Chapter 3

Peruvian Israelites

Territorial Narratives and Religious Connections across the Atlantic

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When it comes to understanding the Atlantic space as a space for relationships, I would argue that two concurring social phenomena that appear to contradict each other should be taken into account: on the one hand, the influence of history and memory on people's narratives and worldviews at present; and the influence of such narratives on the continuous building of such people's historical memory. A good example for the convergence of these processes is the Evangelical Association of the Israelites Mission of the New Universal Pact (AEMINPU), which is a new Peruvian religious movement also known as 'Israelites'. This is the name the members of the congregation give themselves and it is also the name they are known by in Peru and the other Latin American countries towards which they are expanding (Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Argentina and Ecuador). It was founded by Ezequiel Ataucusi Gamonal, an Andean peasant from Arequipa (southern Peru), who received the 'divine mission' to announce the *new* salvation pact and the *new* 'Royal Law' (the Ten Commandments of God's law) to the whole of humanity.

Throughout the following pages I will discuss how Peruvian Israelites build a theology of world history and Peruvian history that gives meaning to their congregation within both itself and the rest of the society as part of the search for a place within the rest of the national and transnational social processes. In my research on the Israelites' narratives I have found several elements coming from Catholic heritage, Andean messianism and

Peruvian ethno-history, particularly from the Inca period. Examples of this are their arguments saying that Incas 'already knew God' on the same terms as they do nowadays; but it was through the arrival of the Spaniards in America that Peruvians – meaning Incas – got to know the Bible and Jesus Christ. Moreover, throughout their discourses they make connections between 'East' and 'West' – Israel and Peru, for instance – when they relocate holy places such as Jerusalem in Peru, or when they argue that Mount Sinai has moved to Machu Picchu Mountain, transferring to it the importance that Mount Sinai had in biblical times.

Thus, in this chapter I will reflect on all these aspects, including that they are nourished by two forces – a centripetal one and a centrifugal one: on the one hand, the centripetal idea of a project of national salvation through the consideration of Peru as a 'new sacred geography'; and on the other, the centrifugal idea of the process of transnationalization of the Israelite movement, which is nourished by a transatlantic religious imaginary and has the transnational projection of its doctrine among its objectives.

Peruvian Israelites: An Approach towards Their History and Biblical Andean Exegesis

Ezequiel Ataucusi Gamonal (1918–2000), a peasant from Arequipa, was the one who received the revelation of a belief based on a new compilation of the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Law. The history of the congregation is closely related to his biography, and he had already had several religious experiences during his life before he founded it (Scott n.d., 1984; De la Torre López 1996, 2007; Marzal 2000). For instance, as stated by Scott in an interview carried out in July 1987, Ezequiel had told him that he recalled having questioned, at the age of nine, the worship of saints as being a consequence of God's direct instructions, saying that 'priests are the ones inventing saints' (Scott 1984: 2).

Ezequiel had set himself up as the cornerstone of the congregation since its very beginning, placing himself on top of the ecclesiastical and administrative hierarchy of the AEMINPU, in such a way that the religious movement was shaped around him and emanated from his persona. The role played by him in the Israelite worldview is palpable both within his discourse and in the presence he still has, even after his death, in their religious spaces and practices. In fact, he is still regarded by his followers as the *new* prophet for the *new* people of Israel.

This congregation has been officially acknowledged as Peruvian religion, which does not mean that it is the official religion of the country.

According to Désilets (2006: 36), the Israelites are a religious movement born in Peru, with its utopia being the restoration of the people of Israel in Peru (Colombani 2008). This is in contrast with one idea that recurs within their discourse, which is that of the need to spread their word throughout the planet so that humanity can be saved and have its place at the doomsday, a prescription which they have been defending since their founding. The researchers working on this congregation (Scott 1987; Marzal 1988; Ossio 2003, 2014; De la Torre López 2004; Désilets 2006) have labelled it as a 'Peruvian religion' because of the Andean roots that characterize its worldview, the weight this historical background has on its configuration, and the very importance they give in their discourse to the Peruvian nation and territory, which they identify as 'Privileged Peru' – which means the land where God came to found the pact, the 'navel of the World'. However, it is necessary to revise this predisposition of the social sciences to determine religion geographically (Sarró and Blanes 2009a).

Ossio (2014) argues that the vast expansion of the Israelite movement began in the 1980s, when it brought native Andeans, Amazonians and coastal dwellers together, probably because they were looking for alternatives to Shining Path's terrorism. It was in those years that the Agricultural People's Front of Peru (FREPAP), the political party founded by Ezequiel Atacusi Gamonal, was born; it is defined in its founding statutes as being the actual party of the exploited and marginalized people in Peru.

As already noted, the members of this congregation call themselves 'Israelites' because they assume to be the modern-day spiritual 'brothers' of the biblical people of Israel. They could be defined as a prophetic, Christian, messianic-millenarian religious group, whose main characteristic is the biblical literalism[1] that impregnates their doctrine and religious aesthetic; which translates into an obsession with putting their biblical exegesis into practice and thus fulfilling their divine commandments. As an example, this biblical literalism makes them visually recognizable because of the clothes they wear – both men and women wear robes, and women also wear veils. In addition, both make use of the *semejanzas* or *nazareato*, which consists in letting their hair grow, including their beards and moustaches in the case of men, and their religious practices – they gather every Saturday, every new moon, every 10 October for the expiation, and for the three annual festivities: *Ázimos* in April, Pentecost in June and *Cabañas* in October. Among their ritual practices it is important to stress holocausts,[2] the singing of hymns and the expiation through blood. Such visibility, which has not always been positive or accepted by the rest of Peruvian society, is used by parishioners as a strategy for religious proselytism (Meneses 2005).

The doctrine of AEMINPU is based on three fundamental propositions: (1) the messianic confirmation of Peru as the chosen place – 'Privileged Peru'; (2) the idea of Ezequiel as the new messiah, acknowledging Jesus Christ as the 'Eastern Christ', with Ezequiel as his reincarnation, referred to as the 'Western Christ'. His death in 2000 led to an identity crisis within the congregation around the matter of succession. Before dying, under divine inspiration, he said that his successor would be his youngest son, Ezequiel Jonás Ataucusi Molina, although the entire congregation does not agree on this decision; and (3) the millenarian certainty that the current generation of Israelites will be the fourth generation that God will come to judge: after one thousand years of life, seven years of punishment will come, which only the Israelite congregation will survive, and for whom the heaven on earth will begin (De la Torre López 2005: 334; Meneses 2009: 100).

Nowadays, Jonás is still the official leader, for he has held the overriding authority in the congregation since 2000. When Ezequiel died, brothers turned to the Bible in search of a new prophecy that allowed them to explain what was happening and what to do in the future. The argument raised by them to explain this charismatic transition and to legitimate the leading of Jonás is the following: Ezequiel's body was a *temple* for the Holy Spirit, a means for the divinity to communicate with humanity, but such bodily shape ended its time without having accomplished its 'divine mission', so the Holy Spirit had to look for another temple: Jonás' body, to whom the name of Ezequiel was added in order to identify him more closely with his father. Although brothers claim that 'both of them are the same thing', they had to look for a biblical legitimation for this new face and the conditions under which he would carry out his leading.

East and West: Two Key Territorial Terms in the Israelite Worldview

Israelites make use of the terms *Oriente* and *Occidente* referring to East and West. These are two key territorial terms in the Israelite worldview; because for them it is in Peru and through their congregation that both parts of the world become fused. It is from the moment this encounter takes place onwards that the countdown for the doomsday and the end of the world begins. Within their discourse, Israelites identify the East with Israel, a territory that belongs to the biblical people of Israel; and the West with Latin America, in particular with Peru, the place where the new people of Israel were born as a restoration of the old biblical Israel. Their worldview understands the world map in a very special manner,

as for them there are two hemispheres that do not correspond with north and south, but with what they consider to be the eastern and western hemispheres, with the Atlantic Ocean acting as the separating element between them, not only territorially speaking, but also in terms of morality and temporality. The biblical text on the basis of which this division is validated is taken from Isaiah 43:5, 'Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the East, and from the West I will gather you'. This text is studied together with another two that support their argument: Zechariah 8:7, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country'; and Numbers 34:6, 'For the western border, you shall have the Great Sea and its coast. This shall be your western border'. Machu Picchu is one of the elements with a deep symbolic character for the Israelites, given that some of them claim the Ten Commandments to be hidden there. Others argue that the Indian head drawn by the mountains on the outline of Huayna Picchu corresponds to the Inca's face, which they merge with Ezequiel's face not only in their discourse but also in many illustrations, as if they were the same person. Ossio quotes a text, broadcasted on the Internet by members of the congregation, saying that

> INCAS means Israel was born in Cusco in South America, these people also disobeyed God's laws (*ama sua*, do not steal; *ama quella*, do not be weak; *ama llulla*, do not lie) and God distanced them from him, yet he did not abandon them, and on their descendants would the Kingdom of God be erected by the end of time (now). The city of Machu Picchu was built with the power of the Holy Spirit, and it was there that the Inca royalty and the empire administrators celebrated the feasts commonly referred to as Inti Raymi, the Sun God feast.[3] (Ossio 2014: 159)

This connection with Peru involves a tendency towards linking with the Incas, which also implies highlighting Ezequiel's image as the 'new' Inca and strengthening the connection with Machu Picchu as much as defending and proposing Tahuantinsuyo as a viable sociopolitical model to be restored under their worldview nowadays.

Through the biblical interpretation of different archaeological sites or landscapes, Israelites make a link with the East – Israel. They morally circumscribe themselves (Blanes 2012) to a distant territory through a time–space connection, which counts on the Incas as a connecting link through time, because they were the immediately preceding people with whom God established a covenant of salvation as they descended from the ancient biblical people of Israel; and on the Atlantic Ocean as a bridge through space, as it is space for relationships between East and West.

Regarding time, this interpretation allows them to build narratives of their ethno-historical past, which they claim to be the national history. In other words, they hold in high esteem the oral memory about the Inca Empire that has been transmitted from generation to generation (in a loose sense); and also about all the archaeological sites linked to them through a biblical interpretation, which is unquestionable and allows them to blend mythical times into the narrative because it comes from the Holy Scriptures. This is the way in which pre- and postcolonial historiography interweaves in the Israelite discourse and worldview, where elements of this Andean messianism can be found through the messianic and redeemer role first played by Ezequiel and then by his successor and son Ezequiel Jonás.

Regarding space, a process of relocating holy places, which is necessary in order to understand the Israelite imaginary, may be detected. If we look at religion through the lens of the studies on mobility and transnationalism, we have to be conscious that not only do people and beliefs travel, but also territories and places. Israelites produce a New Jerusalem in Peru, they move the East to the West, and understand that the Amazon forest is the 'new' Promised Land, the place to retire in order to wait for the arrival of the Last Judgement, as it will be there where God will come to collect the chosen. All of this is built on the messianic-millenarian idea of salvation that allows them to have a future in the midst of the socio-economic and political crisis in which Peru was immersed at the time when this congregation was founded.

'Privileged Peru' and the Transatlantic Israelite Diaspora: An Analysis of Israelite Territorial Narratives

Since the beginning of the congregation, the restoration of the people of Israel in Peru has been one of the utopias shaping the Israelite imaginary. In the process of materialization of such utopia, the way in which they understand Peru as the 'privileged country' plays a key role, not only in terms of symbolism, but also geographically and territorially speaking. In order to understand this utopia, the thorough analysis and examination of their 'territorial narratives' was of great help. Damonte understood this as:

> Narratives in which discourses and social practices with an explicit and evident territorial dimension are integrated, producing thus non-circumscribed social spaces. Such narrations are textual in so far as they include oral and written history, as well as collective memory; but they are also practical, since they include rituals and everyday practices. These are social narrations about a physical space (Damonte 2011: 19)

Such narratives – which constitute a fundamental category of analysis, since they make it possible to understand the constitution of territories and analyse the different forms of territorial ascription – in the case of Israelites are mediated by their ways of religious reflection. In other words, these territories and the claim for an Israelite territoriality over them are founded on specific chronotopes (Bajtin 1981; see Navarrete Linares 2001 and Cantón Delgado 2008) produced by their narratives, in which they interweave several space–time dimensions: a biblical one, one of the past and one of the present. This allows them, on the one hand, to produce and legitimate a network of sacred territories comprising the different places of worship or ritual spaces, and on the other hand, to acknowledge Peru as the 'privileged country', not only in terms of religion, but also ethno-politically and territorially; and eventually, it also allows them to appropriate the Peruvian national territory, for the moment symbolically speaking. I refer to this situation as being 'for the moment' owing to the fact that they did start a 'process of colonization' (De la Torre López 2007) in the Peruvian jungle (see De la Torre López 2004, 2007; Ossio 2014; Meneses 2015, 2017), where they hold the actual and *divine* property of the land, and consider it *their* territory.

Damonte (2011: 19) makes analytical distinctions between the categories of 'territorial narratives', 'territory' and 'land'. He claims that the first ones 'are key elements in territories, but they are not territories', and that they give spatial support to the discourses and collective practices. Therefore, territories are built through the articulation of diverse territorial narratives 'in a political project which not only looks to describe but also to rule a determined space', as it is observable in FREPAP's politico-religious proposals and also in the jungle colonies. In other words, Israelites, with Ezequiel as their leader, have modelled a political project in order to be able to practise territoriality over a space that is not only physical, but also symbolic, since it implies their connection with a history in which ethno-religious elements allow them to elaborate 'territorial narratives' through which they can claim such territory, which they understand as theirs biblically, religiously and politically.

Since I began the work that I have been doing in the last years about Israelites, I have placed myself in a theoretical position from which I can problematize the relationship between religion and territory, escaping from the geographical fixation of religion. That is the reason why I consider it necessary to reflect on how the idea of 'privileged Peru', or the process through which Israelites try to create a 'New Jerusalem' in Peru, has been built, and how this is articulated with the centrifuge idea of spreading the Israelite *Word* towards the 'four corners of the earth'. In order to consider this, I believe the concept of 'moral circumscription'

proposed by Ruy Llera Blanes (2012) is relevant, which has allowed me to regard beliefs in a deterritorialized manner and reflect on how their religious discourse produces territories of geographies where cultural history and sacred places from Peru and the Middle East meet. In other words, it involves understanding what Israel and Peru mean for them, and what the mechanisms are that allow Israelites, as Peruvians, to produce ideologies of ethnic and religious belonging to Israel. For such purpose, the concept of 'remote place' (Sarró 2008) has been equally helpful, since it has allowed me to think about the meaning of the word 'Israel' in their imaginary, and to understand what they mean when they claim to be Israelites.

The motto 'privileged Peru', which is observable in many Israelite ritual spaces, constitutes a mechanism of legitimation that provides a basis for their leader's place of birth, and gives support to the congregation (De la Torre López 2005; Meneses 2009; Ossio 2014). According to Meneses (2009: 100), 'Peru is the scenario for the new covenant and for the new people that was chosen for the alliance with a God that took pity on human kind'. In this sense, one brother claimed that 'this congregation appeared here in the West and in Peru. That is why Peru is privileged, because this was the first country'. Apart from this reason, Israelites turn to the Bible as an ultimate source of legitimacy in order to blend certain biblical texts with the territorial location of Peru according to their world geographic hermeneutic. This narrative about 'privileged Peru' is not made up exclusively of words (where I include their celestial hymns), but it is also complemented with images or photo montages that are used for garnishing churches, political headquarters, public sermons and web pages, in order to accompany and visually reinforce the discursive act – see the prior example of Machu Picchu.

Another element of legitimation is constituted by their diverse interpretations of the Peruvian map. We must forget the Mercator (1569) map projection and all the ones that have followed it up to the present day, because the Israelite cartographic conception responds to a symbolic rework of such geographic coordinates that is mediated by their religious hermeneutic. Sarró (2013: 384) reminds us that '"territory" is not thought by everybody in similar terms'; that is to say, territorial configurations are built from a particular position in a specific spatial dimension, and thus we think of geography or world cartography in a necessarily different manner. In line with Smith's work (1978) *Map Is Not Territory*, Sarró claims that a 'map is not a primary or direct representation of the land, but a tool to represent space in a very different way as we perceive it in reality, a tool whose complexity we are not usually aware of'. They create and legitimize the 'mystery of privileged Peru' through their vision of the

world map, which provides them with a mapping of the world and a way to inhabit it according to their universe of meanings (Smith 1978: 291–92).

This relationship between AEMINPU and territory turns even more complex when two ideas are intertwined: the centripetal one of a national salvation project through the constitution of Peru as 'new sacred geography'; and the centrifugal one of the process of transnationalization of the movement itself, in so far as, in the first place, it is nourished by a transatlantic religious imaginary, and that it also has among its goals the transnational projection of its doctrine. Therefore, two dimensions emerge that may seem to oppose each other but, at the same time, they give meaning to their own existence.

Regarding the second dimension, it could be stated that the Israelite congregation is made up of a network of people who are constantly moving, not only within the Peruvian borders, but also to the neighbouring countries where the congregation is settling (Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, etc.), and even across the Atlantic Ocean, as is the case with the Israelites I have been in contact with in Madrid and Barcelona (Spain). Ezequiel himself announced in his testimony that 'spreading the Word of God to the four corners of the earth' is one of the tasks that God handed over to him in his 'encounter' with the providence. In this way, the process of expansion of the *Word*, which answers to a strategy of transnational religious proselytism, was driven and legitimated by the founder of the congregation himself.

On several occasions, reference to the existence of Israelites in Latin America and all around the world has come up during the conversations and interviews held with Israelite brothers. This is upheld as another element of legitimacy and power for the congregation, and is regarded as a further step of great importance for the whole of humanity to get to know the people of Israel and to have the chance to join the Israelites in order to be saved in the Last Judgement.

Transnational religious processes imply migratory flows which involve a flow of symbols, signs, meanings and representations (Perera Pintado 2007: 146) that constitute elements that are essential in the reconfiguration of feelings and discourses of ethnic, religious or territorial belonging (see Sánchez Carretero 2008; García 2008). According to Levitt (2001: 10), 'despite similarities between contemporary and earlier migration experiences, clear differences characterize contemporary migrants' transnational religious lives'. This has to do with the development and implementation of new technologies both in transportation (planes, for instance) and in means of communication (mobile phones and Internet), and the access to them. These new technologies allow greater frequency and immediacy in connections between people who move somewhere

else and those who stay, and also with those whose lives are in frequent movement.

Considering all the foregoing, it seems interesting to examine the Israelite diaspora as an active agent in religious transnationalization, in which diverse diasporic dimensions are articulated. According to the Israelite narratives about their past, in which they identify themselves with the biblical people of Israel and resemanticize the arrival of Spaniards in South American territories in order to justify their present and even their future, I consider the Israelite congregation to have been born as a Christian diasporic community because of their identification with the physical or symbolic territory of Israel and the holy city of Jerusalem, which is where the idea of creating a New Jerusalem in Peru comes from – their search for the promised land, and the imperative intention to spread their *Word*. That is to say, with their religious 'diasporization', they are leading to a process of resemanticizing and remapping of the history of Christianity and, specifically, the history of Atlantic Christianity. In this regard, one brother told me: 'Spaniards were the ones bringing the Bible in Peru – but now it is us, Israelites, who have to bring the Word of God to Spain and to the four corners of the world'. This reasoning justifies diaspora as a 'divine mission', and shows the diasporic circulation process of Christianity carried out by the Israelite congregation, which works as a filter that produces a *new* form of Christian belonging based on their narratives about their local historical memory. In other words, they give new meanings to the history of Christianity from a Christianity that travelled and then relocated in Peru, and was thus transformed, which now again tries to expand – or still tries to expand – its religious imaginary through the Israelite diaspora.

Human Mobility and Religion: The Atlantic Ocean as a Space of Circulating People, Ideas, Beliefs and Religious Practices

Although Peru is not an Atlantic country geographically speaking, but a Pacific one, it is important to propose my analysis from an Atlantic perspective, since if we take the Atlantic history (Armitage 2004) and the Israelite imaginary into account, it is possible to claim that Israelites share in the Atlantic traffic started in the fifteenth century, which includes Peru in such a dynamic since the arrival of European colonists to this territory in 1532.

The Atlantic space works as space for relationships, which is constantly built by human mobility, and it plays a key role in the creation of the historical memory of the populations settled around it. Not only in

the physical meaning of 'around', but also in the symbolic one, in so far as there are nearly endless connections mediated by the Atlantic space between South American territories not directly bordering this ocean and Europe or Africa. Furthermore, it becomes necessary to relativize the idea of 'around the Atlantic Ocean' in physical terms also, since if we think at a regional level, it could be said that South America is an Atlantic region or a region bordering the Atlantic Ocean.

Following Sarró and Blanes (2009a: 7), I consider religion as one of the relevant signs in the analysis of human mobility. In fact, 'although quantitatively [the number of people moving could be] barely significant, they have an impact on the target religious scenarios' (ibid.: 9), and such impact does not only take place in the religious sphere (see Teixeira Sáenz 2014). However, not only the diverse spheres constituting the environment where new beliefs are introduced are influenced, but the process of religious relocation itself is a reciprocal process of influences whereby the *arriving* religion is also affected. Moving people or groups not only *bring* religion, as any other aspect of their cultural background, but they re-create it and relocate it (see Baumann 2010). Religious patterns interact with each other during the mobility process, and also with the new environment they arrive in. People are not hermetically sealed containers in which it is possible to safeguard the content from any kind of inclemency or influence of the environment. Quite the opposite – any kind of process involving migration or religious transnationalization or, in short, human mobility, opens a field of agency. This particular instance allows me to show how beliefs, groups or territories are located in diverse societies and territories. Therefore, it is possible to claim that 'transnationality does not contradict the development of new religious territorialities' (Moreras 2006: 13), but it allows the opening of diverse dimensions in such processes.

Final Thoughts

Firstly, I would like to suggest that diverse variables intertwine within the elaboration of Israelite narratives about 'privileged Peru', such as the hermeneutic of their ethno-historical past, their religious imaginary and the reading of the Bible, and their way of seeing and re-creating maps. The meeting of all these aspects shows a creative process of religious production of the territory and the landscape. Not only this, it also reveals the continuous process of transferring a symbolic narrative to several physical means with the intention of appropriating them, not only physically but also symbolically, and attributing a heritage to it from their religious imaginary. Furthermore, I consider that 'Peru' and 'Israel' are

not just locations in the Israelite narratives. These are concepts beyond the territory attributed to them by specific cartographic coordinates; they constitute *significants flottants* (Sarró 2008), which are also in a continuous process of resematicizing.

On the other hand, I would like to bring up a reflection on the idea of the search for the Promised Land. According to what is said by De la Torre Castellanos (2009: 17–18), it could be claimed that the Israelites' project prompts consideration on 'the role played by religion in the refoundation of "chosen peoples" and/or "promised lands" through making the spiritual discourse into an instrument for the redefinition of novel identities and territorialities in order to face the dislocation attached to globalization' – and not only on the role played by religion, but also on the role played by territories in such new ways of religious reflection, in which the claim for both territory and land intervenes in cases such as the Israelites.

When Ezequiel promotes the migration towards the jungle, where brothers – who generally come from the poorest sectors of society – will have access to land and will be able to devote themselves to the divine business of agriculture, I understand that he is merging together the peasant claims for land and the search for the Promised Land, which is characteristic of the biblical diaspora of the people of Israel. Both dimensions, a more ethno-political one and a more religious-symbolic one, are part of a discourse that mobilizes its followers and allows them to begin with the long materialization process of their social utopia in agricultural colonies that were built from an Andean worldview which acted as a filter in Peruvian Israelites' biblical hermeneutic. But not only does it allow them to materialize such utopia, it also makes it possible for them to implement a political project on a geography that is considered sacred by means of transferring their territorial narratives from an abstract or symbolic level to a physical environment covering not only the jungle but also other spaces, where landscape depicts elements from the Incaic past.

Finally, as mentioned above, my intention has been to consider the Atlantic space as a space for relationships that is constantly built by human mobility. Such an analytic approach towards the Atlantic space has a lot to do with the concept of Atlantic history, which has been developed mainly in the Anglo-Saxon world. 'Atlantic history' is defined by Simal Durán (2013: 200) as an analytical construction that departs from 'the claim that the geographic area defined by the Atlantic Ocean – that is, the European, American and African continents – started in the early modern period', and it was born as 'a consequence of the European maritime expansion, which is a process of triangular integration that ended up in the formation of a world with commonalities'.

Thus, it would not be possible to analyse the history of such places unilaterally, but from the connections existing between them, with the Atlantic Ocean as their meeting space. In spite of the criticism received about this approach (see Simal Durán 2013), taking it into account allows me to observe the social phenomena emerging from the circulation of people and ideas across the Atlantic space. In this specific case it has allowed me to approach the transnational dynamics or connections framed and produced by the Israelite diaspora.

In social sciences, the Atlantic Ocean has received several forenames: Latin Atlantic (Queirolo Palmas 2009), Christian Atlantic (Sarró and Blanes 2008; Sarró 2009), lusophone Atlantic (Sarró and Blanes 2009b), black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993; Silvestre 2002; Armitage 2004; Johnson 2007; Parés and Sansi 2011; Fioux-Salgas 2014), white Atlantic and anglophone Atlantic (Armitage 2004), North Atlantic and South Atlantic (Cardoso Reis 2015) and Spanish Atlantic (Andrien 2009; Altman 2011; Simal Durán 2013). Although such names refer to religious, ethnic, linguistic, political and geographic aspects, it could be claimed that all of these adjectives problematize the Atlantic Ocean as a space for relationships, for interactions (Thornton 1992), for traffic (Gilroy 1993; Braz Diaz 2012) and for missionary journeys – *travessia missionária* (Sarró and Blanes 2008), which, in short, refer to human mobility.

With all that, what is clear is that the Atlantic Ocean has and contains a religious history. Sarró and Blanes (2008: 841–43) claim that 'the Atlantic Ocean had to be tamed and illuminated by the torch of the Christian civilization from the fifteenth century', and that it 'was always a force for the transmission of the Christian religion, and it still is nowadays'. Thus, it has been at the same time the scene and the main character in Christianity's history and expansion. Part of this history has been built and carried out by Peruvian Israelites, not only because nowadays the Israelite diaspora has crossed the ocean to relocate itself again in the eastern hemisphere – specifically in Spain – but also because when Christianity spread throughout the entire American continent, starting in the fifteenth century, it *scattered the seeds* for the emergence of religious groups such as the Israelites, thus constituting part of the Christian diaspora with a connection to a common place of religious origin: Jerusalem or Israel – and also Peru in the case of Israelites – thus establishing links between both territories. However, the Israelite diaspora does not take place as a phenomenon separated from Peruvian and other Latin American transatlantic diasporic flows. Therefore, in order to consider the Israelite diaspora, it is necessary to articulate this religious dynamic together with others that are outside of the religious, economic and political spheres, though resemanticized from the Israelite point of view in order to shape transnational

mobility as a religious 'path' or, in short, as the Israelite diaspora, which (self-)identifies them with the biblical people of Israel and perpetuates their search for the 'Promised Land' (see Meneses 2017).

<div align="right">*Translated by Daniel González Hacha*</div>

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Notes

1. I consider it necessary to briefly comment on the usage of this concept, since literalism could be defined as the understanding of texts according to their 'literal', 'simple' or 'evident' meaning (Crapanzano 2000). However, such meaning is neither universal nor uniform (Crapanzano 2000; Riba i Cañardo 2007), for it is mediated by the user's cultural background, which is why the use of certain practices depends on the reader, who reads/interprets.
2. Holocausts or burning offerings constitute a fundamental ritual element for Israelites. It consists in the burning of a previously prepared animal on a wood pile while hymns are sung.
3. In Spanish, the use of INCAS as an acronym matches the words *Israel Nació en el Cusco en América del Sur*.

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