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HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

Carlos Aguirre and Charles F. Walker, editors

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A todos los limeños y limeñas de ayer y de hoy,
y especialmente a Carlos, Susana, María y Samuel,
nuestros limeños más queridos.

Lima, aire que tiene una leve pátina de moho cortesano,
tiempo que es una cicatriz en la dulce mirada popular,
lámpara antigua que reconozco en las tinieblas, ¿cómo eres?

Lima, air with a slight patina of courtly mold,
time which is a scar in the people's sweet gaze,
ancient lamp that I recognize in the dark, what are you?

—Sebastián Salazar Bondy

Translated by Charles F. Walker

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Chronicle of Lima

by Antonio Cisneros

“To allay the doubt
that grows tempestuously,
remember me, Hermelinda,
remember me.”

(“Hermelinda,” popular Peruvian song)

Here are recorded my birth and marriage, the death
of grandfather Cisneros and grandfather Campoy.
Here too is recorded the best of my works, a boy and beautiful.
All the roofs and monuments remember my battles against the
King of the Dwarfs and the dogs
in their fashion celebrate the memory of my remorse.

I was also

fed up with the base wines and without a trace of shame or
modesty was master
of the Ceremony of the Frying.

Oh city

maintained by the skulls and customs of kings who were
the duller and uglier of their time.

What was lost or gained between these waters?

I try to remember the names of the heroes, of the great traitors.

Remember me, Hermelinda, remember me.

The mornings are a little colder,
but you'll never be certain of the seasons
—it's almost three centuries since they chopped down the woods
and the fields were destroyed by fire.

The sea's close, Hermelinda,

but you can never be sure of its rough waters, its presence
save for the rust on the windows,

the broken masts,
immobile wheels
and the brick-red air.

But the sea's very close
and the horizon extended and suave.

Think of the world
as a half-sphere—half-an-orange, for example—on 4 elephants,
on the 4 columns of Vulcan,

and the rest is fog.
A white furry veil protects you from the open sky.
You should see

4 19th century houses,
9 churches from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries,
for 2½ soles, a catacomb too
where nobles bishops and lords—their wives and children—
shed their hides.

The Franciscans
inspired by some chapel in Rome—so the guide'll tell you—
converted the tough ribs into dahlias, daisies and forget-me-nots
—*remember, Hermelinda*—the shinbones and skulls into Florentine
arches.

(And the jungle of cars, a sexless snake of no known species
beneath the red traffic-lights)

There's also a river.
Ask about it, and they'll tell you that this year it's dried up. Praise
its potential waters, have faith in them.

On the sandy hills
barbarians from the south and east have built
a camp that's bigger than the whole city, and they have other gods.
(Arrange some convenient alliance.)

This air—they'll tell you—
turns everything red and ruins most things after the briefest
contact.

Thus your desires and efforts
will become a rusty needle
before their hair or head have emerged.

And this mutation—*remember, Hermelinda*—doesn't depend upon
anyone's will.

The sea revolves in channels of air,
the sea revolves,
it is the air.

You cannot see it.

But I was at the quayside in Barranco
picking out round flat pebbles to skim across the water.

I had a girl with slim legs. And a job.

And this memory, pliant as a pontoon-bridge, anchors me
to the things I've done

and the infinite number of things left undone,
to my good or bad luck, to things I've neglected.

To what was lost or gained between

these waters.

Remember, Hermelinda, remember me.

Introduction

Lima is a vibrant, multiracial city with over 8 million people. Reflecting Peru's centuries-old centralism, it continues to attract migrants from throughout Peru seeking economic and educational opportunities, and it now holds more than a quarter of the country's population. This includes the very rich, who live in well-protected gated communities; the ever-insecure middle class; and the multitudes of working poor, who live in the tenements in the city center, in partitioned-off houses, and in the "new towns" that ring the city in every direction, the Pacific Ocean being the only barrier. The city stretches well over sixty miles north to south and continues to expand. In recent years, coinciding with a period of relative economic and political stability, it has become a hot international tourist destination, famed for its colonial architecture and, more recently, for its creative and diverse culinary offerings.

Limeño/as can be and are of indigenous, African, European, Asian, or, more frequently, mixed descent, but each of these categories has its own complexity. "Indigenous" refers to Quechua, Aymara, dozens of jungle groups, and others. Peruvians use the term *chino* to refer to all Asian Peruvians, including Japanese and Polynesian as well as Chinese. It shouldn't be forgotten that immigrants from Europe and those brought by coercion from Africa also have diverse backgrounds. The mestizo population includes persons of mixed origin, but gradations of skin color and racial status destroy the pretensions of homogeneity that ideologies of mestizaje sometimes suggest.

Race, and its inevitable companion, class, are at the core of the persistent question of who is a limeño or limeña. Many people—including white *criollos* (people seen as eminently coastal rather than Andean),¹ Afro-Peruvians, and coastal mestizos—believe that they have greater rights to the city because their great-grandparents were born and grew up in what in colonial times was called "the City of Kings." This view questions the presence of the millions of Andean migrants and their descendants: they have come to the city since early colonial times, but their numbers have increased dramatically in the last few decades, and many of them maintain

2 Introduction

their native language and culture as well as strong ties to their towns of origin. Migrants would contend, on the other hand, that they are remaking the capital, adding the Quechua language, Andean food and music, and other customs to the urban sociocultural mix. The perception of Andean limeños as “new” immigrants is clearly false: although the number of Andean immigrants has skyrocketed in recent decades, this migration process began well before the twentieth century.

Lima is a city of contrasts. Class inequalities are immediately visible and frequently appalling, and juxtapositions and disparities stand out in daily life. As in other cities of Latin America, teeming shantytowns can be found on the hills above affluent neighborhoods with mansions. One of the most exclusive neighborhoods, Las Casuarinas, backs up to the much poorer Pamplona Alta (see color insert). While some districts enjoy nice streets, manicured gardens, and security guards, others lack basic services such as water and electricity. In recent decades class segregation has increased as the upper classes flock to the well-maintained districts to the east, having outgrown the traditional upper middle-class districts such as Miraflores and San Isidro. As perceptions about insecurity have grown, many areas—and not just those of the elite—have added gates to what were public streets, while a virtual apartheid reigns in the beaches of Asia to the south of Lima. Nonetheless, the search for any place to call home has led the poor to occupy areas near the affluent. Rich and poor and the light- and dark-skinned continue to mix.

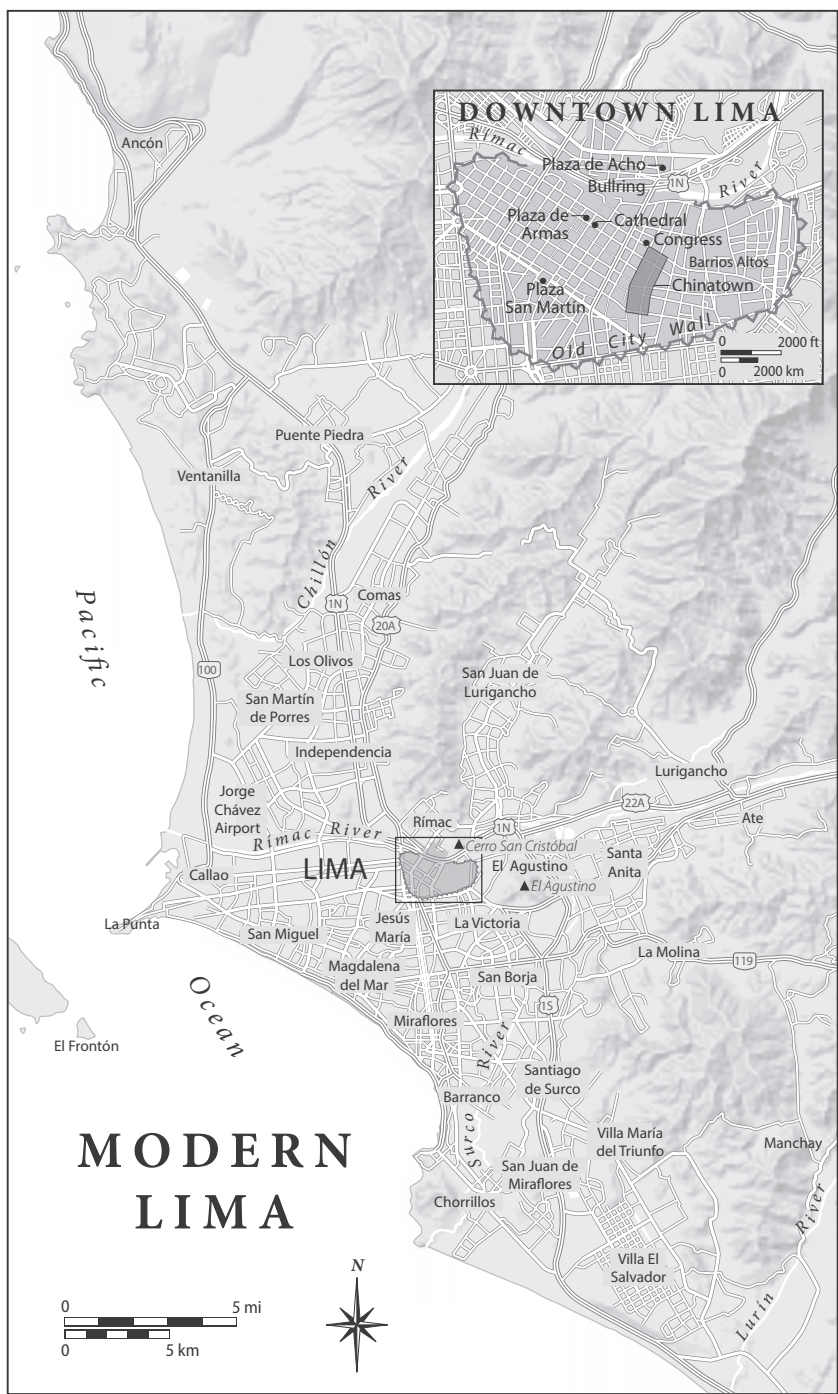
Lima has grown so much that we could argue that there are many Limas today. In their introduction to a set of essays about twentieth-century Lima, Carlos Aguirre and Aldo Panfichi used the image of an archipelago to refer to the multiplicity of social, economic, and cultural spaces that, although sometimes physically segregated, are nonetheless connected in multiple ways.² There is the Lima of the *callejones*, where Afro-Peruvians and other members of the city’s lower orders created some of the city’s great musical traditions and where today large sectors of the urban working poor struggle to survive amid poverty and marginalization. There is of course the Lima of the few remaining majestic colonial mansions and the many churches, monasteries, convents, and chapels that still grace the historic downtown or *centro*. There is the Lima of middle-class chalets and Belle Époque buildings and streets, and the Miami-like suburbs where the wealthy and the superwealthy live. And there is the Andeanized Lima of *polladas* (fund-raising dining and drinking get-togethers), noisy and colorful weekend *chicha* or *huayno* concerts, and impressive economic vitality.

Lima is today a city of cities, a massive human and cultural entity

that is at once the continuation of its colonial roots and a completely new (re-)creation by present-day limeño/as. It is diverse and contrasting: it has always been. The debates that mark the city today, especially the question of who is a “true” limeño or limeña, date not from the second half of the twentieth century but from the city’s founding by the Spanish conqueror Francisco Pizarro in 1535. And although the city has changed drastically since the sixteenth century—the original city center grid now makes up about 5 percent of its full size—these glaring class inequities, rich racial mixing, and vibrant social life have marked the capital since its creation.

This reader seeks to provide a sample of Lima’s complex history—its glories and traditions, its pleasures and charms, as well as its old and new predicaments and tensions. We aim at offering a comprehensive and historically informed view of the city’s changing physical contours, its ever-shifting populations, and the competing mythologies and imaginaries created around all of them. We also highlight how different intellectuals (broadly defined) have attempted to address the ever-pressing question of where to locate Lima’s identity. Nostalgic traditionalists, critical intellectuals, travelers and scientists, poets and singers: all of them share a fascination with the city and have collectively and conflictually constructed the images of Lima. We hope to transmit to the readers our own fascination with Lima and to help them create their own understanding of the City of Kings.

The Lima Reader is roughly organized into chronological sections; except where specified, all endnotes are our own. We have sought to provide diverse texts but also accessible ones. We reluctantly left out many topics, authors, and episodes, characters, corners, or districts that deserve more attention simply due to the lack of space. Our emphasis has been to provide multiple, sometimes clashing viewpoints. The book’s organization reflects Lima’s long history and the contentious debates about its “soul” and future, controversies that date from the sixteenth century and continue today. For some, Lima is enjoying its finest moment, with new high-rise apartments, malls, and shopping areas popping up from north to south, not just in the affluent corridor near the ocean and to the east, and with the food boom attracting tourists and prompting culinary nationalism. For critics, the quality of life has actually declined with recent economic growth, due to torturous traffic, fewer and fewer parks and public spaces, growing inequality, distressing crime, the loss of historic monuments and buildings, and minimal or inefficient planning. We underline the historical roots of these tensions, but also incorporate another key aspect of the city: limeños’ sense of humor. Perhaps it’s safe to say that one thing will never change in



Modern Lima. Lima continues to extend into the desert and fields to the north and south and up the Andean foothills to the east. The old colonial center, *el centro*, now constitutes about 5 percent of the city. Map drawn by M. Roy Cartography.

Lima: the debates about the city's heart and soul, often conducted over a delicious meal.

The renowned poet Antonio Cisneros (1942–2012) had a clear favorite topic and inspiration: his hometown of Lima. In his aptly titled “Chronicle of Lima” (1968), which opens this book, he brings up his family's deep roots in the city, but also approaches it from many other perspectives. He alludes to its environment, the lack of trees and the corrosive humidity and fog, the often dried-up Rímac River, the Franciscans and the catacombs of their church. But he also underlines the massive presence of Andean immigrants in the shantytowns that surrounded the city, a transformation that, unlike many of the city's older residents, Cisneros embraced. We have included this poem here at the beginning because it provides such a sweeping view of Lima and alludes to themes present throughout the book: the resilience of pre-Columbian and colonial elements; the city's unique setting; and the ongoing Andeanization of the City of Kings.

The reiterated invocation of Hermelinda, in the epigraph and the poem, alludes to a romantic and very popular *vals* written by Alberto Condemarin in the 1920s, one that connects love, loss, and memory: just as Condemarin didn't want Hermelinda to forget him (she apparently did, as she married the famous composer and musician Felipe Pinglo), Cisneros did not want his beloved Lima to forget him. We are confident that the city has not.

Notes

1. The term *criollo* is used for both whites and Afro-Peruvians and also often connotes cunning, the ability to get around bureaucracy, court someone, or confront any challenge with charm and humor.
2. Carlos Aguirre and Aldo Panfichi, introduction to *Lima, siglo XX: Cultura, socialización y cambio* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2013), 16.