

Review Essay

The Quinto Suyo: New African Diaspora History from Peru

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Malambo. By Lucía Charún-Illescas. Translated by Emmanuel Harris II. (Chicago: Swan Isle Press, 2004. 230 pp., translator's note, glossary. \$28.00 cloth.)

Esclavos de la ciudad letrada: Esclavitud, escritura, y colonialismo en Lima (1650–1700). By José Ramón Jouve Martín. (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2005. 206 pp., bibliography, illustrations. \$9.00 paper.)

Las máscaras de la representación: El sujeto esclavista y las rutas del racismo en el Perú (1775–1895). By Marcel Velázquez Castro. (Lima: Universidad Nacional de San Marcos, 2005. 288 pp., bibliography, illustrations. \$6.50 paper.)

Breve historia de la esclavitud en el Perú: Una herida que no deja de sangrar. By Carlos Aguirre. (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2005. 280 pp., illustrations, bibliography, appendixes. \$13.00 paper.)

Inca rulers divided their empire into four parts, or *suyos*, and called it Tawantinsuyo, the “Empire of Four Parts.” The term *Quinto Suyo* (Fifth Part) combines Spanish with Quechua to draw attention to the sizeable, but often overlooked, segment of the Peruvian population with African heritage that claims a history of slavery, resistance, and survival. *Quinto Suyo* is a term popular with Afro-Peruvian advocacy groups fighting the marginalization of blacks, racial discrimination, and the omission of their history from most textbooks. By highlighting the little-known experiences and contributions of Peru’s black population, the new African diaspora history from Peru continues in this vein of exploring Afro-Peruvians’ deep

historical engagement with wider Peruvian society and its institutions and practices of power.

Lucía Charún-Illescas brings to life fictional, but historically valid, events in her colonial novel *Malambo*. Rather than re-create a specific historical occurrence and its context, Charún-Illescas strives to give a “past” to a group traditionally oppressed, marginalized, and made invisible in the national literature and histories until recently. *Malambo* evokes a world of freedom and bondage in which the descendants of Peru’s African ancestors can recognize themselves as active subjects exercising agency and helping promote the fusion of elements characteristic of Peruvian society and culture. The beauty of the novel is that it teaches students through dialogue and characters’ thoughts and actions about the class, ethnic, and religious heterogeneity among slaves and blacks (and the Spanish for that matter) and their extensive interaction with other groups within colonial South American society outside the plantation sphere. The novel follows the last years of Tomasón, a slave whose great talent and skills as a painter of religious art allowed him to live independently from his master while paying his owner part of his earnings each month. This is the world of urban slavery in South America, in which the levels of mobility and independence achieved by some skilled male artisans or female market sellers and healers might surprise people more familiar with U.S. slavery and plantation societies more generally. The characters reflect the reality that people might save up part of their earnings or win favors from owners, particularly female slaves and children, to buy their freedom or freedom for their kin, creating families with both enslaved and free, skilled and unskilled, rural and urban members. Another reality illustrated in the novel is the existence of harsher conditions and isolation on rural plantations and farms that might push runaways to flee, “towards the enemy,” and lose themselves within Lima’s ample black community. Inaccessible rural areas were not the only refuge for runaways. In the novel, Pancha represents this rural-to-urban flight. She also shows the economic niche and status many Afro-Peruvian women secured as vendors in the market and herbal healers with an ethnically diverse clientele. Finally, the novel grapples with the difficult realities of concubinage and inter- and intraethnic tensions. *Malambo*’s characters seem to spring to life directly from the archive.

The genre of a novel allows the author to speculate and propose views of the past that historians have not been able to reconstruct from the documents. The author has attempted, perhaps less successfully, to recover all the richness that could have existed in the popular usage of language in the black community at the end of the sixteenth century. Another suggestive feature of the novel that is hard to confirm in the historical record for this

period is the decision to include the Yoruba pantheon of orichas in characters' religious practice and inner thoughts. The characters and scenes alternate between the Spanish center of Lima and the Malambo neighborhood across the river, where the free blacks and runaways lived alongside indigenous people. Turning colonial authorities' disapproval of this neighborhood on its head, Charún-Illescas portrays the plebeian neighborhood as a place of harmony and human decency juxtaposed against Lima as a chaotic zone of exploitation and illness. When this novel is taught in history classes in the United States and Peru, students respond favorably to seeing the experience of slavery come alive and take a human path through love, hate, sex, and courtship. They also tend to recognize some characters as rather archetypal and therefore flat and unchanging, especially the one indigenous man named in the novel. Peruvian students dislike the random mixing together of historical figures and events spanning some thirty years. Nevertheless, both the novel's successes and limitations fuel useful classroom discussion and learning.

José Ramón Jouve Martín brings historical documents and literary analysis together in a fruitful and accessible way to prove that even unlettered people could understand and participate in literate society. *Esclavos de la ciudad letrada* presents another important moment in the Afro-Peruvian experience in Lima, when more than half of Lima's population claimed African ancestry. Although set a half-century later than *Malambo*, the monograph shows the same Afro-Peruvian engagement with the individuals and institutions of a wider colonial society. Jouve Martín traces how Africans moved from an essentially oral tradition to a written one in which access to writing and legal documents represented power. Far from their being entirely excluded from this literate world, Jouve Martín found that Afro-Peruvians routinely made wills and developed relationships with scribes and notaries who helped them also produce bills of sale, contracts, and letters explaining the terms of a person's freedom. Afro-Peruvians used writing to legitimize important changes in their lives. They even learned to use popular literary tropes and presented theatrical pageants during municipal celebrations, drawing on the wider colonial society's ability to recognize stories like the siege of Troy. Jouve Martín also argues that some blacks acquired primary education in the city, but the archival evidence presented for this is somewhat thin. Through the use of attorneys and notaries, Afro-Peruvians learned to employ the mechanisms of the Spanish legal system to negotiate their position within colonial society and improve their individual situations (for example: to stop abuse, prevent the separation of spouses, or claim sanctuary in the Church). Unlike native communities' collective lawsuits, Afro-Peruvians did not generally act in the court in a collective

fashion. Not only did documents assimilate Afro-Peruvians into colonial society through vertical relationships, they also played a role in negotiating horizontal relations among the colonized, exposing internal contradictions and conflicts. In artisan guilds, Afro-Peruvians followed lettered practices of producing invoices, receipts, and a variety of contractual agreements. Based on representative documents covering the years from 1650 to 1700, Jouve Martín's study offers ample evidence of a surprising level of blacks' (even slaves') awareness and engagement with Lima's lettered practices and traditions.

In *Las máscaras de la representación*, Marcel Velázquez Castro shifts the focus to the political elites' methods of producing the meaning of slavery and to the last fifty years of colonial rule and the first seventy years of the Peruvian republic (1775–1895). The representations of Afro-Peruvians in Peruvian literature and essays constitutes one of the least understood cultural and social legacies of slavery. Velázquez Castro addresses this by reconstructing the sensibilities of those authors outside Peru's black community who created an image of the slave and slavery that reflected the writers' political, class, and cultural interests. The phenomenon he reveals is the cultural construction of difference stretching from the reproduction of colonial racial images to the consolidation of a modern racist discourse. The period sources analyzed include primarily civil court cases (1810–21), newspapers and magazines (1756–1902), and books, pamphlets, and articles (1732–1890s and beyond). The ideological debate over the consequences of slavery helped generate a republic founded in the abstract upon a formally homogeneous community of citizens, but that still preserved very real inequalities among the members of a multiethnic society. The construction of Afro-Peruvians and Indians as deficient legitimized their relegation to manual labors and justified their sociocultural and political marginalization. Even emancipation in 1854 caused no reevaluation of Afro-Peruvians; instead, abolition unleashed a paranoia that helped the dominant factions of political elites to adopt racism as their dominant ideology. Written descriptions and drawings of the elections from this period present corrupt and disruptive Afro-Peruvians. They are cast as the central figures that cause the failure of elections to peacefully transfer government power from one administration to the next. In short, Peru is conceptualized as divided between a white creole elite and the descendants of Africans who condense all the vices and problems of the colonial era. Velázquez Castro convincingly argues that the culmination of this historical tradition developed by politicians and jurists is a republican state and a nation imagined as modern and Western in which there is no place for the Afro-Peruvian population.

Carlos Aguirre integrates much of his own groundbreaking research

with the contributions of several other historians to produce his synthesis of the history of slavery and blacks in Peru, *Breve historia de la esclavitud en el Perú*. The section dedicated to the origins of slavery in colonial Peru covers the numbers of slaves involved, the slave markets, and how blacks were fit into the system of *castas* (castes) in the Andes. Aguirre contrasts the roles of slavery in colonial agriculture with slavery's role in the urban economy, primarily along the coast in both cases. The sections analyzing cultural contributions and religion focus principally on Christianization and syncretism and the manifestations of what Aguirre labels "Afro-Peruvian culture." The book concludes with the disintegration of slavery, largely due to Afro-Peruvians' effective strategies of resistance and self-emancipation, long-term struggles that made President Ramón Castilla's proclamation of freedom in 1854 anticlimactic. Although the book is pitched to a less specialized audience, it offers scholars a very helpful and up-to-date overview of the field and represents a good example of the kind of publication academics can create for a national audience in order to address the silences and marginalization that negatively affect Afro-Peruvians and other excluded populations. The book includes many color and black-and-white illustrations and a seventy-page documentary appendix with materials from 1614 to 1888. Although the book ends with the 1850s, Aguirre clearly sees the work as telling the history of how Peru became so deeply wounded by the still-virulent forces of discrimination and racism.

The new scholarship on the African experience in Peru ranges over time periods and disciplines, offering an increasingly sophisticated set of studies for researchers to draw upon or depart from in their own work. The new scholarship also provides a variety of teaching tools that can be deployed effectively in history, language, and literature classes. Perhaps with these authors, the Quinto Suyu is beginning to find a wider voice.