

Book Review

The Articulated Peasant: Household Economies in the Andes. By Enrique Mayer. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002. xvii, 390 pp. ISBN 081333716X \$31.00 (paper).

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In the central Andes of Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia high mountains, deep valleys, and the seemingly inhospitable high grasslands—the stark punas—testify to the human capacity to occupy even the most extreme environments. Small villages occupied by peasants speaking Quechua or Aymara dot the landscape. Alpine and subtropical climates are traversed in a day's walk over often precipitous foot and animal paths. Inca and pre-Inca ruins attest to the long domination of the peasant by early states. Spectacular terraces sculpted into the mountains demonstrate the centrality of farming. Towns, usually structured around a central plaza with Roman Catholic church, sometimes built atop a pre-Columbian temple, evoke the Spanish colonial system in which peasant labor produced gold, silver, and other primary products required for European expansion. Shantytowns ringing the cities reflect more recent economic forces that have pushed peasants off rural land. So too do the telephones and internet cafes nestled among the colonnaded arches of provincial cities, where people chat with spouses and children living abroad, migrants who have abandoned Lima, Quito, and La Paz to work in the United States, Europe and Japan, even as their kin struggle on rural farms.

Within this ecological and social amalgam, Enrique Mayer has focused on the rural productive system, taking into account the multifaceted Andean world. The title of his book, *The Articulated Peasant*, is an apt description of his approach: rural households do not exist alone but are tied to—or articulated with—ever larger systems. He presents the results of more than 30 years of research in a variety of Peruvian communities. Most chapters are revised and updated versions of earlier papers, many influential and widely cited but available only in Spanish. Chapters typically

conclude with an epilogue indicating how his ideas have changed since original publication.

In chapter 1, written especially for this volume, Mayer critiques the literature on household economy, focusing on the role played by family, gender, and age in the circulation of goods and services within the rural home. He builds on these ideas throughout the book to demonstrate the dynamic way in which peasants interface with and construct responses to internal and external forces, a creativity that allows the peasant household to persist as a mode of livelihood.

In chapter 2 Mayer reviews Murra's conceptions of pre-Columbian adaptations to the vertical environment. Murra's ideas had stimulated much research (including my own) in the 1970s and 1980s concerned with ecological adaptations along a single mountain slope. In addition, influenced by Karl Polanyi's ideas, Murra postulated that the pre-Columbian state utilized reciprocity and redistribution rather than markets or trade to move goods, a unique response to Andean ecology. Mayer sifts the evidence and finds support for many of Murra's ideas, but he modifies them with the caveat that precolonial societies engaged in more trade than Murra allowed.

In chapter 3, Mayer deals in a similarly detailed manner with the changes imposed by the Spanish colonial *encomiendas* and tribute payments on the structure of rural households. He uses archival data from shortly after the Spanish conquest to construct a narrative representing a peasant's probable reflections on his life, an interesting technique to capture the flavor of peasant reality.

In the subsequent chapters, Mayer focuses on contemporary communities. Chapter 4 discusses reciprocity, redistribution, the fiesta system, and corvee labor. His data show that fiesta sponsorship is not a leveling mechanism, as many suppose, but a means of amassing wealth. In chapter 5, he contrasts barter and cash transactions, demonstrating the creative use of barter to cope with crop loss. Barter is usually less profitable than cash sale, but like most Andean transactions, it creates a web of relationships that can be called upon for other kinds of help. Barter is also conducted among equals, allowing the cash poor peasant to avoid the discrimination often encountered in cash transactions with mestizo townspeople. Chapter 6 considers commodities, focusing on the harmless and socially important coca leaf and its transformation into destructive cocaine. Mayer includes an impassioned plea calling for the legalization of the coca leaf (but not cocaine) as an export commodity. He is certainly right in this; the "drug war" has wrought enormous social damage in the Andes. Chapter 7 (written with Manuel Glave) analyzes the meaning of profit and loss in peasant economies, clarifying the differences between standard business accounting procedures and those of peasants. However calculated, the production costs of native potato varieties are greater than those of commercial

ones, a conclusion that surprises me but one that often presages diminished cultivation and consequent genetic loss of native stock. This is a distressing conclusion, since the Andes were the center of potato domestication and hold genetic reservoirs of this important food. "On-site conservation of genetic diversity in landraces," they write, "requires a profitable commercial foundation" subsidized by the sale of "high-yield improved varieties, favorable prices, and strong, culturally sustained values in the subsistence sector" (p. 224).

In chapter 8, Mayer introduces the concept of production zones, differentiating them from ecological zones by emphasizing their human construction. He includes a valuable review of the literature on Andean ecology and discusses the relationship of production zones to systems of land tenure and community control of the productive system. Peasant rights to land often depend on active participation in communal labor corvees and ceremonial obligations. Chapter 9 extends this discussion through a detailed history of land tenure in a community in the Cañete river basin. Chapter 10 concludes the book with an assessment of the negative impact of neoiberaliisHi and other global forces on the peasant household.

The strength of the *Articulated Peasant* rests in the presentation of the research and ideas of a major figure in Andean studies. It is also a comprehensive treatment of Andean scholarship on rural economy and ecology, including generous summaries of the research of César Fonseca, a talented scholar killed in his prime by a tragic fieldwork accident, whose work is little known outside Peru. A minor weakness of the book also lies in its comprehensiveness: at times the text reads like an annotated bibliography. To my mind, moreover, Mayer pays insufficient attention to demographic change that (along with ecological, economic, sociocultural, and political forces) provides the dynamic substrate of peasant life. A brief discussion of the consequences of the Shining Path war also would have been useful (even though Mayer has published on these matters elsewhere) and I would like to know more about the effect on the peasant economy of increasing numbers of rural Protestants who eschew participation in the fiestas so central to agricultural work.

In spite of these caveats, this is a valuable work by a central figure in Andean scholarship that outlines a theoretical schema of the dynamic adaptations of rural households to multifaceted environmental and social challenges. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the Andes or peasant economies or human environmental relationships.

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