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Book Review

– *Now Peru is Mine. The Life and Times of a Campesino Activist*, by Manuel Llamojha Mitma and Jaymie Patricia Heilman. Duke University Press, 2016

Manuel Llamojha lived to tell the tale, and readers will be grateful for it. Born to a poor peasant family in rural Ayacucho, Peru, his action-packed career as an activist for campesino empowerment brings to life central aspects of twentieth-century Peruvian history. Llamojha found an ideal interlocutor in Jaymie Patricia Heilman, a historian whose expertise on the political history of modern Ayacucho adds a significant layer to his account. The result of their collaboration is a compact, accessible, and moving book, written in a hybrid genre that Heilman calls "testimonial biography" (13). A blend of Latin American *testimonio* and scholarly biography, *Now Peru is Mine* combines Llamojha's storytelling, based on interviews in Spanish and Quechua and on extensive quotes of his writings, with historical contextualization by Heilman, grounded on complementary interviews, multi-archival research, and secondary literature. Although the project is explicitly framed as a collective endeavor, the authors' voices are distinct, identified by different fonts, with Llamojha's imitating those of the typewriters that were so important in his life. This felicitous differentiation delivers the activist's own words, while also allowing for critical, usually sympathetic, appraisals by Heilman.

What makes the book particularly compelling is the combination between Llamojha's outstanding political achievements, his qualities as an impossibly cunning, often hilarious "affable trickster" (81), and his unbreakable commitment to what he calls "the philosophy of the peasantry" (137): the cause of peasant self-organization. It unfolds chronologically to reconstruct his life (1921-2015) with an almost exclusive focus on his political trajectory -- an emphasis he favored, with the consequence of sometimes obscuring facets of his life that may have added valuable texture. The narrative begins with his awakening to politics, still a child, in the face of the local landowners' blatant exploitation of his peasant family in Concepción, Ayacucho, and the first formulation of what would become a lifelong pledge: to "fight with the hacendados until the haciendas disappeareded" (27). It ends with the return to his hometown, an elderly man still enthusiastically fighting abusive authorities

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and lamenting the return of large rural landholdings under neoliberalism. Marked by struggle and itineracy, Llamojha's trajectory was tangled with profound changes wrought upon Peru during the twentieth century. He managed to play a role in many of these transformations; to others, he was an outstanding witness.

Take Llamojha's early rise to political prominence. An immigrant in Lima during the late 1930s and 1940s, he soon became the leader of the "immigrant club" that pursued, and eventually obtained, the official recognition of Concepción as an Indigenous Community. Already in this initial period some epochal trends are revealed through his experiences: the murder of an abusive *gamonal* (rural strongman) by peasants, the fight for campesino legal rights, internal migration and consolidating centralism, the pull of the Catholic Church and the Army for social mobility, the impact of APRA's creole radicalism but its lack of interest in peasants. Similarly, subsequent chapters show the ways in which his life intersected with the intertwined emergence of massive indigenous mobilization and the explosion of the Cold War in Peru. By the early 1960s, amidst unprecedented agrarian unrest and after years of successful activism, Llamojha burst into the national scene, first as an unsuccessful congressional candidate and then as the leader of a nation-wide peasant organization. His was an extreme instance of the rise of new forms of leadership and the opportunities for transnational connections that the polarized times entailed, as shown by his visits to Cuba, Russia, and China, the narrations of which constitute memorable travelogues. But his life also typifies the extreme repression suffered by the protagonists of the Latin American Cold War: he and his family were constantly accused of being part of international conspiracies, often in fact related to local disputes for power. They were persecuted, imprisoned, displaced, and tortured.

Llamojha's story also illuminates the impact of the Sino-Soviet split and the chronic divisions of the Peruvian left, the struggle for agrarian reform in Peru and its problematic implementation by the Velasco regime, and, in what seems like a tragic culmination, the bloody internal insurgent-counterinsurgent war that ravaged the country since the Shining Path's declaration of war against the Peruvian state in 1980. The treatment of this war is another highlight of the book. Llamojha's home department of Ayacucho was its epicenter, and given his political activities, he interacted with key actors and institutions. Crucially, this meant that for a long time he was accused of being a member of the Shining Path, a tremendous burden during Peru's dirty war, and one that, as Heilman points early on (8), scholars like herself perpetuated. His son Herbert Llamojha was marginally involved with some of the earliest actions of the Shining Path, and then disappeared during the escape of *senderista*s from the prison of the city of Huamanga, in early 1982, in what was a fundamental episode of the war. Heilman's archival findings about this period are extremely impressive. The combination with Llamojha's account results in some the best pages of a growing literature that sheds light into Peru's internal war from

within rural Ayacucho, often to complicate established narratives about peasant agency and victimhood.

A central contribution of *Now Peru is Mine* is its treatment of the political role of literacy in modern Peru. In this case, a charismatic leader's deployment of Spanish alphabetic literacy and legal knowledge were vital elements of the long quest of Andean peasants to become legible as citizens of the Peruvian state. Precisely because Llamojha was keenly aware of the power of written words and Heilman stresses his credentials as an organic intellectual in his own right, a more thorough analysis of his historical interpretations and anti-colonial ideas would have been warranted. Regardless, the book is an invaluable contribution to Peruvian, Latin American, and Native American studies. That a story as remarkable as Llamojha's has been largely forgotten is an indictment of the persistent anti-indigenous exclusion that its authors denounce. Because words can indeed be powerful weapons, it deserves a quick translation and wide attention in Peru.

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