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CLAH LECTURE: *Every History a Question, Every Question a Community*

My experience of doing Latin American history has been inseparable from dialogical and communal dynamics. In my view, every history is a question, and behind every question is a community or set of communities. So let me begin with a question made famous by Marc Bloch: What's the use of history? Looking at our globalized society, where short-term commercialism runs rampant, and breeds temptation to push aside broad education in critical thought while pursuing a more narrowly focused credential, we can ask the question again. What indeed is the use of history? It's a legitimate question. Students have a right to know what we think about it. They may have experienced history in school as learning stuff that doesn't seem relevant.

Consider this wonderful exchange in the Argentine comic strip *Mafalda* by Quino. Mafalda and her younger friend Miguelito—the kid with big hair who trips over his big ideas—are walking to school with their briefcases in hand. Miguelito shares his complaint about studying history: *"Yo creí que la escuela era otra cosa . . . Y no un lugar en que enseñan vejeces."* (I thought school was something else . . . and not a place for teaching useless old stuff.) He continues: *"¡Qué Colón, que los conquistadores, que los indios, que tal batalla, que tal otra! ¡Todo del tiempo de Ñaupa!"* (So Columbus, so the conquistadors, so the Indians, so such-and-such battle, so another one! All in the really old days!)

Mafalda tells it like it is: *"¡Pero así es la historia, hombre! ¿Cómo querés que te la enseñen?"* (But hey that's the way history is! How do you *want* them to teach it to you?)

And Miguelito wags his finger and shouts out the answer: *"¡PARA ADELANTE!"* (GOING FORWARD!)

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Mafalda and Miguelito are great fun. All kidding aside, though, Miguelito had a point when he asked, "what's the point?"[1] So we return to Marc Bloch, the historian who, with his colleagues of the Annales group, did so much to transform French and European historiography in the twentieth century. In a bitter historical moment, as France crumbled before the Nazi onslaught, Bloch made some decisions. In 1941, he began writing a book on history and the historical craft as such. In 1942, he joined the Resistance. In 1944, the Nazis captured and executed him. Bloch didn't finish the book, but we know its point of departure. It was a question posed by his son: "Tell me, Daddy, . . .what is the use of history?"[2]

Bloch did not have an easy answer. Upon re-reading *The Historian's Craft*, one sees that part of the answer was an act of faith—as if doing history were a pathway to reaffirm the value of humanity and civilization, in that menacing moment, in spite of everything. At this level, what stands out is the affection and devotion the study of history evokes in Bloch. History's insight, its methodology, its traps: these enchant and fascinate him. They ground him. Bloch's answer, at one level, is to share the allure and the grounding.

At another level, more explicit, fascination in and of itself doesn't suffice. Bloch puts forth the idea of "understanding" as a human imperative. It is, as he put it, "the beacon light of our studies." We humans don't want to stop at knowing events in their narrow or immediate sense. We want to analyze not just what's on the stage of life, but what took place behind the curtains before they went up. We want to see not just the words printed on the document, but also how they got there and what remained unstated.

For Bloch, the desire to understand and even explain experience, not simply to know its facts, is what defines us as human. Like Miguelito, we're not satisfied with just a recital of facts about this battle or that one. Our "will to understand" drives us to ask where that battle came from, what it amounted to as human consciousness, whether a different outcome was possible, whether and why its consequences mattered in the long run. For Bloch, history engages this longing to understand, and thereby helps us to live better. It offers not short-term utilitarianism, but rather the possibility to live with perspective, as human beings.[3] Put differently, to live without history is to live without

1. Mafalda 03-232, https://stryptor.herokuapp.com/mafalda/03-232, accessed March 27, 2019. Isabella Cosse has provided a wonderfully insightful analysis of what Mafalda can tell us about the history of middle-class society and politics in Argentina and beyond. See for example "Mafalda: Middle Class, Everyday Life, and Politics in Argentina, 1964–1973," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 94:1 (February 2014): 35–75.

2. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Peter Putnam, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1953), 3.

3. Bloch, *Craft*, 143, 10, for quotes.

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experience. It is to live a life in vain, always reactive to immediate events. [Hmm . . . sound familiar?]

I agree with Bloch's interpretation. We want to understand, not just to know, and this quest helps us live better. Nonetheless, in the spirit of thinking with Bloch rather than against him, one might add some implications. First, if history is about wanting to understand, then history doesn't belong to the past—rather, it's a dialogue of present and past. Second, what drives the dialogue and makes it interesting is some sort of question we wish to pose to the past. History begins with such a bothersome, discomforting question that keeps going round in our heads and demands some sort of answer. Of course, one must pose the discomforting question with respect and professionalism, recognizing that the past is a world of experiences in its own right, not a warrant to manipulate.

One must respect, too, the craft of historical analysis. To analyze the documents and archives and evidence with critical rigor and adequate methodology: this process is also an experience in and of itself. The questions we pose to history need to be sincere questions, open to surprise rather than suffocated by a predetermined answer.

Nonetheless, profound respect for the past and for rigorous historical method doesn't negate one's awareness that we can't rigidly separate past from present. History is a past-*and*-present dialectic of mutual construction, inspired by a nagging question or desire to understand. In this sense, Leopold von Ranke's vision of descriptive history—narrating the past precisely as it was—turns out to be a deceptive mirage. History responds to a compelling desire to "understand" something. That something emerges from the anxieties, questions, conflicts, and curiosities of the present, including struggles to shape the future. Behind a history worth doing is a question worth asking.[4]

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4. For the irony that Ranke as consumed by historians in the US context flattened Ranke in the German context, set within a larger account of US historians' debates on objectivity and relativism, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 26–30, 86–87, 98–100, 139–141, 262–263. For useful commentary and debate, see "AHR Forum: Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream* and the Future of the Historical Profession," *American Historical Review* 96 (June 1991): 675–708. The risk of such debates is a lens largely restricted to the Global North. For distinctive dynamics of historiography as seen from Latin America, including a tendency to consider paradigms and theory more explicitly, see Frederick Cooper et al., *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 3–20; Gilbert M. Joseph, ed., *Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History: Essays from the North* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Heidi Tinsman, "A Paradigm of Our Own: Joan Scott in Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 113 (December 2008): 1357–1374; and Barbara Weinstein, "Developing Inequality," *American Historical Review* 113 (February 2008): 1–18. For superb recent reflections on temporality by historians in dialogue with theory and social science, see William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Shelly Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland: Modern China in the Age of Global Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

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From this perspective, I can ask myself this: when I look back on my journey as a Latin American historian, what have I learned that I didn't understand when I went to Peru some 40 years ago to research the colonial history of Huamanga and its indigenous peoples? When I arrived in Peru in 1976, two gifted scholar-teachers had already exerted an influence on my thinking. As an undergraduate at Cornell, I took a class with the anthropologist John Murra. He invited students to consider the creative cultural achievements of Andean peoples. How could peoples of the high Andes have built societies whose agriculture, animal husbandry, and social reciprocities produced wealth and communities of formidable scale and complexity, despite an ecological environment so forbidding to agriculture and so prone to scattering people into physically dispersed, noncontiguous fragments? Then, as a graduate student at Yale, I experienced the magic of historian Karen Spalding, whose work took a similar direction but pushed the question forward into colonial times.[5]

But graduate students also learn from other graduate students, and from faculty beyond their specialized niche. I went to Yale thinking I would major in US history and do a minor field on Latin America and anthropology. The Latin American graduate program had amazing intellectual electricity. People like Florencia Mallon, Barbara Weinstein, and Gil Joseph, among others, asked such great questions about what people did in the face of enormous power and injustice, and they brought such formidable analytical skills, empirical research drive, and history-theory dialogue to those questions. And there was a brilliant historian of Brazil in the mix, Emilia Viotti da Costa, whose intellectual intensity and range were matched by a ferocious commitment to student success.[6]

Small wonder that some US history students, among them Steven Hahn and yours truly, turned into fellow travelers of the Latin American history program. Hahn's work on US Southern history and later African-American history evinced a comparative sensibility, nurtured by serious engagement with other regions of the Americas.[7] Yours truly fell in love with Latin America—the

5. For pioneering articles by John V. Murra and Karen Spalding, see Murra, *Formaciones económicas y políticas del mundo andino* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1975); and Spalding, *De indio a campesino: cambios en la estructura social del Perú colonial* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1974). See also Spalding's masterful *Huarochirí: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

6. Before her flight from the Brazilian dictatorship and eventual arrival at Yale, Emilia Viotti da Costa had published a brilliant study of Brazilian slavery and its destruction: *Da senzala à colônia,* rev. ed. (São Paulo: Ciências Humanas [1966], 1982). For intellectually powerful books based on the dissertations of the students whose dynamism pulled me into their orbit, see Gilbert M. Joseph, *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, Mexico, and the United States, 1880–1924* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Florencia E. Mallon, *The Defense of Community in Peru's Central Highlands: Peasant Struggle and Capitalist Transition, 1860–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850–1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983).

7. The wider comparative sensibility and engagement continues to inform his work. See the magisterial interpretation of US history as a making of nation and empire: Steven Hahn, *A Nation without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830–1910* (New York: Viking, 2016).

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scholarship and historiography and questions and debates it inspired, the community of professors and graduate students who gathered to study it at Yale, and yes, one decidedly brilliant graduate student whose name I won't divulge. But I can tell you this. Her name rhymes with 'Valencia' [Florencia Mallon]. So I made the jump, from Latin American history as a minor field to Latin American history as a way of life.

But what was the "bothersome question" that kept going around in my head and demanded historical research? The question cannot be reduced to the direct influences, important as they were, of the individuals I've mentioned so far. Those folks and many colleagues in Latin America, especially Peru, Mexico, and Chile, and also in CLAH and LASA, proved fundamental over the years. But none of us drop out of the sky—contexts matter. In the intellectually formative 1960s and early 1970s, we were shaped by larger environments of politics and society and scholarship that kept posing questions for thought.

In the US context, my graduate student colleagues and I came of age in an era of turbulence that shattered social conceits and complacency. On the international front, there was the barbarity of the Vietnam War and US imperial swagger in Latin America. On the home front, there were the struggles around civil rights and social emancipation, not to mention shocks of violence that created a certain level of "war at home." Not everyone reacted to the larger environment in the same way, of course. But a significant fraction of young intellectuals in formation began to wonder if academia, too, was part of the problem. Could one find fresh ways to break out of stifling structures of power, injustice, and thought?[8]

This wondering and wandering was more a sensibility than a coherent manifesto. At bottom, it was a quest to understand human agency and experience in the face of overwhelming structures of power. That sensibility influenced the questions many of us posed for historical research in specific historical contexts. And it influenced which intellectuals from other fields many of us found interesting or good to "think with," even if the specific contexts of their research and writing differed from ours. For us, historians like E. P. Thompson, who pioneered the

8. For a more extended reflection on these themes, see Steve J. Stern, "Africa, Latin America, and the Splintering of Historical Knowledge: From Fragmentation to Reverberation," in *Confronting Historical Paradigms*, Cooper et al., 3–20. On Latin American students and intellectuals within wider contexts of politics and society during and after the "Global Sixties," excellent starting points include Jeffrey L. Gould, "Solidarity under Siege: The Latin American Left," *American Historical Review* 114 (April 2009): 348–375; Victoria Langland, *Speaking of Flowers: Student Movements and the Making and Remembering of 1968 in Military Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique C. Ochoa, eds., *Mexico Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018); and Jessica Stites Mor, ed., *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

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language of "agency" in contemporary historical scholarship with his book *The Making of the English Working Class*, and Eugene D. Genovese, who turned US slavery studies inside out with *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, became important touchstones. Antonio Gramsci's reflections on hegemony and the state also seemed a breath of fresh air.[9]

The climate of politics, society, and scholarship gave shape to the bothersome problem—agency and its attendant questions—that I brought to research on Huamanga. The generic version of the question was inadequate, however; it had to be grounded in Latin America's own historical contexts. What could "agency" mean in a specific colonial moment, particularly in the first century of plunder, violence, economic exploitation, and population collapse after Spanish conquest? Was it even possible to see sub-imperial indigenous actors—not those of the Inka lineages and their communities, but actors of the ethnic *ayllus* and communities subordinated to Tawantinsuyo—as people making history, and in such extreme and destructive times? If so, what difference—if any—did their efforts make to the workings of colonial labor, justice, and power, and to the interior lives and relationships of Andean communities?[10]

To state whether the analysis and conclusions convinced anyone (except the author) would be presumptuous. What bears acknowledging here is the delight of the research—the allure of the historical craft that all of us in this room have experienced. Having a historical question provides a focus to our dialogue of past and present, but bringing to the question an open-minded sensibility rather than a predetermined answer can produce mind-blowing moments! The thrill of the wondrous research moment—the desire for it, the memory of it—keeps us going when research turns into a slog.

I was lucky in this regard. I found traces of an early history of post-Inkaic alliances among Andeans and Spaniards—the ups and downs, and the crisis that wrecked such experiments—that seemed to turn the history of "conquest" inside out. Even more unexpectedly, the more I worked in the archives, the more I came to see that indigenous peoples pulled off a kind of reverse colonization from below. They

9. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, [1963] 1966); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, (New York: Panethon, 1974); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. and trans. (New York: International Publishers, 1971). For insight on the ways agency and hegemony fostered a conceptual rethinking of state formation in Latin America by the mid 1990s, fundamental books are Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); and Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

10. The tension between "subordination" and "agency" is explicit in the language of the introduction to the original edition. See Steve J. Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), xv–xix.

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invaded colonial judicial institutions, turning them toward unintended purposes and effects. They thereby forged a demographic and labor history far removed from official colonial design, and, arguably, undermined the most strategic institution of all: the *mita,* the labor drafts that undergirded silver mining and colonial society.

Let us remember, however, that although Bloch clearly shared in the allure of history as research, he also warned that fascination does not suffice—we reach for "understanding," too. The larger good fortune I experienced was not the thrill of the research nugget, but the discovery that it is indeed possible to narrate and analyze what historical "agency" can look like, and with what consequences, in the specific context of early colonial society in the Andes and Latin America.

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So far, so good. A history worth researching is a history that seeks an answer to a question worth asking. What I didn't understand, however, is that the nagging question that animates one's first book is not exhausted upon completion of the project. Sure, the *author* is exhausted! ("Give me my tenure already! Let me curl up under a *manta* and get some sleep!") The *question* turns out to have an afterlife. The larger question may remain the problem of agency in the face of overwhelming power and injustice, in the specific contexts of Latin America and its relation to world history.

But communities interested in history's questions evolve. The shifting contexts of politics and society and yearning reshape communities of intellectual debate and puzzlement and learning—and the discomforting questions that drive us to undertake exhausting research projects in the first place! So even if the larger question remains apparently the same—the problem of agency—it acquires new layers of meaning. New or complementary discomforting questions start to demand a place in the dialogue.

Within this framework—behind every history a question, behind every question a community or communities of inquiry— let me share briefly some additional things I learned. Here are three examples of the ways the question of agency became a moving research target, an evolution through dialogue with communities of learning and debate, each grounded in larger climates of debate and yearning. Let me pose each example as a question that is both a complement to the original question of agency, and a new question in its own right.

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The first question after the study of Huamanga is the classic question that arises after publication of a case study in a book. "Is any of this generalizable?" One wants to understand if the agency traced for Huamanga fits into a larger pattern, with variations across time and space, or if one's case study is an outlier. One may interpret my subsequent team-based book, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World* (1987), and articles in several journals, as attempts to wrestle with the problem of generalization. For me, however, what gave specific shape to a rethinking of Andean agency on a larger time-space canvas of ethnicity, migration, markets, and rebellion was not individual brainstorming, but rather participation in a community of scholars assembled by Brooke Larson and the Social Science Research Council, to deepen dialogues of Andean history and anthropology. The book on Andean rebellions did put forth a somewhat generalizable concept, "resistant adaptation," to supersede dichotomies of accommodation versus resistance by considering how peasants incorporated a sense of social rights within their adaptations to power—and thereby a right to rebel if certain boundaries were violated.[11]

But what that concept might mean—its potential for research and analysis, the questions it could address—kept evolving through dialogue with colleagues rooted in specific political and intellectual contexts. Peruvian scholars Carlos Iván Degregori and Ponciano del Pino, for instance, sensitized me to the ways that resistant adaptation ("*adaptación-en-resistencia*") might provide insight into peasant agency in the midst of war—and in relation to insurgents, rather than to the state. Carlos Iván and Ponciano wanted to figure out what happened in communities that came under the sway of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), but then experienced increasing alienation over time.[12]

11. For "resistant adaption" in its initial formulation, see Steve J. Stern, ed., *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 8–13, 30–33, 71–75. For articles on other themes that emerged from research on Huamanga, see these articles by Steve J. Stern: "The Struggle for Solidarity: Class, Culture, and Community in Highland Indian America," *Radical History Review* 27 (1983): 21–48; "Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean," *American Historical Review* 93 (October 1988): 829–872; and "Paradigms of Conquest: History, Historiography, and Politics," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (quincent. supp., 1992): 1–34. For the SSRC project and the big-picture canvas, see Brooke Larson and Olivia Harris, with Enrique Tandeter, eds., *Ethnicity, Markets, and Migration in the Andes: At the Crossroads of History and Anthropology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

12. See Carlos Iván Degregori, "Harvesting Storms: Peasant Rondas and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho," in Steve J. Stern, ed., *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 128–157, esp. 142–147; Carlos Iván Degregori, *Qué difícil es ser Dios: el Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso y el conflicto armado interno en el Perú: 1980–1999* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2010), esp. 183–195; and Ponciano del Pino, "Family, Culture, and 'Revolution': Everyday Life with Sendero Luminoso," in Stern, ed., *Shining and Other Paths*, 158–192, esp. 178–180. For *comunero* politics and the Sendero problem within a longer temporality, see Ponciano del Pino, *En nombre del gobierno: el Perú y Uchuraccay: un siglo de política campesina* (Lima y Juliaca: La Siniestra Ensayos; Universidad Nacional de Juliaca, 2017).

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A second question that arose was, "what about gender?" What difference could analysis of gender and women's history make to understandings of power, authority, and subaltern agency in colonial Latin America? This question drove me to undertake a massive project on Mexico. In its first conception, *The Secret History of Gender* was to be a comparative history of Mexico and Peru, but it evolved into a comparative regional study of Mexico, because Mexico's archives were so rich and the problem of region so important. (Also, there was the matter of a war going on in Peru . . . .)

What drove me to research a history of women and gender, however, was, again this time, not private brainstorming. It was the graduate student community. At the University of Wisconsin's Madison campus in the 1980s and 1990s, the graduate students in Latin American and Caribbean history built intense dialogues with their peers in African history and the Women's History Program. The latter owed its strength to the arrival of Gerda Lerner and Jeanne Boydston and Linda Gordon, of course, but also to larger social environments of intellectual and sociopolitical debate about women, gender, and feminism. The communities of debate included not only those that came together in the United States, but also *encuentros feministas* (gatherings of feminists) in Latin America, most notably a key meeting in Lima in 1983.

Dialogues in the US and Latin America pushed me to consider a new question. In a world where Eurocentric assumptions still so strongly pervaded much historical and theoretical scholarship and teaching, what might gender history or women's history look like if built from Latin America outward? Could such an approach shift our understandings of peasant or plebeian life, let alone women's agency in pre-feminist or non-feminist times?[13]

When I speak of the impact of graduate students and Latin American field experience on my research, I should also acknowledge faculty colleagues. Tom Skidmore, Francisco Scarano, Florencia Mallon, and I worked as co-mentoring teams, above all in relation to graduate teaching. We

13. For reflection on Mexico as paradigmatic in considering Old Regime societies, see Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 309–317. On the feminist *encuentros* and contexts of shifting activism and social thought in the 1980s and 1990s, fine starting points include Sonia E. Álvarez et al., "Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002): 537–579; Nancy Saporta Sternbach et al., "Feminisms in Latin America: From Bogotá to San Bernardo," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 17* (1992): 393–434; Alejandra Massolo, *Por amor y coraje: mujeres en movimientos urbanos de la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1992); and Narda Henríquez, ed., *Encrucijadas del saber: los estudios de género en las ciencias sociales* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1996). For a review of historiography, see Sueann Caulfield, "The History of Gender in the Historiography of Latin America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81 (August-November 2001): 449–490.

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supported the idea that everyone on the faculty needed to return again and again to Latin America and the Caribbean, and we covered for one another. The teamwork and the love of field time—Tom couldn't get through a lecture without breaking into Portuguese! —shaped our community climate and camaraderie, not only as co-mentors of the students but also as colleagues open to learning from the students as well as one another. In that sort of climate, shifts in research direction were understood and applauded, not shunned or feared.[14]

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Again and again, I owed my shifts of research focus not only to intellectual restlessness as an individual matter, but to intersecting communities of thought and debate that reframed the meaning of old questions while adding new ones. Nowhere was this relational aspect of research more powerful than when I began working on histories of memory struggle that built new competing languages of experience: the just-in-time salvation

14. Thomas E. Skidmore was a bibliophile whose thematic range was evident in conversation as well as his many books and articles on Brazil, and his works of panoramic scholarship. For the variety of his works focused on Brazil, see for example *Politics in Brazil, 1930–1964: An Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); and *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought,* 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). For panoramic writings, see for example "Workers and Soldiers: Urban Labor Movements and Elite Responses in Twentieth-Century Latin America," in *Elites, Masses, and Modernization in Latin America, 1850–1930,* Virginia Bernhard, ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 79–126; "Studying the History of Latin America: A Case of Hemispheric Convergence," *Latin American Research Review* 33 (1998): 105–127; and Skidmore with Peter H. Smith as co-author, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Revised editions of this comprehensive text appeared in 1989, 1992, 1997, 2001, and 2005. James N. Green later joined the co-author team and revised editions have continued to appear. Francisco Scarano published on an astonishing range of themes, including Puerto Rican history as such, but his work also extends to a comparative or expansive register. For a sampling of the former, see *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800–1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Scarano, ed., *Inmigración y clases sociales en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1981); "Las huellas esquivas de la memoria: antropología e historia en *Taso, trabajador de la caña*," in Sidney W. Mintz and Francisco Scarano, *Taso, trabajador de la caña* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1988), 9–50; "The Jíbaro Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico, 1745–1823," *American Historical Review* 101 (December 1996): 1398–1431; and Scarano's comprehensive and influential text, *Puerto Rico: Cinco siglos de historia* (Bogotá: McGraw-Hill, 1993). Revised editions appeared in 2000 and 2007. For works in a comparative imperial register, see for example "Labor and Society in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Modern Caribbean,* Franklin W. Knight and Colin Palmer, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 51–84; "Liberal Pacts and Hierarchies of Rule: Approaching the Imperial Transition in Cuba and Puerto Rico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 78 (November 1998): 583–601; Scarano, ed., with Margarita Zamora, *Cuba: Contrapuntos de cultura, historia y sociedad/ Cuba: Counterpoints on Culture, History, and Society* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2007); Scarano, ed., with Alfred McCoy, *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); and the comprehensive reader, Scarano, ed., with Stephan Palmié, *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and its Peoples* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Florencia E. Mallon's range was evident not only in her shift of substantive focus and her methodological innovations when she turned to research on Chile after writing deeply researched books and articles on Peru and Mexico, but also in the diverse genres of her publications on Chile. These include a community history written with literary flair: Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailío and the Chilean State, 1906–2001* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). In addition, see the Mapuche testimonial memoir of Rosa Isolde Reuque Paillalef, for whom Mallon served as editor, translator, and interlocutor: *When a Flower is Reborn: The Life and Times of a Mapuche Feminist* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); and Mallon's novel, *Beyond the Ties of Blood* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2012).

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from Marxist disaster, the persecution whose witness leads to moral awakening, the open wound when shocking violence is compounded by cruel misinformation, the virtue of forgetting and looking away to build a bright future.

These competing languages constituted new pathways to making and unmaking political legitimacy in times of mass atrocity and so-called "dirty war." In truth, social actors in both Chile and Peru led me to the project that ended up becoming a trilogy on Chile. In 1992 or 1993, I received a letter from Chile's Vicaría de la Solidaridad asking whether the University of Wisconsin library would like to receive a multivolume summary of key facts in its case files on persons detained and disappeared by the Pinochet dictatorship. The poignant language of the letter—its insistence on tracing the persons whose very existence the regime wanted us to forget—planted a seed.

In 1995, Peruvian scholar Patricia Oliart planted another seed. I had worked with Peruvians and other colleagues to organize a conference in Madison, a retreat where we would try to historicize and analyze the grassroots dynamics and consequences of the Shining Path war. At the time, the war seemed poorly understood and fresh analysis seemed both an ethical and intellectual imperative. Oliart's brilliant discussion of Alberto Fujimori's political style drove home the fact that the question of *how to remember* the war had become strategic—critical to Fujimori's consolidation of power, his 1995 re-election, and the future.[15]

These experiences exposed me to new social actors and communities of debate, anguish, and mobilization in Chile and Peru (and over time, in other societies). They set me off on a new research path. How might the memory question itself offer a new lens for understanding legacies of atrocity, and struggles for a new moral language of meaning and mobilization in our own time? What

15. For Fujimori as political style and phenomenon, see Patricia Oliart, "Alberto Fujimori: 'The Man Peru Needed?'" in Stern, ed., *Shining and Other Paths*, 411–424. The strategic aspect of memory came through forcefully in the oral debate. For the case file summaries on disappeared persons in Chile, see *Detenidos desaparecidos: documento de trabajo*, 8 vols. (Santiago: Arzobispado de Santiago, Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1993). By 1993, the Vicaría had closed as an active vicariate, but its successor entity, the Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad, served as an important archive and documentation center. The wider context was the difficult post-dictatorship transition, in politics and society generally, and in the Church specifically. See Steve J. Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989–2006* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–210, esp. 106–135; and María Angélica Cruz, *Iglesia, represión y memoria: el caso chileno* (Madrid y Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2004). The Vicaría had itself been a successor entity to an ecumenical organization known as the Comité Pro-Paz (formally, Comité Ecuménico de Cooperación Para la Paz en Chile), whose closure Pinochet had forced in 1975. See Steve J.Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973–1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 105–114.

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might memory struggles tell us about agency and mediation under dictatorial regimes of shocking violence, and in their aftermath?[16]

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I now understand that a good historical question yields not a tidy answer, but rather a long journey of questioning. We discover a series of related yet diverse questions whose answers we can address only by taking seriously humanity's pact with history—our obligation to remember those who are dead, to notice possibilities lost or forgotten, to engage temporalities beyond the immediate. In Latin America, that pact with history is acutely urgent, from a civic as well as an intellectual standpoint. It's acutely rewarding, too, from a human standpoint.

So what's the use of history? I have three answers.

First, the questions we pose to the past—the historian's insistence that we see social phenomena in the arc of time—yield a perspective fundamental for living well. Questioning, analyzing, and situating life within the longer arc of time

16. Social actors in Chile made fundamental contributions that went well beyond the initiation of the new project, not only in the research process but also in many other ways. These included the evolution of the questions I was asking and the arguments in play, and involvement in team- based projects. See Mario Garcés et al., *Memoria para un nuevo siglo: Chile, miradas a la segunda mitad del siglo XX* (Santiago: LOM, 2000), esp. 5–33. Social actors also fostered my emerging awareness that to respond ethically to what was at stake in human terms, I would need to write an experimental book in an unusual authorial voice, different from the one I used in the second and third volumes of the trilogy on Chile. The introductory volume, written especially for general readers and students, relied on an ethnographic "life-story" mode of narration to make vivid what mattered in human terms; provided an afterword for each chapter as a device to enrich, extend, or unsettle the narration; and relied on life stories to provide a narrative basis that sets up the theory chapter, rather than the other way around—most of the theoretical discussion was back-ended rather than front-ended in the book. See Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Some experimentation, including the use of chapter afterwords, continued in the second and third volumes, but the narrative style followed conventions of academic historical writing more closely.

I should add that over time, social actors elsewhere in Latin America—notably other Southern Cone countries, and Peru and Colombia—also shaped my learning journey on the memory question. I learned much from engagement with the Social Science Research Council's project on memory, repression, and democratization, directed by Elizabeth Jelin and Carlos Iván Degregori in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Other important engagements were with conference initiatives and collaborative projects in Peru in the 2000s to consider achievements, limitations, and artistic spaces opened up for work on truth, memory, social critique, and repair in the aftermath of the 2003 truth commission report, and more recently, an initiative by Colombia's Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica to assess achievements and limitations of its victim-centered memory work, in dialogue with an emerging but fragile peace process. For a look at these initiatives, see for example Elizabeth Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria* (Madrid and Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2002); Elizabeth Jelin, ed., *Las conmemoraciones: las disputas en las fechas "in-felices"* (Madrid and Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2002); Ponciano del Pino and Elizabeth Jelin, eds., *Luchas locales, comunidades e identidades* (Madrid y Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2003); Carlos Iván Degregori, ed., *Jamás tan cerca arremetió lo lejos: memoria y violencia política en el Perú* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2003); Cynthia E. Milton, ed., *Art from a Fractured Past: Memory and Truth-Telling in Post-Shining Path Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Ludwig Huber and Ponciano del Pino, eds., *Políticas en justicia transicional: miradas comparativas sobre el legado de la CVR* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2015); and Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica [Colombia] and Steve J. Stern, with Jacob Blanc, Debbie Sharnak, and Bridgette Werner, *La memoria nos abre camino: balance metodológico del CNMH para el esclarecimiento histórico* (Bogotá: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018).

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helps us with that drive to understand, the drive that Marc Bloch so cherished. In today's world of the incessant digital nudge and the never-ending media storm, perspective to live and think beyond the immediate reactive response is indeed important.

Second, we historians pick up specific adaptable skills in our journey of questioning. Sometimes they're useful for civic or other functions, as well as intellectual purposes. The work I did as an expert witness in a court seeking justice for the torture and assassination of Víctor Jara was an experience as meaningful as any book I ever wrote. Among other things, it taught me to value the craft skills we develop. History as practice sharpens our ability to see beyond the readily visible. To ferret out sources and their back stories, to analyze contexts and connections that draw out the significance of otherwise fragmentary facts or evidence, to assess causes and consequences beyond the immediate triggers and aftermaths: these practices prove to be useful skills, whether in a courtroom or an archive, a classroom or a work place, a social organization or a protest movement.

Third, history opens up a world of relationships far beyond ourselves, or more precisely, beyond the most immediate and familiar local world of "ourselves". When I look back, what I see is that good historical questions—what they mean, how to research them, how they take us to new questions—are not a function of individual ontology. They derive from relationships with communities of people rooted in their own social, political, and intellectual contexts, yet intersecting with our own lives. Together, we discover that some questions are urgent and that they are historical. In a world of loneliness, notwithstanding our abundance of superficial connectivity, such relationships are not trivial.

Perspective, skills, relationships: I've argued that history is useful and urgent. That interpretation doesn't preclude enchantment, of course. Useful or not, history is also downright fascinating. And nothing is worthier of wonder than the ordeals, achievements, failures, and creativity of Latin Americans.

But here we go again. *Wonder* breeds *question*. Every history a question, every question a community of intersecting communities.

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