

ONE

“I’m Going to Be President of the Republic”

THE FORMATION OF AN ACTIVIST, 1921–1948

Seven years old and outraged at the theft of his family’s livestock by a local landlord, a very young Manuel Llamojha Mitma proclaimed, “I’m going to be president of the republic, and I’m going to make the haciendas disappear!” This chapter considers Llamojha’s formation as an activist, exploring how and why he chose to dedicate his life to a struggle for justice. His dreams and ambitions radically transgressed the boundaries of an indigenous peasant’s expected life course. The constraints of anti-Indianism in Peru were so tight that many Peruvians deemed campesinos too backward and too ignorant to do anything other than grinding physical labor on the land.¹ Educational opportunities in rural Andean communities were also so grossly lacking that few indigenous peasants could realistically aspire to much more than a life of agricultural labor. The most ambitious and fortunate campesinos were sometimes able to enter positions of local authority—becoming district mayors or justices of the peace—and some were able to migrate to urban centers and find working-class jobs. But the goals Llamojha set for himself, including the priesthood, military leadership, and even the presidency, were ones definitively closed to indigenous peasants, and few Peruvians would have even imagined an Andean campesino having such ambitions. Such were the extreme limitations of life in Peru’s rural indigenous communities during much of the twentieth century.

Llamojha was an exceptional child who became an extraordinary man, but there was much about his early life that would seem familiar to Latin Americans who grew up during the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, more Latin Americans lived in the countryside than in cities, and many shared Llamojha's experiences of grinding rural poverty, pronounced state disregard for the countryside, and hacienda abuses.² Impoverished Latin Americans often desperately wanted access to better schools and better teachers, longing for education, and in these pages Llamojha explains how he acquired his most important political tool: his literacy. Like Llamojha, tens of thousands of Latin Americans migrated from the countryside to urban centers in the first decades of the twentieth century, searching for better opportunities and better lives. Many faced terrible ethn racial and class discrimination on their arrival in the city. Some joined burgeoning leftist political parties and organizations that promised to fight for socioeconomic justice and build more equitable nation-states. Llamojha himself turned to what soon became one of Peru's most important political parties: APRA.

Childhood

Born at the base of a tree on May 3, 1921, Llamojha began his life in the humblest of circumstances.

My parents had gone to harvest wheat, potatoes, and that's how I was born, at the base of a tree.³ When I was born, there was nothing. Just birds singing in the tree, while I was crying at its base. There weren't even any angels there to greet me. When Christ was born, angels came! But not for me; they didn't come for me. Not angels, and not the Three Wise Men either!

Situating the very start of his life on a plot of his family's farm land, a few kilometers away from the community of Concepción—a small town in what was then Cangallo province in the department of Ayacucho—Llamojha stressed his connection with rural Peru, his poverty, and the unremarkable beginning of his very remarkable life.⁴

The eldest of six children, he was born to indigenous peasant parents who were themselves from the region.⁵ Like the overwhelming majority of campesinos in early twentieth-century Ayacucho, Llamojha's mother, Paulina Mitma Vásquez, spoke only the indigenous language Quechua. His father



FIG. 1.1 Concepción. Author photo.

was different. Although Quechua was his first language, Anselmo Llamojha Martínez spoke some Spanish, and he even knew how to read, something that was exceptional among indigenous peasants of the period. That rarity was a symptom of the Peruvian state's terrible neglect of rural Andean communities. Many communities, like Concepción, had no schools at all, and those few rural schools that did exist rarely taught past the earliest grades. Such schools also suffered from a lack of resources, and their teachers often had little more than basic literacy and numeracy skills.

My father knew how to read, though not very well. He didn't have sufficient schooling, because back then, there were no schools in the Peruvian Andes. The hacendados prohibited it. Because there weren't any schools in rural towns, people would learn to read by paying someone who already knew how. My dad sold a young bull to someone so that he'd teach him everything. And later, to learn about the church and how to sing in church in Latin, he sold another bull to another person who was a cantor [church song leader] and who played the organ.

Anselmo Llamojha's path to literacy was one followed by other Andean campesinos privileged enough to have the means to privately fund literacy train-

ing.⁶ Such peasants, however, were rare: most were so impoverished that they could not spare animals, crops, or cash to pay for an education. The Peruvian state's pointed abandon of the Andean countryside meant that it was not until the 1940s that the state initiated significant efforts to expand access to education there.⁷ It was not until 1969 that education became compulsory for all Peruvian children, forcing the state to ensure access to schooling.⁸ Some Andean communities were able to cobble together enough resources to establish schools in the 1920s, when Llamojha was a child, but as he notes, many such schools faced concerted opposition from hacendados who felt threatened by indigenous education, no doubt fearing that widespread literacy among campesinos would limit landlords' abilities to exploit them and gain access to their lands and resources.⁹

With his literacy and musical training, Llamojha's father then began assisting local priests with their duties.

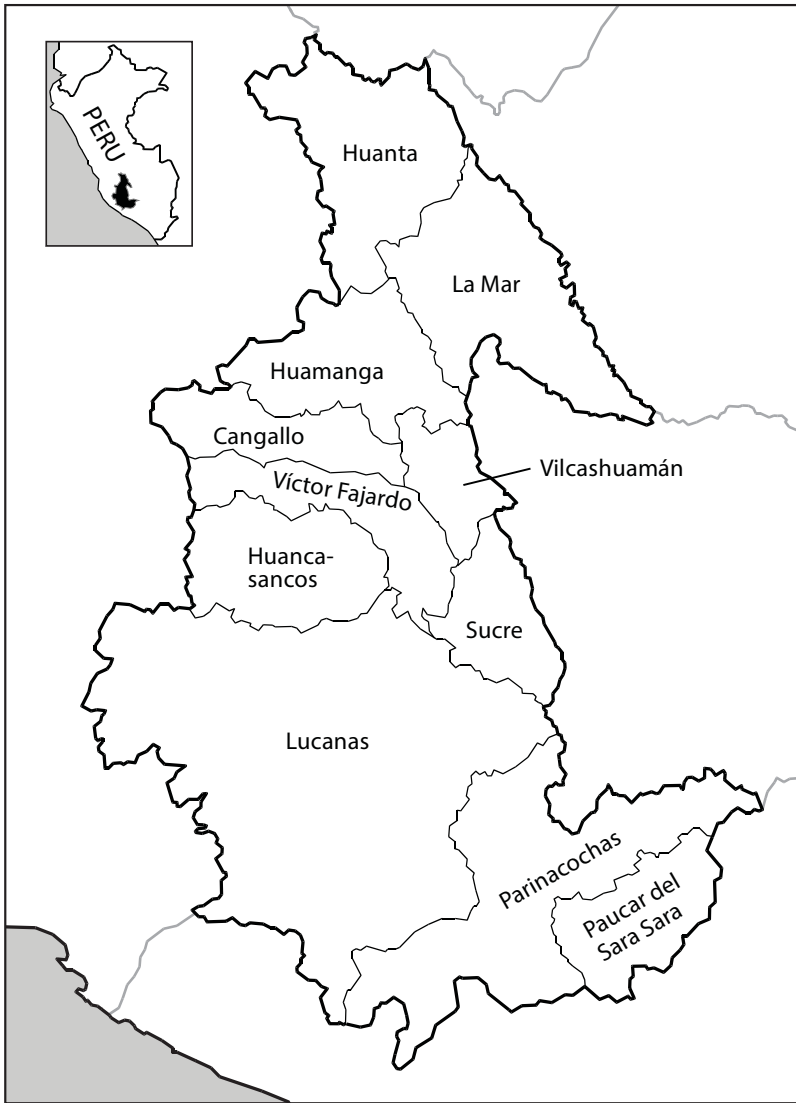
My father worked in the fields and he was an assistant in the church; he helped the priests say mass. He was also a cantor and he played the church's organ. They always called him to other *pueblos* [towns or communities], too, to get him to go and celebrate the patron saint festivals. As for my mother, people tell me she was just like me. She was really good to me.

Llamojha had much more conflicted memories of his father, a demanding and sometimes violent man.

My dad didn't have patience for anything. For us, for kids. He wouldn't let us play at all. Not at all. When we were at home, he'd give us wool to spin. We had to spin wool until we got sleepy. He didn't let me do anything. We couldn't play when he was around. It was only when he was away that we could go and play for a while, run around. But when he was at home, not at all. Not for anything! He'd give us homework, or make us help in the kitchen, anything. We couldn't be lazy.

If I was doing something, everything was fine. But if not, the whip! He wasn't just this way with me; he was the same with people on the street, kids out on the street. When he went out, no one could be out in the street playing. He'd get out his whip and chase the kids. He'd even whip their parents!

"Why are your kids outside playing?" he'd say. The whole pueblo was afraid of my dad. And they respected him. That's what my dad was like.



MAP 1.1 Department of Ayacucho



FIG. 1.2 Paulina Mitma Vásquez, Llamojha's mother, location and date unknown. Photo courtesy of Manuel Llamojha Mitma.

Llamojha's father also provided young Manuel with what would soon become his most important skill: the ability to read and write.

When I was about five years old, my dad taught me to read and write. First, my dad taught me the alphabet. After I learned the alphabet really well, he gave me homework from the Mantilla book; he made me finish it. Back then, Mantilla was the famous book.¹⁰ You had to finish that book. Those who did so perfectly, who mastered Spanish, could be authorities. Also, the book *Mosaico*.¹¹ *Mosaico* was for learning to write. That's how it used to be.

Llamojha's father not only taught him to read and write but also pushed him to study and improve. There were many reasons why Anselmo Llamojha was so determined to educate his young son. Literacy enabled indigenous peasants to gain access to positions of political authority in their home communities and districts, and it allowed them to personally examine the legal

documents that were a fixture of rural life—documents that often led to exploitation, as unscrupulous individuals routinely tricked illiterate men and women into signing unjust contracts and bad land deals. For males, literacy meant access to citizenship, as the right to vote was restricted to adult men able to read and write. Literacy also conveyed a tremendous amount of respect and dignity, as it correlated so closely with urbanism, modernity, and power in Peru.¹² Many indigenous people also valued literacy in its own right, treasuring the ability to communicate and learn through reading and writing.¹³

Because of his father's stern exactions, Llamojha was forced to turn his childhood labor responsibilities for tending the family's animals into a space for studying and learning.

My father gave me homework, and I'd go out to tend my sheep, but I had to take my book with me.

"You have to study up to this part," he'd say.

I studied, I wrote, I copied, so that it all entered into my head. I'd go home and he'd give me a test, and then he'd give me more homework for the next day. He taught me to read, little by little. We always lived in the countryside. So, when I would go out to tend to my sheep, I always went with my books. Before, because there wasn't a school, they didn't even sell notebooks in our community, or pencils either. So, I wrote on maguey leaves. *Hojepajpas* [the Quechua term for such leaves], we said. We wrote on the leaves with little sticks. Using little sticks, the writing comes out really clearly.

As Llamojha recalled this period of his life, he drew a clear connection between his education and his political goals. He recalled, "I had a plan: to learn to read, and I wanted to be president of the republic! But first, I knew I must study." Llamojha's literacy also propelled him into his very first position of leadership.

Back then, no other boys knew how to read. Of all the adults in the pueblo, only four people knew how to read. Because I was the only boy in the pueblo who knew how to read, no one else, the kids followed me around. They also had their sheep, their cows. Every day, I went out with my sheep to watch them as they grazed, and kids followed me where I went, to the puna [high Andean plateau], so that I could teach them to read and write. Each boy brought a huge number of maguey leaves, and I taught them

how to write the alphabet on those leaves. Every day they followed me! Poor little things.

I taught the boys to read, to write. And at night, I made them march in the plaza. I made them march in the plaza, made them do their military exercises!

The people, they liked this. We did these exercises, and later, my dad made me to go to church with these boys. Inside the church, I made them pray, I made them sing.

But, one day, while these boys and I were having fun in the puna, a fox took our sheep! There used to be a lot of foxes—not like now when there aren't any—and you had to be very careful. But because we were having fun, a fox took my sheep and theirs, too. So when I returned home in the afternoon: a whipping!

When Llamojha shared his life stories, he directly connected his life as an activist to an event that occurred in 1928, when he was just seven years old. This event involved the Ayrabamba hacienda, a large sugar-producing estate that bordered the community of Concepción. As was typical among landowners in the region, Ayrabamba's owner collected *hierbaje*, fees levied on indigenous community members for pasturing their animals on hacienda land. Hierbaje fees were often paid with animals rather than cash, and many peasants felt that these fees were highly unjust and that hacendados routinely used them to justify their illegal seizure of peasants' livestock. Those seizures also imperiled campesinos financially, as families depended on their animals for their very subsistence.¹⁴

I would have been seven years old. We lived in Kalabazayoj, about eighteen kilometers down from Concepción. We lived there in winter, in the rainy season, with our cattle. We had some sheep, too, but not many. Thirty sheep, more or less, and I guarded them.

The hacienda Ayrabamba, it's just down from here [Concepción]. The hacienda took all the cattle from the people, they rounded them up.

"Hierbaje!" they said.

So, when I was tending my sheep, a huge number of police and people from the hacienda appeared, gathering everyone's cattle, sheep, and hens. They came over to where I was and they took away all of my sheep, every last one of them. They took all of them and I got really upset. I went home to tell my parents, to inform them. My dad wasn't home, just my mom, and I told her, crying. My dad came home from the fields in the afternoon and he yelled at me.

"Why did you let them take the sheep?"

"What was I going to do? So many people came, and they took them," I said. But he whipped me anyway.

"You let them escape," he said.

The next day, my dad went to demand the sheep. The hacendada, her name was María Elodia Parodi, she didn't want to give them back, not one sheep.¹⁵ She kept all of them, and six cows, too. And from there, my idea was born.

I swore, **"One day, I'm going to be grown up, and I'm going to study, and I'm going to be an authority!"** My plan was to study and become president.

"I'm going to be president of the republic, and I'm going to make the haciendas disappear!" I said.

This idea has stayed with me all my life. That is, once I was grown I would struggle against the hacendados, fight with the hacendados until the haciendas disappeared. And with this idea, I've fought, to the point of making the hacendados disappear.

The anger that seven-year-old Manuel Llamojha Mitma felt toward local hacendados was a sentiment shared by campesinos across Peru's Andes. Many of them felt terribly abused by landowners who unjustly seized their animals, encroached on and stole community lands, and forced them to perform unpaid labor services on haciendas. During the 1920s this anger coalesced into a massive rural movement for dramatic social, economic, and political change. Indigenous peasants sent innumerable petitions and letters, invaded haciendas to reclaim their lands, and in a few instances even staged armed uprisings to protest abuses and demand better treatment in Peru. Much of this mobilization was informed and directed by the Comité Pro-Derecho Indígena Tawantinsuyo (Tawantinsuyo Pro-Indigenous Rights Committee), until it was outlawed by President Leguía in 1927.¹⁶

Llamojha's anger was also shared by many members of his home community. In 1929 a number of indigenous peasants from Concepción filed a complaint before the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Lima, accusing the owner of the Ayrabamba hacienda, María Elodia Vassallo de Parodi, of a wide range of abuses.¹⁷ Those abuses included her unjust seizure of community members' cattle, unfair fines for pasturing animals, and her attempts to claim ownership of a lake that community members used for irrigation.¹⁸ The following year, four Concepción campesinos appealed to the foremost authority in the department of Ayacucho, the prefect, requesting urgent protection against

this landowner. Their letter charged that she had ordered one hundred of her workers to raid Concepción. Those workers had then seized seventy head of cattle, forty horses, six hundred sheep, and two hundred goats, all on the claim of charging *hierbaje*. The campesinos wrote that the seizure of animals had been unwarranted and, worse still, had been carried out with violence and intimidation. Vassallo de Parodi's workers had fired gunshots into the air, flung rocks at community members, and even whipped some women and children. From the perspective of the men writing to the prefect, all of this was done "with the fundamental and premeditated end of appropriating the lands of the community."¹⁹ Yet, as happened so often in rural Peru, these complaints and pleas brought no meaningful action from Peru's courts, government representatives, or politicians, who showed little interest in defending indigenous peasants.²⁰ Llamojha thus grew up in a community where hacendados' abuses were angrily discussed and challenged, but to little avail.

As he matured and thought more and more about his future, dreaming about becoming president, he also considered a different path: the priesthood.

I didn't like working in the fields. Instead, I wanted to be something else when I grew up. My intention was to become a priest. From the time I was little, when I was around five years old, I wanted to be a priest. I liked that. My dad played the organ and he taught me to play, and also how to read Latin, to celebrate mass, to help the priests. I learned all of this. And so, when I was bigger, ten years old, I started to assist with mass. I was really little, but I helped them celebrate mass.

I wanted to become a priest, and so when my father died in 1936, I went to Lima with this intention.

Llamojha's desire to become a priest reflected the fact that priests ranked among the most powerful and influential residents in rural indigenous communities. Priests were among the few individuals who knew how to read and write, and it was not unusual for them to assume a prominent role in local politics.²¹ They also presided over the key events in Andean peasants' lives: baptizing them into the church, conducting marriages, and holding funeral masses. Priests' proximity to the word and instructions of God also meant that they commanded respect from peasants, most of whom were devoutly Catholic. Llamojha saw the admiration Concepción's campesinos had for the local priest and for his father, a church assistant, and he probably desired the same sort of admiration for himself. Llamojha is also a very spiritual man, as is shown in his frequent references to Christ in his recollections and writings.

Determined to become a priest, Llamojha left his home community of Concepción in 1936, when he was just fifteen, and made the long journey to Lima. That move to Lima was far from unusual: as many as 65,000 men and women migrated from Andean provinces to Lima between 1919 and 1931. They moved to the nation's capital because they understood that in their extremely centralized country, wealth, political power, and social opportunities were concentrated there. Prospects for education, employment, and social advancement were far greater there than in their home regions.²² But in Lima, many of these migrants found themselves victims of significant race and class prejudice, scorned and exploited by wealthier and whiter Limeños (Lima residents) who disdainfully regarded them as backward, ignorant Indians. Llamojha experienced that treatment in his own extended family, as his cousin's Limeña wife believed she and her husband could cheat him, taking advantage of his labor while tricking him out of a salary.

An uncle of mine took me, he brought me to Lima so I could study to become a priest. We arrived in Lima and then he left me, he abandoned me. I worked for two years. First, I went to the home of a relative who had a dairy business, Julio Calderón Llamojha, and I delivered milk in a wagon. I worked for two years, and he didn't pay me during those years. He told me he was sending my mom the money. Then, because he wasn't paying me, I spoke with my mom and she told me it was a lie.

"He hasn't sent me any money at all!" she said to me.

So, I talked to him. His wife was the one who did this, because she was a Limeña. I spoke to them and told them that I wanted to leave. They didn't want me to go, they wanted me to continue there, and they offered to pay me. But even then, they still didn't pay me! So I escaped, I escaped. Because I didn't find work, I had to sleep in cornfields. I looked for work for a month, and I didn't have anything to eat. Happily, I had a friend from the north, and he gave me 5 soles [Peru's monetary unit] when I told him about my situation. I used that money to eat until I could find a little bit of work.

Llamojha worked in Lima for a couple of years, until about 1938, when he decided to study for the priesthood. Having been told that the Convento de San Francisco (San Francisco Monastery) took in orphans and educated them, he decided to approach the priests living there.

I went, all by myself, to introduce myself at the Convento de San Francisco. I spoke to a priest who came out to meet me when I knocked on the door.



FIG. 1.3 Llamojha, Lima, 1939. Photo courtesy of Manuel Llamojha Mitma.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“I’ve come to see if you’ll take me. I want to be a priest.”

“What level of schooling do you have?”

“I don’t have any. I’ve never been to school,” I said.

“How are you going to become a priest then? Come back here when you’ve finished your education. If you’ve never been to school, how are you going to become a priest?”

But I insisted. “But I want to be a priest! I’m already trained for this. I help celebrate mass, I do everything. I go from town to town, helping priests celebrate mass.”

"Do you know Latin?" He pulled out his Latin book. "All right, read!"

So I read.

"All right, sing!"

So I sang.

"It can't happen. To be a priest, you need a higher education."

"But it's not necessary," I said. "I know everything. I know how to celebrate mass. I go to the pueblos where there aren't any priests, and I hold mass," I said to him.

"How can you conduct mass? You're committing a crime!" he said to me.

They didn't want to take me. They gave me three books in Latin and threw me out. With that, I left, and I lost my hope.

The priest's rejection of Llamojha was about much, much more than his lack of education: it was about his race and his class. In Peru, as throughout most of Latin America, the Catholic priesthood was largely reserved for middle- and upper-class men of European descent.²³ The notion that an Andean campesino would think himself a candidate for the priesthood most likely struck the priest as absurd, so he challenged the teenager on the grounds of his education, incorrectly assuming—as so many in Peru did—that to be indigenous was to be illiterate.²⁴

But Llamojha was not discouraged for long. Instead, he came up with another plan: he decided to become a soldier.

"There's time to study in the barracks, and I'll have food, everything," I said.

I wanted to study, because I'd never gone to school. Sure, I knew how to read properly, but I wanted something more. So, I thought I'd join the military and study politics. I wanted to become a soldier so that I could make a revolution, an armed struggle, to make all the haciendas disappear. My intention was to form a government, become president of the republic, and put Peru in its place. There were so many abuses in Peru, so much injustice.

I introduced myself at all the barracks, but none of them would take me. Not for anything!

"You're just a youngster, and you don't have your papers," they'd say. I was so mad!

Llamojha's ideas about the military reflected the fact that recruits were provided with a rudimentary education—something the Peruvian military

regarded as part of its heavily racialized “civilizing mission” for predominantly Quechua- and Aymara-speaking conscripts.²⁵ While some Andean men shared Llamojha’s view that military service was a route toward education and upward socioeconomic mobility, his efforts to enlist were highly unusual. The most common route into the military was conscription, as all Peruvian men were required to do a period of compulsory military service. Only those with enough money to purchase exemptions were spared this obligatory service. But because military officials often fell short of their recruitment goals—due to exemptions and noncompliance—they frequently resorted to a forced recruitment practice known as the *leva*: seizing young men unable to produce their identity documents and taking them straight to the military barracks.²⁶ The *leva* overwhelmingly targeted rural indigenous men, and many Andean families angrily opposed the practice, as it wrenched young men away from their families, fields, and communities, where their labor, economic support, and social presence were sorely missed.²⁷ The practice of forced recruitment—this time, operating in the city—was how Llamojha was finally able to enter the military.

I was walking around one day, down Abancay Avenue, and a number of soldiers were rounding up boys as recruits. They used to draft people like this. I stuck myself in among the boys so the soldiers would take me to the barracks, because they wouldn’t take me when I went on my own. So, I put myself in among the group of recruits, without the soldiers realizing. And that’s how they took me to the Santa Ana barracks.

I was there for a month. They checked me out there. After examining me, they took me to Miraflores, to the San Martín cavalry. I was really happy.

“Now Peru is mine!” I said.

I was happy there. They gave me a horse; I had to wash my horse each day. They make you get up early there, when it’s still dark out. They get the soldiers up, so that they can do exercises. I was always the very first one ready in the morning.

At the barracks, Llamojha once again began leading his peers. This time his followers were not school-age children but young men drafted into the military from departments in Peru’s Andean sierra region. Those departments were overwhelmingly rural and indigenous, and the recruits were monolingual Quechua speakers. As Llamojha explained,

When I had been there a month, they brought in some recruits from the sierra. There were about one hundred of them, and they didn’t speak

Spanish. So I was put in charge of them. I was named to lead the exercises, to get them to do their exercises, speaking in Quechua. They were from haciendas and I spoke to them.

I said to them, “We have to make a revolution! We have to stay here to make a revolution. Once and for all, we have to save our campesino brothers who are like slaves on the haciendas!”

In his interview with the CVR, Llamojha further fleshed out this story:

The campesinos said, “Yes, yes. When we are on the haciendas, they make us suffer. They tie us up, they whip us.”

We thought and we talked about this. “How are we going to save ourselves? We’re suffering.” So, this was my approach: take the presidential palace!

But Llamojha’s plans to use his army career as a launching point for revolution fell apart, betrayed by the very skill that would later prove so central to his activist career: his writing. As he explained in one of our interviews,

Because I always walked around with my folder, I had all my writings, my plans in my folder. I wrote while I was in the barracks, but I really shouldn’t have written things down.

I wrote, “Now I’m going to carry out a coup d’état. I’ll get myself prepared here.”

All my folders, my plans about how we were going to make a revolution, they were all underneath my pillow. One day, there was an inspection. They’d inspect the bed, do the cleaning, all of that. A sergeant who was doing the inspection found my folder; he went through it and found my plans, and he delivered it to the commander. In the barracks, General Porturas was in charge. My folder got delivered to him. The next day, he called me.

“You have plans here in the barracks for making revolution!”

They accused me of being an Aprista.

It is not surprising that the barracks commander associated Llamojha’s plans for revolution with membership in APRA, which was Peru’s most significant populist political party. Members of this party, known as Apristas, had launched a series of insurrections against the state in the early 1930s. The party was repeatedly outlawed and had an especially tense relationship with the Peruvian military.²⁸ Here again, assumptions based on race and class no doubt shaped others’ perceptions of Llamojha: unable to imagine that an

indigenous peasant could independently formulate his own plans for revolution, military officers simply assumed that he was carrying out the orders of a militant urban political party. They punished him accordingly and even sent him to El Frontón, a penal colony on an island off of Lima's coast that was one of Peru's most notorious prisons.

They punished me for a month. They took away my shoes, and I spent the month sweeping the whole barracks shoeless, punished. I slept in a jail cell without a bed for one month. From there, they sent me to El Frontón prison. I was in El Frontón for three months, and then I got out. But I had nothing. I had to keep fighting, I had to be something. But I had failed. I could no longer be a soldier. I was sad. I couldn't be a priest. I just had to work, nothing more.

Although Llamojha was not a member of APRA during his time in the military, he considered joining the party shortly after his release from prison. He had likely met several Apristas while imprisoned in El Frontón, as the island jail housed numerous political prisoners.²⁹

I heard their propaganda. They always talked about the masses, about the campesinos. I met with some Apristas in Lima, but I just met with them, nothing more. I wanted to belong, I wanted to be one. APRA had only just emerged and at that time, I was in [the coastal city] Callao. So I went to their first assembly. I went to this meeting and I met [APRA founder] Haya de la Torre there. It was a giant meeting, and everyone had their white handkerchiefs. I took out my little handkerchief, too.

"Let's see the handkerchiefs! With your left hands!" they said.

But then I went to APRA's main office, and they started talking differently. I told them that we had problems with the hacendados and that we wanted them to help us in Concepción.

The party said, "No, no, no. How are we supposed to help you against the hacendados?"

"But the hacendados are taking our lands," I said.

"No, we can't look into that!"

"But the pueblo is abused by the hacendados," I said.

"No, we don't do that."

They weren't interested at all. So, I told them to go to hell!

Llamojha's negative experience with APRA reflected its tepid support for indigenous issues and community land struggles at the national level. While

APRA's regional branches were often highly attuned to local political needs, and sometimes even drew significant support from indigenous peasants, Haya de la Torre never pursued the issue of indigenous land rights in a meaningful way. Instead he argued for a program of anti-imperialism, nationalization, and regional rights.³⁰

Although Llamojha quickly withdrew his support from APRA, he nonetheless continued his political education and development during the mid-1940s. His continuing political evolution owed partly to his work in Miraflores, a neighborhood that would ultimately become Lima's wealthiest residential district. He worked for a family that belonged to Peru's oligarchy—an elite so small and so disproportionately powerful in economic, social, and political terms that it was commonly referred to as Peru's "forty families."³¹ The things Llamojha saw, heard, and read while working in Miraflores cemented his understandings of class and race inequalities and injustices in Peru. He explained that, following his release from El Frontón,

I found a job in a home on the other end of town. I worked in Miraflores in a home of the high bourgeoisie, of the great and powerful; the Pérez Figuerola family. I worked there as a butler for two years, with my black pants and white coat, with my bow tie. I dressed like this to serve them. It was a big house, because they were great and powerful millionaires. There were five of us guys, four girls, a cook, a tailor; one person for every job. I worked there for two years; I was very considerate.

And while I was there, I heard them talking. I was listening, you see. This family had three haciendas, and I learned about what it was like. They talked about people, about the Indians and the blacks who worked on the hacienda.

"This person didn't do his work, so we kicked him off the hacienda." They talked about all of this and I listened. I was recording it all in my mind.

"Your time is almost up!" I thought.

I know all of their secrets! I have read all of their codes. They didn't know that I was doing this; it was all in their libraries. I would go into a room to clean, and they'd stand up and leave. And from there, I'd take out all of their books and start to read all of their secrets. I have read all of their plans, what they have to do when there are strikes. I read all of this. I know how they manage Peru. Right now, currently, only eighty families dominate Peru. Eighty families of the high bourgeoisie. I know all of their secrets, their strategies! I moved to other houses, too. I was there until 1948.

The final key element for understanding Llamojha's emergence as an activist involves his work with other Lima-based migrants from his home community, Concepción. Together, in 1941 he and several of his fellow migrants formed a club named the Comité Pro-Comunidad Indígena de Concepción Chacamarca (Pro-Concepción Chacamarca Indian Community Committee).³² That name reflected the club's earliest goal: getting official recognition of Concepción as an "indigenous community," a legal status that guaranteed community land rights and the right to elect a village council. Formal recognition as an indigenous community would be Concepción's most valuable tool in a fight against hacienda encroachment, as officially recognized indigenous community land was inalienable, that is, it could not legally be bought, sold, or appropriated.³³

Many such migrant clubs formed in Lima during the 1930s and 1940s, as tens of thousands of migrants moved to Lima from the Andean sierra searching for work and education. These clubs often hosted social events for members, and they provided a sense of community and social support for Andean migrants as they struggled against the alienation and severe discrimination they faced in the nation's bustling capital city.³⁴ Many migrant clubs quickly became much more than social organizations; they became political advocates for their home communities. As Lima was the heart of Peru's political and economic system, these migrants were better positioned than Andean community members to lobby government officials, and they had more financial resources to dedicate to their home communities' legal struggles than did those who remained in the countryside. These migrant clubs ultimately provided the very sort of support for Andean communities that the Peruvian state so grievously failed to offer.

We gathered there and we helped Concepción with everything. Those from Lima, they sacrificed a lot, to do everything.

We fought, and the institution sustained the fight with money. Everybody contributed. They held parties to collect money. The institution fought a lot, to work things out with the hacendados, for travel fare, to receive visits here. The institution collaborated in everything, in the search for the pueblo's papers. Back then, we didn't have the pueblo's papers ready. So we worked to get Concepción its land title. The institution did everything. It also worked on the issues regarding the hacendados, to defend ourselves against the haciendas. That's how we fought hard to find justice.

I asked Llamojha what role he played in the migrant club.



FIG. 1.4 The Pro-Concepción Chacamarca Indian Community Committee, Lima, 1946. Llamojha is seated third from right. Photo courtesy of Manuel Llamojha Mitma.

All my life, I was secretary general! They never let me go! I was always named secretary, because I work with papers, I handled the papers.

The migrant club also played a major role in winning official recognition from the government for Concepción as an indigenous community. Acquiring formal recognition was a cumbersome and expensive process, as community members had to provide a census of their community's population, a map of the community's lands and borders, and its official land titles.

We started the process in 1942. We started filing papers with the ministry for the community's official recognition. Of course, it was already a community. It always had been. But it lacked legal recognition.

The community finally won official recognition in 1944. Llamojha told his CVR interviewers that the migrant club also helped Concepción fight against

local hacendados. When his interviewers asked what this fight involved, he explained:

It was about the borders, because the haciendas advanced and occupied. The Ayrabamba hacienda occupied sixteen hundred hectares of our land. Ayrabamba is really small, it only has 380 hectares, just sugar-growing plains. But Ayrabamba wanted to take our lands right from the peaks, where there are twenty-eight agricultural plots. They took them from us, and they made us pay rent, on our own land! But we fought hard. This fight against all the hacendados began in '43. But it didn't go anywhere [at first] because the main leaders of Concepción sold themselves out to the hacendados.

As secretary general of Concepción's migrant club, Llamojha also challenged local authorities who he believed worked against Concepción's interests. In 1946 he was one of forty-eight Concepción community members to sign a letter to the director of Indian affairs. Though we cannot know it for certain—and he himself is unsure—he most likely wrote this letter. The text carries his particular style, and he was one of the few members of the club able to write with both ease and grace. The letter complained that Juan Zea, Concepción's *personero* (official legal representative), had been abusing his powers and should be removed from his post. As the letter phrased it, “because he has committed grave offenses, the Indians no longer have the least amount of confidence in him and yearn for him to be replaced by the person who ends up being voted for in the elections. This is justice.”³⁵

Seven months later, over one hundred Concepción community members, including Llamojha, signed their names to a letter repeating the calls for Zea's ouster from the *personero* position. This letter reiterated the complaint that he had not fulfilled his duties, and it added new charges, claiming that he had forced Concepción community members to pay him cash and had seized their animals by force. The letter even accused him of attempted homicide, asserting that he had attempted to kill his niece when she objected to his unwarranted seizure of goods. The same letter also accused him of becoming an “unconditional and submissive servant” of the hacendada Elodia Vassallo de Parodi.³⁶

Zea was not the only abusive authority against whom Llamojha and his fellow community members protested. As secretary general of the migrant club, Llamojha, together with the club's president and accountant, composed a letter to Cangallo's subprefect in February 1947. The letter denounced the

actions of Concepción's lieutenant governor, Grimaldo Castillo. They wrote: "The pueblo finds Castillo repugnant because he is a despot and never does what is good for the pueblo. He just responds to the hacendados' dictatorial orders. The pueblo asks that he be replaced by someone who would be elected."³⁷ The demand, in essence, was twofold: first, that Castillo should be removed, and second, that Concepción residents should have the right to choose their own lieutenant governor rather than simply accept the individuals appointed to the position by regional authorities.

Complaints against abusive authorities were a constant in Peru's rural Andean communities during the twentieth century. Indigenous peasants often felt abused and mistreated by district authorities who seemed more interested in their own private gain than in the interests of the community. It was particularly upsetting that these authorities were appointed rather than elected into their positions of power. Rural residents had no say over whom the regional authorities chose to govern them at the local district level.³⁸ The most they could do was send letters of protest denouncing particularly abusive figures. Regional and national authorities rarely heeded those complaints, and it was not unusual for abusive district authorities to remain in positions of power for years, even decades.³⁹ It is not then surprising to learn that the Concepción migrant club's demands for Grimaldo Castillo's removal were left unanswered. He would remain a prominent and vexing figure in Llamojha's political life for decades to come, holding positions of power at the district level until he was assassinated by the Shining Path in the 1980s.

Llamojha left Lima in 1948, returned to Concepción, and began a period of active and direct involvement in rural struggles. Reflecting on why he left Lima, he explained:

A commission came from Concepción and my institution in Lima named two of us. That's why I came back to Concepción. They sent us to investigate the hacendados' abuses against us, and I remained here with my campesinos. What's more, the other pueblos didn't leave me alone. Campesinos always brought me to their communities, to teach them how to fight against the hacendados.

Llamojha's return to Ayacucho in 1948 launched the next phase of his political career.