Over dinner with longtime friends during a sabbatical in Peru several years ago, I recalled that thirty years had passed since we had all participated in the landmark Congress on Research on Women in the Andean Region, an international gathering held at Lima’s Catholic University in 1982. My three friends were residents of Peru, but for me the conference had marked my first trip back to the country, five years after completing my doctoral research and two years into what is sometimes called the violencia, the protracted period of conflict between the guerrilla movement Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and national military forces.¹

My sabbatical research in 2011–12, a reexamination of gender, race, and indigenous identity in Andean Peru in light of past debates and more recent feminist intellectual and political currents, had transported me back to that earlier time. I had visited my usual field site in Huaraz, two hundred miles north of Lima and ten thousand feet up in the Andes, but during this yearlong affiliation with the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, I took up residence and carried out research in Lima for a longer period than I had done in the past. When I was not conducting interviews across the sprawling city, I explored Lima’s libraries and research centers. In the IEP’s own library I came across a copy of the pale-blue-covered informe
final (final report) of the congress, something I had at home but had not pulled off the shelf in many years. Seeing it again after so long, I was reminded that over 120 invited participants had presented research papers on a host of subjects, from the work of women in the rural sector to their labor as migrants in the urban informal and formal sectors; their organizations and social movements; their strategies for carrying out domestic responsibilities, particularly in the popular sectors; and finally, participants’ feminist research methodologies. My host at dinner that night, Jeanine Anderson, had written the final report (Anderson de Velasco 1983), and she recounted stories from the congress that were still vivid in her memory.

At that gathering three decades earlier in Lima, participants had had a clear sense of history in the making. Research on Andean women could scarcely be traced earlier than the 1970s, when feminism had begun to galvanize researchers to take women’s lives seriously as subjects in themselves. Moreover, this was a time of growing recognition of the transformative effect such scholarship might have on our understanding of societies more broadly within the humanities and social sciences. In a landmark moment in feminism’s advance, the United Nations declared 1975 International Women’s Year and convened a congress in Mexico City; at the urging of attendees, 1976–85 was named the Decade for Women. This was the era of “women and development” (Boserup 1970); and not long after the first UN conference, an academic gathering at Wellesley College (Wellesley Editorial Committee 1977) was instrumental in promoting feminist perspectives that challenged the Western development agenda, which generally had either overlooked women or expected them to carry extra burdens. Peru itself was on the map for its early feminist activism and research, and in 1983 Lima became the site of the second continental Latin American feminist encuentro (gathering). It was a time of passionate activity, even as the nation experienced a deepening conflict and time of fear during the confrontation between Sendero Luminoso and the military.

At this historical juncture, the pioneering research on Andean women emergent in the 1970s tended toward two divergent poles: analyses that emphasized the “complementarity” of gender roles in the rural sector and suggested that a gender hierarchy was the result of externally imposed ideas and practices, whether from colonialism or contemporary urban
culture, and analyses that, in contrast, held that patriarchal relations were rooted in “traditional” rural communities and would be altered only with “modernization” (Babb [1976] 1985b; Isbell [1978] 1985; Bourque and Warren 1981a, 1981b). My work during this period focused on the well-known community of Vicos, a former hacienda that had been the site of a major project in applied anthropology in the 1950s and early 1960s. In many ways, the initial debates on the lives and prospects of Andean
women set an agenda whose traces extend through the present, though the pace of research in Peru’s rural sector slowed substantially for well over a decade as a consequence of the violence in the country.4

Notwithstanding the stalled pace of scholarly activity and feminist debate, a small number of researchers continued sporadic work on the Peruvian Andes (and migration to the coast) in the turbulent 1980s; while some took a symbolic approach to gender and cultural difference, relying on “Andean continuities” to account for an enduring gender complementarity, more adopted a historically grounded approach (Bunster and Chaney 1985; Silverblatt 1987; Seligmann 1989; Babb [1989] 1998). There had been too much social disruption to cling to such essentialized notions of lo andino (the Andean) without examining forces of change.5 My own work, including my presentation at the 1982 congress, reflected a shift from attention to complementary gender roles in rural Peru to increasing interest in women’s productive and reproductive activities as market women and household workers in commercial centers in the Andes. In many cases, both of these approaches—those embracing the complementarity and the production/reproduction frameworks—were influenced by currents in Marxist feminism, and in historical materialism more broadly, and they sought to valorize and assess women’s distinct contributions as workers in the gender division of labor. In the case of urban marketers, I showed, women’s work was vital to the economy even as they were frequently scapegoats for harsh economic conditions of that time.

By the mid-1990s, Peru was emerging from the internal war that had cost nearly seventy thousand lives, a loss suffered most notably in the southern Andes but throughout the nation as well. There was a gradual normalization of activity, though the deep emotional wounds of that time have been much slower to heal. As the nation sought an economic recovery, it looked not only to mining and agriculture but also to tourism as long-standing prospects for development; however, it would take another decade before many tourists were attracted once again not only to Peru’s archaeological sites and the natural environment, which were perceived as safe, but also to its cultural-tourism sites and to Andean people themselves. My recent work on tourism in postconflict Latin America considered the Peruvian case as one in which memories often needed to be deeply suppressed. Indigenous women and men had a significant part to