

COMMENTARY

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Comparative studies between the Andean region and Mexico have interested historians, anthropologists and economists for a long time. The two regions have enough in common to make a comparison viable, and sufficiently striking differences to make it fascinating. Both regions constituted the only great empires of pre-hispanic America. Both were based on a juxta-position of powerful emperors and a large nobility at the top and communal organizations at the bottom (though not at the rock bottom) of society. Both ruling groups of these empires, the Incas in the Andean region and the Aztecs in Mexico, only emerged about a century before the coming of the Spaniards. Both of these powerful empires crumbled under the assault of only a few hundred Spaniards.

Nevertheless, both empires also manifested profound differences. The Inca empire was far more integrated than that of the Aztecs. In fact many Mexicanists refuse to label the territory ruled by the cities of the triple alliance, Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan, an empire at all. The Incas attempted to garrison their empire, sent administrators to all the regions under their control and carried out extensive resettlement of populations. Attempts were made to set up a common religion, a common ideology and Quechua was to be the common language of the whole empire. At the same time the Inca empire attempted to preempt the redistribution of wealth by absorbing the surplus that the local population produced and redistributing it in part to the Inca nobility, in part to the subject population. No comparable structure emerged in Mexico. The Aztecs sent garrisons only to border regions, did not attempt to homogenize the religion, the language and the culture of the regions they ruled nor did they seek to administer them from their capital. The Aztecs did absorb a large part of the surplus that the common people produced but they did so only with the aim of supporting the cities of the triple alliance. Redistribution of goods was largely carried out by trade in Mexico while the state assumed that function in Peru.

Differences within the two empires existed not only at the top but at the bottom of society as well. The village community seems to have been far more widespread and above all more egalitarian in Peru than it was in Mexico. There were no periodic redistributions of land within the

community in Mexico as there were in Peru, nor was the Mexican community (i.e. the *calpulli*) obligated to care for widows and orphans and the poor as the Peruvian community (i.e. the *ayllu*) did. The result of these social and economic differences as well as the ecological variations (there was more intensive agriculture in pre-Columbian Peru than in Mexico and the inhabitants of the Andean region, unlike those of Mexico, practiced livestock raising before the Spaniards came) was that Mexico in contrast to the Andean region was affected by periodic famines which produced a large degree of mortality.

As a consequence of these differences, large segments of the subjects of the Aztec Empire considered it as tyranny that had very little legitimacy. In Peru, by contrast, the Incas seemed to have been much more profoundly embedded among the population. The results of these differences in legitimacy could be clearly seen during the conquest and afterwards. In Mexico, Hernan Cortes rode the crest of a popular uprising against the Aztecs. No similar popular revolt supported the Spanish conquest of Peru. The myth of a golden Aztec past has never existed in Mexico nor has it had any relevance to later uprisings. In Peru, by contrast, every major social upheaval until today was linked to the belief in an age of justice and glory during the Inca period.

A further factor of insecurity of the Aztec empire in contrast to its Andean counterpart was the existence of a large hostile frontier on its borders. The nomadic and semi-nomadic inhabitants of northern Mexico constituted a far greater threat to the stability of Aztec, or for that matter all, central Mexican rulers that had preceded them, than the closest Andean equivalent to this frontier: the inhabitants of the Amazon jungle.

Did these differences continue into the Spanish colonial period or did Spain succeed in homogenizing both regions and creating a similar type of entity? The Spaniards certainly attempted to do so. They introduced the same religion, the same ideology, the same institutions, and frequently the same people were in charge first of one, then of the other region. Both regions, the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the Viceroyalty of Peru, became the mainstays of Spanish colonial rule in the Americas. Similar crops and techniques were introduced in both regions. Both were affected by a similar catastrophe: massive Indian mortality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In both the population decline was reversed by the eighteenth century and in the latter years of Spanish colonial rule both the Andean region and Mexico underwent the greatest

popular uprisings in the history of the Spanish empire.

The three essays by Nils Jacobsen, Eric Van Young and Albert Meyers clearly show the new and old type of similarities and differences that emerged in the two regions during the colonial period and above all at its end.

Nils Jacobsen compares both the reception and the effects of livestock raising in both regions. Both Eric Van Young and Albert Meyers deal with a similar subject, the social changes and the crisis in the countryside of Mexico and Peru at the end of the colonial period. One difficulty of a comparative nature that the latter two papers have is the fact that while Eric Van Young deals with the whole of New Spain, Albert Meyers only concentrates on a limited region of Peru, the Mantaro valley which is not necessarily typical of the whole of the Viceroyalty of Peru. Nevertheless, all three papers do make it possible to assess some of the main similarities and differences between the two regions.

Nils Jacobsen's fundamental thesis, which I fully agree with, is that in Peru livestock raising at least to a degree was absorbed into the Indian economy. In New Spain by contrast it remained outside the Indian economy and to a large degree began to disrupt it. Some of the fundamental reasons for this discrepancy that Nils Jacobsen lists are very convincing: the fact that Indians in Peru had raised livestock prior to the conquest made it much easier for them to do the same afterwards. Another fact of an ecological nature that Jacobsen cites, namely that in many of the stock raising regions agriculture could only be practiced to a limited degree and thus was not displaced by the new livestock industry is also very clear and convincing. What I feel Mr. Jacobsen should have insisted on more is to show that both Indian communities and the Indian nobility were far more powerful in Peru than in Mexico. The reasons for this discrepancy had to do with a number of factors both historical and ecological. In historical terms the Incaic *ayllu* seems to have been both more widespread and above all far more structured and pervasive (with its profound care for orphans, widows, those who could not work, etc.) in the pre-hispanic period than the Aztec *calpulli* where these social functions do not seem to have existed. Another difference was that in Mexico the center of Spanish settlement was identical with the center of Aztec rule: the Valley of Mexico. In Peru, by contrast, the Spaniards tended to settle above all in the coastal regions and in the mining region of Potosí and less so in the Cuzco region of the southern highlands, the old center of Inca power. As a result, the Inca nobility retained a far greater measure of control than the Aztec nobility did. Its

power was also strengthened by the fact that in linguistic and cultural terms, the Incas had achieved a far greater degree of homogeneity on the eve of the conquest than the Aztecs had. As a result, the Quechua language was far more widespread in Peru than Nahuatl was in Mexico and the legitimacy of Inca rule was far more recognized. Not only the tradition of cattle raising but the greater power of this Inca nobility and of the village community in Peru allowed it to play a greater role in such an important and at times decisive part of the economy as livestock raising. In Mexico by contrast, this even more important segment of the economy became a non-Indian domain and as a result not only the Indian communities but the Indian nobility in most parts of the country (with conspicuous exceptions such as in Oaxaca) became marginalized in economic and social terms. This in turn would help to explain the far smaller role that both Indian communities and Indian nobles played in the major social upheavals in New Spain in comparison to Peru.

Another difference between the two regions that Nils Jacobsen stresses is that livestock raising caused much more profound economic and social changes in Mexico than in Peru. One reason is simple and obvious, livestock had not existed in pre-Columbian Mexico as it had in pre-Columbian Peru. Perhaps even more important though is the fact which Jacobsen also mentions, that in Mexico in contrast to Peru, thanks to livestock raising, immense new territories, i.e. the northern part of Mexico that had only been inhabited by nomadic Indians before, were now settled. This in turn profoundly transformed the whole character of Mexico and accentuated its differences with Peru. Northern Mexico constituted a freer and more modern segment of the country's society: Nothing similar to northern Mexico developed in Peru. While its impact during the colonial period was limited, during the nineteenth and above all early twentieth centuries, Mexico's northern frontier would become a center of modernization as well as a center of social revolution that in the years 1910-1920 would overwhelm all of Mexico and leave its profound imprint on the whole of society. The Revolution of 1910-1920 whose influence on Mexico can still be felt and which propelled Mexico into a development not only different from that of Peru but from all of Latin America was inconceivable without the livestock raising that first helped to populate the frontier where all victorious armies in 1910-1920 originated.

In spite of the profound social economic differences between the Andean region and Mexico, both suffered from a crisis similar in many respects in the last years of Spanish colonial rule.

With respect to New Spain, Eric Van Young aptly characterizes this period with the words "growth without development." There was growth of agriculture, industrial and mining production. There was the general demographic increase and the population of the cities rose at a far more rapid pace than that of Mexico as a whole. Nevertheless, the living standards of the mass of the population fell. In contrast to other authors, Van Young does not attribute this evolution primarily to the Bourbon reforms, but to a combination of demographic increase and limited access both to land for cultivation and to pasture lands. As a result, peasants were forced to sell their labor at increasingly cheaper rates and to migrate to the cities whose population increased dramatically. This in turn led to an increasing demand which stimulated agricultural production on the larger estates. As the estates found *demesne* agriculture to be more productive than share cropping, more peasants were displaced and the living standard decreased even more. As a result the death rate increased and the growth of population, though not stopped, diminished significantly in the last years of Spanish rule in New Spain. Van Young does not dismiss the Bourbon reforms altogether but he considers them as secondary to the combination of demographic increase and insufficient land which in turn led to a transfer of wealth from the peasants to the landowners, and from the countryside to the cities. The Bourbon reforms may on the one hand have stimulated some aspects of mining production which created a larger market for agricultural production. On the other hand, they may very well have slowed economic development by increasing taxation and the transfer of revenues from New Spain.

Did similar developments occur in the Andean region? Albert Meyers' description of the evolution of the Mantaro Valley definitely shows that a series of developments were common to both the Viceroyalty of New Spain and that of Peru: an increase of an agricultural population owning insufficient lands of their own to subsist. In the Mantaro valley, it was above all the control of pastoral lands by the large estates that produced increasing shortages and lack of land among the peasants of the region.

As in New Spain mining production as well as production of commercial crops on large estates increased. As in New Spain overall economic activity seems to have increased in the Mantaro valley and in the viceroyalty of Peru as a whole. Unlike Eric Van Young, Albert Meyers does not attempt to assess to what degree these tendencies were due to the Bourbon reforms, and to what degree population increase and ensuing impoverishment of the poorest segments of the rural community

were responsible for many of these developments.

A comparison between Eric Van Young's and Albert Meyers' papers indicates several areas of contrast between Mexico and Peru, i.e. at least between New Spain and the Mantaro valley that are worth exploring further: In contrast to Van Young, Meyers never speaks of famines in his region. Does this indicate that the pre-hispanic contrast between Mexico and Peru subsisted into the colonial period and that for a number of ecological and perhaps social reasons famines could be far more easily avoided there than in Mexico?

Meyers coincides with Van Young's assertion for New Spain that forms of forced labor were receding in the eighteenth century because of the increase in population. There was a sharp decrease in debt peonage in Mexico and of the *mita* in Peru. Nevertheless, Peruvian miners seemed to have had more difficulties than Mexican miners (except in the more inaccessible frontier regions) to attract free labor. Meyers does not see the main cause of this in a lack of landless laborers (such as existed in the sixteenth and perhaps in seventeenth centuries), but rather in the low salaries paid by the miners. He implies that many mines were run by small marginal operators who may not have had the capital to pay these wages. Why was this the case at a time when the Spanish state was attempting to revive mining by every means at its disposal? What viable alternatives did the landless laborers who did not work in the mines have to find their sustenance?

One fascinating contrast between late colonial New Spain and late colonial Peru concerns land expropriations. I fully agree with Van Young's statement that massive land expropriations took place in New Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when most of the Indian population had died, and not on the eve of Independence. Meyers seems to indicate that something very different occurred in Peru. Here in the last years of Spanish rule, *cofradías* on the one hand and landowners of the other seem to have confiscated a very large amount of Indian lands. One explanation, for which I have found no evidence up to now, might be that Indian mortality was smaller in Peru than it was in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mexico. As a result more Indians would have remained on their land. A second explanation, which may make more sense is that less Spaniards emigrated into the densely settled Indian regions of highland Peru than they did into the core areas of highland Mexico. As a result, Indian communities and nobles retained more of their land. With increasing commercialization and land values rising in the eighteenth century, incentives to expropriate Indian lands

may now have increased.

One obvious difference between New Spain and Peru on the eve of Independence was the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century a major popular uprising, the Tupac Amaru revolt, had already occurred in Peru and been crushed, while the great lower class revolt in Mexico, the Hidalgo revolt, had not yet taken place. Did the crushing of the Indian revolt in Peru mean that the landowners now felt strong enough to appropriate the lands of the vanquished? This would lead to another set of interesting comparisons between Mexico and Peru for the defeat of the Hidalgo and Morelos revolts in Mexico did not lead, at least in the short run, to any massive attack on Indian property rights. The contrast is all the more interesting since the Mexican state that assumed power shortly after the defeat of Hidalgo and Morelos was far less committed to maintaining the integrity of Indian lands than the Spanish state that still retained power in Peru for about forty years after the end of Tupac Amaru revolt. The contrast might conversely be due to the fact that the weak Mexican state that followed independence simply did not have the kind of power that the Spanish state in Peru still possessed to crush peasant resistance against expropriation. Above all, the newly created Mexican state did not have the authority and means to create the kind of order that was necessary in order to allow and encourage the type of economic boom that made land expropriations worthwhile in an economic sense in the first place.

These are just a few of the comparative problems for which these excellent papers have laid the basis and which I feel require a large amount of additional research.