Burn The Ancient Flints Bright: Proving a Unique Colonialism in the Andean Region

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Drawing on the works of Latin American intellectuals such as Pablo Neruda, Ernesto Guevara, and Jose Carlos Mariátegui, this paper explores the limitations of the commonly used academic definitions of 'settler' and 'exploitative' colonialisms. The Andean region is used as an example of an area that cannot be easily categorized into those labels due to its unique geographic location, the population demographics that emerged shortly after the initial Conquest, the nature of Indigenous participation in the new society, and the motivations of the Spanish colonial forces. The impacts of these unique factors on the modern Andes are used as a proof of why it is important to question Eurocentric definitions of subaltern experiences.

The Andean region of South America has long been seen as something of a spiritual centre for Indigenism. Prominent Latin American intellectuals such as Pablo Neruda and Che Guevara have drawn on the unique energy of the "navel of the world" (Guevara 103), with particular reference to the legacy left by the Inca Empire. Yet the Andes and their Indigenous inhabitants were colonised by Iberian powers in the Conquest, the same as the rest of Latin America. The question remains as to how and why the Andean nations, defined here as the modern states of Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, retained their roots in the face of foreign domination and oppression.

Colonialism is defined broadly as “a system of external rule and settlement [by a foreign power] in a territorial space” (Baylis et al. 162). In discussions of the experiences of formerly colonized nations, the further labels of ‘settler’ and ‘exploitative’ are employed to categorize and understand the structures of colonialism that occurred in a given area. Settler colonialism functions through the replacement of local populations with an invasive settler society. (Baylis et al. 165). The invaders disregard Indigenous ways of being, impose their own culture, and are generally concerned with acquisition of territory. Native peoples are expected to assimilate into the foreign culture. Classic examples of settler colonialism can be found in Canada, Australia, Israel, and South Africa. In exploitative colonialism, the interests of the dominating power revolve primarily around economic gain, and as such involve less migration from occupying states to the colonies. While local populations are allowed to remain in place, their traditional power structures and practices are disrupted and replaced with systems that serve the interests of the occupying nation. Native peoples are further exploited as workers on the industrial projects of the colonizers (Baylis et al. 166).

The Middle East and much of the African subcontinent experienced exploitative colonialism. As much as these definitions can be useful in understanding and discussing colonialism and the decolonial movements that followed, not every experience can be so easily categorized. The Andean states are one of those problem cases, rarely mentioned in discussions of colonialism because of the difficulties in ascribing a label to the events that started in 1532. This paper will argue that the Andean region of South America experienced a unique colonialism that does not fall under either of the two categories previously outlined. The case of the Andes varies from classic understandings of colonialism largely with regards to the way the occupying forces, in this case the Spaniards, interacted with Indigenous populations. Specifically, racial demographics and the creation of the mestizaje identity, the ways in which Indigenous peoples participated in industry, and the intentions of the colonizers are key concepts that prove the unique case of Andean colonialism and decolonial movements. In analysing colonialism in the Andes, attention must also be paid to the historical development of the Spanish presence.

The first colonizers of South America came from Iberia and hit the eastern Atlantic coast of the South American continent first,

arriving in the late fifteenth century. Many chose to stay on the beaches and inlets of Brazil and Argentina. The sheer difficulty of the trip further West meant that only the hardiest men chose to navigate the Pacific seaboard. From there, even fewer conquistadors penetrated the wilderness of the Andean cordillera, members of that "special class of men... in whom a craving for limitless power is so extreme that any suffering to achieve it seems natural" (Guevara 85). Their dreams of limitless power quickly ran up against the logistical issue of being profoundly outnumbered by an Indigenous population used to the regenerative advantages of a resilient food supply (Graber, "Farming like the Incas). And if there was a lack of Spanish men willing to aid the colonization effort, even fewer white women came to what was known as New Granada. The bulk of colonizers were "viceroys, courtesans, adventurers, priests, lawyers, and soldiers" (Mariátegui 45), and they never arrived en masse. These demographics alone negate any possibility of Andean colonialism being settler colonialism.

There were no campaigns encouraging Spaniards to emigrate, and Indigenous peoples were not forced into reservations to make way for settlers. The other unique consequence of the population imbalance was a high degree of racial hybridity, which began early in the Conquest. Due to the lack of suitable Spanish brides, white men started having children with Indigenous women. Some of these mestizo children would remain with the families of their mothers, speaking Quechua and coping with the new world order. Others, most often the sons, would go with their fathers to be trained in the continuation of the Conquest. (Poma de Ayala 342). This degree of miscegenation is not typically present in settler or exploitative colonialisms, as both those systems try to uphold racial purity. This is not to say that the Spanish and Inca peoples wanted to mingle in this way. Scholars from both societies called for racial segregation (Poma de Ayala 267), and the majority of the unions between conquistadors and Incan women happened through force. The unique factor in the racial demographics in the Andes is not the sentiment from which it was borne, but the extent to which it occurred. The large mixed-race population also had a significant influence on the social dynamics of the New World. The mestizaje identity is not entirely reliant on genetic hybridity, but miscegenation certainly played a role in the creation of this phenomenon.

Before addressing the ways in which it impacted Andean colonialism, a clear definition of mestizaje must be given. While it is a concept with a great deal of personal and regional variety, it is possible to define in broad terms as being the fusion of Spanish culture with Indigenous practices to create a third, unique identity. Note that it is a separate concept from the racial marker of 'mestizo', as Andean mestizaje goes beyond miscegenation. It is the precious marble *chakana* of the Incan kings, suspended in the sacristy of a Catholic church built on the stone bones of ancient palaces (de la Vega 73). It is the timeless stone pyramids on the hillsides, topped with crosses in a Jesuit attempt at compromise (Guevara 97). Physical markers such as these speak to the fusion inherent in mestizaje, and to the way mestizaje presents itself in the Andean region.

This subsect of the identity is entirely original to the Andes, for the simple reason that the local Inca culture existed nowhere else on Earth. The empire that created the Inquisition, the novel, and the vanity of mirrors put its fiery spirit on great galleon ships and outsourced its passions abroad. Conquistadors brought with them their "terrible Spanish Christs and the religion of suffering" (Neruda 83) and were met by the Inca, who in their mountain temples sacrificed virgins to the sun and stored their magnificent histories in strings of knots. (Cartwright, "Quipu"). The culture clash was often violent, but had the effect of creating powerful new identities, traditions, and ways of being. The intersection of any dominating colonial power with Indigenous peoples would inevitably influence the future of all societies involved, but the Andean iteration was unique regarding the degree to which Indigenous practices were incorporated into the new society. Under traditional exploitation colonialism, local peoples are used as labour in imported modes of production, without playing a role in the formal epistemologies created by the profiteers. Settler colonialism attempts to erase local peoples from the new world entirely, without using them or their knowledge in industrial projects. In the Andes, Indigenous traditions played a significant role in post-Conquest economic and social arenas. A particular example of this phenomenon can be found in the primary material undertaking of the colonies: mining.

The Spanish soon realized that there was money to be made from the mountains, and set about extracting it in the form of silver and gold. In this pre-Industrial world, precious metals held the

highest value, and they were summarily stripped from the hillsides and sent back to Europe. The profits made from these natural resources went on to fund further expansion of the coastal urban areas and rural mining communities (Mariátegui 52). The relatively small colonial settlements in the mountainous regions were only there to serve the mines, as the Spanish "never really felt themselves masters [of the Andes]" (Mariátegui 14). It was only the presence of precious metals that drew them into the hills. This hesitance reveals another discrepancy between Andean colonialism and settler colonialism: Despite the land being entirely capable of growing crops and sustaining communities, the Spanish showed no interest in settling the land for themselves. Partly because of this reluctance to establish true artisan communities, the Spanish bosses relied heavily on mining practices already used by the Andean peoples. Local technologies such as the *wayra*, a small, windblown smelter, were responsible for as much as half of the silver ore extracted during the sixteenth century. (Carreño 137). The operators of such machinery, known as yanacona, held high status under the Incan regime, and maintained a degree of independence in Spanish systems of production, (Zori 380), as the Spanish understood that their mining efforts would not be possible without Indigenous knowledge. It is also possible that they saw no need to reinvent the wheel, or in this case the *wayra*. By acknowledging the legitimacy of Indigenous tools, skills, and trades, the Spanish subverted general trends of exploitative colonialism, which prioritizes imported knowledge over local practices.

Another key element of the Andean colonial situation were the international systems of the era. The conquistadors that went to the New World were still part of a feudal world order, albeit one on the wane. Capitalism was limited to the burgeoning realm of the English wool markets, and the acquisition of capital was not the primary focus of any nation. Instead, notions of territorial expansion and religious indoctrination informed the actions of great powers. The empire that went into the Andes possessed and was motivated by military and ecclesiastic power rather than political or economic strength (Mariátegui 277). Spain had recently shaken off eight hundred years of Moorish influence and was riding high on the spirit of Catholic triumph and the acquisition of land for the Spanish crown, which was itself seen as a powerhouse of faith. The relationship between Catholic religiosity and Spanish political power was carried over to South America, and as such "[the Spanish] conquest was the last

Crusade." (Mariátegui 265). The desire for land and converts was the same abroad as it was in Spain, and this changed the nature of the colonialism it inspired.

Resource extraction was a significant motive for the Spanish advances into the Andes, but it could not have been the primary goal of the conquistadors, for they did not know that the Andes were rich with precious metals when they initially sailed out from Spain (Eastwood and Pollard 68). They did know that they were going to encounter land and people, or new Spanish landholdings and new Catholic souls. This is entirely different to exploitative colonialism, which holds capital gain as the ultimate priority of the colonizing state. Considerations of territorial expansion are present but are still subordinate to the exploitation of resources (Baylis et al. 163). While the Spanish became increasingly interested in material gain as the centuries continued, the absence of capitalist systems in the initial push into the Andes mark their colonial experience as unique.

As for religion in exploitative colonialism, religious factors can be present but are not the direct concern of the state. If an exploitative colonial state is using religion as a justification for its abuses of power, it is to validate the relations of production it is imposing on the local systems (Baylis et al. 163). For the Spanish, ecclesiastical concerns were foremost among their reasons for colonizing the Andes. The imposition of religious and social norms shows shades of settler colonialism, but it must be remembered that there were never enough Spaniards to replace and displace the Indigenous populations. The motives for Spanish colonialism in the Andes are yet another aspect of the unique situation present in the region.

The religious factor went on to further influence the particular social and cultural dynamics of the Andes. The conquistadors saw the New World as an arena for the dissemination of Catholicism, and their desire to spread the word of God gave them a reason to interact with Indigenous peoples outside the context of labour and production. The religious orders that came to the Andes had a notable degree of success in creating positive relations with locals. The Jesuit order established a strong base in the Andes and were adept at learning from local ways of being, in particular the agricultural practices that allowed the Inca empires to grow to their impressive size.

The religious encounters between Spanish Catholics and native Andeans followed a general trajectory: The two worldviews

clashed, each adapted to the other as necessary, and the newly modified traditions started the progress over again in a gradual progress towards unification (Mills 243). The Jesuits in particular had great success with hybridity. They learned Inca practices, incorporated the ones that suited them into their own ways of being, and taught their own trades when they felt that they would actually suit the environment. This dual system of knowledge created varied productive communities throughout the Andes. The Jesuit approach was based in positive syncretism and succeeded beyond religion. The impulse to convert was the spark for the interaction, but what followed transcended any one aspect of enculturation. It included economics in the form of farming and minor handicrafts, education in the convent-schools (Mills 247) and the first university in the Americas, and politically in the formation of new conceptualizations of power and authority. The cultural exchange spearheaded by religious orders did a great deal for the creation of the Andean identity, understood here as mestizaje. The Jesuit interactions are another indicator of the particular situation of the Andes, as they were borne from an intent not in line with exploitative colonialism and had an outcome that defied the usual structure of an unyielding occupying force that holds its own beliefs as ultimately 'correct.'

The unique spirit of the Andes still exists, and is still a major influence on political movements in the region. In particular, it can be seen in modern environmental movements, which are often spearheaded by Indigenous groups. The *Buen Vivir* or *Sumak Kawsay* ideology is an excellent example of the hybrid nature of modern Andean society and politics. *Buen Vivir* is partly a reactionary environmental movement, partly a social philosophy, and entirely rooted in notions of the collective (Balch). It is a transnational sentiment, espoused by activists and politicians in all modern Andean states. The Ecuadorian constitution was revised in 2008 to include the statement "We... hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living" (Smith). Indigenous practices are at the heart of the *Buen Vivir* philosophy, particularly the idea that natural resources cannot be subordinate to human practices, but that both are equal partners in harmonious systems of maintenance and gain. Eduardo Gudynas, executive secretary of the Latin American Centre for Social Ecology, acknowledges that *Buen Vivir* is not entirely an Indigenous movement. "It is equally influenced by western critiques [of

capitalism] over the last 30 years, especially from the field of feminist thought and environmentalism," he explains. "It certainly doesn't require a return to some sort of indigenous, pre-Columbian past" (Balch). This modern movement is in many ways a product of the legacy left by Andean colonialism. It draws on Indigenous epistemologies, takes a holistic view of society that does not prioritize economic systems, and takes equal inspiration from Western worldviews and theories. These are all echoes of the spirit of the Andes, from the syncretism of European and Indigenous ways of being, the creation of the mestizaje identity, and the desire to create economic systems that draw on various systems of production. By examining modern political movements in the Andes, the long-lasting effects of the unique colonialism can be seen.

The validation of Andean colonialism was never an option. The Spanish conquistadors were brutal in their treatment of the Indigenous peoples with whom they interacted. They were forced away from their traditional ways of land management and community structures and into exploitative, hegemonic labour relations. Being granted a degree of independence was no substitute for genuine freedom. The Spanish had motives beyond economic gain, but that does not detract from the negativity of what came of their greed. In outlining the unique case of the Andes, the goal is to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which colonialism impacted the region, not to justify the actions of the conquistadors and their heirs. By looking beyond the labels of exploitative and settler colonialism, the religious and territorial inspirations of the conquistadors can be better examined, as well as the mestizaje identity created by interactions between colonizers and Indigenous peoples. The world in which the Conquest took place was unlike the world of later colonialisms. A feudal system still dominated the political structures of Spain, which carried over into the way the New World was conceptualized by its colonizers. The special traits of Andean colonialism deserve to be understood outside restrictive labels, to understand the legacies it created and the identities it engendered.

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