering than to the otherness that my figure reflected. Or maybe the curiosity of a foreign stranger from beyond the Callejón made them feel that their experiences were sufficiently relevant to attract the attention of somebody from abroad. In any case, the recognition I gave to their stories seemed compelling to them. But why? What is so relevant about being heard, of feeling that somebody is interested in listening to those stories of loss and suffering?

I started reflecting on this issue while reading Valeria Luiselli's (2020) *Lost Children Archive*, a novel about the efforts of a couple to document the lives of children crossing the US–Mexican border through the Sonora Desert. At some point, the protagonist tries to explain the different understandings she and her husband have around the idea of documenting:

> When I first met my husband, … I found his ideas about soundscaping intriguing, and his past life recording bird songs and song paths in rainforests fascinating, but I never quite understood the methods he used for sampling sounds in our project: no direct interviews, no pre-planned anything, just walking around listening to the cityscape as if waiting for a rare bird to fly. He, in turn, never understood or came to terms with the sound tradition that I was educated in, a tradition much more journalism-based and narrative-driven.

> … When we were in better spirits, we were able to joke about our differences. We'd say that I was a documentarist and he was a documentarian, which meant that I was more like a chemist and he was more like a librarian (Luiselli 2020, 99).

After reading Luiselli's book, the distinction between documentarist and the documentarian remained with me, as something that vibrated with my own work somehow. It was only after reading Tomas Lidman's (2008) historical analysis of scientific libraries that the distinction started to make more sense than ever. According to the author, both documentarist and documentarian emerged from similar principles: to explore the best strategies and techniques to document the knowledge found in scientific libraries. However, he argues that the traditional role of the documentarian, which can be associated with the figure of the librarian as a gatekeeper of institutional and scientific knowledge, began to be contested by the documentarist, a figure emerging in the late nineteenth century and aiming to produce bibliographic records rather than only describing existing material under the existing guidelines. These two fields would evolve, in principle and practice, into two different orientations, where 'the documentarists represented progress with their sights set on the future, while the librarians took the position of safeguarding historical continuity' (Lidman 2008, 11). These orientations, portrayed by Lidman as different temporal approaches to the figure of the document, are what I started to see reflected in my ethnographic work.

Anthropology has been persistently defined as a discipline that documents. It documents cultures, lives, modes of existence, conflicts and decision-making. It documents past worlds and the construction of those to come. Research interests and approaches might have changed over time, but the efforts have been somehow similar: to record, as far as possible, meanings, values and forms of kinship. Documenting efforts in the field have been so massive to the point of creating an excess that is sometimes difficult to manage. Anthropological footage has often ended up in vast archives storing an absurd amount of audio-visual material that remains unseen and unused (MacDougall 2005). This ethnographic impetus with documentation follows what Marilyn Strathern (2003, 5) describes as 'a methodology based on the deliberate attempt to generate more data than the investigator is aware of at the time of collection'. The initial collection of material brings the question about its uses and interpretation. In other words: if the documentarian efforts in anthropology have been focused on how to collect, protect and classify cultural knowledge, the documentarist driver has been oriented to explore what to do with that stored data in the first place.

I certainly relate to Strathern's interpretation of the ethnographic collection as an open-ended process in pursuit of a future, still unknown, analysis – left somehow to the documentarist orientation. But I think this view misses the impact that documentation work conducted during fieldwork might have on the people that the

ethnographer, as a documentarian, encounters along the way. To make this point more precise, I return to Luiselli's book – specifically, a passage in which the protagonist explains to her son that documenting means to collect the present 'for later', while reflecting on the act of documenting as a way of making sense of time:

> I'm not sure, though, what 'for later' means anymore. Something changed in the world. Not too long ago, it changed, and we know it. We don't know how to explain it yet, but I think we all can feel it, somewhere deep in our gut or in our brain circuits. We feel time differently. No one has quite been able to capture what is happening or say why. Perhaps it's just that we sense an absence of future, because the present has become too overwhelming, so the future has become unimaginable. And without future, time feels like only an accumulation. An accumulation of months, days, natural disasters, television series, terrorist attacks, divorces, mass migrations, birthdays, photographs, sunrises. We haven't understood the exact way we are now experiencing time. … Perhaps if we found a new way to document [the world], we might begin to understand this new way we experience space and time (Luiselli 2020, 103).

While re-reading this excerpt, I reconsidered the meaning that my efforts of documenting both the memory and anticipation of disaster in Ancash had for people like Juan Benito. It is less an effort of presenting or representing the disaster but to evoke it: to create an affection strong enough that it can re-orient the notions of time. I take this understanding of ethnography as a form of evocation from Stephen Tyler (1986), who connects it to the idea of aesthetic integration as therapy; it is what links the notions of art, rite and ritual to the practice of restorative harmony. Ethnography, under these terms, is a form of meditative vehicle to disrupt the commonsensical explanations that we may have of the world.

This book, in any case, aimed to be a fully innovative project of collaborative relations with the participants, informants, interviewees, interlocutors or whatever you want to call the people who contributed to this research. It is not a para-ethnographic work proclaiming the destabilisation of expertise hierarchies through collaborative relations with epistemic partners (Marcus 2000; Holmes and Marcus 2006). It is also not an effort to establish diplomatic relations mediating between different modes of existence, as Bruno Latour (2013) suggests what the role of anthropology should be. Yet, it is also not a simple act of 'granting with voice to those silenced by history'. My work, for people in the Callejón at least, had perhaps more to do with the humble task of being the scribe of ongoing events – with tracing 'the quickly changing circumstances of our common world' (Sansi 2013, 460). Maybe that is more than enough for the people I get to talk with during my fieldwork: to give a coherent account among many of the events that have taken place in a region deeply marked by loss, suffering, recovery and frustration. Collaboration here, perhaps,

means to help evoke something that allows us to pause and share those grievances for a moment, while exploring how the future is being conceived under that legacy of loss and trauma.

The difference between Tyler's proposal of a disruptive ethnography and my own experience in the Callejón de Huaylas, in this sense, is that I see my work there not as a way of evoking a rupture with common sense and normality but as the imperative necessity of returning to that normality once destroyed by extreme events. That is why the feeling of being documented here is so important. This, at the same time, is perhaps the main distinction that I found in the orientations of my work, a sort of *tinku* in its own way. Whereas the discipline implicitly requires, as a good documentarist, to disrupt, to create new meaning and forms of understanding reality, people in Ancash deposited on me the existential necessity of being a documentarian: of keeping alive the memory of the old cities, together with the testimonies of those who experienced how the world once came to an end.