

The Black Virgin: Santa Efigenia, Popular Religion, and the African Diaspora in Peru

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This article sketches an archeology of the apocryphal myth of Santa Efigenia, the Ethiopian virgin saint celebrated in the southern coastal valley of Cañete, Peru. The history of Santa Efigenia is used to analyze the invention of popular myths and processions in a rural community in contrast to the cornerstone of popular national religiosity in Peru, the Lord of the Miracles (Señor de los Milagros). The popular worship and diffusion of these devotions and processions intersect with the contested formation of national identity in early and late twentieth century Peru. Moreover, they speak to how traditional and popular forms of religious worship are valued and devalued.

The African diaspora in Peru and the Pacific coast of South America has been difficult to historicize because of the scant cultural evidence for an Afro-Andean nostalgia or separation from an African homeland. The rediscovery and devotion of Santa Efigenia and her emergent popularity in Peru and larger presence in Brazil and Cuba is compelling evidence that Afro-Peruvians have a direct connection with African culture and history and the early religious history of Catholic saints and virgins.

Eo quod castitatem amaveris virum que ne scieris ideo et manus Domini te et eris benedicta aeternum [To attain chastity you must love the truth and not have knowledge of man, by doing so, the hands of the Lord will extend his eternal blessing].

Cristóbal Lozano, *La Apoteosis de Santa Ifigenia*, 1763¹

Amongst the educated classes in Peru, saint-worship is very common. Devotional books comprise stories of the lives of Santa Rosa, Santa Catalina, or Santa Teresa, and sermons are occupied with the intercessory powers of San Antonio, San Sebastian, or Santo Toribio. But the poorer classes of Peruvians have no devotional books; they live in villages where

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¹Latin inscription on painting. Cristóbal Lozano, *La Apoteosis de Santa Ifigenia*, 1763, Capilla de La Quebrada, Cañete, Peru.

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sermons are of exceptional occurrence; and their curas do not teach them either evangelical truths or traditions concerning the saints.

Geraldine Guinness, *Peru, Its Story, People, and Religion*, 1909²

The histories of saints present the most dubious variety of literature in existence; to examine them by the scientific method, *in the entire absence of corroborative documents*, seems to me to condemn the whole inquiry from the start—it is simply learned idling.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 1920³

HAGIOGRAPHY offers historians a way to trace the genealogy of popular religious practices and local power networks via the lens of the lives of saints. As a result, a series of new questions have emerged that move beyond the traditional debates over the authenticity of apocryphal writings or historical accuracy of the life of a particular saint.⁴ What impact did saint worship and devotion have on the lives of believers? How were these beliefs used by politicians, clergymen, military leaders, or the state to manipulate or motivate saint worshippers to act or participate in specific social projects? Peruvian colonial chroniclers were particularly interested in Andean mythology and popular religious practices as part of their project to disable the cultural power of traditional indigenous beliefs. Afro-Peruvians were also the target of a colonial project of eradication of African belief structures, yet they survived and came to constitute an important part of modern Catholic syncretism in Peru.

The African diaspora in Peru has been difficult to historicize because of the scant archival evidence for an Afro-Peruvian nostalgia or separation from an African homeland. Part of this is explained by Heidi Feldman's felicitous notion that Afro-Peruvians belonged to a "Black Pacific" or an indirect passage of an African diaspora instead of the "Black Atlantic" that brought

²Geraldine Guinness, *Peru, Its Story, People, and Religion* (London: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909), 277. The author critiques Peruvian Catholicism from a Protestant perspective.

³Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. H. L. Mencken (New York: Knopf, 1920; repr. Tuscon: Sharp Press, 1999), 46.

⁴The following are important works on the emergence of sainthood in Western Christianity. Peter R. L. Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); Antonio Rubial García, *La santidad controvertida: Hagiografía y conciencia criolla alrededor de los venerables no canonizados de Nueva España* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999); Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Hippolyte Delehaye, S.J., *The Work of the Bollandists Through Three Centuries, 1615–1915* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1922).



Fig. 1. Statue of Santa Efigenia, Capilla de La Quebrada, Cañete, Peru. Photograph by author, 1999.

Africans to the Americas.⁵ However, the existence of a *cofradía* worshipping a statue and painting of an Ethiopian saint, Santa Efigenia, on a former slave hacienda in La Quebrada, Cañete and its emergent popularity in the late twentieth century coupled with a larger historical presence in Cuba and

⁵Heidi Carolyn Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

Brazil is compelling evidence that Afro-Peruvians have a direct connection with African culture and history (see figure 1). The rediscovery and devotion of Santa Efigenia in Peru stands in stark contrast to the canonical history of *Señor de los Milagros* and the diminishing role of Afro-Peruvians in the diffusion and identity formation of the latter.

Popular religious beliefs are usually presented as vulgar [mis]representations of lower forms of belief and practice as distinguished from officially sanctioned Christian dogmas.⁶ The cult of devotion to saints in particular has been generally described as a continuation of pagan practices, static and inconsistent with progress or modernity. However, popular classes in twentieth century Peru have articulated a belief with their devotions and processions, such as *Señor de los Milagros* and Santa Efigenia, that these icons are capable of becoming vehicles of hope and change. Concomitantly, the state and the Church are well practiced in using spiritual beliefs and superstitions as forms of social control designed to manipulate in the service of elite and other powerful interests. The poor and marginalized, as well as elite members of the clergy and colonial government venerated and identified with Peru's iconic saints, San Martín de Porres and Santa Rosa de Lima. Their hagiographies and sainthood shed light on the formation of a Spanish American Creole identity and established the historical context for Afro-Peruvians to create their own popular religious narratives and images of *Señor de los Milagros* and Santa Efigenia as expressions of self-affirmation against the politics of their racial and social marginalization.

I. COLONIAL RELIGIOSITY

The process of Spanish conquest and colonialism in Peru was one of conversion, resistance, negotiation, and reinterpretation of indigenous, enslaved African and Spanish religious traditions.⁷ Persons of Spanish descent born in Peru (Creoles) used hagiography as vehicle to assert the emergence of a collective identity distinct from their European one. This was not just an emulation of European saints and holy images, but an articulation of a Spanish American Christianity that signified the aspirations of Spanish Peru on a par with those of the mother country. This reflected the self-consciousness of Creoles that sought to create and celebrate their own literary and religious notions of identity, honor, and virtue. For this reason, the autochthonous cults and hagiographies of Santa Rosa de Lima (1586–1617) and San Martín de Porres (1579–1639) are more than symbolic as they incorporated notions of proto-nationalism and

⁶Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 20–21.

⁷Alan Greer and Jodi Bilinkoff, eds., *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas, 1500–1800* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Kathleen Ann Meyers, *Neither Saints Nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

a Creole identity formation that struggled as much as the Spanish to incorporate indigenous and enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Santa Rosa de Lima is noted for being the first American born saint, canonized by Clement X in 1671. Because of her importance and status as a “New World” saint, there is an established historiography detailing the process of her canonization and saintly life from variegated perspectives including identity politics, colonial mentalities, narrative tropes, and female mysticism.⁸ Historian Ronald Morgan, asserted that Creoles living in Spanish America not only focused on hagiographies with devotional and theological themes but on issues of social origins, ethnic identities, and a Creole consciousness.⁹ This was a vital dimension of their struggle to assert their political and ideological equality with their Spanish born counterparts. However, this created a dilemma for Creoles who were considered tainted by their cultural and social relations with indigenous, black, and mixed-race groups. One way to reconcile this contradiction of their European origins and identity was to create saints in their own image through a hagiographical discourse that understood that legends have a powerful role in the making of history. They were the spiritual foundations of empire building and not concerned with facts as they offered a truth beyond historical reality.¹⁰ The late seventeenth century canonization of Santa Rosa de Lima illustrated a compromise between Creole and Spanish elites during a time of internal and external strife in the Viceroyalty of Peru and the Spanish empire. She was viewed both as a redeemer of the New World, as proof of the success of the Church to civilize the pagan and savage beliefs of its indigenous and African slaves. Santa Rosa de Lima became a symbol of colonial pride, authority, and emergent Peruvian identity for Spanish, Creole, and colonial social classes of all backgrounds. Each social group claimed her as their protector and would utilize her to further their respective political, ecclesiastical, and social agendas throughout the colonial era and beyond.

The life of a mulatto Dominican lay brother, Martín de Porres, a contemporary of Santa Rosa de Lima, reveals a different hagiographic process, sainthood trajectory, and popular devotion that impinged on issues of race and identity

⁸Luis Miguel Galve, “Santa Rosa de Lima y sus espinas: La emergencia de mentalidades urbanas de crisis y la sociedad andina, 1600–1630,” in *Manifestaciones religiosas en el mundo colonial americano*, ed. Clara García Aylurado and Manuel Ramos Medina (Mexico: La Galera, 1993), 1:53–70; Frank Graziano, *Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Saint Rose of Lima* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Teodoro Hampe, “Santa Rosa de Lima y la identidad criolla en el Peru colonial,” *Revista de Historia de America*, no. 121 (1996): 7–26; Leonardo Hansen, *Vida admirable de Santa Rosa de Lima, patrona del nuevo mundo*, trans. Jacinto de Parra (Lima: Centro Católico, 1895); Ronald J. Morgan, *Spanish American Saints and the Rhetoric of Identity, 1600–1810* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002).

⁹Morgan, *Spanish American Saints*, 11.

¹⁰Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 208–209.

formation in colonial and republican Peru. His humble origins and illegitimate birth, his father was a Spanish nobleman and his mother a free black from Panamá, as well as his profound piety and humility also captured the colonial popular imagination of Lima's residents.¹¹ Yet, despite the recognition and support of the upper echelons of public and ecclesiastical leaders there was no sense of urgency attached to his sainthood. The diffusion of colonial painting and images speak to the devotion he engendered among the Catholic faithful, yet he did not receive the official imprimatur of the Church until he was beatified by Pope Gregory XVI in 1837 and canonized by Pope John XXIII in 1962.¹² Although, Martín de Porres did not achieve the rank of sainthood and national/international popularity until much later than Santa Rosa de Lima, there existed a strong sense of identification with the popular classes for his humble origins and racial mixture, which mirrored so many of their own.

The popular appeal and devotional following of Santa Rosa de Lima and San Martín de Porres broadened nationally and internationally from the colonial era to the nation-building era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, for Afro-Peruvians, the focus of their popular devotion was on the colonial era slave painting and cult of *Señor de los Milagros* (Lord of the Miracles) and to a lesser degree to the Dominican lay brother who was popularly sanctified but whose canonization was still a distant reality.¹³ This era of nation building and national identity formation was shaped in large part by a racial and cultural *mestizaje* that was both demographic and imagined. In the minds of political leaders and intellectuals, it also defined the parameters of Peru's transition to modernity, a process that in turn diluted the cultural authority of Afro-Peruvian cults and popular forms of devotion. San Martín de Porres became a national export, gained in international stature and became more Peruvian than Afro-Peruvian. The same occurred with *Señor de los Milagros* although the procession was co-opted by a *mestizo* social class that pushed out the Afro-Peruvian based confraternity by a slow process of economic and ethnic attrition. This is especially true of the October processions that have taken place since 1687 in Lima and in the second half of the twentieth century throughout Latin America and the United States. These cultural events have lost their Afro-Peruvian character as even the

¹¹J. C. Kearns, *The Life of Blessed Martín de Porres: Sainly American Negro and Patron of Social Justice* (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1937), 12–17.

¹²Martín de Porres is one of only a few saints of west African or slave descent, however, this designation is more rare if we take into consideration that most of the canonized martyrs like Saint Augustine of Hippo and Santa Monica (Augustine's mother) are of North African origins. This is true of most African saints, with the exception of St. Moses of Ethiopia and Benedict of Italy, whose father was an African slave.

¹³Their confraternity, established by slaves of Angolan descent, was officially sanctioned by the Viceroy Amat in 1766, however, its original founding dates back to 1651. Jorge Donayre B. and Lorenzo Villanueva, *Señor de los Milagros: Padre Nuestro* (Lima: Latina S. A., 1987), 16–23.

popular cuisine and entertainment of the street fairs that accompany them are organized and performed by Peruvians of European, *mestizo*, and indigenous descent under the aegis of a cultural authority that is Afro-Peruvian.

In contrast to the colonial based historical trajectories of Santa Rosa de Lima, San Martín de Porres and *Señor de los Milagros*, the history of Santa Efigenia in Peru takes place in the province of La Cañete, part of the department of Lima, located eighty-five miles south of the capital. The province is named after the third viceroy of Peru, Don Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, a Spanish noble who was the Marqués de Cañete. Founded in 1556, it became a province of the department of Lima in 1821. As an agricultural coastal valley it was a primary location for Afro-Peruvian slave labor during the colonial period and subsequently remained an important site of black culture. Today, it is known as the birthplace and capital of Afro-Peruvian art and culture, but this is a relatively recent designation.¹⁴ It is only in the 1970s that regional radio stations and newspapers began to promote Afro-Peruvian cultural festivals in Cañete.¹⁵ An important component of these festivals, which took place throughout the calendar year, was the celebration of mass and processions in honor of their chosen patron saints: San Martín de Porres (1579–1639) and Santa Efigenia (first century).

A late twentieth century movement to gain national recognition of Afro-Peruvian cultural contributions in Cañete focused on the apocryphal and mythical figure of Santa Efigenia, which included a statue and an eighteenth century wall-sized baroque painting of her by Peruvian artist Cristóbal Lozano (see figure 2).¹⁶ These artistic representations located in a private chapel on the hacienda La Quebrada in San Luis de Cañete were presented as legitimate artifacts of Santa Efigenia's status as a folk or popular saint central to their construction of an Afro-Peruvian black identity and culture of devotion.

In 1994, the Afro-Peruvians of this small community created an association and named her as Patroness of National Black Art even as they struggled to craft a coherent historical narrative of Santa Efigenia's origins with a miraculous tale of the presence of the art works vis-à-vis a colonial slave narrative. Unlike other Afro-Peruvian forms of popular religiosity, the contested and elusive history of Santa Efigenia dates back to the writings and debates of early

¹⁴In 1992, Cañete was designated by the Ministry of Industry and Tourism as the Birthplace and Capital of Afro-Peruvian art and culture.

¹⁵Radio Fesa, Radio Imperial, and Radio Estrella del Sur. Municipalidad Provincial de Cañete.

¹⁶Cristóbal Lozano is famous for painting the Viceroy José Antonio Manso de Velasco in 1749 and Viceroy Manuel de Amat y Juniet in 1761. His works focused on the nobility and religious themes, although he also painted some works of a more popular nature. His painting of Santa Efigenia is due to his ties with the Convent of Buenamuerte run by the San Camilo order who owned the La Quebrada hacienda in the eighteenth century. Ricardo Estabridis Cárdenas, "Cristóbal Lozano, paradigma de la pintura limeña del siglo XVIII," *Patio de Letras* 1, no. 1 (2003): 99–120.



Fig. 2. *La Apoteosis de Santa Ifigenia*. Cristóbal Lozano, 1763. Capilla de La Quebrada, Cañete, Peru. Photograph by author, 1999.

Christianity, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Christianization of Africa, a world yet unencumbered by the Iberian institutions of slavery and colonialism.

II. THE APOCRYPHA, *MESTIZAJE*, AND POPULAR RELIGION

The story of Santa Efigenia has its origins in the apocrypha or pseudepigrapha of the New Testament.¹⁷ In early Christianity these writings were used to complete the narratives of the lives of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the apostles/saints. Many of these writings were formally rejected or disputed, yet others not given canonical status were still considered of spiritual value for their tales of martyrdom. Following the death and resurrection of Christ the lives of the apostles and their subsequent martyrdom were central to establishing the authority of Christianity. The dispersion of the apostles was the site of an early historical and doctrinal debate. In terms of understanding the life of Christ, St. Paul and St. John are the foundational gospels. They are considered closest to the historical reality of the actions and discourses of Jesus.¹⁸ It was not until the end of the second and beginning of the third

¹⁷“Apocrypha,” *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 72, 1065.

¹⁸Jules LeBreton, *The History of the Primitive Church*, trans. Ernest C. Messenger (New York: Macmillan, 1949).

centuries that apocryphal works of apostles appear. Jules Lebreton, S.J., argues that these writings presented a danger that ran counter to Christian doctrine. They were very seductive because they were “legends and romances which could then charm and sometimes deceive the Christian people.”¹⁹ Apocryphal gospels were thought to contain stories and teachings of great mystical and spiritual beauty with the power to uplift. The problem was that readers would forge a relationship to understanding the faith through the voice and perspective of an apostle. The gospels that were canonized were always those that subsumed the apostle’s authority and voice to that of Jesus. Theologians continue to debate over the relative influence or importance of any particular gospel. However, with regard to the literature of the primitive Church, the gospels of St. Matthew are arguably the most influential writings.²⁰ This is significant for the purposes of this article because the historical credibility of Santa Efigenia is linked with the canonical gospel of St. Matthew and the apocryphal narratives of the dispersal and martyrdom of the apostles following the death of Christ.

The life of Santa Efigenia is found in the primitive evangelizations of St. Matthew in Africa, stories which exist in a netherworld of mystery and official Church confirmation. Henri Daniel-Rops argues that no period in the whole history of the Church is more important than that during which Christianity was first established, and, “equally true, there is no period of which so little is known.”²¹ This apocryphal narrative relates that his ministry began in Judea, and then later goes to the gentile lands known during that period as Persia, Parthia, and Ethiopia.²² Ethiopian Christianity has presented a problem to scholars because of the persistence of ancient traditions, beliefs, and myths, as well as incorporation of legends from the Old Testament. The widely accepted version attributes the establishment of Christianity to two Syrian boys, Aedisius and Frumentius, who were either shipwrecked from a Christian merchant ship or brought as slaves and later became important royal advisers to Emperor Ezana toward the end of the third century A.D. Frumentius would later return to Alexandria and was appointed the first bishop of Ethiopia and was known as Abba Salama

¹⁹Ibid, 262.

²⁰Jesus Pelaez, “El evangelio de Mateo: Origen, forma y función,” in *Fuentes del cristianismo: tradiciones primitivas sobre Jesus* (Córdoba: El Almendro, 1993), 117–119.

²¹Daniel-Rops traces the existence of churches that were hundreds of miles from the origins of the Gospel and does not attribute the success of evangelization strictly to the Apostles but does look towards venerated traditions as indicators of historical missions, one of which is Matthew evangelization of Ethiopia.

Henri Daniel-Rops, *The Church of the Apostles and Martyrs*, trans. Audrey Butler (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960), 104–109.

²²The Catholic University, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 9: 490–91.

(Father of Peace). This version is based primarily on the work of the Byzantine ecclesiastical historian Rufinus and in concert with the official Roman Catholic Church stance that the apocryphal gospels attributed to St. Matthew is “mere legend.”²³ How then does Santa Efigenia become part of an African diaspora if her historical and contemporary Ethiopian roots remain obscure and unrecognized? The answer lies in her resurrection from medieval scholars whose focus on hagiography led them to study miracles of saints as a useful means to inspire, teach, and edify the brethren.

There is some historical basis for supporting apocryphal versions of St. Matthew’s travels, as the reliable Rufinus himself placed him in Ethiopia. However, the legend of St. Matthew in Ethiopia was rescued by two important sources. One of the famous books of the Middle Ages is the *Legenda Sanctorum*, also known as the *Golden Legend*, by Jacobus de Voragine. Written in the thirteenth century, it focused on rescuing the lives, of the saints and gained great popularity as evidenced by its many editions and translations.²⁴ The second and more detailed source for reconstructing the travels of St. Matthew and the story of Santa Efigenia is not one single text but a body of work carried out by a small group of seventeenth century Belgian Jesuits, organized into a society by Jean Bolland.²⁵ Known as the Bollandistes, they devoted their scholarly efforts to the critical study and publication of the lives of the saints. Their main body of work has been the *Acta Sanctorum*, now a 68 volume encyclopedic text that analyzes the hagiographical origins: myth, legend, and apocrypha of the lives of saints. Their work is at the center of the idea that much of what is known about early Christianity is due to hagiographical texts. These sources have allowed historians of the classical world, Middle Ages, and modern periods to reconstruct the details of domestic and public life of everyday people.²⁶ Hippolyte Delehaye, a noted scholar of the Bollandistes, comments on the heuristic value of the *Acta Sanctorum* for historians:

²³Ibid, 586. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of Saints of the Ethiopian Church: A Translation of the Ethiopic Synaxarium Made from the Manuscripts Oriental 660 and 661 in the British Museum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928); Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7–8.

²⁴The original work by Jacobus was written around 1271 and translated into English in 1450. The 1483 Caxton translation has emerged as the definitive English translation, although he based his edition on prior English and French translations and not the earlier Latin versions. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*, trans. William Caxton Volfour (London: J. M. Dent, 1900).

²⁵*Enciclopedia Vniversal Ilvstrada Europeo-Americana*, vol. 8 (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1910), 1385.

²⁶Hippolyte Delehaye, S.J., *The Work of the Bollandists through Three Centuries, 1615–1915*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922); Hippolyte Delehaye, “Hagiography,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1910); Société des Bollandistes, www.kbr.be/~sobcoll/.

Of all literary undertakings which the European world has known, the *Acta Sanctorum* must certainly have the longest continuous history Hagiography had earned an ill notoriety as a department of history, but within the last fifty years so complete a revolution has been effected in the principles and methods of the *Acta Sanctorum*, that an ordinary historian, paradoxical as it may sound, is likely to prove a more lenient judge of the historical value of the hagiographical material than the Bollandist Fathers.²⁷

According to the *Golden Legend*, St. Matthew traveled east and encountered the challenge of converting Ethiopia to Christianity. He arrived in the city of Nadaber, and was received by a eunuch of Queen Candace and tested by two enchanters to prove the spiritual power of Christ. His goal was to baptize the Ethiopian royal family, thereby converting the Ethiopian people.²⁸ In matters of Christian conversion, the uninitiated requires some proof of holiness or spiritual powers. He gave sermons describing the paradise of heaven and the path was open to all who believed in Christ. The holy men of Ethiopia seized upon this idea to appease King Egippus who was mourning for his son's recent death. They convinced him that Matthew had raised him to heaven and in return Egippus and his provincial leaders honored him with gold and sacrifices. Matthew, refusing to be deified, gave all praise to the Lord Christ. The gifts were used to construct a church, which Matthew used as a platform for thirty-three years to convert all of Ethiopia to Christianity. The King, his wife Candace, and daughter Ephigenia [sic] were all baptized. Matthew astutely recruited Ephigenia to the Church and she was named mistress to more than two hundred virgins, an act that made her purity public and helped create her legend. By celebrating Ephigenia's virgin status, she became a symbol and model of faith and chastity, one that urges followers to respect themselves and their bodies, but also a special source of inspiration that calls followers to entrust themselves in Christ. Moreover, she is considered a more perfected person, even more than a person in the state of matrimony. From the perspective of Catholic faith, virginity is a more revered state of being even as matrimony is an official sacrament: "matrimony populates the earth, virginity the heavens."²⁹ Only a select few (virgins and saints) are endowed with the sufficient state of perfected grace to carry out a specific mission. In the case of Ephigenia, this mission was the establishment of Christianity and conversion of Ethiopia. However, this mission was broadened by hagiographers who promoted Ephigenia's sanctity, which facilitated her diaspora to Europe and then to the Americas.

²⁷Delehaye, S.J., *The Work of the Bollandists*, 226.

²⁸Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 150–151.

²⁹P. Francisco de B. Vizmanos, S.I., *Las Virgenes Cristianas de la Iglesia Primitiva* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1959), 33.

The Bollandists, whose work is to historicize and contextualize the lives of the saints, concede that there is some doubt as to whether St. Matthew even went to Ethiopia. They conclude however that the legend is consistent with other sources and apocryphal writings of the period. It is clear that the story of Santa Efigenia is written as a corollary to the keen interest in the martyrdom of St. Matthew. His martyrdom is a significant historical event that has been subject of different versions. In effect, the origins of Santa Efigenia are shrouded in myth, folklore, and a spirited ecclesiastical historical debate. This, however, is consistent with the lives of most of the saints especially from a professional historical perspective. Despite these clouds of doubt, they constitute a body of martyrs that directly touch, influence, protect, and comfort those who believe in their power. This form of popular belief often counterbalanced a life of hardship and marginalization. As many popular groups, Afro-Peruvians sought this type of solace in a saint who was also a guardian angel cast in their image and one that could watch over them individually and collectively. Peter Brown refers to this type of relationship as the “invisible companion,” describing a relationship between a believer and an intermediary figure that is constant and guides that person from birth to after death.³⁰

The diaspora of Santa Efigenia from Ethiopia to the Americas is part of the dispersal of African popular religious expressions that connected Africa, Europe, and the Americas.³¹ The “Black Pacific” is arguably a better conceptualization of the African diaspora in Peru. The Africans that were enslaved and brought to the Pacific coast entered via the Rio Plata area or Cartagena in Colombia and crossed land to reach Peru. The Afro-Peruvian population was relatively isolated in comparison to Cuba or Brazil, where one finds a stronger presence and perpetuation of African cultural traditions. In this sense, the Africans who passed through the Black Pacific were not a direct part of that metaphor of ships transporting commerce and culture. The African diaspora in Peru, nonetheless, shares that consciousness that stems from longing or nostalgia that results from a separation from a homeland. This helps to explain why Afro-Peruvian cultural forms have fallen under the rubric of creole culture or *mestizaje* instead of a strong and organized sense of negritude or Afro-Peruvian ethnic identity.

Santa Efigenia is a minor figure in comparison to the cult of *Señor de los Milagros* but despite her sketchy origins, her acceptance, adoption, and emergent power among Afro-Peruvians intersects in interesting ways. I argue

³⁰Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 50–68.

³¹The Black Atlantic is used as a metaphor of ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean and bringing forms of culture back and forth between people of African descent. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

that the dilution of the cultural ownership of *Señor de los Milagros* has in part fueled an interest in the cult of Santa Efigenia. Virgins and marianism, devotions to the Virgin Mary, play an important *supporting* role to that of cults to Christ. Saints, virgins, prophets, and other popular figures form a devotional constellation around the center of Christian faith, Christ. Santa Efigenia, of course, does not compare in size or scope to the image of Christ painted by an unknown slave in 1651.³² However, her emergent currency among Peruvians who identify themselves as Afro-Peruvians occurs at a time when the processes of *mestizaje* and marginalization have transformed *Señor de los Milagros*. Afro-Peruvians literally have created new icons to authenticate themselves ethnically, culturally, and politically. The vagueness of Santa Efigenia's origins and her relative obscurity has allowed her to be claimed by the new Afro-Peruvian community.

Peruvians celebrate a variety of saints and holy days not directly tied to their racial or ethnic background, but Afro-Peruvians historically and currently have a special relationship with *Señor de los Milagros*. Interestingly, such a relationship does not exist with San Martín de Porres, a saint well known throughout Latin and North America. There is a broader identification of his humility and mixed-race background, but not the authentic bond that exists with *Señor de los Milagros* and arguably the stronger one with Sta. Efigenia. The waning of that bond with *Señor de los Milagros* took place in the second half of the twentieth century, a period of decline of the traditional ethnic neighborhoods and customs. The accelerated process of *mestizaje* in the latter part of twentieth century not only contributed to the statistical decline of Afro-Peruvians, but their ability to maintain cultural ownership over popular forms of expression in music, sport, and religion. The backdrop of a failed agrarian reform, neoliberal economic policies, and a centralization of political, economic, and cultural authority contributed to create social conditions that exacerbated the marginalization of Afro-Peruvians and their attempts to reassert their cultural ownership over their history and forms of expression in contemporary Peru. *Señor de los Milagros* has its roots in colonial Peru and its development as Peru's and Latin America's largest religious procession, surpassing even the popular Virgin Guadalupe of Mexico and originating as a primarily Afro-Peruvian expression of popular religiosity.³³

³²Ruben Vargas Ugarte, S.J., *Historia del Santo Cristo de los Milagros* (Lima: H. Vega Centeno, 1957).

³³Raúl Banchemo Castellano, *Lima y el mural de Pachacamilla* (Lima: Editorial Jurídica, 1972); Ismael Portal, *Lima Religiosa 1535–1924* (Lima: Librería e Imprenta, 1924); María Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, *Pachacamac y el Señor de los Milagros: Una trayectoria milenaria* (Lima: IEP, 1992); Ugarte, *Historia del Santo Cristo de los Milagros*.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century the photographs and images of *Señor de los Milagros* clearly places the procession as the dominion of Afro-Peruvians. In 1908, during Holy Week, the photo journal *Variedades* published two photos of the procession passing through Rimac.³⁴ One shows a crowd of thousands surrounding the procession, demonstrating its popularity and the caption reads:

“On Holy Monday and Tuesday a procession was run through the neighborhoods of the other side of the bridge following the ancient practice of these people so fond of their customs.”³⁵

The other shows a small crowd of Afro-Peruvian and *mestizo* devotees posing as the image is carried out of a small church, Santa Liberata in Rimac. A close examination reveals the *cargadores* to be all Afro-Peruvian. *Variedades* was a photo journal that highlighted current events and also aimed to present slices of Lima’s cultural life, and at times, its social problems. Its historical value is in capturing an essence of Lima’s society across sections of race and class, albeit from a privileged and modernistic perspective. The journal promoted the idea of a type of Christianity in Peru that was less superstitious and tied to what its editors considered the blind faith and fanaticism of the past. It should be replaced with the ideals of reason and progress motored by science, and this in turn would create a new form of Christianity not as artistic or beautiful but ultimately more humane.³⁶ In 1915, in an October edition that featured the sentencing of “Carita,” the Afro-Peruvian who killed his archrival “Tirifilo” in an infamous duel between *faites*, *Variedades* again covered the procession of *Señor de los Milagros*.³⁷ In this more extensive coverage that contained many photographs and descriptions of the procession there are some instructive observations that begin to illustrate the change in social and ethnic character of the procession. The article notes that the procession continued to grow in attendance and popularity. There is also an ingenious juxtaposition of photographs that reflect the waning of the traditional Afro-Peruvian roles in the procession. There is a striking increase in the number of affluent people who take to wearing the traditional purple cassock and a growing division between the haves and have-nots, or as the writer more elegantly phrases, “the divine and the profane.”³⁸ The divine are represented by a posed photograph of an unidentified lay group similar to the Knights of Columbus, judging by their uniformed dress and formality. The profane are the poor underclass of black and *mestizo* who sit by the side

³⁴*Variedades*, (1908): 226–227.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 226.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Variedades*, (1915): 2753–2755.

³⁸*Ibid.*

of the road selling their traditional food and trinkets, also joined by the most humble and downtrodden of the poor that wait almost against all hope for a miracle.

Two representative groups of the procession, *los cargadores* (men who carry the icon on their shoulders during the procession) and *las zahumadoras* (women who burn incense and lead prayers) have since the colonial era been the domain of Afro-Peruvians. In both cases, this domain was already being challenged in the photographic essays of *Variedades*. The growing financial cost associated with the confraternity of *cargadores* marginalized its original Afro-Peruvian membership while the numerical presence of the *zahumadoras* was also reduced.³⁹ In 1918 again, *Variedades* provides extensive photographs and coverage of the procession. The photographs showed the procession being carried through the Plaza de Armas filled to capacity, demonstrating its ethnic diversity and growing popularity.⁴⁰ The crowd is of primarily *mestizo* origin and a photograph of a young man selling “*turrones de Doña Pepa*” to a crowd of young people, all non-Afro-Peruvian, is evidence of the cultural appropriation that took place. There is also creole food being sold by non-Afro-Peruvian vendors as large crowds of people lined up to eat the traditional October feast, however, it is the image of the “*turron*,” the epitome Afro-Peruvian traditional pastry, being sold by a *mestizo* vendor during the procession that is most indicative of the social process of *mestizaje* at work.

However, the editors of *Variedades* were premature in signaling the demise of these Afro-Peruvian representative groups. For example, photographic essays as late as 1925 continued to show Afro-Peruvian *cargadores* and *zahumadoras* at the center of processions. In 1925, an editorial opined, “the procession that in the past belonged to people of color has now turned aristocratic.”⁴¹ These editorials are elitist in perspective because of their penchant for a type of modernism that defines non-European based national culture as quaint, superstitious, and, most importantly, relegated to the past. The marginalization of Afro-Peruvian culture joins an *indigenismo* movement that admires Peru’s indigenous past while condemning its contemporary backwardness. One of the goals of *indigenista* writers was to bring indigenous culture and history to the foreground of a national Peruvian identity. In this sense, they considered the *mestizo* as a corrupting factor that spoiled the purity of the Indian. However, one of the political compromises

³⁹ Affluent limeños have always financially supported the procession. Banchero and Rostworowski both point out that *las zahumadoras* during the colonial era were the favorite slaves of affluent families who sponsored expensive clothes and borrowed jewelry to indirectly promote their own status.

⁴⁰ “La procesión en la Plaza de Armas—En la calle del correo,” *Variedades* (1918): 1025–1026.
⁴¹ “La procesión que antaño era de la gente del bronce ahora se toma aristocrática,” *Variedades* 893 (1925): 728.

that emerges out of this literary and social movement is the valuation of the *mestizo*, a conflictive figure/category because it claimed to be a racial synthesis and congruent with progress and modernity. Yet, the *mestizo* is conflicted because he cannot help but celebrate his European roots at the expense of autochthonous ones. For Afro-Peruvians this meant that their stake in a religious procession that was once their providence diminished as it became part of the formation of a new national identity.

Maria Rostworowski goes a step beyond *indigenismo* writers by advancing the idea that *Señor de los Milagros* has Andean origins in "Pachacamac."⁴² This view places Afro-Peruvians as a vehicle for its cultural dispersion and justification for its appropriation or definition as a creole or *mestizo* popular devotion. Afro-Peruvians also participated in other processions, in particular, the procession of *Señor de Rimac*. They turned to more local devotions where their presence was numerous in ways that matched their participation in *Señor de los Milagros* just twenty-five years earlier.⁴³ Photographs of the procession show an Afro-Peruvian *cofradía* (confraternity) leading a procession of a thousand devotees. The Afro-Peruvian *zahumadores* are elderly and one can clearly identify from the photographs that Rimac was a primarily Afro-Peruvian neighborhood. These images belied the census data of the period and demonstrate their inconsistency, as well as spoke to the adaptability of Afro-Peruvians to have diverse outlets for their expressions of popular religiosity.

Throughout the twentieth century, Afro-Peruvians continued to participate in the procession of *Señor de los Milagros*. But as their recognized population numbers have diminished so has their cultural capital. According to the 1940 census, the last to use race as a category, Afro-Peruvians constituted approximately 29,000 or 0.47% of the total population. One can legitimately argue that these numbers are misleading due to the practice of census takers allowing individuals to self identify their racial category. In a society as historically conflictive about racial and ethnic categorization as Peru, accurate census data according to race did not serve the purpose of a stakeholder of a *mestizaje* or modernization project. Ultimately, the census data does provide an accurate picture of people who culturally identify themselves as *negro*/Afro-Peruvian. It is this group that has been displaced from their ownership of ethno-cultural expressions: music, dance, cuisine, sports, and popular religion.⁴⁴

⁴²Maria Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, *Pachacamac*, 14–16.

⁴³*Varietades*, 893 (1925): 729.

⁴⁴Sports commentators on a routine basis refer to soccer players from Chinchas as players who are primarily Afro-Peruvian. They are described as talented, lazy, and prone to vices despite many Chinchanos having successful careers abroad. Afro-Peruvian music and dance are routinely performed by non-Afro-Peruvians who are lauded as being the guardians of these form of cultural expressions. Traditional Afro-Peruvian dishes have also become nationalized, even Doña

III. AFRICAN DIASPORA

Afro-Peruvians continue to worship and pray to *Señor de los Milagros* and other images of Jesus Christ, saints, and virgins. These relationships are part of a spiritual bond that is interwoven with their ethnic and national identity. Unsurprisingly, they identify with saints that are closest to their own image, through culture, race, and ethnicity. Santa Efigenia falls into this category; her emergent popularity is an attempt by Afro-Peruvians in the 1990s to regain control over their cultural and racial/ethnic identity, as well as their history.

The small chapel that holds the statue and painting of Santa Efigenia is located in the village of La Quebrada, District of San Luis, Province of Cañete, which is part of the southern Lima Region of Peru. The village is one of a group of three former haciendas: Cerro Azul, Casa Blanca, and La Quebrada. In the early eighteenth century the hacienda, then known as San Juan Capistrano, was owned by a *presbítero* [priest] Don Antonio Salazar. The hacienda was purchased by the San Camilo order on January 14, 1741. Named after the Italian saint, San Camilo de Lelis, the order in Peru is known for their work with hospices and attending to the sick. They purchased the hacienda in order to conform to the laws that required them to own income-producing property to support their convent in Lima.⁴⁵ In the nineteenth century, Scottish immigrant and sugar planter D. Enrique Swayne owned it before passing it over to the Rizo-Patrón family in the early twentieth century.⁴⁶ During this time, the coastal valley of Cañete was made up of a few large haciendas that according to German traveler Ernst Middendorf were:

“in earlier times, worked by black slaves. The descendants of the freed slaves, along with a population that was formed little by little from a mixture of blacks with aboriginals [indigenous], were the most discredited of the country.”⁴⁷

Pepa's turrón, a cake prepared during the month of October in honor of the procession of Señor de los Milagros, is prepared and sold by mestizas from the provinces.

⁴⁵ Archivo del Convento de Buenamuerte, Legajo 1148, folio 1.

⁴⁶ There was a proposed trainline from the port of Cerro Azul to Cañete in 1866. The line was designed to link the haciendas of Cañete to foster their ability to export their products. The line was never constructed and the concession was declared insolvent in 1867. E. Larrabure y Unáñue, *Cañete: Apuntes geográficos, históricos, estadísticos y arqueológicos* (Lima: Imprenta del Estado, 1874), 56–57. Swayne owned several sugar haciendas in Cañete until his death in 1898. His heirs and creditors formed the British Sugar Company before selling to Rizo-Patrón after the fall of the sugar industry and the conversion to cotton farming. P. F. Martin, *Peru of the Twentieth Century*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1911), 155–156.

⁴⁷ Ernst Wilhelm Middendorf, *Peru*, vol. 2, (Lima: UNMSM, 1973), 93.

The province has a tradition of being a center of Afro-Peruvian revolt and social disturbance. During the War of the Pacific, Afro-Peruvians took advantage of the breakdown of social order during the Chilean occupation to redress their mistreatment from hacienda owners and the Chinese labor that had replaced them after they gained their freedom. The region has maintained an Afro-Peruvian identity and sense of ethnic and cultural pride that was built upon by Sabino Cañas, and Afro-Peruvian community leader, who organized a small group of followers from the surrounding villages of Cañete and Chíncha to establish the Santa Efigenia Association on August 20, 1994. They had multiple goals in mind when they petitioned the municipality to create an association and name her as patroness and protector of National Black Art. They seized upon an opportunity provided by a regional economic development project promoted by the Ministry of Industry and Tourism to market Afro-Peruvian culture through a series of festivals, including religious cultural expressions.⁴⁸ Their need to authenticate their cultural ownership of Santa Efigenia required a historical explanation of her origins and diaspora. Their sketchy attempts contributed more to mystifying than to clarifying, yet their rewriting is part of an African diaspora that weaves tradition, fact, and fiction to serve more pragmatic aims.⁴⁹

According to the Association's popular history, Santa Efigenia has been at the hacienda of La Quebrada since approximately 1741.⁵⁰ Her journey from Africa to Iberia and then to the Americas took place aboard a slave ship, her image stowed away by black female slaves who hid her among the belongings of the slave traders. They were astute enough to commingle the image with the belongings stored for the owners of the Casa Hacienda of La Quebrada where she became their patron saint and protector. The image was hidden and the slaves would meet secretly at night to pray and honor her with music and dance. As the word spread of her presence on the hacienda, hundreds of slaves joined in prayer to ask the image to alleviate their suffering and to soften the hearts of their owners. Their nightly clandestine gatherings were eventually discovered, although not the image, by one of the hacienda owners. Any night time slave gathering outside of the auspices of their owners was considered subversive, especially one that harkened back to African beliefs and powers. A slave explained the reason for their meeting

⁴⁸PromPerú was established by the government during this period to promote international and national tourism. One of their successful projects was to recreate the image of Ayacucho from an area known as a center of political violence and terrorism to one of religious celebrations.

⁴⁹The following websites contain informational and promotional material, as well as links to related interest sites on municipalities and Afro-Peruvian topics. The official website of the Municipality of Cañete, www.municanete.gob.pe, and one that focuses on Afro-Peruvian culture, <http://caneteartenegro.blogspot.com>.

⁵⁰Asociación del Arte y la Cultura Negra del Perú "Santa Efigenia," *Nota de prensa-Programa y reseña histórica*, (Cañete, September 8, 1998).

and described the great beauty of Santa Efigenia. The owner was so moved (relieved) by the faith of the slaves that he commissioned a life-sized oil painting of her and built a small chapel on the hacienda in her honor. The slaves were given permission to worship in the Catholic tradition and once they saw the painting they then brought the image to the chapel to be placed at the altar. They were allowed to pray and celebrate a festival in her honor on September 21, the day of St. Matthew according to the Roman Catholic calendar.⁵¹

This historical reconstruction is problematic in a number of simple ways, but its importance lies in its contribution to the diffusion of a primitive saint whose origins are more steeped in fiction and mythology than history. It is virtually impossible that slaves could hide an image—carved in wood, painted, and approximately three feet in height—given that the nature of transporting slaves was an economic endeavor. Slaves brought to Peru had already gone through the Middle Passage, therefore, they had already passed through a port of entry and through the hands of a third party before being brought to Peru. The notion that such an image could be concealed and transferred from one slave ship to another is not plausible. Historians have documented well the practices and strategies of slaves to maintain their cultural traditions by meeting at night or odd hours unsupervised by their owners. This part of the story rings true, although, the notion of hundreds of slaves meeting clandestinely at night would certainly arouse suspicion if not alarm, given that they were more likely planning an uprising than worshipping. At least, this would have been the perspective of a slave owner or manager. The slave owner understood that by commissioning a painting and building a chapel they made the management and control of slaves more efficient. Ultimately, it was a profitable business decision to provide slaves an outlet for worship. After all, he was just following the social control model of the Catholic Church, famous for its practice of co-opting and incorporating the autochthonous religious beliefs of indigenous groups and non-Europeans.

A 1998 press release on the annual September 21 celebration of Santa Efigenia was disseminated as part of Cañete's project of establishing the province as a center of Afro-Peruvian culture and promoting a national festival that included a variety of activities: music performances, dance contests (*zapateo* and *danzas negroides*), cock fights, beauty contests, and *el curruñao o gatada*.⁵² A 1999 *El Comercio* newspaper article entitled, "The day the rats celebrate," focused primarily on the gastronomic oddity of eating grilled cat as part of a

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²This article and half-page color photograph of an Afro-Peruvian eating grilled cat exemplifies an attempt to reify existing stereotypes of Afro-Peruvians, particularly those living outside urban areas. *El Comercio*, September 20, 1999.

regional cultural and popular religious celebration in honor of Santa Efigenia. A minor historical note was added only to say that very little is known about the history of Santa Efigenia.⁵³ That same year, the Association garnered private sponsors and printed a more sophisticated program flyer that again provided a historical summary of her origins, as well as a program of the procession and festival activities.⁵⁴ The flyer introduces a brief history of the patron saint and focuses on her diffusion and popularity in Brazil, Cuba, and Peru. In Cuba, *El Cementerio de Santiago de Cuba* is named after her, famous for being the final resting place of Cuban revolutionary icon, José Martí. In Brazil, there are several confraternities and churches that carry her name in the states of Bahia, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. These cults date back to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are part of the variety and depth of Afro-Brazilian identification with icons and religious practices of the African diaspora, as well as the use of these cultural practices by Portuguese Carmelites as colonial tools of conversion, orientation, and education.⁵⁵ In the city of Salvador da Bahia alone, there are two devotional cults and several wall/ceiling paintings and statues in the churches of São Francisco and Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos (see figure 3).

The invention of Afro-Brazilian popular religious devotions to Santa Efigenia is exemplified in the legend of Chico Rei. He was a nineteenth century slave who worked in the gold mines of Vila Rica, Minas Gerais. He became famous for buying his freedom and helping others to buy theirs, choosing Santa Efigenia as his patron saint, and building a church in her honor.⁵⁶ Historian Elizabeth Kiddy's insightful study of Afro-Brazilian rosary brotherhoods in Minas Gerais illustrated how the quasi-historical/fictional and oral tradition narratives of Chico Rei and Santa Efigenia are representative of the creation of a new Afro-Brazilian identity that incorporated shared histories of Africa.⁵⁷ This history of a more well-developed and articulated black consciousness in Brazil

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Asociación del Arte y la Cultura Negra del Perú "Santa Efigenia," *Programa de la tradicional festividad en honor a nuestra "Santa Efigenia"* (Cañete, September 17, 1999).

⁵⁵Anderson José Machado de Oliveira, *Devoção negra: santos, pretos, e catequese no Brasil colonial* (Rio de Janeiro: Quartet Editora, 2008), 25–38.

⁵⁶Chico Rei was a tribal leader from the Congo who came to Brazil in the eighteenth century. He attracted the notice of Portuguese slave traders for his authority he held over his fellow captives and was given the name of Chico Rei. He worked in the gold mines of Minas Gerais and hid flakes of gold on his body and hair over a period of years that enabled him to buy his freedom. A natural entrepreneur he amassed enough wealth to buy a gold mine of Encardideira in Vila Rica (Ouro Preto). He used the profits from the mine to help slaves to buy their freedom and to sponsor the construction of a church of Santa Efigenia. Kwame Athony, Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. eds., *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45.

⁵⁷Elizabeth Kiddy, *Blacks of the Rosary: Memory and History in Minas Gerais, Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 78–79.



Fig. 3. *Santa Efigênia*. José Joaquim Da Rocha, 1774. Ceiling painting, Convento e Igreja de São Francisco, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. Photograph by author, 2011.

vis-à-vis religious orders (Carmelite and Franciscan) and secular organizations has influenced the development of the cult of Santa Efigenia in Peru. These devotional manifestations in Brazil and Peru are more than localized patterns of resistance; instead, they stress transnational interconnectedness of popular African and Catholic traditions of popular religiosity.

The story of how Santa Efigenia arrived in Cañete is retold with some differences from the aforementioned version. According to legend, she was

brought to Peru on board a slave ship directly from Europe. The image of the saint was hidden among the belongings of the slaves. The ship encountered a storm that threatened to capsize it which compelled the slaves to take out the image and pray for their lives. The ship was saved and the slave traders, grateful for her intervention on their behalf, allowed the slaves to disembark and keep the image with them. The slaves of La Quebrada would escape to *palenques* to avoid the tormenting work and mistreatment imposed on them, and at night would join others to ask Santa Efigenia for guidance and protection. According to Sabino Cañas, a piece of cloth from the colonial era dates her presence in the chapel back to the seventeenth century.⁵⁸

This historical revision of the earlier version reveals some striking changes and additions that attempt to contextualize the presence of Santa Efigenia as part of an African diaspora to the Americas. The linkage with Cuba and Brazil is interesting for its brief focus on Afro-Brazilian history, in fact, the orthographic errors in Spanish suggest that this section of the program was written in Portuguese originally then cut and pasted. Moreover, the story of Chico Rei is the main focus of the piece followed by the location of the Santa Efigenia cemetery in Cuba. Peru is only mentioned once as another country of destination of the saint. By making the African diaspora of Santa Efigenia a central part of her history the Association links her presence in Peru directly with Africa. It therefore is necessary to alter her history to show Africans in control of her image even as they are enslaved, the epitome of powerlessness. This version uses Santa Efigenia as a cultural metaphor to articulate that Afro-Peruvians were able to maintain a physical and tangible ownership of an important remnant of their original African heritage. The altered history of Santa Efigenia in Cañete is embellished to reassert her authenticity, which grows according to each assertion of how long she had been in Peru. In addition, the slaves who brought and hid her are characterized as more rebellious and independent. The earlier version has them concealing the image and sneaking off at night to pray and celebrate. The re-write has the image in the care of runaway slaves, which was a state of affairs that the hacienda owners would hardly have met with kindness or understanding. Santa Efigenia becomes a symbol of rebellion and defiance instead of a figure that persuades slave owners to lessen their brutality and mistreatment of slaves.

Cañas' claim to have a piece of cloth that dates back to the seventeenth century replaces his earlier unsubstantiated one that dates her to the mid-eighteenth century. Moving her arrival a hundred years earlier is an attempt to convince Afro-Peruvians and others who are being introduced to the saint for the first time of her colonial roots in Peru. This second version

⁵⁸Ibid.

is part of a program flyer that has as its main goal the same as the earlier press release: to promote tourism for the September festival. However, the historical changes to an earlier version already fraught with inconsistencies argue that Cañas and the Association are struggling to transform a myth into history. Only vaguely aware of her origins they are completely unaware of the scholarly debate surrounding the very same uncertainties they are trying to simplify and clarify for different reasons. The art works and archival documentation of the Buenamuerte convent reveal that the La Quebrada hacienda was under the aegis of the San Camilo order that had personal ties with the renowned artist, Cristóbal Lozano, who painted commissioned works for the colonial elite as well as religious patrons. What is clear is that the hacienda was part of the colonial slavery economy owned by the Church and that the San Camilo order was an active participant in the effective administration of that system. However, just as they were committed to the material success of their hacienda, they were also interested in the spiritual welfare of the slaves and local community.⁵⁹ To this end, the artwork that was brought to La Quebrada was part of the larger colonial project that exploited and disciplined the African and indigenous populations at the same time that it brought comfort and hope through the intercession of a black saint. Ultimately, the strong identification with Santa Efigenia the Afro-Peruvian community has held in its collective memory served to foster a renewed interest in Afro-Peruvian culture on a national level and, unwittingly perhaps, by refashioning the history of Santa Efigenia the Association has re-infused her with the mystical power that saints need in order to remain spiritually relevant.

IV. CONCLUSION

The festival has grown in popularity as the Afro-Peruvian community of artists, musicians, writers, sports figures, and admirers have converged on Cañete each September in growing numbers. Santa Efigenia has been reinvented in the late twentieth century much in the same way she was invented by the chroniclers of St. Matthew: through a process of combining myth, fiction, memory, oral history, literature, folk tales, and political imperatives. Afro-Peruvians have claimed her as one of their own and by doing so are striving to retain control over their present by challenging and revising their past. The African origins of Santa Efigenia endow her with an imprimatur of authenticity that cannot be diluted by the process of *mestizaje*, a process that works stronger in large

⁵⁹David G. Sweet, "Black Robes and 'Black Destiny': Jesuit views of African Slavery in 17th Century Latin America," *Revista de Historia de América* 86 (July–December 1978): 87–133.

urban areas, such as Lima, than in the countryside. In this sense, her virginity and purity continues to attract believers and worshippers who identify with her blackness and her spiritual ability to provide comfort and protection in this life and beyond. Moreover, her history and reinvention provide a fascinating insight into the social practices and beliefs of Afro-Peruvians and those who have worshipped her in the past. Perhaps Nietzsche's condemnation of the study of saints as "learned idling" is accurate if one takes his definition of the scientific method literally. After all, Peru has been described by writers and travelers as having a type of Catholicism that is ceremonial, theatrical, and possibly the most active followers of saints and beatified in all of Latin America.⁶⁰

The devotion of *Señor de los Milagros* and Santa Efigenia are counterpoints from the perspective of the Afro-Peruvian model of *mestizaje* in the twentieth century. At first, the Afro-Peruvian population assimilated into the creole culture of coastal Lima and other cities along the coast of Peru. Many of them considered themselves to be creoles as they shared a set of cultural expressions in the areas of music, dance, cuisine, and religious practices with descendants of Europe. In this sense, this allowed them to join a cultural category rather than a racial one, even though it was clear that they were not afforded the same social privileges. The emergence of Santa Efigenia, or her rediscovery by the Afro-Peruvian community in Cañete, establishes an important link with the African diaspora, strong in other parts of Afro-Latin America and weak in Peru. This link allowed Afro-Peruvians to ethnically identify with their origins and separate themselves from creole or *mestizo* culture. Their contributions to Peruvian culture and society were already being diluted in the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century by the processes of assimilation, marginalization, and *mestizaje*. These processes formed the basis of Peru's struggle to articulate a coherent national identity. It would also prove to be insufficient to meet the social challenges caused by successive waves of indigenous and *mestizo* migration and thereby altered the cultural and racial paradigm envisioned by modernizers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the 1990s and early twenty-first century there was an academic and political attempt to revalorize the social contributions of Afro-Peruvians led by the Francisco Congo Movement (est. 1986) and the more recent LUNDU-Center for Afro-Peruvian Studies and Promotion (est. 2001). The mission of these advocacy organizations is to promote increased political participation and social justice, and to build intercultural networks with other Afro-Latin

⁶⁰Gustavo Adolfo Otero, *El Perú que yo he visto* (La Paz: Imp. Artística, 1926), 75–78; Luis Alberto Sánchez, *El Perú: Retrato de un país adolescente* (Buenos Aires: Edición Continentes, 1958), 189.

American communities throughout Latin America. Their emergence is *pari passu* with the crafting and reinvention of Santa Efigenia as a political and spiritual symbol in response to the cultural and institutional marginalization of Afro-Peruvians, as they seek to construct a self-awareness and connectedness with the African diaspora and their shared histories and struggles.